

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 13, NO. 235.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1913.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

WEST VIRGINIA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AMONG the acts of Lincoln that friend and foe lovingly dwell upon—the former as an evidence of Lincoln’s self-abnegation in the singleness of his purpose to save the Nation; the latter as an evidence of Lincoln’s “disregard for the obligation of the oath of office”—was the admission of West Virginia into the Union.

West Virginia was organized into a separate State out of thirty-four western counties which seceded from the State of Virginia. The Constitution explicitly forbids the formation of a new State from territory belonging to another State, without the consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned. It goes without saying that the Legislature of Virginia did not give its consent to the secession of her western counties. This notwithstanding, Congress passed an act in 1863, and Lincoln, as President, signed the act incorporating West Virginia in the Union.

The un-Constitutional action was the culmination of more than two years{'} efforts, whose every step rang to the songs of “the freedom of man.” Nor was the “freedom” in the songs an abstract idea, the application of which might be different in different minds, and conflicting. The “freedom” in the tune was concrete. It was the freedom of the then Negro slaves, their freedom to work when and where they pleased, free from physical coercion, and on such terms as they chose to accept. To that tune, barely was Lincoln inaugurated and Virginia had passed her secession ordinance, when thirty-four western counties of the State met in convention; drafted a new constitution; submitted the same for the ratification of the inhabitants; constituted themselves the “Sovereign State of West Virginia”; applied for admission to the Union; and were admitted in 1863—to the greater glory of Freedom.

This retrospect is called forth by the scenes of which West Virginia is now the

theatre—a portion of the State placed under marshal law, and the air kept whizzing with the bullets of constabulary and militia, bent upon the mission—of enforcing the freedom of the worker to work when and where he pleases, at such terms as he chooses to accept?—No! just the opposite—bent upon the mission of dragooning the miners to work when and where their masters will it, subject to what terms their masters please to dictate!

To use the slang idiom of the day, this is “some somersault back.” Is it? Not at all.

Man does not jump from slavery to freedom. From chattel slavery he jumps, or is elevated up, to wage slavery. The external manifestations of his sufferings may look different, the essence of slavery—working for others—remains. As the wage-slave is, like the chattel slave, a slave still, the treatment he receives will ever smack of the complete status of slavery which consists in chattel slavery. The fact may be veiled—the wage-slave has “rights” that are denied the chattel slave—yet ever and anon the veil of “freedom,” with which the bourgeois conceals the slave status of the working class, is rent; and then the “sky-blue-and-scarlet” fact of actual slavery transpires.

In all the North, which sent her sons to the front to liberate the Negro, the fact of Labor’s slavery is none the less than in West Virginia. It was, however, left to West Virginia, by that providential dispensation that delights in what the simple-minded call “accidents”—it was left to that State, for the promotion of whose birth the Constitution was violated in the interest of Freedom, as understood by bourgeois,—it was left to that State to underscore with the mailed hand, and too illumine with fire the fact that the freedom of the Working Class will never be accomplished but with the abolition of the Class Social Order of inhuman disorder.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded November 2014

slpns@slp.org