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Just a Word, Mr. President

By Eugene V. Debs.

President Taft, I mean isn't it time for you to take another trip to the Rio Grande? Things are looking very qually for your friend Diaz. You, and Roosevelt before you, did everything possible on this side to keep the bloody clutches of your friend Diaz at the throats of the ten millions of peons worked in Mexico and owned and robbed in Wall street. You had your secret service thugs and assassins turned into the bloodhounds of Diaz and you had every patriotic Mexican soul who was fighting for his countrymen, and sought refuge here, thrown into United States dungeons, buried alive, and devoured by vermin, to intrench and prolong the reign of the decorated cannibal who masquerades as the president of Mexico, and whose bloody claws you grasped in full and hearty fellowship as you assured him of your profound respect and the absolute confidence of your mutual masters in Wall street.

Do you remember this occasion, Mr. President, when your own people were shut out and one of your most ardent admirers was murdered by a guard in his eagerness to witness the ceremony? Do you remember the soldiers that surrounded you, with shotguns in their hands, and pressed in closely upon you to guard you against your own chosen people while you, with ashen, cowardly lips, delivered the message of your masters?

Let you have forgotten your speech on that occasion, I will here quote from it as it appeared in the newspapers at that time:

It gives me the greatest pleasure and I esteem it a special honor to assure your excellency that the American people regard you with the highest respect as an illustrious ruler who has always been profoundly concerned in the prosperity of his country and the happiness of his people, and the beneficence of whose reign will be recorded in the pages of history.

Oh, what a lie! What a wicked, ghastly, damnable lie! That lie should have stuck in your throat and strangled you until you were as black in the face as the administration you were glorifying. No wonder you and your Archibald Butt had to shut out the people and have yourselves walled in with mailed murderers as the only fit witnesses to such an immoral and debasing exhibition.

There are two occasions in your life, Mr. President, that you ought not to forget; the one when you embraced the Czar of Russia, and the other when you grasped the hand of the Czar of Mexico. The countless ghosts of the victims of these bloody monsters do not envy you the presidency of the United States at the price you paid for it.

The Mexican people are not rising against the people of the United States; they are rising against Diaz and his Wall street administration of assassination in Mexico and they are going to overthrow that bloody despotism, based upon the robbery of the people and maintained by force and murder, in spite of the aid and comfort and connivance of your administration in the United States.

Oscar Lawler may be in official clover at Washington and Flores Magon may rot in an American prison cell, but the eternal forces that unmake kings and tyrants, destroy thrones, crush iniquity and triumphantly vindicate the right, are at work, and when the hour strikes, the revolution in Mexico will drive out its dictator and your friend Diaz will be lucky if he escapes with his head on his shoulders.

A CORRECTION

The editors of Regeneracion wish to correct a mistake as to the policy of the Liberal Party which unfortunately was made last week by a contributor to the English section.

Under the heading "A Political Document" it was said that the Mex-

ican Liberals had joined hands with the middle class revolutionists who are now operating against the Diaz government. We wish to say that had we known the contents of this article we would not have permitted it to be printed.

The Liberal Party has not joined hands with the Maderists. It has not endorsed and will not endorse either Madero or his program. The Liberal Party is a working class movement. If it triumphs it will proceed at once to returning the stolen lands of the people to their rightful owners.

The Maderist Party would merely restore the republican constitution. It would not break up the big haciendas, which are one of the chief bulwarks of the slavery and peonage under which at least one-third of our people are living. We believe that the time has passed for middle class revolutions. The revolution of the Liberal Party will be a working class revolution.

Concerning Mexico

Fact 1. Butcher Diaz has been president of Mexico for some thirty years.

Fact 2. During that time he has maintained his hold on that office by killing and imprisoning those who would oppose his repeated re-elections.

Fact 3. He has sold many concessions to American capitalists for the building of railroads and factories and the working of mines.

Fact 4. He has used his arbitrary power to establish a system of peonage by which the working class of that country has been reduced to a condition of practical slavery to American and Mexican capitalists.

Fact 5. This has caused these slave masters to be very friendly to his administration.

Fact 6. Diaz is getting very old, and these capitalists, fearing his death, are very anxious to have a man for vice-president who will follow in his footsteps and continue them in their graft of slavery.

Fact 7. This led to the banishment of Madero and Reyes, the opposition candidates for president and vice-president, during the late campaign, thus leaving a clear field for the tools of the exploiting class.

Fact 8. The present and past administrations in this country have used the United States and officials and courts to arrest such men as had fled from his oppression, and either return them to him to be murdered or imprison them in federal prisons.

Fact 9. President Taft, when he visited Texas, crossed the Rio Grande and was cajoled with this Occidental czar, no one but themselves knowing what took place in that surreptitious confab.

Fact 10. There is, at present, a revolution in progress in Mexico, and United States troops are being rushed to the border, ostensibly to prevent violations of neutrality.

Conclusions. 1. The Mexican tyrant has sold these concessions to American capitalists for two reasons: To get the aid of the American capitalistic government and to provide the "slews of war" to put down all opposition at home.

Conclusion 2. These American capitalists who have been given unlimited power to exploit Mexican labor used their money and influence to elect Roosevelt and Taft.

Conclusion 3. In the star chamber interview between these two arch-conspirators against the laboring people of the two countries an agreement was entered into by which the power of the United States government should be used to put down any uprising of the people of Mexico against their oppressors.

Conclusion 4. The sending of United States troops to the border to preserve neutrality is a mere pretense, since there could be no serious breach of neutrality.

Conclusion 5. Should the present uprising assume formidable proportions, some of these American concessionists will explode a pop-shot of dynamite in some worked-out mine or abandoned shack.

Conclusion 6. These troops then will, with the consent of Diaz, be rushed across the border for the ostensible purpose of "protecting American interests," but in reality to shoot down men struggling to free themselves from a far worse oppression than that which our forefathers fought against for seven years, or that which cursed the people of Cuba when we went to war to secure that island as loot for American capitalistic freebooters.

Conclusion 7. Over-awed by the power of the great American republic, the poor peons will give up and sink into a condition of more abject slavery than before. This will give their masters more money with which to control the two governments and purchase legislation to secure them in their graft.

Conclusion 8. Free trade will be established between the two countries and the product of starved peon labor will flood American markets to crowd the American laborer down to a like condition of peonage.

Conclusion 9. When this condition

prevails and it has become so bad that it will be necessary to arrest men for political offenses, Mexico may be rolled on to reciprocate the friendly services of this capitalist-ruled country by returning fugitives from oppression.

The first five chapters of this book, which, in a little less extended form, were published serially in The American Magazine in the fall of 1909, called forth a considerable measure of comment both in the United States and Mexico. Both the magazine and myself were deluged with letters, many of which asserted that the writers themselves had witnessed conditions similar to those which I described. On the other hand, there were many who flatly averred that I was a fabricator and a slanderer, declaring, variously, that nothing akin to slavery or even to peonage existed in Mexico, that, if it did, it was the only practical way to civilize Mexico, anyhow, that the Mexican working people were the happiest and most fortunate on the face of the earth, that President Diaz was the most benign ruler of the age, that a long enough hunt would discover cases of barbarities even in the United States, and we would better clean our own house first, that there were \$900,000,000 of American capital invested in Mexico—and so on and so on.

The remarkable thing, indeed, about the discussion was the headlong manner in which certain magazines, newspapers, book publishers and private individuals in this country rushed to the defense of President Diaz. These individuals evidently acted on the theory that a charge of slavery in his domain was an aspersion on the rule of President Diaz, and quite correctly so. Wherefore, they proceeded to denounce me in the most vigorous terms, on the one hand, and to let loose a flood of adulatory literature concerning President Diaz, on the other. I imagine that it would require a very long freight train to carry all the flattering literature that was circulated in this country by the friends of Diaz in the six months following the first appearance of my articles upon the news-stands.

The perusal of those articles and this other literature also would drive anyone inevitably to the conclusion that somebody was deliberately distorting the truth. Who was distorting the truth? Who—and why? Since the who as well as the why are peculiarly a part of this story I may be pardoned for pausing for a few pages to reply, first, to the question, "Who?"

It would give me pleasure to present here some hundreds of letters which, among them, corroborate many times all the essential features of my account of Mexican slavery. But did I do so there would be little room left in the book for anything else. I can merely say that in most cases the writers claimed to have spent various numbers of years in Mexico. The letters were unsolicited, the writers were paid by no one; in many cases they were endangering their own interests in writing. If I am the liar, all of these persons must be liars, also, a proposition which I doubt if anyone could believe were they to read the letters.

But I am not printing these letters and I do not ask the reader to consider them in my favor. Samples of them, and a large enough number to be convincing, are to be found however, in the November, December and January numbers of The American Magazine.

I shall pass over, also, the published testimony of other writers, well-known investigators, who have corroborated my story in more or less detail. For example, the account of the slavery of the American rubber plantations, written by Herman Whitaker and printed in The American Magazine for February, 1910; the accounts of the slavery of Yucatan by the English writers, Arnold and Frost, in the book, "An American Egypt," which was quoted at length in The American Magazine of April, 1909. The corroboration which I shall present here is taken almost entirely from my critics themselves, persons who started out to deny the slavery or to palliate it, and who ended by admitting the existence of the essential features of that institution.

To begin with the least important class of witnesses, I shall take up first the statements of several American planters who rushed into print to defend the system of their friend Diaz. There is George S. Gould, manager of the San Gabriel rubber plantation,

on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. In various newspapers Mr. Gould was quoted extensively, especially in the San Francisco Bulletin, where he speaks of the "absolute inaccuracy" of my writings. Here are some of his explanations taken from that paper:

"As general manager of the San Gabriel, I send \$2,500 at a certain season to my agent in the City of Oaxaca. He opens an employment office and calls for a quota of seventy-five men. * * *

"The laborer is given an average of fifty cents (Mexican) a week until the debt he owes the company is liquidated. The company is not obliged to pay him this amount, but does so to keep him contented. He is usually contracted for for periods ranging from six months to three years. In three years, if he is reasonably industrious and saving, he will not only have paid off his debt money, but he will draw his liquidation with money in his pocket. * * *

"The sum total is this: The peon slavery in Mexico might be called slavery in the strictest sense of the word, but as long as the laborer is under contract to the plantation owner he is being done an inestimable good. It is the plantation owners who prevent the peon—ordinarily worthless humans with no profession—from becoming public charges. Unwittingly perhaps they block a lawless and irresponsible element by teaching the peon to use his hands and brain."

Mr. Edward H. Thompson was for many years the American consul in Yucatan. Mr. Thompson owns a henequen plantation, and, though I did not visit it, I was informed that he held slaves under exactly the same conditions as do the henequen kings. Immediately following the publication of my first article Mr. Thompson issued a long statement that was published in so many papers that I imagine a news syndicate was employed to circulate it. Mr. Thompson began by denouncing my article as "outrageous in its statements and absolutely false in many details." But read what Mr. Thompson himself says are the facts:

"Reduced to its lowest terms and looking at the matter without the desire to produce a sensational magazine article, the so-called slavery becomes one of simple contract convenience to both parties. The native needs the money, or thinks he does, while the planter needs the labor of the native servant."

"The indebted servant is held more or less strictly to the terms of the verbal and implied contract, according to the personal equation of the planter or his representative. This general fact is equally true in all of the great industries of our country as well as in Yucatan."

"I do not seek to defend the system of indebted labor. It is bad in theory and worse in practice. It is bad for the planter because it locks up capital that could otherwise be employed in developing the resources of the plantation. It is worse for the servant, because by reason of it he learns to lean too much on the powerful protection of his creditor-employer."

Reading those lines with discrimination, you will observe that Mr. Thompson admits that debt slavery is prevalent in Yucatan, admits that it is a system that cannot be defended. Then why does he defend it?

Mr. C. V. Cooper, an American land promoter, writing in the Portland Oregonian, says that he read my articles with "amusement mixed with indignation," and decided that they were "grossly exaggerated." But he made some admissions. Said he:

"The Mexican peon law provides that if a servant for any reason is indebted to his employer, he must remain and work out the debt at a wage agreed upon between the employer and the employee."

But, Mr. Cooper, if the employee must remain, how can he have any say as to how much the wage which you declare is "agreed upon" shall be?

Very naively Mr. Cooper explains the freedom of the peon. Says he: "There is nothing compulsory in his service at all. If he does not like his surroundings or his treatment, he is at perfect liberty to obtain the amount of his debt from anyone else and leave the property."

From whom else, Mr. Cooper? Oh,

Conclusion 10. It behooves every worker in the United States to take an active interest in the movements that are being inaugurated by this government for the further enslavement of their class.

L. M. KNOWLES.

the sweet, sweet liberty of Mexico! It is too bad that Mr. Cooper should have marred such a rosy picture as he paints by admitting the man-hunting part of the system. But he does: "Should a man run away, we can have him brought back if the amount of the debt involved is worth while. The expense of his capture is paid by the plantation and added to his account."

Yet Mr. Cooper finally avers: "The peons are perfectly free to come and go as they choose, with the only legal proviso that they do not swindle any one out of money that has been advanced them in good faith."

Mr. Cooper thought so well of his defense of the Diaz system that he— or someone else—went to the expense of having it printed in pamphlet form and circulated about the country. There were other pamphleteers besides Mr. Cooper, too, who rushed to the defense of Mexico. One was Mr. E. S. Smith of Tippecanoe, Iowa, the man who wired President Taft begging him to deny The American Magazine the mails, and that before my first article went to press.

Mr. Smith wrote "The Truth About Mexico," which The Bankers' Magazine printed, and the same matter was afterwards put into a pamphlet. Mr. Smith was so extravagant in his denials of imperfection in Mexican institutions and so glowing in his descriptions of Mexico's "ideal" government that one of that government's warmest defenders, The Mexican Herald, was revolted by the production and printed a long editorial in which it prayed that Mexico might be delivered of such friends as Mr. Smith.

Mr. Guillermo Hall, another American who is interested in Mexican properties, considers my articles a "great injustice," inasmuch as, since the poor Mexican knows nothing of freedom, he must be perfectly well off as a slave. The Tucson, Arizona, Citizen quoted Mr. Hall as follows: "The cold facts stated in black type might seem preposterous to the Americans of this country, whose training and environment are so different. * * * In the lower country along the border, for instance, the so-called peon has no conception of the liberty we enjoy in America. He absolutely doesn't know what it means. The property owners there are compelled by force of circumstances to maintain, at present, a sort of feudalism over him."

Mr. Dwight E. Woodbridge, a planter and writer, wrote at length in defense of Mexican slavery in the Mining World, the organ of the American Mine Owners' organization. Here are some excerpts:

"Unquestionably there are brutalities and savageness in Mexico. Outrages are committed there, both on the prisoners taken from confinement to haciendas and on the Yaquis. * * * I am interested in a large plantation in southern Mexico, where we have some 300 Yaqui laborers."

"Throughout the Yaqui country I have seen such things as are pictured in the magazine, passed the bodies of men hanging to trees, sometimes mutilated; have seen hundreds of tame Yaquis herded in jails to be sent to the plantations of Yucatan, or Tlaxcala, or Veracruz; have heard of worse things."

"There is a certain sort of peonage in Mexico. One may call it slavery if he will, and not be far from the truth. It is, in fact, illegal, and no contracts under it can be enforced in the courts. The slave is a slave so long as he is working out his debt."

Of course none of the defenders of Mexico admit all of my assertions, and all of them, naturally, seek to minimize the horrors of the slave system—otherwise they could not be defending it. But you will see that one admits one thing and another until the whole story is confessed as true.

Among the American publishers who rushed to the defense of Diaz was Mr. William Randolph Hearst. Mr. Hearst sent a writer, Othman Stevens, to Mexico to gather material to prove that Mexico is not barbarous. Valiantly did Mr. Stevens attempt to carry out his trust, but in dealing with the contract slavery system he succeeded in admitting most of the essential points, and was able to defend only on the plea of capitalist "necessity." Some of his admissions, as they appeared in the Co-

mopolitan Magazine of March, 1910, are:

"To offset these prospects of early industrial advances in the contract labor system, and the contract labor system in Mexico is a bad institution. Its repulsive features to our eyes is the fact that, while the laborer enters voluntarily into the contract, the law gives the employer a right over the workman's person in the enforcement of the contract. Theoretically, there is no argument to be made for contract labor."

"If an engaged rebel or is insolent or lazy, the litho rod in the hands of the 'boss' of the gang winds around him, and he soon understands that he must fulfill his part of the contract. If he runs away, a reward of ten dollars is paid to whoever brings him back. His clothes are taken away from him, and he is clad in a gunny sack with holes cut for arms and legs."

Mr. Stevens' defense of this system, as published in the same number of the same magazine, is:

"Outside of the restrictions of dogmatic controversy there is only one phase that makes a wrong right, and that is necessity. A legal enforcement of a contract by using physical force over the person is in itself wrong. On the other hand, legislation now prohibiting contract labor would work a greater wrong, for it would destroy millions of investments, would retard a most beneficial and rapid development of the richest region on this continent, if not in the world, and would, by reflex, work more harm to the very people it would intend to aid than an indefinite continuance of the present conditions."

This is exactly the logic the slave-driving cotton planters of our southern states used before the Civil War. It will hardly "go" with anyone who has not money invested in Mexican plantations which are enganchados.

I do not wish to tire the reader, but, aside from the fact that I have been most violently attacked, I have a reason for wishing to go a little deeper into this matter of critics and corroboration. Let us get right down into Mexico itself, down to the very newspapers that are paid a specified sum each week in exchange for manufacturing public opinion favorable to President Diaz and his system. In Mexico City there are two daily newspapers printed in English, the Herald and the Record. Both are prosperous and well edited, and both are open defenders of the Mexican government. The Herald, especially, repeatedly denounced my articles. I believe that I can show as many as fifty clippings from this paper alone which, in one way or another, attempted to cast doubt upon my statements. Nevertheless, in the course of the daily publication of the news, or in the very campaign of defense, both of these papers have, since the first appearance of "Barbarous Mexico," printed matter which convincingly confirmed my charges.

October 23, 1909, the Daily Record dared to print an article from the pen of Dr. Luis Lara y Pardo, one of the best-known of Mexican writers, in which he admitted that my indictment was true. A few lines from the article will suffice. Said Dr. Pardo:

"The regime of slavery continues under the cloak of the loan laws. Peons are sold by one hacendado to another under the pretext that the money that has been advanced must be paid. In the capital of the Republic itself traffic in human flesh has been engaged in."

"On the haciendas the peons live in the most horrible manner. They are crowded into lodgings dirtier than a stable and are maltreated. The hacendado metes out justice to the peon, who is even denied the right to protest."

A widespread fear among the common people of being ensnared as enganchados would argue not only that the system is extensive, but that it is fraught with great hardship. January 6, 1910, the Mexican Daily Record published a news item which indicated that this is true, and also suggested one way in which the government plays into the hands of the labor snarers. Shorn of its headlines, the item is:

"Five hundred contract laborers intended to work at construction camps on the Veracruz and Pacific railroad, are encamped near Buenavista station as a result of their unwillingness to sign a formal contract, and the law prohibiting their being taken into another state without such contract."

"Governor Landa y Escandon yesterday afternoon refused to grant the request of R. P. Davis and F. Villademoros, signers of a petition to him to allow the laborers to be shipped out. With their wives, children, and all their worldly possessions they form a motley camp near the station."

In their petition, Davis and Villademoros claim that the railroad company is suffering large losses by the detention of the laborers and that many of the latter fear if they sign

contracts they will be shipped to sugar and coffee plantations and held until the expiration of the specified terms.

Governor Landa refused the request on the ground that the law requires such a formality to protect the laborers, while the reason for waiving it did not appear logical."

The Mexican Herald furnishes more corroboration than the Mexican Record. Commenting editorially upon the announcements of "Barbarous Mexico," it said, August 27, 1909:

"In this Journal during recent years, and in many Mexican papers as well, the abuses of the peonage system, and the ill-treatment of the los enganchados or contract laborers in some regions, have been most frankly dealt with. The enlightened Governor of Chiapas has denounced the evils of peonage in his state and has received the thanks of the patriotic press of the country. That there are dark spots in agricultural labor conditions, no fair-minded person of wide information seeks to deny."

About the same time Paul Hudson, general manager of the paper, was quoted in a New York interview as saying that my exposures "do not admit categorical denial." And in the Mexican Herald of May 9, 1910, J. Torrey Connor, writing in praise of General Diaz, says: "Slavery, doubtless, is known to exist in Mexico—that is generally understood." In February, 1909, in an editorial item upon the political situation in the state of Morelos, the Mexican Herald went so far as to admit the killing of debt laborers by their masters. To quote it exactly:

"It is undeniable that their (the planters') management is at times severe. When angry they heap abuse on the peons and even maltreat them physically. In some instances they have, in times not so distant, even taken the lives of native laborers who have incensed them, and have gone scot free."

August 27, 1909, in an article on "The Enganchado," the Herald said, in part:

"The enganchados are guarded most carefully, for there is the ever present danger of their running away on the slightest opportunity. Often the cabos are cruel in their treatment, a fact which is to be condemned. * * * It is not in keeping here to mention the abuses which are alleged to have been practiced against the enganchados, the treatment of men so shamelessly that they die, the raping of women, the deprivation of the laborers of any means of bathing, and the unsanitary condition of their houses, leading on to noxious diseases. * * * No planter who knows the real history of the system, or the inside facts of the neighboring plantations, will deny for a moment the worst stories of the enganchado are true."

"Plantation men do not take the enganchado labor because they like it. Nor do they prefer it to any other, even the lowest. But there is a certain advantage in it, as one planter said to the writer, with a queer thrill in his voice: 'When you've got 'em they're yours, and have to do what you want them to do. If they don't, you can kill them.'"

"Such corroboration from a subsidized supporter of the system itself would seem rather embarrassing to those individuals who were so zealous as publicly to announce that my portrayal of Mexican slavery was a fabrication. It will be seen that my exposures of Mexican slavery were not the first to be circulated in print; they were merely the first to be circulated widely, and they went into considerably more detail than anything that had gone before. The little item that I have just quoted admits practically all the worst features which I dealt with in my articles.

(To be continued.)

"Barbarous Mexico"

John Kenneth Turner began last year in the American Magazine a true story of the horrors of slavery in Mexico today, where men, women and children are bought and sold, where they are worked to death or beaten to death.

These articles told only half the story. It remained to show that this slavery is only made possible by the military despotism of Diaz, and that this despotism is kept in power by the aid of American capitalists and the United States government.

The whole story, with many vivid photographs, is now offered to the American people.

The book may be obtained from the author, 1921 Darien Place, Los Angeles, California.

SINGLE COPIES, \$1.50, postage paid; three copies for \$3.50.

This is the publisher's price for the book.

Stockholders of Charles H. Kerr & Co. will be furnished with copies at the regular publisher's discount.