

Great Labor Problems for Mexico to Solve

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MEXICO CITY—Mexico will never have permanent peace until the peons are paid living wages. As it is now it is more profitable to be in the army than to work on the farms, and unless President Huerta adopts the drastic policy of Porfirio Diaz the brigand and rebels will have no trouble in getting recruits.

The question of wages and labor was agitated during the administration of Madero, and his efforts to better labor conditions were one cause of his downfall. The present administration is trying to carry out some of the policies inaugurated by him and the indications are that the labor troubles are only at their beginning.

Wages in Mexico.

I have some figures before me which come from the secretary of agriculture. He puts the daily wages now being paid on the farms at from 20 to 25 cents a day, but adds there are places out in the country where they are not more than half that amount. This is in American money, as are all the figures of this letter.

There are millions in Mexico who are working on the haciendas for less than 25 cents a day and there are thousands in the factories who are being paid less than \$1. In some of the mills the minimum wage is as low as 10 cents, and it runs from that to 45 cents, whereas in others, for the same kind of work, the wages run from 50 cents to \$1. There are something like 40,000 laborers employed in the large factories, and their average wages per day are in cents gold.

The government is trying to remedy these conditions. It has established a department of labor, which has already dealt with seventy-five strikes, and it is now taxing the product of each factory on the basis of its hours of work and wages. The institutions are favored according to whether they conform to the government regulations or not. The administration is trying also to improve the condition of the laborers on the farms by giving back lands to the towns and gradually bringing about a division of the large estates. As to this, however, but little has yet been accomplished.

Fighting for a Ten-Hour Day.

The fight of the men in the factories is for a ten-hour day, and they want to fix also a minimum wage for all parts of the republic. As it is now some of the factories are working from 12 o'clock in the morning until 9 o'clock in the evening. There is only one exception. This is on Saturday, when the hands are let off at 4 p. m. In the mills in which that rule prevails the cloth made is white cotton sheeting, and the regular output is about 1,800 pieces per day. The biggest cotton mills here are those of Orizaba. They employ 10,000 hands, the most of whom are native men and boys, and some being women. The work is done with modern machinery and the company makes a large profit. It pays higher wages than those here mentioned, and it has built 1,300 houses for its factory hands. There is another cotton factory in the state of Toluca, where most of the workmen are boys from 8 to 15 years of age. Here the average wage is about 20 cents a day, and until lately the hours have been long. Nearly everywhere the women are paid less than the men and the boys less than the women. This is so in the tobacco factories as well.

What Mechanics Get.

I had a talk last night with an American contractor who has been putting up buildings all over Mexico. He tells me that the ordinary mechanic's wage in the cities is from 60 cents to \$1 a day. Carpenters get \$1 for good work, and bricklayers and masons the same. In the coast towns, where there is plenty to do around the wharves, the wages are higher, but as a rule the higher the wages the less number of days of work furnished. The man who gets \$1 a day will work only two or three days a week, and if he gets \$2 he may work a while and then lay off a month. A few weeks ago a contractor found that six of his men were doing so well that he could raise their wages 50 per cent. They were receiving \$1 per day, and he gave them \$1.50. The result was that he got only three days of work the next week, and he finally had to discharge the whole gang and bring in new men at the old rate of wages. He says the labor is not so efficient as ours, and that one American will lay more bricks than four Mexicans.

Labor on the Plantations.

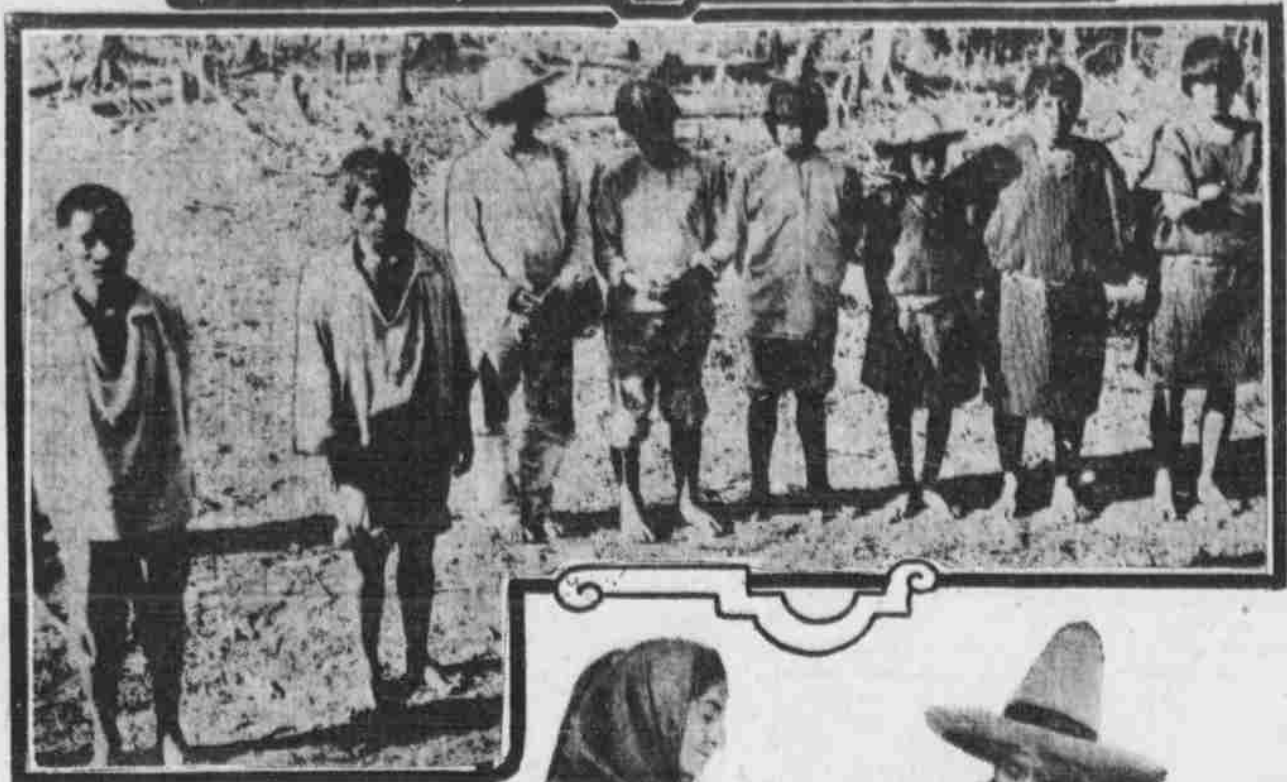
The laboring people on the haciendas or farms are far worse off than those of the cities. The average wages there run from 15 cents and upwards per day, but millions of farm hands and their families are in a state of debt slavery, getting little more than their clothing and food. The laws are such that they dare not leave their masters without paying their debts, and as a result they work along from hand to mouth, receiving a little spend-a-money now and then, and increasing their debts whenever they have a wedding or a funeral. The only way they can escape is by getting someone to assume their debts, and this is sometimes done by the neighboring hacendados or others who want their workmen and can find none in the market. It is difficult to get a peon away from his old master, and this is especially so if he has been fairly well treated.

How Money Talks in Mexico.

And still I find that money talks quite as loudly here as on the other side of the boundary. At least it did so not long ago for some Americans who were opening a rubber plantation in the tropical lowlands, and were hard up for labor. They offered big wages, but in vain. All the peons of the neighborhood were in debt slavery to the owners of the estates.

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This institution is the only one in the central west with separate buildings situated in their own ample grounds, yet entirely distinct, and rendering it possible to classify cases. The one building being fitted for and devoted to the treatment of non-contagious and non-mental diseases, no others being admitted; the other Rest Cottage being designed for and devoted to the exclusive treatment of select mental cases, requiring for a time watchful care and special nursing.



Peons on a Rubber Plantation in Chiapas

about, and promises of the foreigners fell flat.

At last the Americans brought in several bushels of new Mexican dollars, and laid them in great piles on the table in the rude building which formed their plantation office. They then called in the peons and showed them the money, saying that they had brought it there to pay off their debts for them and also that they had bushels of other dollars to pay them wages as well. They offered to pay the debts of the peons provided they would drop their present employers and work for them, and the wages they proposed were higher than the peons had ever had in the past.

The sight of the money worked wonders. The peons came over in a body and were instructed by the Americans to get papers showing their exact indebtedness. They did so, and the Americans then went with them to their old employers and saw that they were legally freed. The men were then able to contract, and their contracts were registered with the officials of the district so that they became legally bound to their American employers.

Peonage Still in Force.

Nominally there is now no slavery in Mexico, but really this form of debt slavery is still in existence. The rich estate owners have practically controlled the jefe-politicos or local officials, who can force the men to go into the army, and it is through them that they have kept the Indians at work. During the administration of Diaz it was the same with the factories, the jefe-politicos aiding in keeping the men on the job. The wiping out of this great labor-forcing machine is one of the questions agitated by the reformers of Mexico today, and it is the hope of the most advanced that it may be accomplished. The system has been complete and wide-reaching and all sorts of methods have been employed to keep the peons in debt. Nearly every big estate has its store where the Indian laborers can run bills of credit, and the same has been true of the factories and in the mines. The peon is naturally thriftless. He is like a child, and he will borrow all that he can. This is especially so at the times of weddings and funerals. A man will mortgage his future in order to have a big wedding outfit, and when deaths occur there is more debt on account of the funerals. It is now over forty years since peonage or debt slavery was abolished by law, but that law is a dead letter in many parts of the republic. There are back districts, such as mabocany camps, from which now and then come stories of flogging, and there is undoubtedly forced labor on certain of the big haciendas.

Worse Than Our Loan Sharks.

I heard the other night a story of how the innocent Indian is sometimes kept on the job. It shows a condition more corrupt than the worst practices of the American loan shark. In this instance one of the peons thought he would keep track of his indebtedness and had it marked down item by item in a book. He took this book to his master, and asked him how it came that the foreman had charged him \$15, when he had only received \$5. The master called in the foreman, whereupon the foreman swore at the peon, saying:

"You ignorant fellow, can't you see you owe \$15. First there was the \$5 I gave you for food; second, the \$5 I gave you for third, the \$5 which was charged to your account. Now three times five is fifteen. You owe \$15, and you must get out of here and go back to your work."

This is probably an overdrawn statement, but fraud could be easily perpetrated upon the peon by an unscrupulous master.

Millions Who Cannot Read.

Indeed, it is hard to describe the conditions of the Mexican masses. There are here about 16,000,000 men, women and children, and of these more than three-fourths are Indians, of as pure blood as that which flowed through the veins of the Aztecs. There are several millions of a mixed breed, and some hundreds of thousands who have come down direct from the Spaniards. Of the Indians there are something like 12,000,000 who can neither read nor write. There have been a number of laws making education free and compulsory, but they have been honored in the breach rather than in the observance, and today there are something like 12,000 schools for a population about one-sixth that of the United States, and the school population is not one-twenty-fifth that of ours. Right here at the Mexican capital you can find the public letter-writer on the streets, as in India, and there is one such scribe near the cathedral who has a typewriter and takes down dictation from the Indians by tapping the keys.

Aster Schools.

This condition seems all the worse when we remember the advanced civilization of the Aztecs at the time Cortes came. They had their own records and picture writing and they lived far better than they do now. Mexico City then had 120,000 stone houses and Montezuma had other rich cities and villages in his possession. He had the country better garrisoned than it is today and he kept better order. He had a system of postal stations and his courier service was such that re-



A Public Letter Writer at Vera

lays of letter carriers brought dispatches from Cortes at Vera Cruz over the mountains to the capital and back, a distance of about 400 miles, in a little more than a week. Fresh fish from the Gulf of Mexico were brought to Montezuma's table within twenty-four hours from the time they were caught. The Indians of that day wore clothes of woven cotton, and they were far better clad than they are now. The women had skirts and petticoats of different lengths, and these were of fine texture and prettily embroidered. The people made beautiful toys and were skillful in metals, making hatchets of copper alloyed with tin and great plates of gold and silver wonderfully carved. We do not know just how much gold Cortes carried away, but among the first presents he received from Montezuma was a golden plate as big as a cartwheel, and it is said the Indian chiefs who met him wore armor of gold and that they had collars, bracelets and earrings of the same precious metal.

How the Peons Live.

Such were the Indians who lived here about 400 years ago. They were enslaved by the Spaniards and a large proportion of them have been slaves ever since. I wish I could show you how they are living in these days of our advanced civilization and in this year of our Lord 1913. On most of the haciendas on the plateau they have huts of sun-dried brick, many of which are so low that a man cannot stand upright in them. The rooms are small and dark. Some of the houses have no windows and their doors are of the rudest description. The roofs are flat and the houses are, in fact, little more than brick boxes. They are very like the homes of the fellahs on the banks of the Nile.

In the mountains about Toluca are shanties not more than four feet in height, and near the railroad on the way to Mexico City you may see families living in shacks made of old ties or boards stuck up against the side of a hill, the home being half cave and half house. Sometimes the ties are set on end, forming the walls of the hut, while a thatch of cactus or straw makes the roof. If you will remember how long a railroad tie is you will know the height of such huts. In other places there are huts built with ridge poles, and these roofs are sometimes of boards or ties.

In traveling through the mountainous regions the board roofs are sometimes held down by stones placed upon them and the ties are laid in mortar. In but few of such huts are nails used, ropes and withes taking their places.

In the Tropical Lowlands.

Further down the lowlands the huts are made of cane and poles. The poles are driven into the ground, and the cane is fastened to them, the house being finished with a thatch roof made of corn stalks or cane. Sometimes these pole walls are plastered, but often you can see through between the canes. The weather is so warm that no fires are needed and the cooking is often done in the open air.

Here in Mexico City the most of the Indians live in tenement houses, whole families often being crowded into one room. Many of the larger buildings have the poor on the first floor and the better classes above. On the outskirts are the homes of squatters made of refuse material from tin cans to store boxes, and there are some huts of sun-dried bricks, so low that the people have to stoop to enter them.

In a Mexican Hut.

I wish I could take you into some of the poorer huts, such as you can find in almost any part of the republic. I entered one last week whose ground floor was not bigger than that of a kitchen of a two-family flat. It had walls of railroad ties stood upon end and the laid across the top formed the roof. A cradle hung from the roof and out of it a baby with a skin as red as a freshly boiled lobster looked at me as I entered. A frowny peon woman was rocking the cradle, and two copper-faced children hung round her knees.

I looked for furniture. There were only two stools and a mat which was spread upon the ground. The father, mother and

and when there is certainty that it has come from a healthy animal.

I wish to add here that certain bacilli are always present in raw milk, and that they prevent the formation of large numbers of other bacteria, such as those of typhoid fever. The latter cannot develop in raw milk. When the milk has been boiled or sterilized, however, typhoid bacilli which have gotten into it will remain in it for months, as well as other forms of poisonous bacteria which are injurious to children. When raw milk free of all objections cannot be obtained it is best to use buttermilk.

Some persons possess an antipathy to milk, which in its ordinary form, is not well tolerated by their stomachs. This is especially noticeable in women and young girls. In such cases the milk may be diluted one-third with some alkaline mineral water, such as Vichy celestins. The addition of some fine flour may also render the milk more digestible, and,

hence, better borne. Small children, too, sometimes prefer milk given to them in this form. For those who cannot tolerate ordinary milk the more easily digested buttermilk may be used.

Milk should be taken raw, but circumstances may present themselves, however, when a glass of hot milk will exert a beneficial influence upon the system. This is the case, for instance, where one has been out on a damp, cold day and comes in feeling chilled, as by drinking hot milk we greatly stimulate the activity of the skin. In colds, if early in the morning or on rising hot whey or hot milk is taken, it will exert a favorable influence upon the inflamed mucous membranes.

To warm the body up on a cold, frosty day tea is often used, but from the standpoint of health milk is better. The yolks of one or two eggs make of milk a very strengthening drink.—Health and Longevity.

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A low state of the general health is now the accepted cause of backwardness in children. So in the case of a backward child it is best to look towards building up its health. It will usually be found that the main trouble is in the food, in lack of assimilation and digestion. Hence care should be taken in the kind of food given to the child. This, with plenty of air and exercise, should bring about a change for the better.

Watch the conditions of the bowels, to note whether the waste is being passed off or not, or whether it is being passed too freely. If either condition prevails give a small dose of that gentlest of all laxative-tones, Dr. Caldwell's Syrup Pepsin. Thousands of mothers will testify to the wonders it has wrought in the lives of their own children, and for that reason legions of families like those of Mrs. J. E. Brunty, 193 9th Ave., Nashville, Tenn., are never without it in the house. Mrs. Brunty writes: "Harry had always been constipated until I gave him Dr. Caldwell's Syrup Pepsin. I am certainly going to keep this medicine in the house in the future for I know it to be good." It is pleasant to the taste and so perfectly safe that it is given to infants, and yet is equally effective for grown people. All druggists sell it and the price is only fifty cents and one dollar a bot-



HARRY BRUNTY

tle, the latter for families who need it regularly.

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If no member of your family has ever used Syrup Pepsin and you would like to make a personal trial of it before buying it in the regular way of a druggist, send your address—a postal will do—to Dr. W. B. Caldwell, 417 Washington St., Monticello, Ill., and a free sample bottle will be mailed you.

Hot weather is approaching



This is the season when a man, spending a large part of the day in his office, is looking for an office in a cool building.

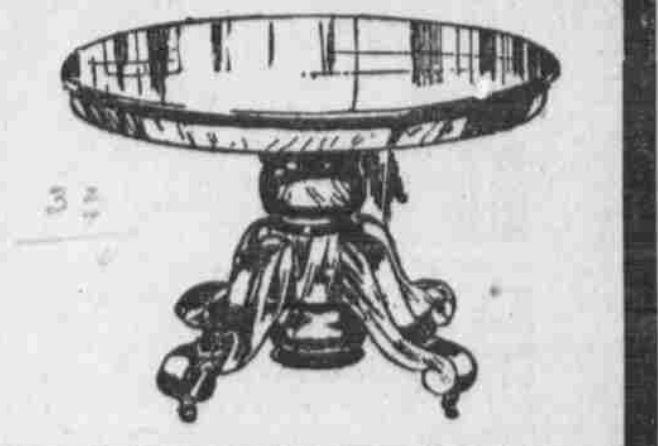
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