

Mr. Fish and Present Day Negro Slavery

By CYRIL BRIGGS.

WILL Fish and his fellow fascists advocate a boycott on Southern cotton, tobacco, rice, etc.? Will they favor a proposal to investigate Negro slavery, through peonage, share cropping, tenant farming, etc., in the South?

To the lies peddled by these gentlemen on imaginary "forced and convict labor" in the Soviet Union is added the disgusting spectacle of a gang of murderous slave-drivers evoking a vision of slavery where none exists and pretending to be shocked by the vision while supported and unmoved by the actual existence of slavery at home.

Under the system of land monopoly by the heirs of the former slave owners, several million Negroes are today held against their wills on the plantations of the rich landowners of the South and Southwest. These Negro workers may not leave their landlord while in debt to him. And under the system of landlord supervision of crops, landlord cheating on accounts, denial of the rights to market crops, the Negro farm workers—share croppers, tenant farmers and farm laborers—are constantly forced deeper and deeper into debt to their landlord or employer.

Many of these victims are furnished the bosses by the courts and sheriffs.

"Negroes may be arrested for slight offenses and farmed out to employers."

"On such agreement the contract labor law allows the planter to hold the convict until the debt is paid." (Reuter: The American Race Problem.)

In the meantime the Negro victim of present-day chattel slavery in the United States is charged for food, clothing and money advanced by the employer, and gets deeper and deeper into debt.

"Because of poor judgment, crop failure, or other reason he may be unable to discharge his obligation and virtually ceases to be a free person," admits E. B. Reuter, Professor of Sociology in the University of Iowa, in his book "The American Race Problem."

"If the offender runs away, refuses to work, or disobeys the commands of the master he may be returned to jail and this results in the imposition of a new sentence."

"Prison labor is sold to private persons who work the convicts for labor."

"Peonage and debt slavery are means of securing cheap and steady labor."

These admissions are reluctantly made by Reuter in his book. Emmet J. Scott, Negro reformist and another apologist for the capitalist system, cited the convict leasing system as one of the greatest causes of the mass migration which reached its peak in 1919:

The convict system by which the courts are permitted to inflict heavy fines for trivial offenses and the sheriffs to hire the convicts to planters on the basis of peonage. . . ."

These conditions exist today in the South and Southwest. The bosses' press has recently admitted this. The New York Times two weeks ago published a dispatch from Arkansas in which it was admitted that:

"The share cropper can't move to another plantation unless his debts are assumed by the new planter."

And again:

"What the share cropper, tenant and small farmer have been living under for years, is nothing less than slavery."

This applies to both Negro and white farm labor, but especially to the Negroes.

The white planter may at any time sell or transfer his claim in the Negro worker—which amounts to selling the Negro worker.

In many states, this slavery has been legalized by the bosses' laws. These laws will be dealt with in other articles.