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EDITORIAL

VEILED PEONAGE.

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WHAT is announced as “the most comprehensive of employees’ pension system” is to be put in operation by the Chicago packing firm of Morris & Co., on January 1, 1909. Closely looked into, the scheme is an elaborately veiled peonage scheme.

The Morris & Co. “system” combines a pension fund, an employees co-operative bank and an industrial profit sharing scheme.

None of the three elements that constitute the Morris & Co. system is new.

Pension funds have been schemed before. They are in operation on railroads and other capitalist establishments. Their practical working amounts to tying down the employee to the sweet will of the employer. The employee must contribute to the fund, or he forfeits his job; and he must have continued to be an employee or he forfeits his pension when it is to be due. The consequences need not be pointed out. They are obvious. Rather than forfeit his contributions to the pension and, along with that, the pension itself, the employee puts up with almost anything. His employment or his discharge being at the employer’s will, the pension lure acts as a subjugator of the employee.

Employees’ co-operative banks also are no new devil’s device. These banks accomplish partly the purpose of a “pension fund,” mainly they accomplish another purpose. Poultry raisers would have but little benefit of their fowl if these laid their eggs wherever they pleased. The eggs would be hard to find. Poultry raisers manage things so that their fowl lay their eggs at given places. That renders the eggs accessible to the poultry man. Employees’ “co-operative banks” are of the nature of the pre-arranged nests on poultry farms. The employees make their deposits (lay their eggs) there—and the employer, who is the runner of the bank, thus has ready at hand the bulk of the cash he gives out in wages. Employees’ “co-operative banks,” accordingly, are not only one more fetter to make the workers subservient, they also serve the purpose of practically increasing the employers' disposable capital—thereby his club over his wage slaves.

Finally, profit sharing is old as any hill in the mountain range of Exploitation. Their course is not always lighted by the lurid lights of mass suicide among the workers that lighted the course of the Alfred Dolge profit sharing Dolgeville concern. They amount to a martingale that keeps the worker's neck bent. For the sake of the share, always illusory, the worker is driven to submit to an intensified exploitation.

The feature of the Morris & Co. "system" is that it combines all these three schemes of oppression. Any one of the schemes is a partial peonage; all the three schemes combined place the workers within a stockade that is none the less strong for being invisible, and rivets to his neck an iron collar that is none the less forceful for being intangible.

Chattel slavery hides its head in shame before the more powerful contrivance of "free labor"; peonage hides its head in shame before the "cleverer" Morris & Co. "system." As "free labor" under capitalism is veiled slavery, so is the Morris & Co. "system" veiled peonage.

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