

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 6, NO. 174.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1905.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

LEST BURNETT BE FORGOTTEN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE fact is transpiring that M. Henry Burnett, the acting chief of the United States branch of labor and quarters in Panama, in his endeavor to cater to the comfort and happiness of the laborers employed in digging the isthmian canal, is importing “wives” for the men. Most of the laborers are negroes brought in from Jamaica and other West Indian islands. So then, Jamaica, Martinique, Santa Cruz and other places are ransacked for “wives” for these laborers. Ships are sent out in search of loads of females; it is even said that some of the ships employed by M. Burnett in this trade are U.S. ships; and they return laden with the wished-for cargo. Objection has been raised that the practice very much partakes of the old African slave trade, seeing that in some instances the prospective “wives” are actually kidnapped from their old homes; then also objection has been raised on the ground of immorality. But Mr. Burnett, who is described as a man of “clean-cut features,” besides “able and practical,” insists that the practice is above reproach. Being pressed with the question whether he did not consider that the people of the United States may object to the continuance of such relations, as the importation of these “wives” implied, on its soil under sanction and by the act of its Government, Mr. Burnett jauntily answered:

“I can’t see why they should. We are down here to build this canal. What have the morals of a lot of West Indian negroes got to do with it? I assert that they are not immoral in preferring to live with a woman without a marriage ceremony. They may be unmoral—that is, without morals as we understand morality—BUT THEY ARE OFT TIMES TRUER TO THE WOMEN THEY SELECT THAN OUR PEOPLE WHO HAVE A CEREMONY PERFORMED.”

Miss Helen Gould has organized herself into a public institution for the

distribution of rewards to those who “deserve well of the country”. In the fulfillment of her nobly self-imposed task, the lady recently donated a magnificent silver teaset to Gen. Sherman Bell of Colorado—another gentleman of “clean-cut features”, “able and practical”—for his services there to “the country”. Quite possibly some carping critic of the General’s “service to the country” might have questioned him, as Mr. Burnett is now questioned, and asked whether to deport workingmen out of the State, or locking them up in bull pens, and arresting public magistrates, in short, whether raising Cain generally was not in violation of the civic rights of the workman. We make no doubt that the valiant General’s answer would have been much like Burnett’s. He certainly would have answered: “I am down, or out West here to uphold the capitalist class. What have the civic rights of a lot of workmen got to do with it?” Of course their civic rights had nothing to do with it, for the same reason that Mr. Burnett gives for his action in Panama. The General got a silver tea-set, should not Burnett get at least as much?

The capitalist class is served as faithfully by the Panama Canal Scandal as it was by the Colorado Scandal. The violation of all human and divine laws—from which the canal graft sprang and which is accompanying it at every step—is every bit as grandiose as the violation of all human and divine laws, from the violation of which the capitalist mine graft in Colorado has sprung, and which likewise accompanied it at every step.

Let not Henry Burnett be forgotten.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded January 2009

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