The WESTERN SOCIALIST

JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

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THE WESTERN SOCIALIST is published by the World Socialist Party of the United States and the Socialist Party of Canada. Subscriptions, donations, articles and correspondence for insertion in THE WESTERN SOCIALIST should be addressed to the World Socialist Party, 27 Dock Square, Boston 8, Mass., or Socialist Party of Canada, P. O. Box 751. Winnipeg, Man.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

3 ISSUES ..... 25c — 12 issues $1.00

LIFETIME $10.00

ABOVE RATES INCLUDE POSTAGE

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The Slums of Miami

Miami is a winter playground for the rich, but like cities in general, it consists of both rich and poor with sharp contrasts between the palatial homes of the wealthy and the shacks and hovels of the destitute. This paradise of the South is a paradise only for the idle rich who live in luxury and manifest their "superior intelligence" in such useful and productive pastimes as ostentatious display of wealth and parasitical existence. These are the so-called brains of America. The other picture of Miami — poverty, slums, discrimination — never appears in the blurbs sent out by the Miami Chamber of Commerce so that it may come as a shock to many to learn that the working class in Miami is faced with the same problems as elsewhere — poverty and increasing insecurity. The Negro districts, in particular, are vast areas of almost unbelievable squalor and in this sordid environment, disease and crime is increasing to such a degree that the very ones who support the system that produces such effects are compelled to take heed. A committee has been formed to study conditions in the Negro areas and it has already noted the following:

> **"They saw one hovel in which twenty-one humans live in squalor, drinking brackish well water, using one roofless toilet. They saw four tumbledown shacks housing twenty children and adults, all forced to use one outdoor sink for drinking, bathing and washing. They saw an airless lean-to down a corridor so narrow that they were unable to turn around and had to back out into the squalid street. Two women existing there paid rent to an organization known as the Love and Charity Society."**
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> [Miami Herald, June 19, 1948].

And in nearby Coconut Grove:

> **"In its downtown clearance program, the committee heard Dr. Cato say that 40,000 persons are living in an area of only 318 acres.**
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> **"He added that only 10 per cent of the houses are in good repair; that the death rate from tuberculosis of Negroes in the district was more than three times that of Whites in other sections; that typhus fever is most prevalent in that area because of rats.**
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> **"The lack of refrigeration for formulas has caused the infant mortality rate in the Negro section to be much higher than elsewhere, Dr. Cato said, and the sanitary conditions are 'deplorable'!"**
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> [Miami Herald, June 11, 1948].

These conditions have existed for many years and this probe is by no means the first. For over 10 years investigations have been made and certain reforms recommended without any perceptible action being taken. It is a simple matter for social reformers to discover evils — there are evils galore all about us — but attempting to apply remedies, without getting rid of the cause itself, is an entirely different story. We happen to be living in a profit system where the driving force is the attainment of profits and not the welfare

of all of the people. Property owners in Miami are certainly no exceptions and are not interested in spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in housing improvements unless they are assured they will get their money back. And how can they get a profitable return when the vast majority of the Negroes in Miami, like millions of workers everywhere, are limited by their meager earnings and can afford nothing better than the shabbiest of housing. The property owner in a slum area is frequently censured for the unwholesome living conditions but he is no more calloused than the average capitalist. Business is business and he is no more the cause of slums than the munition maker is the cause of wars. It is the social system and not the individual that is at fault.

Capitalism not only creates slums, but simultaneously brings into being its two component parts — disease and crime. And its for these two reasons, in particular, and not concern for the unfortunate victims, that there is so much hue and cry for slum clearance. Any tears that the capitalist apologists may shed over the plight of the Negro are purely of the crocodile variety. That there are no lofty motives involved is well demonstrated in the Miami Herald of June 7:

> **"The public health, for instance, is not divided into White and Negro compartments. The overall health of our Colored people is involved into ours. Contagious disease, for example, does not stop at a segregation boundary. Enlightened White self-interest should dictate a not-to-be-denied drive for slum clearance."**

A second phase of the slum question is the crime that breeds and flourishes wherever poverty and despair exists. Crime detection and punishment can be a heavy burden to those who have to foot the bill. As taxpayers, in general, they are anxious to eliminate as much of the cost as possible. These "altruistic" persons are also very much interested in slum clearance. Walter E. Headley, Assistant Police Chief of Miami, has pointed out that only about 25 per cent of the crimes in the Negro area result in arrest because of police difficulty in patrolling the section and lack of communications. From the Miami Herald of June 28, we read:

> **"Headley reported that the overcrowded Negro slums breed 75 per cent of the local crimes of violence; that the area, which houses 19 per cent of the City's population in its shacks and hovels, is responsible for 62 per cent of Miami's misdemeanor cases."**

What more conclusive proof do we need to substantiate the socialist contention that environment moulds human behaviour, and that crime and other social ills exist and grow whenever conditions are propitious. Despite those who insist that criminals are born and not made, facts do prove that crime increases in ratio to poverty and misery and that given similar conditions, peoples will react very much in the same way regardless of color or creed. Given a socialist environment of abundance, human beings will behave in a sane and social manner.

We can safely assume that even should housing improvements be made in the Negro slums, the general status of the Negro will remain unchanged. He is a most pathetic victim of this society as he is exploited as a wage-worker and segregated and discriminated against because of his color. Just as long as this system continues so long will poverty and want stalk him, slum reforms or no. The Negro cannot solve his basic problems within the confines of a capitalist society, and sooner or later will have to join hands with his fellow workers everywhere for the task of ending the last of all slave societies.

This latest in a long series of slum clearance committees has an unenviable and hapless job. It has already requested an extension from sixty days to one year and as Chairman Robert A. Graves remarked in the "Miami Herald" of June 28: "We are