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*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Pamphlet: The Negro Worker Vol. 2 No. 7**

Extracted on Mar-28-2024 08:43:19

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Mr. Vandervelde "Discovers" The Congo

The atrocities of Belgian imperialism in the Congo which are well known from the time of Leopold have become so widespread of late that even Mr. Emile Vandervelde, social democratic leader of the II International, has been forced to speak on these outrages in the Belgian Parliament. Although this gesture of Mr. Vandervelde cannot deceive us, for there is no individual who is more personally responsible for the brutalities, outrages and butcheries committed in the Congo than this ex-minister-president of his Majesty's Belgian government, we are nevertheless publishing excerpts from his speech in order that our readers will not charge us with exaggerating the unbelievable things which go on in the Congo under the administration of a so called human and enlightened nation.

Those white imperialists and their black apologists who are today conducting the vilest propaganda against Liberia in order to annex this little Negro republic, would do well to turn their attention to the Congo and other colonies in Africa under British, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian imperialisms -- all of which are carrying on the same policy as the Belgian exploiters, oppressors and murders. -- Ed.

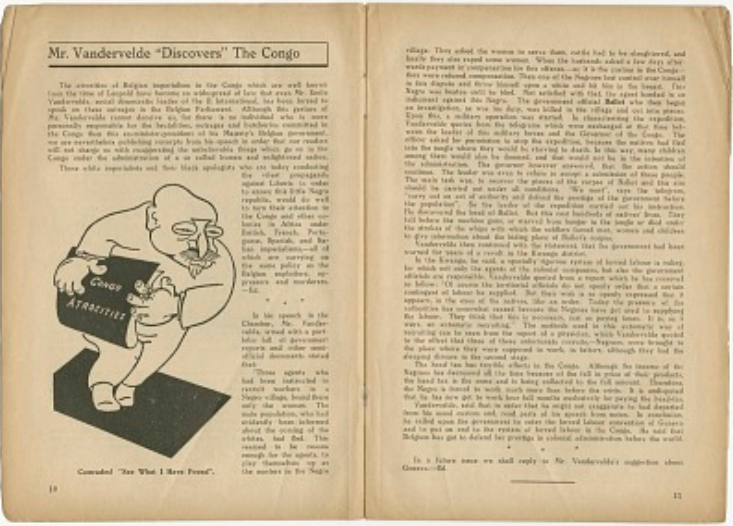
In his speech in the Chamber, Mr. Vandervelde, armed with a portfolio full of government reports and other semi-official documents stated that:

"Three agents who had been instructed to recruit workers in a Negro village, found there only the women. The male population, who had evidently been informed about the coming of the whites, had fled. This seemed to be reason enough for the agents, to play themselves up as the masters in the Negro

[[image]]  
[[caption]] Comrades! "See What I Have Found". [[/caption]]

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village. They asked the women to serve them, cattle had to be slaughtered, and finally they also raped some women. When the husbands asked a few days afterwards payment in compensation for this offense, -- as it is the custom in the Congo -- they were refused compensation. Then one of the Negroes lost control over himself in this dispute and threw himself upon a white and bit him in the breast. This Negro was beaten until he bled. Not satisfied with that, the agent handed in an indictment against this Negro. The government official Bailot who then began an investigation, as was his duty, was killed in the village and cut into pieces. Upon this, a military operation was started. In characterising the expedition, Vandervelde quotes from the telegrams which were exchanged at that time between the leader of this military forces and the Governor of the Congo. The officer asked for permission to stop the expedition because the natives had fled into the jungle where they would be starving to death. In this way, many children among them would also be doomed and that would not be in the intention of the administration. The governor however answered, that



the action should continue. The leader was even to refuse to accept a submission of these people. The main task was, to recover the pieces of the corpse of Ballot and this aim should be carried out under all conditions. "We must," says the telegram, "carry out an act of authority and defend the prestige of the government before the population". So the leader of the expedition carried out his instruction. He discovered the head of Ballot. But this cost hundreds of natives' lives. They fell before the machine guns, or starved from hunger in the jungle or died under the strokes of the whips with which the soldiers forced men, women and children to give information about the hiding place of Ballot's corpse.

Vandervelde then continued with the statement, that the government had been warned for years of a revolt in the Kwango district.

In the Kwango, he said, a specially rigorous system of forced labour is ruling, for which not only the agents of the colonial companies, but also the government officials are responsible. Vandervelde quoted from a report which he has received as follow: "Of course the territorial officials do not openly order that a certain contingent of labour be supplied. But their wish is so openly expressed that it appears, in the eyes of the natives, like an order. Today the pressure of the authorities has somewhat ceased because the Negroes have got used to supplying the labour. They think that this is necessary, just as paying taxes. It is, as it were, an automatic recruiting." The methods used in this automatic way of recruiting can be seen from the report of the physician, which Vandervelde quoted to the effect that three of these unfortunate recruits,-- Negroes, were brought to the place where they were supposed to work, in fetters, although they had the sleeping disease in the second stage.

The head tax has terrible effects in the Congo. Although the income of the Negroes has decreased all the time because of the fall in price of their products, the head tax is the same [[same]] and is being collected to the full amount. Therefore, the Negro is forced to work much more than before the crisis. It is undisputed that he has now got to work four full months exclusively for paying the head-tax.

Vandervelde, said that in order that he might not exaggerate he had departed from his usual custom and, read parts of his speech from notes. In conclusion, he called upon the government to enter the forced labour convention of Geneva and to put an end to the system of forced labour in the Congo. He said that Belgium has got to defend her prestige in colonial administration before the world.

In a future issue we shall reply to Mr. Vandervelde's suggestion about Geneva. -- Ed.



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