

# World slavery



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Describe the problem of slavery in the world. What is the extent of the problem? What different kinds of slavery are there? What part does poverty play in

causing and perpetuating slavery?

One of the convenient myths being perpetrated is that slavery no longer exists in modern societies. As the experience of black Americans clearly shows, attaining nominal legal recognition as freed people need not translate into real, meaningful independence. The condition of black Americans before 1861 and in the decades after it were not drastically different. Usually slavery is associated with bonding chains, physical exploitation and the crack of the whip by slave owners. This kind of outright possession of other human beings has largely ceased to exist, but other sophisticated forms of slavery have cropped up. Today, the most potent instrument of slavery is economic power as opposed to physical power. With most countries in the world joining the neo-liberal bandwagon, the power of money has established itself as the most potent instrument of perpetrating slavery. Previously, slaves would obey their masters for fear of the whip. But today, they do so for fear of starvation.

Financial glottalization, euphemistically called neo-liberal reforms by most right-wing politicians, has contributed greatly to economic disparities across the world. In the thirty odd years since the initiation of the globalisation process, the income gap between the rich and the poor has only widened. It might be true that the Gross Domestic Products of several countries (especially those in Asia) might have improved during this period. But internally, the standard living for a majority of the population has stagnated or worsened. This kind of imbalance serves the interests of the rich perfectly,

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as they now have access to a desperate labour market that is ripe for further exploitation. It should be remembered that poverty is at its most severe in regions with high concentrations of wealth. This is why, prostitution has burst like an epidemic in Eastern European and South East Asian countries that have embraced neo-liberalism in recent decades.

Since conventional notions of bonded slavery are not applicable in contemporary times, the parameters for evaluating its existence have to be modified as well. In this new understanding, slavery is closely associated with poverty. So if an individual is not able to eat two full meals everyday, or is unable to get access to basic healthcare, or does not have protection against natural elements, he/she can be said to be a slave. In this condition of acute deprivation, the individual will have no option but to take any work he/she is given at rock-bottom wages. In other words, the chattel slavery system of centuries past is now replaced by wage-slavery. The former might appear to be the more brutal of the two, but on closer inspection, we see that there is no moral distinction between the two. Renting ones body and intellect in order to prevent starvation and suffering is no more superior to obeying commands for fear of punishment. They are essentially the same. But with billions of dollars being poured into corporate propaganda each year, the sting is taken out of modern wage-slavery. George Orwell, the author of dystopian masterpiece 1984, would agree with the view that the Public Relations industry has sold the notion of wage-slavery as something beneficial and benign to the masses, if not outright desirable. So, until capitalist corporate hegemony is tempered by humanitarian concerns, both poverty and slavery will continue to mar the state of our species (and the planet too).

Works Cited:

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