

The People.

VOL. IX.—NO. 27.

HENRY KUHN, NAT'L SEC'Y, S.L.P.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1899

PRICE 2 CENTS.

EDITORIAL

TURNING THE CYCLE

By DANIEL DE LEON

It is out of feudalism that capitalism rose. Every step onward was at first a step away from feudalism. The conclusion would seem to be forced that, as society moves still further onward, it moves still further away from feudalism, still further from where it started. Rash conclusion. Beyond a point, if real onward, real progressive steps are not made, society turns back to where it started from.

Capitalist society in America has reached the point that marks the period where, if the onward march towards Socialism is not taken, a retrograde march back to feudalism must set in. Of this fact, and of the fact that the retrograde march has commenced there are not a few instances. The latest is recorded in Oklahoma Territory, near the town of Bliss.

From Bliss, O.T., comes the news that the critics of Markham, the poet of the "Man with the Hoe," who snort at the thought of a free-born American being classed as brother to the ox, should pay a visit to the 7,000 acre farm of the 101 live-stock company there. The man with the hoe has actually usurped the specially ordained work of the ox, the most remarkable fact known to the agricultural fraternity being on view in that locality in the shape of HUMAN TEAMS pulling the plows. When the team of men are ready to start, the driver, in lieu of a whip, holds over his team a loaded revolver, not for the purpose of hastening operations by making targets of the men, but to use as a signal so that the human horses can have a fair start.

Here surely there seems to be a reason for Edwin Markham's startling queries: "Are we shaping a new feudalism—an industrial feudalism—which will press the life out of the worker and be dead to all thought of his social well being?"

The men are usually tramps who have been drummed into the service of the livestock company by a liberal payment. When the pistol has cracked and the team has the plow fairly under way, the tramps rise from the crawling attitude of the start and pull the plow, walking in the natural position. With so many of them in a

team the work is divided into a very small amount of exertion for each man, and “Weary Waggles” and “Footsore Willie” have comparatively an easier time of it.

Superintendent J.C. Miller says that only at certain periods of the year does it pay to have the tramp team at work, for while there are horses available the latter are naturally preferred. When the farmers are all working early and late and all the cattle are busy in the fields the horse becomes a scarce article on these big farms, and the Oklahoma agriculturist has to find some substitute. The farmers of the territory are taking up the idea, and the supply of tramps is getting as scarce as the supply of horses.

Mr. Miller claims he can do the plowing with a team of tramps at just half the amount it would cost him to hire horses when the latter are badly wanted and are being held for the highest price. In Oklahoma the ranchers are so large that no one man owns enough horses to do his work in the busy season.

It is not probable that the dignity of the genus tramp would suffer men to work in this lowly manner on farms where the natives could gather around and criticise. But here, where the ranch owner and his hands are the only persons encountered in a day’s walk, the broken down gentleman and the mechanic who is walking for a job submits to being harnessed like cattle to a plow without the fact being bruited abroad over the land to the injury of their reputation. While at work the tramps are at least sure of a square meal, for the ranch owners are hospitality personified, and the appetite that is cultivated by dragging a plow through the field is liberally satisfied with good, wholesome fare. The sleeping provision made for the tramps is far better than that to which they are accustomed, so that the wanderer who is enlisted as a helper on the ranch in place of the costly horses finds that he has fallen in for a comfortable job at good money.

Are we not under a full head of steam towards feudalism?

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

Uploaded May 2005