

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 212.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

MODERN DISPOSSESSMENT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ONE of the passages in Marx's *Capital* gives a historic account of the circumstances that furnished to the oncoming capitalist class a proletariat—an element stripped of all property and thereby compelled to sell its labor-power at the pittance offered to it.

The action of the Crown in seizing estates compelled large numbers of lordlings to “set free” their numerous retainers. The “setting free” consisted in discharging these retainers and throwing them upon the high roads. Simultaneously with this process, another went on apace. The free peasant proprietors were ruthlessly dispossessed. Farms were turned into sheep-walks; peasants driven out to make room for hunting grounds; households were broken up by main force; Bacon's history of those days depicts a widespread system of expropriation furnishing paupers in huge numbers. The presence of this new element was grist to the bourgeois mill. The element needed to sweat out surplus value was thus produced, and was used.

Just now a very similar process is going on, although no longer to furnish the bourgeois with the means to RAISE surplus value, but to furnish it with the means to PRESERVE the surplus value which it has squeezed out of the workers.

The announcement that 8,000 men have within the last two months applied to the recruiting offices for enlistment in the Army should make the judicious pause. It announces the fact of the latest dispossession, and the uses to which it is to be put.

What the conduct of the Crown and the upper nobility did in the days of Henry the VIII., the conduct of the plutocracy is now doing in our own days. In the days of Henry VIII. the smaller holders were dispossessed of their property; in these days the proletariat is dispossessed wholesale of its jobs. In the days of Henry VIII. the

expropriated population rushed to the cities, were caught in the web of the bourgeois, and were made to sweat surplus value; in these days the expropriated proletariat, expropriated of its pittance as wage slaves, is rushing to the Army there to sell their hides in order to fight for the plutocracy against the swelling tide of discontent, and thus insure to the plutocracy the possession of its plunder.

The method of the expropriation or dispossessionment has changed; its immediate object has changed; in all essentials the process is a repetition of what happened in the days of Henry VIII. The only real difference is that the law of social evolution answered in the affirmative the question put in the days of Henry VIII. as to whether the process would be crowned with success; whereas the answer to the same question, put in our days, is answered emphatically in the negative; at least it is answered with a huge ?.

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

Uploaded December 2009

slpns@slp.org