

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 37.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

THE STAKED OX.

By DANIEL DE LEON

STATISTICAL figures, given by Dr. John E. White of Atlanta on the system of leasing convicts in Georgia, and the gentleman's proposed remedies to do away with the evil, suggest a staked ox, striving to free, yet winding himself ever faster and closer to the stake, as a fit picture of the reformer in modern society.

From 1865 to 1899 convicts were sold in Georgia "as one would sell cattle." The convict was first sold wholesale by the State; he was then retailed from purchaser to purchaser. During this period the State got \$7.50 a head a year for its convicts.

The second period began with 1899 and continues to this day. The difference consists in the discontinuance of the public sale like cattle, and in improved private bargaining. The convicts are now leased by the State at \$136 a head—an increase of \$128.50 apiece to the State, leaving the lessee free to sublet, an opportunity that has given birth to a special industry, that of leasing and sub-leasing convicts, the dealer frequently making as much as \$434 profit in the operation. The consequence is that the State of Georgia now derives a revenue of \$200,000 from her convicts; the "tax payers," good, moral Christians that they are, look upon the convict "as an asset, not as a liability; as a good fortune rather than a burden," seeing that he lightens their taxes; and, finally, the enterprising Georgian, with an eye to "turning an honest penny," regards the convict as an article of trade from which profits can be drawn that "would make Shylock sweat with shame."

Such a state of things Dr. White justly deplors; and, trying to put an end to the corrupting influence of such practices, he has looked around for a remedy—and found it, he complacently announces. He found, not one, he found two remedies. Either confine the convicts in stockades and put them to work at building macadam roads, or put them to work on model State farms. In other words, beat the devil around the stump.

The identical evils now deplored from the leasing system would continue—the State would receive a large, most probably a much larger, revenue from the convicts whom she would exploit exclusively, than the \$200,000 that she now pockets through the leasing system; the increased revenues would lighten still more the taxes of the taxpayers; these would look upon the convict with still greater affection “as an asset, not as a liability; as a good fortune rather than a burden”; and the final result would be an intensification of the corrupting influences now complained of. The dull staked ox only winds himself faster around the stake.

The criminal is the product of society. Society, not the individual, is guilty. Any effort, looking to the removal of the evil effects of crime, that does not proceed from these premises, tugs at the wrong chord. Crime is removed only by the removal of the material conditions that generate it. It is these material conditions that are the criminals.

Capitalist society, which eggs on Want and the Fear of Want like dogs at the heels of the people, converts the “Commonweal” into a den of criminals. The most powerful “convict” the less powerful, and thus “convicts” become national “assets,” windfalls rather than “burdens.”

Not the “reform” of the staked ox, but the hammer blows of the Socialist Revolution, heralded by the Socialist Labor Party, will stead. All else is an endless winding around the stake and a weariness of the flesh.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded March 2010

slpns@slp.org