

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 342.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JUNE 7, 1910.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## SHOT-GUNS AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

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**T**HE other day an Indiana farmer seized a shotgun and shot a neighbor in the back in a dispute over a plot of land. Private property was repeating its origin and forecasting its future.

Private property had its rise in violence. It was conquest by the strongest, and woe to the vanquished. What a Caesar, a Charlemagne, and a Napoleon accomplished on a gigantic scale, was also accomplished on a smaller scale by all who sounded the breaking up of primitive communal society by “digging a trench about a piece of common land, and saying “This is mine.” What occurred first with land occurred later with the tool. As soon as the complexity of machinery rendered it difficult for one man to acquire or operate it, he who did acquire it became equipped with the power to do violence to his fellow men by enslaving them to his uses. This congenital stain private property has never succeeded in wiping off. It never will. While the institution of one man owning what another needs to live by lasts, tragedies like that in Indiana will hold the stage.

Yet in its time private property, however violent its birth and character, was a step in advance. It enabled at least some to attain what previously none had attained—plenty and leisure. It created inequalities in society, but even those inequalities were in the nature of a rise above the previous dead level of drudgery and poverty. It was the foothills mankind had to traverse in its progress from the arid plain of equal misery to the luxuriant plateau of equal affluence.

Why then not continue in private property? Just because it is the foothills—an entirely necessary and unavoidable stage, but not one to be lingered in when the better vista is at hand. The lesson of co-operated industry, taught by private property, has been learned. The tool has been developed to the point that with its blessings equally distributed none need want. In the face of these facts, to go longer

stumbling among the crime-producing adversities of private property is a greater crime than all others, for it breeds all others.

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Uploaded June 2011

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