

# The People.

VOL. VII, NO. 2

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 1897

PRICE 3 CENTS

EDITORIAL

## Tell-Tale Words.

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Language is like geologic formations; words and expressions are like geologic specimens. As a geologic specimen reveals the age, period and material history of the place from whence it was taken, so do words and expressions reveal the social conditions under which they were formed. Language is not less valuable to the study of sociology than mineral specimens are to the study of geology. There are two quite common expressions in vogue in these days whose study will aid not a little in understanding social evolution and the marked changes we have undergone within the last hundred years.

The first of these expressions is "Labor Market."

Every one knows that with the emancipation of this country from England, the trammels of feudal rule were sundered, the feudal system was overthrown, and the present, or capitalist, system, was established. It is a feature of capitalism that it treats everything as merchandise: honor and man, the noblest and the basest, all and everything is measured with the yardstick of dollars and cents, in short, is degraded to the level of the market. Under capitalism labor, or, which comes down to the same thing, the workingman, is a merchandise, just as pork or potatoes; its price, that is its wages, is controlled by the identical economic laws that control the price of potatoes and pork. And yet, while a hundred years ago people talked of the "potato market" and the "pork market," it occurred to no one to talk of the "labor market," the merest suggestion of such a term would have been considered either idiotic or disgraceful. To-day the expression passes current as a well-known technical term, expressive of a generally recognized fact. As a chip from a Laurentian rock can not be found in sand stone, neither could the term "labor market" have been understood a hundred years ago. The fact that it is understood to-day betrays more clearly than any act of Congress could how far our economic-social development has gone.

A hundred years ago, at the very infancy of capitalism in this country, the

merchandise quality of the human beings, who had to work for their living, was not yet apparent; it was then believed that man (excepting of course the blacks, who were chattel slaves) and merchandise were wholly different; the sacredness which theoretically covered the human being gave birth to belief in the possibility of a democratic republic. Since then the development of capitalism ripened the putrid plant into full blossom. The identity of merchandise and an increasingly large majority of the people of the country has sprung into plain view. The term "labor market" more than any other demonstrates that in the economic revolution which the country has undergone, capitalism has destroyed and is incompatible with the democratic republican aspirations of the Fathers.

The second of these tell-tale expressions is "land poor."

A hundred years ago such an expression as "land poor" would have been as unintelligible as to-day would be the expression "millionaire poor." To-day a millionaire can not be poor; a hundred years ago a land holder could not be poor. This has changed, has changed so completely that the changed conditions have given birth to the expression "land poor." A hundred years ago with capitalism at its infancy here, he who had land had all that was needed to live; he could easily, with the then tools, produce and sell. But since then capitalism developed to the point of taking the sceptre from the landholder and placing it in the hands of the capital-holder. Capital now stands, as a social necessity, between the citizen and natural opportunities. He who has land and no capital may be as badly off as he who has neither. He may be poor. The "land poor" is a product of a social evolution that is led by {the} hand of Capital. The term "land poor" has a sneer drawn across its face every time a single taxer opens his mouth.

The study of current expressions is a study of sociology.

[Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.](#)

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