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EDITORIAL

NEWS FROM KHERSON.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“THE peasantry are burning estates,” comes the news from Kherson, a Russian province bordering the Black Sea.

Not merely a natural incident attendant upon the conflict there in progress is this burning of estates. This destruction of property is the culminating result of a particular attitude toward property which has been bred and fostered in the peasants. That attitude has been bred and fostered, on the one hand, by a system of relentless exploitation, on the other hand, by an insufficiency of that revolutionary education which would have taught the peasantry not to look upon wealth as the property of the landlords, to be burned, but as their own property, to be taken possession of.

The growth of that attitude that burns property in Kherson is well worth looking into, for there is something very closely akin to it developing here in America.

The fertile fields of Southern Russia once produced yields of wheat so bountiful as to be marvelous. Odessa, in her exports of that product was the greatest shipping port in the world. This indifference of the peasants to the existence or non-existence of wealth first manifested itself in their production, year by year, of less and less wheat. Relentless exploitation was the cause. The landlords taking from the peasants all but a bare living, and the peasantry learning that their greatest industry resulting in bountiful crops assured them no more prosperity than indolence and small crops resulted in this indifference of the peasantry, as a consequence of which the wheat product of Southern Russia has fallen to less than half the bountiful output of years ago. Insatiate landlords ever goading and goading the peasantry, whether they produced large crops or small crops, have destroyed the effectiveness of even goading as an incentive to industry.

If not already sufficiently condemned by the evils resulting to its subjects, then, by this very incapacity to carry on production, Russian feudalism has filled its cup of condemnation to overflowing.

In America relentless capitalist exploitation has likewise filled the working class of America with a growing spirit of indifference as to whether their labor produces less or more. But in America this indifference of the workers is not the only impediment to production. Here the capitalists themselves, through curtailments of production and through their destruction of so-called over-production, furnish a superfluity of evidence of the incapacity of capitalism to carry on production. If Russian feudalism, by the indifference it has instilled into its peasantry is condemned; then, by the vandalism of its masters, added to the indifference of its workers, American capitalism is twice condemned as incompetent to carry on production.

The redemption in America is the growth of revolutionary education dispelling the indifference of the workers. When the tide of discontent has risen to that height to plunge the workers into open conflict with employers there can be little doubt that the news which will then go forth from here will be, not that the workers are burning the factories, but that they are taking possession of them.

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