

## **Editorial: A Hoary Headed Delusion**

Mr. Morrison L. Swift, the irrepressible Boston reformer, has issued another leaflet containing another proposed solution of the Labor Question.

His plan is that there shall be a "Convention of Capitalists" to "hear views and obtain suggestions" and to "take immediate steps to relieve the most pressing evils of the industrial system." Mr. Swift is of the opinion that, in the solution of the Social Problem, "the capitalists should take the lead," and he declares his plan to be "the American way" of going about the matter.

The American way!

It is no wonder that men, intent upon riveting the shackles of slavery upon our people, should endeavor to beguile their contemplated victims with the talismanic word "American," if we find men like Mr. Swift, honorably intent upon freeing our people, themselves succumb to the identical pernicious buncombe, and thereby defeat their own purpose in that they aid in beclouding the public mind.

The American way! If one speaks of English legislation, laws that have been enacted are meant; if one speak of German music, he alludes to strains that have been produced by German composers; if one speaks of Russian methods, he means methods that prevail in Russia; by parity of reasoning, if one speaks of "the American way" in connection with the solution of critical social questions, he implies that critical

*Daniel De Leon*

social questions have been solved by us in ways different from other countries.

Let us cast a look back and see in what way we have met our critical social problems; let us then compare *our* way with that of other people, and let us then see what difference there is, if any.

The first critical social question we had to deal with was that of our continuance as feudal subjects to the British crown. Under the system then in force our colonies had virtually no rights, the Crown was omnipotent. With the development of the colonies two powerful classes faced each other here: the colonial subjects and the representatives of the feudal rule. These two classes locked horns, each based upon its economic interests. The bulk of the colonists, accordingly, pulled for freedom; the feudals pulled for subjection. As a class, neither did the feudals labor for freedom nor the colonists for subjection. The issue was that the colonists prevailed—thanks to their efforts, and despite the efforts of their oppressors.

The next great social question we had to deal with was that of slavery. It came up in two divisions. First, at a time when the slave-holding interests were dominant. The question then presented itself in the shape of an alleged necessity for the extension of our territory. This “necessity” looked different according to the point of view from which it was considered. To the slave-holding class it was an ABSOLUTE necessity; and right they were; without such territorial extension they would have quickly smothered in their own fat; their economic class interests demanded imperatively more land. On the other hand the non-slave holding, or rather non-slave needing portion of the country denied the “necessity,” and opposed it violently; and right they were; their economic interests not only did not require but were injured by an extension of territory that would extend slavery. The two class interests locked horns. Neither the one nor the other left its colors. It was not with the aid of the non-slave-holding interests that the slave-holders prevailed; they prevailed despite the efforts of their

## *A Hoary Headed Delusion*

adversaries. The war with Mexico was the result, followed by vast annexations. This was No. 2.

The next great social question we had to deal with was the second division of the slave question. The economic interests had remained substantially the same only more strongly emphasized and antagonistic, but the economic power had changed hands. The former all powerful slave-holding interests had been over-topped by the formerly less powerful anti-slavery interests. Again the two locked horns, and this time the latter prevailed, not with the aid, but despite the violent opposition of the other that cost the country torrents of blood. This was No. 3.

Glancing at the civilized countries we find the process of the class struggle to proceed upon identical lines. Whether in England, France or Germany, everywhere it is the same; the class whose economic interests are opposed to those of the class in power must FREE ITSELF; must do so without the aid, nay in the teeth of the opposition of its adversary.

Biology teaches that evolution has to be accomplished from within; social biology illustrates the same principle; and even theology declares the identical idea when it admonishes man that he must “work out his own salvation.” America is part of our planetary system. She is subject to all the laws—geologic, biologic and sociologic—of all other nations. The term “American way” is buncombe, mischievous, deceptive. The sooner we drop the silly conceit that we are not as others are, the better. That day we shall be free from one of the most enslaving fetters with which the enemy has shackled the public mind.

In America, no more than anywhere else, is anything but hostility to be expected from the capitalist class. Capitalism will not take the initiative. It will be from the working class that the first and the last word must come.

*The People*, Vol. III, No. 12. Sunday, June 18, 1893

## **A Hoary Headed Delusion**

*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the  
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

*Uploaded August 2002*