

Daniel De Leon

## **Editorial: Not ‘Human Nature,’ But ‘Human Intellect’**

“You must first change human nature” is one of the most common objections Socialists have to meet. This objection proceeds not always from the ill-intentioned; it frequently comes from well intentioned and rather friendly quarters. The latest of the latter instance is furnished by the Springfield, Ill., *Trades Herald*. This esteemed contemporary is of the opinion that “As advocated by its trained and eloquent exponents, the Socialist theory, if practically applied, would transform this worm-eaten and hard-pressed earth into a pleasure garden of felicity, happiness and plenty;” but all this notwithstanding, our friend, the *Trades Herald*, opines that, to achieve these desirable ends, “*the adherents of Socialism must primarily successfully petition the Lord to eradicate all selfishness from the heart of man.*”

If the well-intentioned people, who, like the *Trades Herald*, believe Socialism must be preceded by a change of human nature, would take the trouble to ascertain what Socialism really is, they would discover that Socialism is a social evolution bound to result from the material conditions of the capitalist system, the same as the capitalist system was bound to result from the material conditions of the previous feudal system; they would discover that human nature did not change before capitalism made its appearance, but that the opinions of men and their character were changed or modified by the changed social system. In short, they will find that as well might one talk of “first changing human nature” before

*Daniel De Leon*

displacing the old style overland emigrant wagons with modern steam cars; or “first changing human nature” before displacing the old style system of correspondence with the telegraph; or “first changing human nature” before displacing the old style system of type-setting with the modern Mergenthaler, as talk of “first changing human nature” before displacing the existing, clumsy and misery-breeding capitalist with the orderly, benign and happiness-breeding Socialist system.

The old style overland emigrant wagon, the old style system of slow correspondence, the old style system of type setting were all thrown aside, not because “human nature changed,” but because the human intellect perceived the power for greater possible comfort in the improved substitutes. So with Socialism. It is not “human nature that must be changed,” it is the intellect of the people that must be quickened into the perception that the capitalist “machine” is old, worn out and clumsy, and has become injurious, and that the Socialist “machine” that has grown out of the capitalist—just the same as steam cars, telegraphs and Mergenthalers grew out of the things they replaced—is a superior contrivance that it is ready to take the place of the old, and that unless we do our civilization will be blocked, if not destroyed.

*The People*, Vol. IV, No. 7. Sunday, May 13, 1894

## **Not 'Human Nature,' but 'Human Intellect'**

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

*Uploaded October 2002*