

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: Co-Operative Communities

It cannot have failed to attract the attention of newspaper readers how frequently of late mention is made of the starting of some new co-operative community. They are cropping up North, South, East and West. To some this is an encouraging sign; to us it is not; at least it does not appear to be an unalloyed good.

In so far as the starting of such colonies may be taken as a barometer of the Socialistic sentiment that is now leavening the land it certainly is cause for joy; nevertheless, in so far as such sentiment is manifesting itself in the starting of such colonies it is an evil; at least it is a dangerous thing—more likely to lead to harm than to good; and, furthermore, indicative of a very unripe understanding of Socialism.

Socialism, i.e., the movement that demands the collective ownership of the people's machinery of production, springs from that development of industry that renders peoples dependent one upon the other. Time was when the family could be the unity of society. That was the time when small production was in vogue. At that time the family was substantially self-supporting; the town or township was absolutely so. Under such conditions Socialism could not suggest itself. But with the introduction of machinery and its perfection the social basis was revolutionized. Not only did the machine force co-operation upon hundreds of families within one industry, but it subdivided labor to the extent of forcing co-operation upon whole countries, whole States and, finally, upon

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the whole nation. To-day the New Bedford or Fall River spinner is not an independent entity resting on his own bottom; he is a link in a long chain that spreads through the whole country that makes him dependent upon the shoemakers of Auburn, Me., the miners of Ohio, the farm hand of Kansas, the shippers of California, the cottonfield workers of Texas, the hatters of Danbury, the sugar workers of Louisiana, etc., and each and all of these dependent upon him and interdependent upon one another. When production has reached that point Socialism is demonstrated and becomes a necessity.

The co-operative community is based on a denial, at least on a disregard, of that fundamental principle of Socialism that establishes the idea of integral co-operation, i.e., of the necessity of modern society to co-operate in all the fullness of production. The co-operative community ignores the extensive interdependence man has reached; it accordingly ignores the Socialist conclusion that to-day the Co-operative Commonwealth must be co-extensive with the nation's boundaries.

Societies of this sort are, accordingly, wrongly poised and cannot last. The work of Noyes on American Socialisms,* giving an account of all the communistic settlements in America and the cause of their failures, is valuable reading at this time. These communities are either in the nature of cloisters to which men flee for asylum—and then they draw forces from the struggle that is going on where all the available forces are needed; or they are meant to be miniature demonstrations of Socialist theory—and then they are fraught with danger because their wrong construction insures their failure, thereby rather injuring than promoting the cause they have at heart.

Socialism is a national evolution; like the eagle that needs the wide expanse of the dome of heaven to spread its wings, and could neither develop nor be “exhibited” in a rat hole, so

*John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, New York, 1870.—R.B.

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does the Co-operative Commonwealth need for its field the full extent of a commonwealth of the broad dimensions that modern civilization requires, and never could thrive or be “demonstrated” within the narrow compass of a “community.”

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