

# The People.

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FIRST EDITORIAL

## IS THERE A “WOMAN QUESTION”?

By DANIEL DE LEON

A recent number of the *Cosmopolitan* contains an article on the “Woman Question” by the talented Olive Schreiner that goes far to render one charitable towards that brand of “Reformers” that move along the line of sex. If so talented a woman as Olive Schreiner can blunder so egregiously, what can be expected of her less favored sisters?

The purpose of the article is to show how the march of society is marked by marked changes in the work that woman has performed; each change consisting in stripping her of some function previously performed by her, until the day has come when even the function of bearing children is being taken away from woman.

Surely the presentation of the “Woman Question” in such a way, especially culminating with such a climax, should serve to establish beyond peradventure the fact that there IS a “Woman Question”; a very serious question, at that, and one particularly concerning WOMAN. Nevertheless what the article does accomplish is to crushingly demolish that baneful error that consists in blurring the Race or Social Question by introducing the untenable issue of sex. Indeed, the very climax of the article by specifying a subject, that falls exclusively within one sex, serves the purpose of demonstrating the fundamental falsity of the sex issue.

Another talented woman, George Eliot, called attention to the fact that the important thing to do was not to discover differences in things seemingly alike, but to discover the likeness in things seemingly different. If Olive Schreiner had taken her philosophic sister’s advice, she would have escaped the blunder into which she fell, and would have discovered in the seemingly different fates of man and of woman an eye-opening identity. She would have discovered that machinery, together with concentrated capital, was stripping man as well as woman of one household function after another; she would have discovered that, as fast as sewing, spinning, etc., was taken from the housewife, carpentering, tinkering, etc., was also

taken from the pater familias, production tending evermore to be carried on en masse, for sale, ever less for home use or consumption; and thus, following the march of events by the light of that wise direction to seek the likeness there may be in things seemingly unlike, rather than seek the difference there may be in things seemingly alike, she would have noticed (and understood) the significance of the simultaneous phenomena of HE TOWNS and of SHE TOWNS,—manifestations that are but the acme of the broad fact that Capitalism uproots the family, depriving man as well as woman of the function of procreation; and, above all, that WOMAN, as well as MAN, figures among the pestiferous tyrants as the beneficiary of this family-destroying and race-unsexing system of capitalism.

There is no woman question, nether man question; there is no race question, nor color question, nor religious question. What there IS is the Humanity Question,—the SOCIAL QUESTION. To take up sex, color, creed or race is to fritter away energy at the twigs of the tree whose trunk should be attended to. All these so-called “questions” are but the fruit or flower that betray with their poison-taste or smell the nature of the poison-tree from which they spring. That tree is Capitalism, the poisoner of the human race.

Brothers and sisters, all, let us lay the axe to its root and hew that tree down!

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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