

EDITORIAL

THE FUNCTION OF THE INTELLECT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE following letter reached this office from a correspondent in Brigham, Utah:

“Some time ago you answered W.A.E., Salt Lake City, through the Letter-Box:

“Capitalism does not need to “run its course” before Socialism can be ushered in. There is where the human agency, or the agency of the human intellect can and should come to the help of evolution. It is not necessary for the human race to go through every painful link of the painful chain of the evolutionary process. The human intellect having gathered sufficient facts to establish its scientific theory, and being enabled (as science only enables) to foresee and thereby discover the law of social evolution, can spare the race the sufferings it would otherwise have to undergo by waiting till capitalism had “run its course.”

“1st. Is it a misconception of the materialist conception of history to assume that it is material environment that is the prime factor in shaping and developing the human intellect?

“2d. If the human intellect has ‘gathered sufficient facts,’ etc., is it not because the environment has enabled, or rather caused it to do so?

“3d. That granted, does it not follow, capitalist society being the environment and the intellectual status of the people (the race) its outgrowth, that when conditions are ripe for the Socialist Republic, and the human intellect able and ready to establish it, that capitalism has already ‘run its course,’ and that the race has already been through each ‘painful link of the painful chain of the evolutionary process’?

“Is this good logic—if not, where did I ‘fly the track’?”

A boil has not “run its course” until it has gathered to a head the impurities of which it was a symptom of. So with capitalism. It cannot be said to have “run its course” until it has reached the logical fullness of its premises. For capitalism to have “run its course” competition must be at an end—both the competition of the primary capitalist stage carried on among many small holders, and also the

competition of the secondary capitalist stage carried on among the few surviving large holders. Each of these two stages and also the final or complete stage of monopoly, when the boil may be said to have “run its course,” together with the thousand intermediary stages of dissolution and re-formation on a more advanced stage, are “painful links” in the “painful chain” of the evolutionary process.

Now, then, it is unnecessary for the human races to go through this detailed experience—every link in this long chain—before it is fit and ready to establish Socialism; nor is the theory of such an anticipation of the fullness of events at fisticuffs with the materialist conception of history. On the contrary. The materialist conception of history points to certain material conditions as prerequisites for certain perceptions. The material conditions that embitter competition with the train of consequences, point quite clearly, long before even the present stage of capitalism is reached, {to the fact} that Socialism is the solution of the ills that have sprung up and of the greater ones that are inductively perceived. Everyone does not realize that. As the skin of every man is not equally thin to feel a certain outside material fact, neither is the mind’s eye of all equally penetrating. Obviously, if the human race were universally gifted with a Marx’ eye, it would not wait, that is have to be taught by a piling up of the agony (go through each painful link of the painful evolutionary chain). It would forestall the storm, that is, it would “take evolution by the hand.” In fact, such is the mission of science. It conveys prescience. Being science it must stand upon material facts: and being science it can foresee. As the Marxes are few, a large number of facts are necessary to quicken their perception. The less clear the eye, all the broader premises are required by it. It is the exaggeration of these principles that, on the one hand, brings forth the Utopian or sanguine, and, on the other, the Pessimist—two extremes that are equally fatal. While the former will rush at conclusions without the requisite premises, the latter thinks so poorly of the human intellect that it hopes for nothing from it until it is utterly crushed with the facts—until it has gone through the very last link of the evolutionary process. While the former will be visionary, the latter may be too slow.

The specific spot where our correspondent “flies the track” is the theory implied in this third paragraph that for capitalism to have “run its course” and to be “seen

through” are synonymous terms.

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