

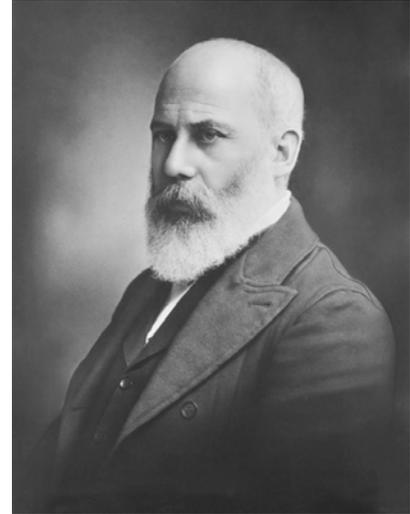
Daniel De Leon

“IMPRACTICALITY” OF SOCIALISM LAID OUT FLAT.

**Brooklyn Philosophical Society and Record Audience
Hear Old Thought Clash with New and Come out
Worsted — Upholder of Capitalism Driven
Backward from Point to Point by Impenetrable
Logic — Great Gathering Acclaims Victory to
Socialism.**

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THE largest hall in the Long Island Business College was crowded in seats, aisles, sides and rear yesterday afternoon, and a hundred or two people were turned away, on the occasion of the debate, before the Brooklyn Philosophical Association, between Edward Dobson, Associate Editor of the Brooklyn *Standard-Union*, and Daniel De Leon, Editor of the New York *Daily People*, on the subject, “Is Socialism Impracticable?” Dobson of course took the affirmative and De Leon the negative. The time was divided into a period of thirty minutes, one of twenty minutes, and one of ten minutes for each speaker, Dobson to begin.

Dobson at the start cut out his work for himself by declaring he intended to prove that Socialism, insofar as it was based on Marx’s writings, was fundamentally fallacious economically, and impracticable politically. He quoted Marx and the platform of the S.L.P. to show that Socialism held that Labor produced all wealth and that to Labor all wealth was due.

“I vigorously dissent from the statement that Labor alone produces all wealth,” the speaker continued. “That clause is without a basis in fact; and Karl Marx’s theory of surplus value is an economic fallacy. By labor, or labor-power, is meant that physical force in man by which commodities are produced.

“Now the theory that Labor is the sole producer of all wealth is false and untenable for the reason that other factors enter into production. The powers of Nature must be

considered along with those of man.

"We are struck with the marvellous productivity of modern machinery. Now the question arises: Is that increased productivity due to the increased efficiency of human labor power, or to something else? The answer to that question contains the complete refutation of Socialism.

"The answer is that this increased productive power which has contributed to the development of society does not lie in human labor power, but in the machine. The increase is due to steam, electricity and the like, all free gifts of nature to man, and under his control. The products turned out in co-operation with the forces of nature exceed 1,000-fold what mere human labor could produce. Hence it can readily be seen that the increase of production is due to forces which nature has freely given to man. Hence the theory of surplus value—namely, that it is wealth over and above what has been returned to the laborer, and which is still due him, vanishes into thin air. It is only an alleged economic truth.

"It is wrong to mistake the capacity of the machine for the capacity of human labor. Therefore the increased product of labor over and above what it could produce without the machine represents not surplus value, so-called, but products that are virtually free gifts of nature. The work of the machine tender can not be confounded with the work of the machine, and consequently he can not claim as his own the entire product of the machine."

This was the gist of Dobson's argument, which seemed rather to dodge around his subject than to aim at it. He claimed that labor, captains of industry, capitalists and landlords all helped in production, and when each had received his legitimate share, there would be no surplus value to quarrel over. The claim of capital to its share was as valid as the claim of labor to its, and so of the landlord and the captain of industry. "Hence," he concluded, to some scattered applause, after briefly dismissing the political phase of the subject, "Socialism is impracticable."

Hardly had De Leon been introduced to the audience, which greeted him warmly, when he opened up his powerful batteries on the flimsy breastworks thrown up by his opponent.

"I hope you followed well my colleague in debate, for then you will agree that he has

ended by overthrowing his premises,” he said. “If Socialism is a fallacy, then it is out of all possibility that it should ever come about. Mr. Dobson began by showing that Socialism was false, and wound up by saying that Socialism may come about under certain conditions of abolition of state and national lines. Consequently, he has knocked out his own position.

“Mr. Dobson’s first argument was that Marx and the Socialists claim that labor produces all wealth. This Mr. Dobson denies. Then idleness must be the producer of some wealth [Laughter and applause]. He says that the machine is the thing that does the yielding; it is the economic cow, so to speak. Who then should own the products—the workman, who does the milking, or the capitalist who does no milking? If the worker is not entitled to the increased wealth because he has no share in its production, then it must be thrown into the ocean, because the capitalist has no claim on it either, and we must remain where we were when that machine did not exist.

“But this argument is false. Labor is the sole producer of wealth. Nature was there just the same when Adam bit into the apple; but unless labor is performed to bring that nature under control, nature is not only not bountiful, but a cruel mistress.

“Mr. Dobson implies that the capitalist does some work. I wish he would tell me in his next period what work on earth the capitalist does besides the intense work of the pickpocket, who produces no wealth, but transfers what already exists from one person’s pocket to another. They say Jay Gould worked 24 hours at a stretch at times. Many a green-goods man works much longer than 24 hours together. The green-goods business requires, besides a quick mind, light fingers. Yet the green-goods man is called a robber.

“Labor we define as the effort to produce more wealth; and only that effort which materializes in value where none was before, only that is labor. And the capitalist does none of it.

“Mr. Dobson charged Socialism with many calamities to society, should it come into power. One was that money would cease to be. When production is individualistic, value money is necessary. Time vouchers, slips of paper will do just as well when production is collective. The fault with the whole Greenback movement was that it wanted Socialist money before it had Socialist production.

“Another calamity was that factories would close. Why, that is just what is

happening now under capitalism. Out of 31 tin-plate plants, 28 are closed down now, as was stated last week on the floor of Congress. Socialism on the contrary, will open up the factories. To-day no capitalist will produce except with a profit in sight. To get a profit, he must have a high price; for a high price he must have a low supply. Hence he deliberately shuts down his factory and prevents production if there is no gain in sight for him. The coal barons every fall limit the output of coal, so that they may have high profits while people are freezing. Peaches are thrown into Raritan Bay, muskmelons are cast away on the Jersey coast, to lower the supply and raise the price. This is the inevitable result of capitalist production for profit. Under Socialism production will be not for profit but for use, and there will be no reason to curtail the output.

"Mr. Dobson said that Socialism threatened our national existence. It is threatened now under capitalism. Fully one-fifth of the soil of the United States is owned by European syndicates, by heiresses who have surrendered their right to foreign nobles, or to others who are virtually foreigners, who have summer castles in Scotland, their winter palaces in Florence, and their in-between lodges in Switzerland.

"Mr. Dobson said Socialists don't agree, that the reformers must reform themselves. Every time Socialists meet in argument, they are reforming themselves. They are uniting on sound principles, soon to descend like a torrent on the heads of those who stand in the way."

De Leon, having finished dissecting Dobson's argument to the great delight of the large audience, proceeded to build up the case of Socialism. He showed that man was a tool-using animal, and as the tool improved, man's status improved. Just as early man was helpless at the foot of nature, who afflicted him with drought and floods, heat and cold, so man was now helpless at the foot of the capitalist class who own the tools of production which the race needs to live by. "The tool of production is the necessary adjunct to man, and Socialism demands that it shall be the property of man."

De Leon's time being up, Dobson resumed for rebuttal. He sprung a new argument which he said he had purposely ignored before, and now claimed that to the inventor was due the great increase in the efficiency of the machine, and therefore to the inventor the increased wealth was due, not to the man who ran the machine. If it were not for the inventor, man would still be in the stage of cannibalism. He quoted Blatchford against

Marx to show that the inventor was worth more than other men. Ordinary men were, figuratively speaking, mules in a treadmill. They needed the genius of the inventor to uplift them. They were not their own uplifters, but society uplifted them.

He then shifted his ground again and claimed that the owner of the machine was entitled to all it produced above what the laborer unaided could do. When men left the land and went to the city, they needed the managerial ability of the capitalist to increase wages and allow population to spread, till we arrived at the comparative wealth and affluence of to-day. Inequality must always exist. Capitalism had played an important part in civilization, as civilization was a matter of production. Wipe out the capitalist and where would we be? He did not answer the question put to him by De Leon, namely, What work does the capitalist do?; nor did he answer the further question, If Labor does not determine value, what does?

De Leon was then given the floor, as President Breithut of the Philosophical Society, who acted as chairman, said, to "pulverize" Mr. Dobson.

"I don't have to pulverize Mr. Dobson," he said. "He has done it himself. His main argument was that the inventor was entitled to the increased wealth produced. But if man is the product of society, as Mr. Dobson correctly stated, then the inventor is himself a product of society. [Applause.]

"If Mr. Dobson will hunt up the history of inventors, he will find that not one of them was able to profit by his invention. It was stolen from him by capitalism. Whitney, Arkwright, Dempsey—all were either robbed outright, or had to sell their inventions to the capitalist class; not having the money themselves to float it. It is nonsense to say that under capitalism the inventor gets the benefit of his invention.

"Capitalism is based on robbery. Mr. Dobson says: 'When the people left the land and went to the cities!' When did they leave the land? Did they suddenly conceive a dislike for country air, and a liking for the air of the city? They left when they were taken by the nape of the neck and kicked out—expropriated by the landlords. The pages of history are eloquent on that."

The "original accumulation" of the capitalist was taken up and exposed, with conspicuous examples, to be the result of fraud or downright robbery. The average workman produced in a year \$2,300 worth of values. The average wages were \$400.

Hence the worker was skinned out of all but 17 per cent. of what he produced, and consequently capitalism was a system of robbery.

In Dobson's last ten minutes he tried to prove that labor did not determine value, but that demand did, which was promptly knocked out by De Leon in his closing. No formal vote was taken, but from the cheers and applause amid which the exponent of Socialism closed, it was evident that Progress had carried the day.

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