



[Daniel De Leon](#)

COLUMBIA COLLEGE MEN DISCUSS THE IMMIGRATION QUESTION.

A Report From

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AT a meeting of the Academy of Political Science of Columbia college (Hamilton hall) on Nov. 21, Professor R.M. Smith read a paper on "Immigration into the United States." Professor Smith produced statistics to prove that immigration into the United States had increased to alarming proportions; that the quality of the immigrants had deteriorated, and that the time had come for restriction. Professor Smith also hinted that the United States was now populous enough to afford stopping immigration and rely upon the country's natural increase.

After the reading a debate took place. During the debate Professor Boyesen expressed his cordial approval of the sentiments and facts contained in the paper, and he declared himself on the subject more Parisian than the Parisian.

Dr. D. De Leon joined issue with the lecturer, both on the facts and conclusions. He went into a lengthy argument to show that the character of our immigrants was not, on the whole, deteriorating. He reviewed the history of immigration into the United States from the earliest colonial days; showed that at that time paupers and criminals were welcome, were desired, were looked for and did materially assist in the prosperity of the country. This he thought was due to the fact that at that time the immigrant had free access to natural opportunities. He asked, have those conditions changed? They have in a manner. While the territory has increased, while coal and other mines, oil deposits, natural gas deposits and broad acres lie untouched and waiting for industry to exert itself upon them just as in years gone by, yet something has slipped in between the laborer and nature, rendering the latter for all practical purposes utterly inaccessible; and the result of this state of things has been to create discontent among the new

arrivals and to congest the cities. Dr. De Leon concluded that what was miscalled the question of immigration did not point to any danger threatening the United States from without, but to an evil that exists within, and that with the large increase of population the nature of the evil is clearer and clearer and pressing more urgently for its removal.

Dr. De Leon then examined the question from the standpoint of the philosophy of history. He demonstrated that whenever immigration actually threatened a country's civilization it has always been as an unerring sign that that country's civilization was doomed and not worth saving. He said that to admit that there was a question of immigration in this country would be to admit that our civilization has spent itself. But he strenuously insisted that there is no such question confronting the United States today, but only the question of overthrowing an institution hostile to the spirit of American democracy—that institution which bars men from access to natural opportunities and renders them thus unfit for citizenship in a republic.

The audience, which consisted mainly of Prof. Smith's pupils, listened with close attention to Dr. De Leon's remarks and applauded him loudly when he sat down.

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