

Socialism vs. 'Individualism'

De Leon-Carmody Debate

Socialism vs. 'Individualism'

De Leon-Carmody Debate

DANIEL DE LEON
Editor New York *Daily People*

THOMAS F. CARMODY
Attorney General State of New York

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE PEOPLE'S FORUM

Stenographically Reported by Mr. Emmet W. Connors
Delivered at Proctor's Theater, Troy, N. Y., April 14, 1912

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY

INTRODUCTION

When Daniel De Leon, brilliant and learned Marxist, met the attorney general of New York State, Thomas F. Carmody, in debate at Troy, N.Y., on April 14, 1912, it was assumed that he would cross swords with a foeman worthy his steel. It turned out, as De Leon would say, far otherwise and to the contrary. Despite the high office held by Mr. Carmody, as a debater on the subject of socialism, he turned out to be an ordinary run-of-the-mill politician. The subject agreed upon was “Individualism versus Socialism.” Mr. Carmody never came near the subject. As De Leon observed in his first rebuttal: “. . . a stump oration was delivered instead [by Mr. Carmody].” Mr. Carmody was to contest, and if possible disprove, that socialism and individualism were compatible—disprove De Leon’s contention that socialism promotes individuality, and refute his claim that capitalism stifles and crushes it. How miserably Mr. Carmody failed, this record of the debate conclusively shows.

Mr. Carmody’s performance reminds us of old Samuel (“Hudibras”) Butler’s satire in which we are told that—
“He’d undertake to prove, by force
Of argument, that man’s no horse.”

Carmody dodged the issue, justifying completely De Leon’s charge that “he [Carmody] made a plea of confession and avoidance.” Instead of meeting the issue squarely he rigged up a multitude of strawmen, which he thereupon proceeded to knock down. Although De Leon had declared that “he would not have accepted a debate on ‘Capitalism versus Socialism’” (the subject being far too broad), he nevertheless took up Mr. Carmody’s false charges against socialism and Socialists, and disposed of them, one by one. It was a clear case of the doughty defender of capitalism being in wild flight, with the great champion of socialism maintaining the field, or in hot pursuit.

The *Daily People* of April 16, 1912, contains an interesting report of the debate from which the following is thought of sufficient interest to quote here:

“In his opening thirty minutes De Leon defined individualism and individuality as meaning the best in man and womanhood. He then illustrated

how individualism was not today the portion of the masses. He proved his point by quoting from all the leading presidential candidates, all of whom agreed that something should be done to remedy these evils destructive of individualism. He then cited several other economic and sociologic instances of the manner in which capitalism works, compelling it to be a destroyer of individualism. He said that whether or not socialism would restore individualism is a matter which required the handling of broad principles in political economy, sociology and biology, but that one thing was certain, and that is that it did not lie in the mouth of an upholder of capitalism to stand up as a representative of individualism; capitalism had made a mess of individualism. De Leon then closed his argument with a sketch of the economic reasons why, the destroyer of individualism being once smashed, individualism or individuality had to re-rise.”

The New York attorney general’s manner of meeting the issue has already been described, the *Daily People* reporter adding that, as he went along, “the attorney general got more and more tangled up,” whereas De Leon was reported as tearing to pieces “as many of the sociologic and economic errors by the attorney general as De Leon’s time allowed.” “And,” our reporter concludes, “at the close of the debate De Leon received an emphatic ovation.” That this ovation was the well earned reward of the great debater and orator the reader can satisfy himself by studying De Leon’s brilliant arguments as they unfold in the pages that follow.

This famous debate between the greatest champion of socialism in America, and an outstanding defender of capitalism, is a valuable record and a historic document of great importance. It should be studied by the student because of the illumination thrown by De Leon on many subjects in the science of socialism frequently misstated by the upholders of capitalist wage slavery, and misunderstood by many who would be supporters of working class emancipation but for their misconceptions and ignorance of the subject.

—*Arnold Petersen*

New York, N.Y., April 21, 1942

DIRECT PRESENTATION DANIEL DE LEON

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

When the program was put in my hands a few hours ago, and I noticed it was “Individualism versus Socialism,” I thought the proper order of the debate should have been that the representative of anti-socialism should speak first. The title “Individualism versus Socialism” implies the belief that the term “individualism” needs no definition. I shall prove to you that this is an error. I shall begin, however, by stating, as I shall demonstrate in my closing remarks, that we of the socialist movement hold that we are the real promoters of individualism, or individuality, in the country. I put that as my thesis, and that is what I shall argue.

Let us look at the representatives of the ruling class today. They are leading men; they are leading statesmen. I shall begin by quoting the present incumbent of the presidential chair. President Taft admits that, as things are they ought not to be in many respects. He admits that opportunities are not equal to all. He proposes to remedy them in a certain way. His leading opponent is still more emphatic. I mean Colonel Roosevelt. He not only contends that as things are today they ought not to be; not only does he say that opportunities are not equal; he boldly asserts that opportunities are unequal, and that there is no square deal in the country. I am not quoting obscure persons. My distinguished opponent may perhaps reject the utterances of two Republicans. Let me now quote the views of representative men of his own, the Democratic, camp. A gentleman who has been three times honored with the presidential nomination, Mr. Bryan, holds to the language of Roosevelt, or, rather, Roosevelt holds his language on the subject that I have mentioned. He says: “The common people are being thrown down in the interest of plutocracy.” If Mr. Bryan is not acceptable to my distinguished opponent, let me quote Governor Woodrow Wilson, of New Jersey, also a Democrat. He says: “The days of small competition are gone by, and we have to adjust the institutions of the country in such a way that an equal opportunity can be restored to the people. The doors of opportunity are double-bolted.” If Governor Woodrow Wilson is not quite acceptable let

me take another candidate, two of them in a bunch, seeing they travel together: Champ Clark and Underwood. As you will notice, I am only quoting presidential timber. Both say: "The country is taking a header toward destruction." I am quoting from Champ Clark's campaign speeches in Missouri and Illinois, where the people stood by him in the primaries. He said: "We are steering toward a French Revolution on account of the unequal opportunities that the majority of the people are being held to." If Champ Clark and Underwood, traveling in the same boat, are not acceptable to my distinguished adversary, I shall quote Governor Judson Harmon, of Ohio, also a leading presidential candidate on the Democratic side. In answer to Roosevelt's address before the Columbus constitutional convention, he stated that the conditions which Mr. Roosevelt complains of are there, but they are not to be met by the measures which he proposes.

In short, the situation is this: From the mouths of these leading representatives of the present order of things we have the statement that existing conditions do not promote the welfare of the majority of the people. It matters not that they each propose different methods, and that the measures that they propose are different from the methods of socialism, or of the Socialist Labor Party in particular. It is enough that their diagnosis and our diagnosis agree exactly as to present conditions. However different their measures, they are agreed among themselves that present social conditions are the conditions of mass ill-being.

Before proceeding further along this line, let us be clear upon the definition of the word, "individualism." As I started saying, the word seems to be a word of accepted significance; but, in the language of Thomas Jefferson, when society reaches the point that spells revolution, then every single term is summoned to the bar of the people and must be reexamined on the same principle that worn-out coin is reexamined. I shall prove to you that the word "individualism," as it is used by the men who are against socialism, is a word that no longer represents the "coinage" that it once represented. It is a counterfeit, or is found to have been worn out beyond all original semblance. The essential thing is to define the word.

What does "individualism" mean? "Individualism" means that state of things in man or woman that makes him or her a strong individuality; that makes him or her a strong man or a strong woman; that makes him a healthy man and her a healthy woman. There is another term, intimately connected

with “individuality” that I might as well cover now. That is “survival of the fittest.” That phrase is much bandied about. We are told that we have the “survival of the fittest” now, and that that should be enough to shut the mouths of the Socialists. The “survival of the fittest” means the fittest for given conditions—and the “fittest” is not always the “best.”

The fittest in mud is the mud eel. No healthy man or woman can live in mud, and, consequently, the fittest for those conditions are the mud eels. To use the term in the sense that opponents of socialism do is a travesty on “survival of the fittest.” The term means he who is fittest for a certain social condition, and the question comes back: Are present social conditions such that they will develop the highest and best type fit for our ideals of the twentieth century? We Socialists say, No. And we prove it.

Take a forest. That forest consists of trees. It requires individual fine trees to make a collectively fine forest. If the trees are too close together they will interfere with their individual growths. Under that condition of things you will not have a good forest; you will have a jungle. He who, therefore, has the collective thing, a forest, in mind, must have individually good trees in mind, and he who understands what individually good trees mean must necessarily imply the collective thing, a good forest. But trees are inanimate beings. Let us treat of animate beings.

Let us take an army. An army depends upon the individuality of its soldiers. Unless each individual soldier is properly trained in militarism, unless this individuality of a soldier is properly instilled, the army is an impossibility. The general would have a mob, and he would be licked by the other army. What does this imply?

It implies that individualism does not deny socialist or altruist or collectivist requirements. For the very reason that the soldiers must be individually well trained, all of them must give up a certain portion of their individualism to the whole, without which there could be no organization. Without altruism in the army, each soldier would pull his own way, and you might have anything you please, but an army you would not have. It requires individuality, plus the surrender of part of yourself, and that is a point that socialism teaches—man is a social being, and the real capabilities of his individuality cannot develop so long as he is not in society, merging part of his individuality into the whole.

Now then, that being the goal to be attained—strong individuality—an

individuality wise enough to realize that the acquired individuality will be as zero unless it is civilized enough to yield part of itself to the whole—that being the goal, how does capitalism meet the requirements?

We charge modern society, that is, capitalism, with crushing out individuality. Its methods do the opposite of bringing about individuality. Its methods, taking the illustration of the forest, bring about the jungle. Its methods, taking the illustration of the army, bring about a mob, and, whenever you have a mob, you have the man on horseback not far away—a circumstance that explains the presence and existence of Colonel Roosevelt today in the field.

Let me take a few illustrations, in widely opposite ends of present society, to illustrate what capitalism does for individualism. It is fair treatment. Capitalism has had the world to itself. Spokesmen of capitalism admit, as all those whom I have quoted do, that things are not the way they ought to be. They have had society so long in their hands that well may we hold them responsible for the ills that they admit afflict society.

Take two illustrations from the extreme ends of the social system, such as are conceivable only in a Democratic-Republican-capitalist order of society.

Here is a shoe manufacturer. He employs, we shall say, one hundred hands. He will not manufacture unless he either has orders, or expects orders. Suppose he has received orders for ten thousand pairs of shoes, or that he expects orders for that amount. He has one hundred men working. Suppose that each man, on an average, produces one pair of shoes a day. That would mean that it would take one hundred days to fill that order. What does capitalism do for the individuality, or individualism, of these men? Does it encourage them to develop the best that is in them so as to produce swifter, and swifter, in order to accomplish what is desired with least waste of time? No. Capitalism does the opposite. Suppose these one hundred men, who, on the average, produce one pair of shoes a day, and, therefore, have one hundred days of work before them—suppose they put on steam and were to produce two pairs of shoes a day on the average. That would mean that within fifty days they would be out of work. If they put on still more steam and produce four pairs of shoes a day on the average, it would mean that within twenty-five days they would be out of work. If still they put on more steam, it means that all the sooner they will be without bread. That is what the capitalist system does for the individuality of these men. I hope our

friend, Mr. Carmody, will explain how the individuality of these workingmen is promoted under a social system that whips them with a whip of hunger. In what way could those men be expected to develop the best that is in them under such a system? What the capitalist system does is to compel them to lag in their work as much as possible, so as not only not to shorten the period within which they will be out of work, but so as to lengthen the period in which they will have a chance to earn a living. That is what the capitalist system does for individualism with the mass of the workers.

Take an illustration from the other extreme end of the social scale. Look at a large corporation. We know that great efforts are being put forth by large corporations to make it appear, statistically, that a large number of stockholders participate in these concerns. The New York Central claims that it is now owned by something like 20,000 stockholders. See! Why, they have increased the number of people that have—what? Have something to say in the corporation? Not at all. Twenty men in that, and similarly with all corporations, can outvote the others. Stockholding of that sort is a delusion. Those men who constitute the large number of stockholders have not got one-hundredth part of the stock that is held by the leading corporators. Where does the individuality of this large majority of stockholders come in? Can they hold up the minority? Not unless the minority tries to be too “clever” and runs foul of the criminal code. But if they can steer just this side of the criminal code, no court will recognize the majority of the stockholders, because the majority of the stockholders don’t count, and the minority can do as they please. It is not human beings that count; it is stock; it is money; it is property—not human individualism.

I shall sum up these two illustrations with a third, to show you how individualism is the last word that should be in the mouth of a Republican or a Democratic upholder of capitalism. Go to Republican meetings; go to Democratic meetings; read Republican papers; read Democratic papers; read them of all colors and all shades; whether gold or sixteen to one standardists; whether free trade or protectionists; whether for revision upward or downward; get all the shades and varieties of them, and you will find that upon one thing they are all agreed. What is that thing? (Applause.)

Let me go back a moment. Remember the interrogation “What is that thing?”

There was a time in the history of this nation when the citizen went to

the polls as a man, and in a loud voice proclaimed his political choice. There was a time in the country's history when the citizen's individuality would have spurned any move to demand a secret ballot. That was the time in the nation's history that carried individuality with the ballot. Now, what is that point upon which all these capitalist elements agree today? However much they may disagree in other respects, they all agree that, without the secret ballot, we cannot have a free expression of political convictions. Do you realize what that means? That is the point they have brought us to with their individualism. Their individualism is an individualism that has turned the majority of our people into cowards. Today when we go into a sentinel box, the door closed behind us, we cast our vote as though we were committing a burglarious midnight crime. That is what your so-called individualism has brought about.

The Socialist says that the present condition is not one of individualism. Capitalism should begin by proving that individualism has been promoted by it. I demand of my distinguished opponent to show us how individualism is promoted under the capitalist system; and how, as the system of balloting shows, individualism has not been absolutely destroyed. Socialism says that individualism cannot be promoted without your guaranteeing to every single citizen not simply the ballot but also the opportunity to work in which the full fruit of what he produces will be guaranteed to him. It is beside the subject of the debate to prove that the smashing up of individuality by capitalism has gone on hand in hand with the plunder of the working class. But, whether the workers were plundered or not, we have this principle in the Declaration of Independence of the United States: Whenever a certain social system has become hostile to the interests of the people, it is the duty of the people to change it, regardless of how that state of things came about. We charge capitalism with being the destroyer of individualism.

Having a few more minutes' time I want to give one more painful illustration of this alleged individualism that capitalism produces, and why it produces it. I wish to refer to the houses of prostitution. Who, here in Troy, does not know that there are such houses, where any man can go any time he wants? Why is it the police do not destroy them? Why is it the police do not uproot them? Is it graft simply? Those houses of prostitution are pillars of the present social system. Are they symbols of individuality?

You have heard the song, the beautiful song sung on this platform today.

Here we have a beautiful contradiction of capitalism. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of them.” And right on this platform you are about to hear the gospel of capitalist “individualism”—do others or you will be done by them.

In my closing minute I want to give you still another illustration of this contradiction of capitalist preaching and practice. Look at the biggest capitalists in the country. They tell you that “roughing it” makes individualism and individuality. And yet they will write their last will and testament in such a way that their wealth is left to their dearest relatives. What for? If individualism is developed by “roughing it,” they should withhold that cash from those who are dear to them. Their last act on earth gives a denial to their theory regarding individualism being developed by “roughing it.” (Applause.)

FIRST PRESENTATION THOMAS F. CARMODY

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is, indeed, a great pleasure to be permitted to take part in a discussion that involves questions of such great public interest before an audience of this character. It is a great pleasure to have as adversary in that discussion a recognized champion of the doctrines that he espouses. It is a pleasure to have an audience that seems friendly toward the speaker. As an audience that needs to have the question of socialism as against individualism presented fairly and fully, it in some measure at least applauds the doctrines of socialism. You have followed the discussion of my distinguished adversary with sufficient interest to know that it has consisted entirely, as socialism does consist, not in some remedies, but in attacks, not in providing remedies for evils but in an inventory of the evils, most of which are natural to human institutions and to human nature. Whether the doctrines I stand for are properly defined in the term individualism or not, I want you to clearly understand that it does mean that I oppose, the party that I stand for opposes, and all parties oppose (that deserve the name of party) the attack

upon the institutions upon which all parties build their power and upon which individual liberty and opportunity must rest. (Applause.)

I do not intend to let this debate take the current that my distinguished adversary has marked out for it. I do not intend this contest to rest upon an inventory of the evils that exist in our political government, and I do not intend by any specific analysis of particular evils to allow the great principle that is at stake in this discussion, and is involved in the contest which it invokes, and will be one of the elements to be determined in the forthcoming presidential contest, in any extent whatever obscured or clouded by specific references to matters that do not necessarily involve the merits of party doctrines. My distinguished adversary has stated with much eloquence that the trouble is that individualism has been destroyed, and he thereby has made one of the best arguments against socialism that could possibly be presented. More than half of his argument was devoted to pointing out the great industrial army of the present time, wherein individual merit has been destroyed, individual industry has been prevented, and the men and women have become part of a great machine in which opportunity has sunk to a dead level of mechanical organization. What, then (turning to Mr. De Leon), tell this audience when you face them again, will become [of them] under a form of government of which there is no opportunity by law for individual merit or individual industry?

He has named every candidate for president now before the people, and has pointed out that these men concede that there are evils to be corrected, and if the time ever comes when we do not concede that there are evils to be corrected, and when we do not advocate something for their correction, then safety, progress and opportunity in this country are gone. The beauty and grandeur of American institutions is that, when we find evils, when the people understand there are evils, they find that they can be eliminated by the ballot.

I find in this audience many undoubtedly who are laboring men, and who believe in the propaganda that has been preached before you here this afternoon, that with the inequalities, the lack of opportunities possibly, probably actual, that you suffer, that there is something wrong with the form of government under which they occur. The Socialist will never discuss the remedy. That is what my adversary has got to discuss before he leaves this platform. I am not going to run away by telling you that things are bad and

that a tyrannical industrialism controls in our business life. You might as well go out on the streets of Troy and give vent to your anger because the weather does not suit you, because it is too cold in winter, raining on Sunday.

There are things that belong to this world of sin and trouble. Socialism has pointed them out. It takes their symptoms worse than any other class of people. I do not believe that socialism is very dangerous; it does not stay long in any one place; I introduce in evidence Milwaukee and Schenectady.

I believe that the industrial conditions need a remedy. I believe that our industrial laws need revising, or enforcing. I am opposed to any industrial system, and so are a majority of the American people who are not Socialists, to any industrial belief, that gives an opportunity to some men to get more than they earn and other men to earn more than they get. That industrial system that compels the poor man to send his daughters and sons into factories in order to drive away starvation; that does not permit that they go to school and acquire educations and become, as they should be, educated; are elements to be reckoned with in this civilization.

I oppose any influence that undertakes to tear up the courts. I oppose all of the evils that he has pointed out. I will not be put in a position, nor will I allow the cause I speak for to be placed in a position, of hostility to labor. The proudest boast of every party in this state and in every state is that the interests of labor are the dearest of all interests to the political parties in this country. To undertake to place the cause of individualism or to place the great parties of this country against the interests of labor is not true. The effort will miscarry.

Take this state, for instance. Get down to specific things. This state has upon its statute books a law that provides that in all public contracts in the state or municipalities there must be a clause inserted providing for eight hours a day for labor. I made this statement before an audience of Socialists not long since. A few days afterward I received letters saying it was not true, and it is a fact that Socialists deny that the state has been legislating in their interests, but it is a fact that the labor interests of this state have received from the legislature that protection which they are entitled to; and a fifty-four hour law was passed this last session extending to other places where this law does not extend. In addition, the state has a factory inspection bureau to inspect factories and see that laws are enforced, that only those arriving at the proper age are employed, and that there is proper protection for the life,

limb and health of those who are employed. You have a labor bureau, at the head of which is a commissioner of labor who is a union laborer. He has at his control an army of inspectors who go throughout the state to see that labor laws are enforced. Yet you are told that the parties in this state and elsewhere were in a conspiracy against labor.

Now, I want to get to something which is of greater importance. I want to establish as propositions right here that any party that stands against labor does not deserve to live. (Applause.) I will say, furthermore, that any party that does will not live. (Louder applause.) And I will give you a third proposition—applaud this—that any party that undertakes to fool labor by remedies other than sound does not deserve to live. (Still louder applause in which Mr. De Leon joins.)

I want to give my adversary a little something to do. What has socialism got to say about this? What are its remedies? They have pointed out the evils. It will not do very much good for a doctor to come around to your house and tell you how sick you are unless he can give you some medicine to cure. I have their national platform here and call your attention to one plank which is the basis of socialism. The collective ownership of railroads, telegraph, telephones, steamship lines and all other means of social transportation and communication. They say there can be no private title; that whether called fee simple or otherwise, must be subordinated to the public title. First is collective ownership. That is the basic principle of socialism. Without that remedy socialism has no remedy. If that be not a remedy, socialism has no cause. Surely, if it cannot make practical this fundamental doctrine of its creed, then it must cease to appeal to you, or to any other portion of our people for its support, unless they find there an answer to the evils that they have diagnosed as part of the ills of the body politic, then they have no remedy and I am going to ask my adversary to tell what has never yet been told to an American audience in public that I have ever understood or heard or read.

In the first place, how are they going to bring it about? You have got railroads, telegraphs, telephones and canals. How are you going to get them? They are owned by private individuals; they are operated by private individuals as private property. How are they going to be acquired by socialism? Are you going to buy them out? This is politics. This shows whether you get anywhere or not with socialism. Where are you going to get

the money to buy them? Suppose you have got the money and suppose you buy them and pay men for their property, then you start in with a lot of millionaires. I am going to deal with your proposition as you have defined it in the first place. You believe in collective ownership. Then you have got to extinguish private ownership. You have got two ways to do it: you have to pay money for it, or you have got to confiscate it. If you pay for it, you start in with a lot of millionaires. If you confiscate it, where is your socialism? (Applause.)

I put this question to Socialists, and never got any answer except confiscation, which means anarchy. If that be the theory of socialism, and that is the only one that solves the situation, then you have, instead of a solvent of human misery, the most tyrannical, powerful and deadly attack on human liberty that was ever delivered from any source since God said, "Let there be light." You must have some way of making political this doctrine of public ownership.

The present idea, the idea of individualism, is that the business corporations must be made amenable to the law. Nobody believes that they should tyrannize property rights, liberty or interests; that you have the power and disposition if you will with your ballot to rectify and correct. (Applause.) I will not permit any man to say before my audience that the parties of this country are standing upon the prostrate body of the laborer or citizen. I will not allow any one to say, here or anywhere, that this country is drifting or ever will drift over the common humanity that is its pride or its glory. Individualism gives to your man in the shoe factory, it gives to your man on the farm, it gives to your man anywhere, opportunity if he has more brains or industry than any one else has. It gives him the opportunity to work it out.

It has been the glory of this country that its opportunities have made it what it is and what our forefathers {intended} when they outlined the form of government which is ours today, and thank God will always be ours for we are grown patriotic enough to defend it whenever attacked. It was based on the theory that all men should have equal opportunities to earn what they could and to have what they earned. If that does not obtain today, then you have the power to go to the polls and punish the party that does not permit it. But you have not a remedy in anything that socialism provides. I want, during the remainder of this discussion for my adversary, instead of pointing out those things upon which we agree, I want him to give you the remedies

which socialism has. He has mentioned presidential candidates, all of whom have pointed out evils he has dwelt upon. There are many more, but none of those candidates for president have advocated the theories he advocates. Every one of them, Taft, Roosevelt, Wilson, Clark, every one of them is against socialism. While they see the evils, as you see them, they see still that there are remedies under our laws and forms of government for these evils. (Bell rings, one minute before closing.) This discussion will be of no importance whatever unless we are able to have the practical politics of your theories and mine discussed before this audience. I still insist as I sit down for the first heat that when my adversary takes the stand next time that he will tell you how the evils he has pointed out are to be met by the remedies which socialism proposes. (Applause.)

DANIEL DE LEON IN REBUTTAL

If a traveler from Mars had landed here when my distinguished adversary was speaking, he would have been justified in concluding that the debate was not on individualism. Yet that was the subject for debate. That was the subject given to go by, and I mean no insult—but a stump oration was delivered instead. That sort of reasoning will have to be given up by the old parties if they are to keep the ear of the people. Anybody who knows anything knows that the subject of socialism is a broad subject. I would not have accepted a debate on “capitalism versus socialism.” I would have accepted only some subdivision of it; because in a few minutes you can only skim the surface if you are going to take the broad subject of capitalism or socialism. The subject for debate was that one feature, individualism, that issues out of the conflict of capitalism versus socialism.

My distinguished adversary is a lawyer, and so am I. He and those of you who are lawyers will understand me when I say that he made a plea of confession and avoidance. I have shown with the illustrations that I furnished that capitalism has made a mess of individualism. How did my distinguished adversary meet the charge? He admitted the correctness of the picture that I drew, and then he charged me with not providing remedies—as though remedies were the subject of debate—and then he declared the

inventory of the evils that I drew up to be “inherent in things”—I suppose as inherent as the weather. That’s the pagan’s view of things.

The pagan looked upon disease as something that could not be overcome. He took the posture that the adversities which befell him were unavoidable, and he bowed down before them. We say they are not unavoidable. Even against the weather—why, every man and woman protects himself and herself against the weather. We have lightning rods; and we also have pagans today who think it is against “the will of God” to see to it that lightning does not strike our steeples. The pagan would consider the hurricane a breath of God. We deny it. We say that it is not a breath of God; it is a disturbance in nature and we protect ourselves against it, and we see to it that it does not create more disturbance than we can help. So with these social ills. They are not inherent in things. The plea of confession and avoidance was to admit all that I said with regard to the crushing out of the individualism of the people, and then to say: “It cannot be helped, you are utopians, you are trying to change the sun and the moon.” (Laughter.)

He asserts that these evils are inherent in human nature. This “human nature” has also got to be defined. What is human nature? Contemplate a young lady who has a flea on her cheek—if the press, the politicians and pulpiteers tell her that it is a beauty spot, her human nature will cause her to protect that flea. Her ignorance of the facts is superinduced by the leaders of public information. Let someone impart to that girl the knowledge that the flea is not a beauty spot, that it is a parasite which sucks her blood, and will put a hole in that spot, and spoil her complexion, then that same human nature that at first caused her to protect that flea will now cause her to take it between two nails and kill it. Human nature is just what we bank upon. But we claim that human nature is today misinformed and misdirected.

What will become of government under socialism, which “bears man under the dead weight of socialism and anarchy,” according to my distinguished adversary? That is a further plea of confession and avoidance. But since my adversary has abandoned the field, I am willing to follow him up and throw a few hand grenades into the retreating and routed foe.

I regret such a distinguished official of this Empire State should have committed the error of identifying socialism with anarchy. Right here, let me say that nobody more so than the Socialist reverences the history of this country, and recognizes the work done in the Revolution. We are not

Anarchists, and can look to the past more proudly than many of those in the United States who today wave the red, white and blue. I regret that the term was used, and that is putting it very mildly.

Where will human nature be, where will man be when weighed down by socialism? I wish to remind my learned friend of the language held by the Tories against the Revolutionary Fathers when this country was fighting for its freedom. You will find that their language against the Jeffersons of those days was the identical language of Attorney General Carmody today. (Applause.) What will become of this country, the Tories asked, when it is buried under the dead and levelling weight of republicanism? And those Tories were wiped out at Yorktown and elsewhere, and the Republic did arise. There is no difference in the nature of the attacks against the obtainers of our bourgeois freedoms and the attacks used against socialism today. There will be no such thing as “a dead weight,” for the simple reason that under socialism man will have the free choice of work, which he has not today, and he will enjoy all that he produces. But that takes us into the social economic question for which I have not now the time.

My distinguished adversary says that he cannot get an answer from any Socialist, and he hoped I would answer him. I am going to be more courteous to him than he was to me. He did not answer a single one of my questions. There is a story told of Andrew Jackson, who, one day, when president, while standing with his back to the fireplace in the White House, heard a noise outside, and immediately the door of the room flew open, and an old acquaintance of Tennessee rushed in. “What are you doing in Washington?” asked Jackson. “Do you know, General, what is going on in Tennessee?” “No.” “They are charging me with being a horse thief.” “Can they prove it?” Jackson asked. The answer was: “That is the worst of it, they have proved it!” That is the worst of the fix of our adversaries. The socialist charges are proved.

I am asked “How are you going to cure the situation?” “What are you going to do?” “Are you going to confiscate?”

I want my distinguished adversary to refresh his mind upon the juridic meaning of the word “confiscation.” Confiscation means the appropriation of property contrary to the laws of an existing social system. Revolutions, however, bring their own laws with them. Consequently, under the laws of a Social Revolution, that may be done legitimately, without the brand of

“confiscation,” which, under the laws of the social system that the Revolution has supplanted, would be called confiscation. We have a striking illustration of this fact in the language of one of the early leaders of our country, whom I hope Mr. Carmody will not repudiate. When the Revolutionary Fathers were asked: “Are you going to confiscate these colonies?” it was no less a man than Jefferson who answered the “confiscatory” charge: Whenever in the history of a people conditions have become such that they have to be changed, changed they shall be. “Confiscation,” from the British viewpoint, was at the root of this Republic. Like all revolutionary governments, the government of the United States was born in revolution. It did not “confiscate” under the laws of its own existence, whatever the name given to the act by the social system and government which it overthrew. The question is, “Do the requirements of the working class demand a different state of society?” If the answer is “Yes,” then that appropriation is not confiscation at all. I hope my distinguished adversary heard, and will remember, my answer. The breath that denounces us as “confiscators,” curiously enough brands Thomas Jefferson, on this platform, by a Democrat, as a “confiscator.”

The words were put in my mouth that I claim that the old parties are engaged in a conspiracy against the working class. I certainly hold no such view, and expressed none. The class interests—the capitalistic class interests—direct the conduct of the old parties; and that conduct is upheld by the present capitalist system. That is not conspiracy any more than it is conspiracy for centipedes to bite. It is the nature of the beast. It has to do it. The capitalist class could not do otherwise. It is the law of its existence. Being the law of its existence, none but an Anarchist would say that the old parties are in a conspiracy. They are in conspiracies, but not against the working class. They are in conspiracies against one another. One conspires against the others, and all against each, and within the same party there are a lot of conspirators against one another.

There are various brands of Socialists, we are told. Oh, yes. It is a curious remark to be made, on Sunday of all days! When you say that there are in existence several shades of socialism, so that you cannot tell what socialism means, then, by that same token, you declare that there is no Christianity, because there are at least two hundred and fifty varieties of Christianity.

There is nothing in the claim about there being so many varieties of

Socialists; least of all is there any comfort in it for capitalism. I recommend to my distinguished adversary that he refresh his memory on the work of Jane Grey Swissholm, the zealous Abolitionist woman. She despaired at the sight of so many varieties of Abolitionists, but, even when her despair was at its height, that happened that brought the Abolitionists all together, with the consequence that the Copperhead and Bourbon slaveholding Democrats came to grief at Appomattox. It is the law of revolutions that their component elements disintegrate; each then attracts its own special affinities, until that happens that brings them all together into one mighty, irresistible stream. There lies at the other end of this evolutionary chain of our own generation another Appomattox—this time it is in store for capitalism. To use a favorite expression of Lincoln: the more black cats fight all the more numerous will be the black kittens.

We were told by Mr. Carmody that the Democratic Party loves labor. What do you mean by love of labor? Do you mean to give labor its independence? Surely not. Then you don't love labor. What is the use of saying that every man shall have an equal chance, when capitalism is so constructed that everyone hasn't an equal chance? When they tell us they love labor, and I believe most of them are sincere, they love labor in the same sense that human beings love their cattle. They are willing to do anything for labor except get off the back of labor.

We were told that no party can live that is against labor and we applauded that. Capitalist parties, Democratic and Republican, while they are for labor in the sense that I showed you, that are against labor, because they propose to keep labor in wage slavery. No such party can any more last in the United States. It is true that they will elect their candidates, but not for much longer.

We are told that socialism could never be. If socialism can never be, why these terrific onslaughts on it from the pulpit and the press? If socialism is an absurdity, why not let the absurdity kill itself? A party which does not intelligently stand for labor, and that means the emancipation of the working class, that party is doomed in the United States, and the day of its doom is in sight.

THOMAS F. CARMODY IN REBUTTAL

I don't claim to be a prophet, but I can tell just what a Socialist is going to do when he goes to his remedy. Just what the speaker has done. Just what all advocates of socialism always do. They have but a very few words to devote to an explanation of the remedies, while they have a most beautiful vocabulary with which to describe the ills.

I told you that my distinguished adversary would not tell you how they were going to carry into effect the most important declaration of socialism, namely, the acquisition of public utilities. He sat down without telling you, except to vaguely intimate that in this social revolution which he anticipates, a means will be found such as we found in the Rebellion when the slaves were freed, such as we found in the Revolution when the colonies struck down the hand of foreign tyranny and erected a government of independence. While the charge that I made is denied that, carried to its logical conclusion, it meant anarchy, he has admitted that socialism means anarchy when it means confiscation of property rights. Before I discuss that, I am going to clear up some of the confusion in which he undertook to involve the statements that I made in my preliminary remarks.

I did not say, and do not intend to say, that there are evils in our political system that may not be corrected. I did say, if there be any question about my meaning, that such evils as there are, and he has pointed out many fully as well as I can, and I go the whole length in pointing out some, the remedy for which lies with the people in an intelligent application of the power of the ballot. (Applause.) Turbulent destruction of property rights has been preached from this platform this afternoon, although in covert language.

He says when I pointed out to you that there are evils that exist in our public life and used the similitude of the conditions of the weather, he gave you the facetious example of the young lady with the beauty mark of the parasite upon her cheek. We might just as well take that as anything else. What would socialism do with that? The doctrines which they apply to their public questions—according to those doctrines they would cut off the young lady's head and mangle her corpse. The trouble is that their remedies are worse than the disease.

He undertook also to classify me with the Tories. Why, he inadvertently made a very frank admission against his own theories of government. You

will remember that the Tory was the man who said the people were not able to govern themselves. It was the party of Jefferson and Hamilton and Adams who raised upon the Atlantic shores the banner of liberty, and they placed the powers of government in the hands of the people. They gave them the right to elect their public servants; they surrounded public office with constitutional limitations, and lest, in some moment of frenzy, the people might be led by the voice of the demagogue, they placed around each department of government environments of Constitutional strength and power. They gave you a legislative department to make the laws; they gave you the power by the ballot to elect the men that make the laws; they gave you an executive department to enforce the laws. They gave you the ballot to elect the men that enforce the laws. If those who enforce the laws don't enforce them justly, you have the power given you in the Constitution of the nation and of the state to correct every evil of that character. Don't let us misconceive or misconstrue what a democratic form of government means; it means confidence in the people. If properly enforced, and if proper laws are passed, and if when passed they are enforced, if honest men are placed in public office, if dishonest men are driven from public office by the power of the ballot, you will have honest laws honestly enforced. I am not going to be placed in the position before this audience or any other in defending unjust laws or entrenched privilege. I scorn entrenched privilege everywhere, whether it is seeking to destroy the duties of labor, whether it is seeking to curb the currents of justice, whether it is seeking to destroy the heritage of labor which your fathers gave to you, I would destroy it, and you have the power to destroy it. It is not necessary in order to accomplish this that you destroy the government with it or that you destroy property rights. (Applause.)

Here is where I intend to nail socialism to the cross and keep it there. I want somebody to tell the laborer who is working in the shoe factory, or whose boys or girls are working for the purpose of earning an honest livelihood, is there any remedy for that condition? Where do you find a remedy in that policy of anarchy and confiscation, which provides that public utilities shall be controlled by a common ownership and that you acquire public utilities by confiscation? Is there anybody in this land that needs to repel the doctrine of confiscation, that needs to repel the idea of invasion of public rights or public liberty any more than the poor laborer needs to repel

it? Is there a citizen under the flag who needs more the protection of the principle of equality before the law than the poor laboring man? It is the only legacy you have; it is the only protection you have. You should have it, and, if you don't have it, you have the power to get it by your ballots, and it is not either confiscation or anarchy.

I propounded that question in the beginning, knowing that it would not be answered. This debate will end without its being answered, but there will have to be an admission that it is not answered, except the covert one which was given. Confiscation is anarchy.

What is the force of the analogy of the colonies declaring their independence? They did not confiscate anything; they did not confiscate any property; they took what they declared in the Declaration of Independence was theirs. (Loud applause in which Mr. De Leon joins, and from many parts of the theater shouts of "That's what the Socialists will do.") They did not confiscate the railroads or steamboats (laughter)—I was thinking of that platform—what did they take? Did they take anybody's property? Did they? They didn't take a dollar; they didn't take a dollar of anybody's property; they took their liberty which they declared belonged to them. (Applause and laughter.)

You are a little too rapid in anticipating my conclusions. There was not a dollar of anybody's property confiscated. Property rights were held sacred; the only thing they demanded was that foreign tyranny of England be removed from their necks. They demanded, first, the amelioration of their lands; that unjust tax laws be amended or repealed; they demanded equal opportunities to all men. They did not demand that there be confiscated the public utilities.

We go now to the Rebellion, the instances of what Lincoln did in striking the shackles from the slave. That was done as an instance in the war of the Rebellion; it was done as an act of necessity and for the purpose of doing what the laws of this country said would be done from the beginning—give liberty to all. It was accomplished at a time when it could be justified as a military necessity.

I ask you if you find in these two instances a support for the theory of government in these days of opportunities—a support for the socialist theory of government—in these days when schoolhouses are open to all; and if you do not get education you ought to unite with those demanding it.

You say you are going to start this party of yours by confiscating public utilities, by taking away from the great corporations their vested property rights. Do you know what that means? You are taking it away from the rich. The stock in these corporations is pretty widely scattered; much of it is owned by small investors. You take the Troy dam; you take the canals. (Laughter.)

I am rather ashamed to stand before an audience on a Sunday afternoon in the city of Troy, a city of churches, a city of homes, a city of virtue, a city of patriotism and a city of intelligence, and have to apologize for any eulogy that I make of law and order. I am ashamed that I have to stand before an audience and apologize for lauding the institutions of my country. I am ashamed that I may be laughed at and scoffed at by men who enjoy what they do not enjoy anywhere else, did not enjoy since the creation was started, and do not enjoy anywhere else but here. (Applause.)

If that time has come, and if it is here, if we have got in this campaign or if we have got to face in the future any factor of our political existence that stands upon those doctrines, then you are the most dangerous factor that ever stood beneath the flag. The tyranny of life is nothing compared with the tyranny of anarchy. The tyranny of entrenched privilege against which you complain is ideal as against that tyranny that would level and destroy, destroy the altar and the home, destroy equality and labor. (Laughter.) I will say when you laugh at that, then the only safety is in your numbers. Bear in mind that no party will grow in this country and succeed which does not cherish those doctrines that are planted in the heart of every man, that stand for law and order and for the rights of others, and for opportunity. (Applause.)

Every man has got some chance himself, and, if you have not got it, unite yourselves with those who can give it to you, if they deny it to you.

Don't destroy because one of the ramparts of justice has been stricken down. Don't give up the citadel because Benedict Arnold has sold out the cause. Don't punish the other patriots of the Revolution because there are traitors. Don't denounce religion because there are false prophets in the land. (Applause.)

Mankind suffers from ills, but don't destroy its opportunities. I plead here for those principles, and I plead that you may understand them, that you may examine them, and that you may know what they mean and what the creed that you plead means as applied to them. (Applause.)

(Mr. Carmody then sits down with nine minutes of the time allotted to him unused.)

DANIEL DE LEON IN FINAL REBUTTAL

I regret to see the insistence of my distinguished adversary upon “confiscation.” I am surprised that he, a Democrat, should do so. He is thereby repudiating Jefferson. Jefferson’s answer to the charge of “confiscation” is the Declaration of Independence—an ample answer.

I also regret to notice the confusion of thought on the part of my distinguished adversary concerning the liberties that “Jefferson and Hamilton gave to our people.” Does not my distinguished adversary know that what Hamilton wanted was not what Jefferson wanted and got, and does he not know that the Democratic Party has since thrown Jefferson overboard and become Hamiltonian?

My distinguished adversary says we are the worst factors in society. We are not afraid of such charges. That was the charge that the patriciate of the old Roman Empire made against the early Christians; that was the charge that the Roman Catholic political hierarchy later hurled at the Protestants; that was exactly the charge that the Democratic Bourbon Copperheads flung at the Abolitionists. We Socialists have not yet been tarred and feathered and ridden on rails as the Abolitionists were. (Voice from the audience: “What are they doing in California?”) Be not too hasty. The Socialist of America denies all affinity with the element whose leading song has for its refrain: “Hallelujah, Hallelujah, I’m a bum!” Mere declamation is not enough to prove that the Socialist is “the worst enemy in society.”

My distinguished adversary insists that I have not answered his questions.

I maintain that it is he that has abandoned the field. If he desires to debate the subject of socialism, I am ready. Right here I challenge him to debate on some specific subject concerning socialism—“confiscation,” if he likes, or the subject that “The political state, or capitalism, must now make room for the industrial government, or socialism.” The question of socialism requires a careful gathering of facts, and close reasoning. Declamation will not stand.

In the few minutes left to me I shall rapidly take up and dispose of some of my distinguished adversary's last points.

My distinguished adversary said that my remedy for that young lady with the flea on her cheek would be to hack off her head. Indeed not! I distinctly said she would take the parasite between her two nails and nip off its life. Nor is that the treatment we have in store for the capitalist class. We would give them a chance, for once in their lives, to earn an honest living.

My distinguished adversary said that confiscation is anarchy. I have already and amply covered the subject of "confiscation." But as to "anarchy," what is anarchy? A word upon that. Anarchy is that theory of society under which man is a law unto himself. It is a theory of society that denies the collectivity. It is a theory of society that finds vastly more affinity with the capitalist class than it does with the Socialist. It is a theory of society that would throw mankind back to the primitive state. It denies the propriety of central government. He who speaks of socialist policies as anarchy should premise the statement with a book on his theory of anarchy. Such a man's theory of anarchy would be found absolutely at war with all the teachings of political science. To say that socialism is anarchy is to fly in the face of political science.

A word, in connection with "confiscation," as to what the Revolutionary Fathers did. I refer my distinguished adversary to the fiscal history of George III's troubles. The colonists took vastly more than Mr. Carmody imagines. To gauge how much they took, look at the subsequent famines in India. Unable to keep its hands upon what it considered its legitimate property in the colonies, the British Crown had to fall back upon the Hindus to recoup itself. Socialism does not, cannot, contemplate the "confiscation" of existing wealth, for the simple reason that the wealth of society today IS the property of the working class. They produced it. They would be only "taking their own"—just as the colonists did.

We are asked for a complete list of items of the Socialist Republic. The same demand has been made before upon great men upon great occasions—and with as little sense.

When Columbus proposed to start on his trip to discover the eastern shores of Asia, there were people of my distinguished opponent's bent of mind who asked him where the mountains, and the mouths of rivers, and the harbors would lie. His answer was: "I do not know, and I do not care. What I

do know is that the world being round, if I travel westward I must strike land.”

If Columbus is too ancient in history, take Washington. When he was fighting the battles of independence, there were Tory pamphleteers who pestered him and the other Revolutionary Fathers with questions upon the kind of government they contemplated—was it to be a Venetian Doge affair, a Dutch republic of high mightinesses, or what? Washington’s answer was: “First, lick the British.”

Impossible for the capitalist system with its political state to continue. The Goddess of Liberty cannot sit upon bayonets. With a logic similar to that of Columbus’s answer, the Socialist says that the Cooperative Commonwealth, or the industrial government, is next in the order of social systems. No more than Washington can we give details in advance, and like Washington we say: First, lick the British of today.

We are told “the courts are open to all,” yet, in these days, what is the cry that is going up from one end of the country to the other?—The cry of the “recall.”

We are told the doors of our schools are open—and relatively fewer and fewer of the workers’ children can attend. Their fathers earn too little to clothe and feed them for school.

We are told to use the ballot. You bet we will!

The Constitution of the United States was the first to provide for its own amendment. The Constitution of the United States thereby recognized, or, rather, legalized revolution, to use the language of a celebrated man in this country. In the language of Washington, our people hold the government in the hollow of their hand. The facts that I have adduced, the arguments that I have presented demonstrate that the time has come for the oppressed in this country to make use of that Constitution’s amendment clause, and put an end to the capitalist social system. As Socialists, as men who stand upon the international principles of socialism, as men who recognize that the political state is rotten-ripe for overthrow, we organize the industrial unions to seize the reins of future government, and enforce the fiat of the ballot should the reactionists, the Bourbon-Copperheads of this generation, rise against it.

It is in the hands of the Socialists that the American flag is in the keeping of. It is the Socialists who are today bracing themselves against the attempt, and who will block the attempt to reintroduce despotism under the folds of the flag.

We certainly do propose to use the ballot for all that it is worth. We are children of the twentieth century, and as such we propose to deport ourselves. (Prolonged applause.)

The End

[Transcribed for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America,
November 2001, by Robert Bills, slpns@igc.org]