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## The Transmigration of Souls

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**T**he frequency with which one meets in the gold capitalist papers tables and facts to show that it was the states in which the foreign element is large or predominant that “saved the national honor” draws attention to a remarkable feature of modern “nationality.”

It is undeniable that a large percentage of people of foreign parentage voted for McKinley, and that a large percentage of Bryan’s vote came from citizens of native parents. But neither could it be denied that there were people of native parentage who stood by those of foreign parentage for McKinley, and that there were people of foreign parentage who stood by those of native parentage for Bryan. If national extraction controls man’s actions, what caused Russell Sage, for instance, to cast his vote with the citizens of foreign extraction for McKinley, or what caused the Englishman Sam Gompers, for instance, to cast his vote with or support the citizens of native extraction in their advocacy of Bryan? Surely if national extraction is the test, we here have in these two facts an unexplainable phenomenon. The phenomenon is perplexing only when approached from the false side, or in the superficial way, that is characteristic of bourgeois thought. Neither the native, who supported McKinley, nor the aliens, who supported Bryan, are idiosyncrasies. In all instances their course was absolutely logical.

Long after many a European country was well on the way towards full capitalism, did America start on her career thither. The start of capitalism is individual and small production. That period had been passed by several European nations when we out on the same march. Peoples do not, as a whole, keep very accurate track of their own past history; much less do they keep track of other nations’ histories. It was therefore quite natural for our people to fall into the error of looking upon small and individual production as something peculiarly American, typically American. Our people, being uninformed upon the industrial development of other nations, failed to realize that they were simply at an industrial stage that other nations had left behind them, and,

consequently, that what they considered “American” was not American at all, but was common to all nations in the infancy of capitalism. So long as small and individual production predominated here, the aspirations and political bias of the natives continued as of old, and were, accordingly, “American;” but just as soon as the development of capitalism went beyond the stage of small production and drew the line between the old class and a new one—the capitalist—the natives divided. Those who remained at the stage of small production, continued to be swayed by the political views of that class, and, that class being the one that gave the country its freedom, called its political aspirations “American,” in disparagement of the political aspirations of the newly developed capitalist class, whose political trend, was, of course, new. It is no accident that during the anti-slavery agitation, the slave-holders turned up their noses to the abolitionists as “un-American.” In the course of development, the capitalist class proper acquired such a power through its wealth that, in the late campaign, it arrogated to itself the exclusive right to the title of “American,” although its native middle class opponent is greatly its superior in numbers, and although what its development had done was to push it beyond the original American class of small producers and raise it up to a class that it knows full well arose in Europe first. Thus the differentiation of the native property holders into these two classes split them up into hostile political camps, and into hostile views upon “Americanism.”

The same economic development that split up the natives necessarily split up our aliens. All of these, who either have capitalist interests or are dominated by capitalist thought—whatever their antecedents, whether in their old homes they were middle class men or proletarians—necessarily rank themselves here with the capitalist class; while the aliens, who either have middle class interests or are dominated by middle class thought,—whatever their antecedents, whether in their old homes they were capitalists or proletarians—necessarily rank themselves with the middle class.

Thus it comes about that the American capitalists—a class that has reached a development now abreast of Europe—amalgamates with the alien citizens who are controlled by the same class interests or are mentally dominated by them; while our alien citizens who have middle class interests or are dominated by them amalgamate with the American middle class—a class that has remained at the infant stage of industrial development in America.

Thus we discover a veritable transmigration of souls among our population. The Russell Sages becoming truly European, and marching arm in arm for McKinley with the European aliens of capitalist instincts, while the Gomperses turn a somersault back a hundred years in length and join that larger native element, that has remained at the infant stage of America, in its support of Bryan.

It was once a fact and is now a superstition that national traits, especially economic ones, are formed by birth or extraction. Mr. Bayard, for instance, is now following this will o' the wisp by his scheme of consolidating the "Anglo Saxon" nations. The economic opinions of men do not depend upon their nationalities, but upon their class interests. This is the valuable fact which, without their being aware of and certainly against their will, the press of large capitalism is bringing out by its aforesaid tables on the nationality of the states that were carried by McKinley and of those that were carried by Bryan.

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

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