

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 13, NO. 329.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MAY 25, 1913.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

## AN OPEN LETTER NO. 1.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**O Chas. H. Chase,  
Columbia University.  
Comrade—

Your interesting article in the Sunday *People* of last May 4, in answer to Comrade Arnold Petersen's criticism of your Laurel Garden address, "Reconsideration of Socialist Principles in the Light of Henri Bergson's Philosophy," contains several statements which we believe it will prove instructive to the militants in the Socialist and Labor Movement to look a little closer into.<sup>1</sup>

For instance:—

You refer to two Socialist Labor Party Comrades who stated at your Laurel Garden meeting, one, that "our doctrines are true, and since they are true, why, people have to come to us sooner or later," and the other, that "out of the law of surplus value there flowed the inevitable over-production, and that, when the world markets are eventually exhausted, as they inevitably will be, why, then the workers will have to establish Socialism." You declare that "these doctrines are positively vicious in some of their effects," and that they are "largely false"; whereupon you proceed with the warning that "the Socialist Republic is not something to be waited for as was the return of Christ," that the "emphasis" should not be placed upon a "redeeming faith" but upon "a work to be done," and, finally, that whereas "one stamp of the revolutionist is his motto, 'Let us do it,'" "the stamp of the conservative is the warning counsel, 'It will do itself, and do it much better, if you give it time enough,'" and that "in so far as the conservative's counsel is true at all, it translates, itself into 'Some one else will do it.'"

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<sup>1</sup> [The articles by Petersen and Chase, and a third article Petersen wrote in answer to Chase, are attached, starting on page 5. The texts are from the *Weekly People*.—R.B.]

It is clear from the context—rendered all the clearer from this passage: “Can it be that our principles, propagated with maximum ability, could not in some twenty years produce more of a result than we have to show for our work”—that the two Comrades whom you refer to are cited, not as exceptions, but as types of the S.L.P. membership.

It was not our good fortune to be present at your meeting. We know not, of our own knowledge, who spoke there and what they said.

Nevertheless:—

Granting that the two Comrades said exactly what you quote, the conclusion is not necessary from their words that theirs is a millennial attitude, idly expecting “the return of Christ.” The S.L.P. man, especially when speaking at a Socialist meeting, may well leave out from the short five minutes time allowed for “remarks,” as self-understood, the principle of the role performed by and expected from the “human equation” in modern social evolution, and that the material basis, which you recognize must precede the raising of a structure, once present, it depends upon man to take evolution intelligently by the hand, and thus prevent social miscarriage. There is no fatalism, or millennial-attitudinism in a posture that implies confidence in the normal intelligence of our generation.

Assuming, however, that you not only quoted correctly the letter of what the two Comrades said, but that you also correctly reproduced the spirit of their words, the utter untenableness of the conclusion that they typified the S.L.P. need not be left to conjecture.

This is the point that this Letter addresses itself to. We take you for too serious a man, too free from levity, to attach to what one member, or two members, of a body may individually think such importance as to insist upon discussing them. We also hold you for too clean a man to substitute an unimportant issue for the real and important one,—the issue of what two individuals may, or may not, hold, for the issue of where does the S.L.P. stand.

What book, pamphlets, or leaflet issued by the S.L.P.; what editorial matter in any of the Party’s organs; what official utterance by the Party’s national, or State, or municipal conventions, National or State Executives; what unrepudiated article from some Party member; what paragraph, what passage, what line in any of

these—all of which together are numerous “as the sands of the Ocean”—if read with a wholesome mind bears out the theory that the S.L.P. is “waiting for the return of Christ,” that it lays the emphasis upon a “redeeming faith” rather than upon “work to be done,” that it holds the Socialist Republic “will do itself,” or that the Party holds its arms crossed expecting “some one else will do it?” That, not the casual remark of an individual or two—that would be evidence. Can you produce any such? We hold there is none.

Nor,—even accepting your estimate of “results,” to the effect that the S.L.P. has little to show for our work,—would the fact be evidence relevant to the charge of S.L.P. supineness. An organization might have even less to show for {its work} than you hint the S.L.P. has, and yet its activity be intense: the very nature of its activity might be destructive of “results.” Indeed, it is the charge of the enemy that “the activity of the S.L.P. is suicidal.”

The facts are all to the contrary; and emphatically so.

During the first nine years of its existence the S.L.P. lived with its head in the dragon’s mouth. At any time its life might have been snapped off. Within its own camp knives were out against it, for its propaganda of exposing A.F. of L. betrayal of the proletariat, ready at any moment to stab the Party to death. It required a wide-awake activity and wary walking to uphold the standard of Socialism without inviting immediate extinction, to save the Party’s life without degrading and prostituting it to the level of an A.F. of L. milking or blackmailing machine for private lucre. When the supposed death-blow finally fell in 1899 the activity of the S.L.P. had ripened the Party to the vigor requisite to resist any and all blows. Since then, during the last 13 years, the Party has been the storm center of a fierce conflict.

The merits and the value of the conflict, as maintained by the Party, is matter foreign to the present subject. The fact of the fierceness of the conflict is not foreign thereto.

No foe entertains for a millennial-attitudinarian the bitter hostility that the manifold foes of the S.L.P. entertain for the Party, or resorts to the overt, more frequently subterranean, methods of attack that these foes resort to. These are facts, in the teeth of which flies all charge of S.L.P. supineness; and the charge is specifically refuted by the sight that greets the eye of whomsoever takes his stand on the

floor of the National Headquarters of the S.L.P. at the head of the stairs that lead to the composing and printing floor, immediately below,—a spacious basement taken up to its utmost capacity with a printing plant self-sacrificingly set up and run by the Party itself, throbbing with the activity of issuing four S.L.P. journalistic publications, one of them a daily, besides other literature.

Not thus did the awaiters for the return of Christ comport themselves. They fled to the seclusion of the desert, and the isolation of the columns of St. Simeon Stylites.

During the 22 years that we have been in charge of the Party's English organ we have had the opportunity of extensive contact with the Party membership; and the opportunity has been improved upon by a large number of agitation tours, three of them across the continent. During all this interval, and with all this opportunity, we have, so far, met only one S.L.P. man who answered the description you indicated of the S.L.P. membership. His name was Erasmus Pellenz of Syracuse in this State. He believed that the Socialist Republic would come of itself. Logically enough Pellenz pulled out of the S.L.P.; luminously enough he forthwith landed in a political job by the grace of Mayor Maguire of his town.

S.L.P. policy (activity) may be false, if you please; its economics may be back-number; its sociology may be the incarnation of ignorance; its literature may be "vicious"; its tactics may need "reconsideration"; its methods may be what-not; all that may, or may not, be so, and will be the subject of separate treatment. To say, however, of the S.L.P. that it is supinely "waiting for the return of Christ," or that its philosophy is calculated to promote such supineness, is either to be stone blind to fact, or recklessly to strike the fantastic path of romanticism.

Fraternally,

ED. DAILY PEOPLE.

ADDENDUM

## CHARLES H. CHASE'S PHILOSOPHY.

A CONSIDERATION OF IT IN THE LIGHT OF SOCIALIST PRINCIPLES.

By Arnold Petersen.

The lecture delivered by Comrade Chas. H. Chase Wednesday evening, April 9, at Laurel Garden was one of unusual interest, chiefly because of the views set forth by the speaker and partly because of the discussion which followed. The writer, believing that the Party membership will be interested in knowing something about this "Reconsideration of Socialist Principles in the Light of Henri Bergson's Philosophy," craves the indulgence of Comrade Chase for this somewhat late report, review, criticism or whatever one may call it.

The nature of the lecture and the manner in which it was presented, make impossible a detailed report—in fact, it was really no lecture in the strict sense, but rather a confession of faith. I shall treat of the most salient points made by the speaker. The philosophy of Henri Bergson, as presented by the speaker, did not reveal any new viewpoint, nor did Bergson appear as having said anything which had not been said before, and often better.

Thus, e.g., the speaker pointed out that one of the essential features of this "new" philosophy was that nothing was static, everything is in a continuous process of change. Was it not Hegel who said that "nothing is, everything is becoming" (in process of being)? Has it not long been known, that change, transformation of matter, is the very law of the universe?

Another of the philosopher's ideas was that the past does not exist, the past is dead and gone forever—the ruins at Rome, e.g., are not of the past, they are of the present, etc. Taking the statement literally it is obvious that to speak of the past as existing is a paradox. Nevertheless, it is pure sophistry to make such a point. As was pointed out by one of the speakers during the discussion, the past exists in this sense, that the present is the product of the past.

Furthermore, our actions, our views are to a certain extent intimately connected with things which have happened before. Marx, in his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, says: "The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living. At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past..."

Beyond these two points nothing of special interest was made clear about Henri Berg-

son's philosophy—at least not to the writer's memory. The fault lies possibly with the lecturer who later very genially admitted that he really did not know very much about Bergson.

Now, as to the "Reconsiderations," etc.—The two principles of Socialism, the materialist conception of history and the Marxian law of value, came in for a goodly share of "consideration" and "reconsideration." The two terms, Socialism and Marxism, are synonymous. He who speaks of one, implies the other. Hence a "reconsideration" of Socialism is a reconsideration of Marxism, i.e., the principles of Marx. By implication the speaker made Marx to say that, given a certain economic system, a particular method and efficiency of production, a certain form of government, religion, ethics, etc., will be reflected, and that as soon as the economic basis changes, the superstructure changes also, mechanically. In other words, the economic is the SOLE determining factor in human society. If Marx were guilty of such a monstrosity, "reconsideration" would indeed be in order. But let us see what Marx does say: "For production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production **correspond** to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society—the **real foundation**, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the **general** character of the social, political and spiritual process of life." (*Critique of Political Economy*) "**Man makes his own history**, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand." (*Eighteenth Brumaire*) Engels, who shares with Marx the honor of having discovered the materialist conception of history, says in his *Feuerbach*: "The history of the growth of society appears, however, in one respect entirely different from that of nature. In nature are to be found as far as we leave the reaction of man upon nature out of sight mere unconscious blind agents which act upon one another, and in their interplay the universal law realizes itself. From all that happens, whether from the innumerable apparent accidents which appear upon the surface or from the final results flowing from these accidental occurrences, nothing occurs as a desired conscious end. On the contrary, **in the history of society the mere actors are all endowed with consciousness; they are agents imbued with deliberation or passion, men working towards an appointed end; nothing appears without an intentional purpose, without an end desired . . .** men make their own history in that each follows his own desired ends independent of results, and the results of these many wills acting in different directions and their manifold effects upon the world constitute history. **It depends, therefore, upon what the great majority of individuals intend.**" And finally from Marx: "It [society] can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. **But it can shorten and lessen the birth pangs.**"

It is here clearly shown that, while the economic forms the substructure, to which a cer-

tain superstructure corresponds, and this—in the long run—adjusting and readjusting itself to the change changes in the substructure, man, being endowed with consciousness, is an active agent in bringing about these changes. Besides, the superstructure, although the product of the material-economic basis, re-acts upon its cause and either retards or stimulates its operations. The simpler the form of society and its economic conditions, the less is this re-action—the more complex, the more ramified and interrelated the society and its economic basis, all the greater is this re-action. We finally arrive at the point where the motion law of society is discovered, when man **must** consciously take evolution “by the hand” and “shorten and lessen the birth pangs.” If Bergson has made this, or only approximately such a discovery, he is at best sixty years behind the times. At any rate, no “reconsideration” of the materialist conception is necessary on the ground that it is dogmatic.

The second of the two principles of Socialism, the Marxian law of value, was called before the bar. Comrade Chase labored strenuously with the problem, more than once digressing, and rambled over a large field of irrelevancy. It is in no spirit of animosity that I say that the presentation was pitifully confused and incoherent—leaving the audience, and I much fear Comrade Chase himself, in doubt as to just where he stood. During the discussion, however, it became clear that either Chase has studied Marx, and then he rejects him thoroughly, or he has not studied him sufficiently and, as a consequence, has not understood him.

The law of value says that the value of a commodity is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labor-time requisite for its production (and reproduction). Comrade Chase will have none of this. No, says he, it is not labor which gives a thing its value but labor is applied to a thing because it is valuable! But (entering into the spirit of the argument) why is a thing valuable and how is its “valuableness” measured? Why, says Chase, 'tis quite clear: by the importance attached to it, and he bravely proceeds to show the difference in the conception of the “value” a buyer and a seller places upon a commodity. Double, triple—tenfold confusion! Exchange-value, use-value and price hopelessly thrown together—all in the light, no doubt, of the Bergsonian philosophy.

I am not vainglorious enough to believe that I can successfully disentangle this mess and show our friend the error of his way, but I can and will make an honest attempt.

The error, undoubtedly, proceeds from a misunderstanding or lack of understanding of the nature of a commodity. A commodity is a sort of “two-faced” thing; its duplicity consists in its having two “values”—a use-value and an exchange-value. Its use value is quite relative and often manifold. But it is clear that what is useful to one person may be entirely useless to someone else. The only thing, however, which is common to all commodities, irrespective of their utilities, is that they are the product of human labor. Besides being the product of labor a commodity must have been produced primarily for the purpose of **exchange**. A thing consumed by the producer himself may be very useful, but it is no commodity.

Commodities confront each other in the market where they are exchanged at a certain



ratio. Is it according to their use-values? A loaf of bread is supposed to have greater utility than a diamond ring, yet thousands of loaves may be required to exchange for such a one. We ask why? Because infinitely more labor time was required to produce the diamond than the bread. Comrade Chase says the value of a thing is determined by the importance attached to it. Let us see if we cannot recognize an old friend disguised in the garb of "importance." When the demand for a thing is very strong it must be because it is considered very important. If its supply is correspondingly low we shall see it rise in "value"—and, vice versa, if the demand for a thing is very little or if there is no demand at all, it is because it is considered of no "importance" and with a large supply of it in the market we shall see its "value" decline. Hence the "importance" theory resolves itself into the value-determined-by-supply-and demand theory! But if the value is determined by supply and demand, i.e., by the difference existing in the market in the relation between the supply of and the demand for a commodity it would follow that during normal conditions, when supply and demand are equal, the commodity would have no value at all, the difference which supposedly determined its value having ceased to be. Now, we insist that since all other theories regarding the value of commodities heretofore advanced have suffered shipwreck on the rock of facts and reasoning and the Marxian law of value being the only one which meets all the requirements and squares with all the facts in the case **IT** must be the only correct theory.

All commodities must be use-values, though all use-values are not necessarily commodities. Use-values are depositories of exchange-values. The fact that more use is derived from a certain commodity than was originally expected does in no way affect its exchange-value. To the owner of a commodity this latter has no use-value; if it had he would not part with it; he does so for the sake of its exchange-value. On the other hand, the buyer of a commodity acquires it for the sake of its use-value. "All commodities are non-use-values for their owners and use-values for their non-owners."

The writer does not believe that the "reconsideration" of the Marxian law of value was a happy one. Rather, it was a total failure, notwithstanding the "light" of Bergsonian philosophy!

In justice to Chase it should be said that altho' he blundered seriously, his intentions no doubt were the best. What he tried so very hard to make clear was that the Socialist Labor Party, however correct its principles may be, is absolutely useless unless it makes these principles known to the working-class of America. "We must do something, we must move, not degenerate into a sect." We answer that with the material at hand and considering the conditions we are contending against, we are doing what can be done.

The questions and discussion which followed were no less interesting than the lecture. Section New York evidently did not "take" to the Bergsonian philosophy, as presented by Chase. Being asked by the writer to state what discovery Marx made in economics, and to what extent, if at all, it was accepted by modern "economists" he answered that "of course, modern economy does not consider Marx at all." Why, of course not! "Nevertheless," he continued, "I feel quite sure that were the hour not so late I could show you how modern politi-



cal economy arrives at the same conclusion as Marx.” And then some talk about our old friend Fisher (of Yale) and his theories on interest, which we did not quite follow. We feel sorry that the hour was so late.

The modern “economists” are as vulgarly stupid and stupidly vulgar as those who did business in Marx’s time. Comrade Julius Hammer scored a hit when he said that should he decide to study political economy he would certainly not study at Columbia University, (where Comrade Chase gets his knowledge of economics.) We should add, nor at any other capitalist institution. The universities, from being centres of learning and sources of civic virtues have become centres of mental corruption (particularly with regard to political science) and veritable intellectual brothels.

To the writer it becomes more and more clear that the Socialist and labor movement and particularly the Socialist Labor Party must stick uncompromisingly to the time honored principles of Marxism, even at the risk of having the bourgeoisie, and those taken in by bourgeois clap-trap, yelling “dogmatic” and “sectarian.” In knowledge of facts, and the proper use and application of these facts, lies our strength. In Greek mythology the story is told of a giant of Libya, Antaeus, son of Poseidon (god of the sea) and Gaea (the earth), who compelled all strangers passing through the country to wrestle with him. As often as he was thrown to the earth, he derived fresh strength by contact with his mother and therefore proved himself invincible. Hercules, the famous hero of Greek mythology, in combat with him, discovered the source of his strength, and lifting him high from the earth and holding him there, he succeeded in crushing him. As with Antaeus so with the militant Socialist. If the capitalists, by the aid of their hired professors can succeed in removing us from our material bases, cutting us off from the source of our strength, Marxism and its intelligent application, taking us “off our feet” as it were, and sending us chasing the rainbow or rolling in the clouds, indulging in subtle reasoning “a la Ongree Baergsonne” (I am trying to reproduce the gentleman’s name in French)—if they can succeed in doing that, they will be able to crush us as easily as Hercules crushed Antaeus. We think, we know, they will not succeed.

## ADDENDUM

### CHARLES H. CHASE'S PHILOSOPHY.

An Answer, by Charles H. Chase.

The article entitled "Chas. H. Chase's Philosophy," which I was surprised to find in the Sunday *People* of April 20, amounts to a misrepresentation of my attitude toward Socialist principles. I think I understand how Comrade Petersen was led to write of the lecture in the way he did, but that understanding does not obviate the necessity of a re-statement of the salient points I undertook to make that evening. If Comrade Petersen is right in thinking the Party membership will be interested in this matter as he viewed it I believe they will be equally interested in reading my statement of it. I shall use Comrade Petersen's criticism as a basis for my discussion.

I began by saying that philosophy, in the sense in which I was using the term, meant a kind of emphasis, a way of viewing things. I endeavored to show that in discussing evolution Bergson emphasizes the CREATIVE part in his *Creative Evolution*. Bergson emphasizes the "vital urge" in man which impels him to do things which are new rather than tread forever the beaten path,—the "vital urge" which impels men and women to express themselves and to what they wish rather than to bow submission to any creed or formula ever written. I pointed out that over and over again the struggle of man has been to liberate himself from bondage of law and formula and convention that had gradually formed to cramp man's possibilities.

I referred to the Christian teaching of the Middle Ages to the effect that their revealed religion gave the limits and bounds and prescribed all the laws by which man could possibly live. It gave him his prescribed liberties. And thus forming a straight-jacket for man it set itself up as not only sufficient but final. I showed that by taking a new view of the world, by changing the emphasis, man partially broke the shell of that Medieval System and developed science which looked to man as the originator, which emphasized man as the active factor, and which looked upon the world as belonging to man, awaiting his control. And then we developed evolution. That, too, came in as a liberator. But to-day, I said, there is a strong tendency to look upon evolution, not as a liberator of man, not as a principle giving power to man—but as a formula setting him narrow limitations and making him the victim of fate. And I mentioned that some of the Christian churches that condemned evolution when it was new and when it was inspiring man to larger hopes and aspirations are now beginning to say that evolution is true—yea, that it is the very law of the Christian God, the law made by Him for the government of man.

In contrast to this emphasis upon formula, and fixity, and determination by the past, I invoked Bergson as the modern philosopher who emphasizes the “vital urge,” the power of man, man’s faith in man,—the philosopher who emphasizes change, and the creative principle, and who declares that while the past can tell us partly what we are and what we are capable of it does not tell us all. Not only may we find in us powers not revealed by the past, but when we do find those powers the past will not rise up to obstruct us in the expression of those powers.

I did not introduce these things as absolutely new in Bergson. I know very little about Hegel or the use he made of the principle that “nothing is, everything is becoming,” but I was well aware that Heracleitus, an early Greek philosopher, some twenty-three hundred years before Hegel was born laid special emphasis upon this principle that “Everything flows and nothing abides.”

The one “salient point,” then, of my lecture, in respect to the Socialist movement, was my exhortation in favor of creative, vital, conscious action on the part of the Socialist Labor Party in particular and the Socialist movement in general to accomplish its purpose. The implication of Comrade Petersen’s report is that I declared war on Marx and Engels. The fact is that I was very busy with the living representatives of the Socialist Labor Party in Laurel Garden that night, rather than with anybody who has done his work. What I dealt with was present day uses of Marx and Engels, so far as I dealt with them at all. I declared that all of those formulae which Socialists repeat that say evolution will bring Socialism, or which minimize the part man has to play in the process are for the most part paralyzing in effect.

The need of my message—as well, unfortunately, as the evidence that that message did not in every quarter do its work—was brought out in the discussion when two comrades maintained the following: One, that our doctrines are true, and since they are true, why people have got to come to us sooner or later. The other said that out of the law of surplus value there flowed the inevitable over-production, and that, when the world markets are eventually exhausted, as they inevitably will be, why, then the workers will have to establish Socialism.

Now, I maintain that these doctrines are positively vicious in some of their effects. In so far as such doctrines are preached to encourage Socialists in their work, to make them feel that the tide of fortune flows in their direction, and to make their enemies weak in fear of the mighty forces against them—thus far such doctrines, though largely false, may be helpful. But to the degree that they imply that the “material foundation” for Socialism is not yet ripened, that the TIME for Socialist success is not yet, that we labor to-day for Socialism against difficulties which material evolution will remove—to that degree I hold that such teachings are utterly vicious.

Each new year brings some advantages to the Socialist propagandist, but along with these advantages it brings new disadvantages. My point is that if we are serious in this movement we ought to face the situation that confronts us; we ought to recognize and em-

phasize the human factor in the revolution that we are dealing with; we ought to open our eyes and our minds to the fact that one thing needful to the accomplishment of the Socialist Revolution is—not more materialistic evolution—but the organization and training of the revolutionary forces and the performance of the actual task of setting aside the forms, practices and conventions of capitalism and of establishing the Industrial Republic.

I stated in my lecture that it is the very essence of conservatism to hold that these things will work themselves out, and that if we are to do anything it must be very, very little, that we must move very slowly, that we must not try to take things in our own hands. The thing that was prominent in every revolution I know of was man's faith in himself, his recognition that the event depended upon himself. This factor of confident activity, and this habit of facing the situation presented,—these are the elements in the impending revolution which it is within the power of the Socialist forces to cultivate. The Socialist who tends to put off grappling with the problem of organizing for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of Socialism until the future on the ground that according to his conception of the “materialist conception of history” the material conditions will be better prepared tomorrow—such a Socialist is a sluggard, a deluded sluggard. If the “prevailing mode of economic production and exchange” which Engels declares “forms the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history,” etc., was the only factor in a historic epoch, why then we propagandists would be wasting our time agitating—we should turn about and devote ourselves to invention and improvement of machinery. But a “basis” is by no means the whole thing.

I stated in my lecture, particularly, that I hold that this basis is important, and that the social system man is to build must fit the basis—and yet there may be many a different sort of superstructure reared upon any particular foundation. And I simply remind those Socialists who tend to ignore this of the fact that the “basis” for Socialism is here. It remains but for the Socialists intelligently, capably, and efficiently to take hold of the task of organizing the forces to carry out the revolution.

I think I plainly see that in comparison with its clarity in developing abstract principles the Socialist Labor Party has been sadly deficient in that administrative, organizing ability that is requisite to the building of a powerful movement. I am entirely convinced that its agitation and propaganda of organization might be made incomparably more effective than they are. Can it be that our principles, propagated with maximum ability, could not in some twenty years produce more of a result than we have to show for our work? Can it be that the progress we are now making is all that is possible? Of course I realize that the results we have attained and are attaining do not appear of the same magnitude to each of us. I am inclined to judge the progress by comparison with what appears to me to be requisite to a successful revolution or with what it seems to me we might be accomplishing. Of course you may ask me to be specific with suggestions. I have offered specific suggestions in time past; I did so last summer, and I intend to do so again. But the most specific suggestion I can offer just now is that the Party really conceive itself as dealing with the job of bringing about

the Socialist revolution as soon as possible. I mentioned in my address that the Christian Church in its inception looked daily and yearly for the early return of Jesus and the building of His Kingdom upon earth. But as time went by and He did not come, the followers gradually ceased actively to hope for His Kingdom on earth and turned their thoughts instead to heaven. The Socialist movement, likewise, in the earlier days when the memory of revolutions was fresher and stronger had in it something more vigorous and hopeful than the slow pulse one finds beating in so many Socialists to-day. But the Socialist Republic is not something to be waited for as was the return of Christ. The Socialist Republic is a social regime to be established by the work of man. The materialistic foundation has been laid and awaits the builders. Socialism may be preached as a doctrine to believe in, a "redeeming faith," or it may be preached as a work to be done. It usually partakes somewhat of both, but the emphasis may be placed upon either phase. Where I differ with so many Socialists is in placing heavy emphasis upon the work to be consciously undertaken with a view to getting it actually done. One stamp of the revolutionist is his motto, "Let us do it." And one stamp of the conservative is the warning counsel "It will do itself, and do it much better, if you give it time enough." In so far as the conservative's counsel is true at all it translates itself into "Some one else will do it."

What I took up in that address was not any long-since-written text on the materialist conception of history but a present interpretation of that doctrine. If I had been working from a different point of departure I might have taken the very paragraphs which Petersen quotes from Marx and Engels as the basis of my discussion, in which case I should have merely recalled to the minds of my auditors the importance of remembering that, after all, "Man makes his own history" even though not out of the whole cloth, and that "intention," "consciousness," "purpose" and "desire" are not only necessary factors but that they, together with constructive organization, are the only factors upon which the propagandist can operate, the only factors which he can augment in order to hasten the revolution. Here is the legitimate field for the efficient use of the Socialist's highest talents.

As to Marx's economic theories, though I by no means hold that Marx said the last word on economics, I merely took them up in order to make a comparison with some theories of capitalist economists to show that the Socialist need not be so shy and fearful as many of them are in many of these matters of economic doctrine. I have noticed a tendency to something like this in Socialists' arguments. They seem to take the attitude: "If you admit this, then I've got you. But I must not admit that or you will have got me." The point of my consideration of economics that night in Laurel Garden was that if you find a man who has been trained in another school of economics than the Marxian—if his system of economics represents the capitalist system at all, why you can make the very knowledge he has the basis of your argument for Socialism. If a capitalist economist's economics is designed to teach a capitalist to make millions of dollars while his workers work for \$2 a day, why that will furnish a perfectly adequate basis for your argument with the \$2 a day worker against the capitalist system and in favor of industrial democracy. I specifically stated that the

Marxian economics brings into the foreground the exploitation of labor, whereas the economics of the capitalist economists emphasizes something else. But what I pleaded for was a realization that the Socialist stands upon no precarious ground, and that any system of economics which represents the capitalist industrial and commercial system can be made the basis of our argument for Socialism. But can there be more than one "true" system of economics? I consider it wholly unimportant, in one aspect, to discuss such a matter here. But there is more than one system of mathematics.

I ventured the rough definition of value as "the importance a man attaches to a good," using the language of a college economist. I did not say that "value IS DETERMINED by the importance a man attaches to a good." I merely used that as a rough definition, and then proceeded to show that importance was "determined by" other things, among which are the availability of such goods; that in general if one consider commodities, which under Marx's definition are reproducible, etc., the importance to be attached to any unit of such goods will in general depend upon its cost of production—and thus we arrive at the conclusion accepted by Marx from his predecessors. It seems to me that what Comrade Petersen has said on this topic has no meaning whatever when his opening statement is corrected to represent the fact that I was giving a definition of value. If he wishes to leave "value" undefined, I have no objection to that. In fact I regard these technical discussions in the *Daily People* as practically a vice because unproductive of genuine agitation or organization. But Comrade Petersen has gone further than merely to introduce it; he has implied that I am practically unbalanced mentally, and at the same time has apologized for me on grounds of my good intentions and has suggested that I have been spoiled by the university. Let me say, parenthetically, that although the universities are in some degree corrupted, I hope no Socialist will allow himself to be so affected by a knowledge of that fact as to forego any opportunity that may present itself for him to acquire the advantages which may nevertheless be gained from them. When Comrade Petersen says "The universities, from being centres of learning and sources of civic virtues have become centres of mental corruption, (particularly with regard to political science) and veritable intellectual brothels," I should like to know WHEN it was that we had that golden age, the age of their "being centres of learning and sources of civic virtues." Was it when Marx, De Leon, Liebknecht, et al., went to universities? I know from my own experience that this is largely superstition that Comrade Petersen thus gives expression to—superstition with regard to something rather foreign—the same sort of superstition that is appealed to in the unworthy burlesque of Bergson's name, just because he does not happen to have been born in the same country, heir to the same provincialism that some of us are heir to.

To return, then, to the matter of value as "importance attached" etc., and to the discussion of supply and demand, I wish to call Comrade Petersen's attention to the fact that his statement that "when supply and demand are equal, the commodity would have no value at all," cannot be used in any argument which pertains to actual economic exchanges for the reason that "supply and demand are equal" has no meaning unless a certain "price" is un-



derstood. Every variation of price will influence demand immediately, and supply eventually if not sooner.

I have felt compelled to reply to Comrade Petersen upon this technical matter, but if there is any effect at all of this writing I hope it will be on the side of "work to be done" rather than on the side of abstract doctrine. But, of course, that is beyond my control. A movement of works will be interested in methods of improving means and methods of work, whereas those who tend to be sectarian and live mainly in the "faith" will cleave unto discussion of doctrine.

ADDENDUM

## CHARLES H. CHASE'S PHILOSOPHY.

By Arnold Petersen.

Comrade Chase's answer in the Sunday *People* of May 4 to my criticism of his lecture last month is a choice example of what is called "a plea of confession and avoidance."

Chase begins by saying that my article amounts to a misrepresentation of his attitude toward Socialist principles. This may be so. But if it is so, then the fault lies entirely with our friend for saying one thing and meaning something else. His re-statement in *The People*, evasive and rather cautious as it is, does not make his position much clearer than at the lecture.

Comrade Chase says: "The implication of Comrade Petersen's report is that I declared war on Marx and Engels." No implication at all, good friend. I frankly stated that either Chase had studied Marx and in that case he rejected him thoroughly, or he had not studied him sufficiently and consequently had not understood him. Personally, I am inclined to believe the latter to be true, and recalling his statement that he "really did not know very much about Bergson," we have the remarkable spectacle of an S.L.P. man "reconsidering" something which he has never fully, if at all understood in the "light" of something else of which he "really does not know very much!"

Comrade Chase in the beginning of his article observes that he is going to use my criticism as a basis for his discussion. This notwithstanding he feels constrained to introduce the alleged statement of two comrades to the effect that no matter what happens, Socialism will come much as day follows night. The implication seems to be that I too, share this view. I emphatically deny this. My previous article should make this perfectly clear. I believe I there showed both through quotations from Marx and Engels as well as by argument, the imbecility of the idea of an automatic consummation of the Socialist ideal. Only in this sense do I consider Socialism inevitable: I can hardly conceive of the working class, when confronted with the alternative of either submitting to abject, hopeless slavery on the one hand and the potentialities of the Industrial Republic for good and general well-being, absence of poverty and misery, freedom for all on the other hand, I can hardly, I repeat, conceive of a working class, drilled and educated in Socialist principles, failing to organize so as to bring about that consummation, so devoutly wished for. And it is exactly because of my faith in man, "man's faith in man," as Comrade Chase puts it, coupled with my understanding of the economic and social forces at work, that I believe Socialism possible, not in a thousand years, but just as soon as we get that working class organized. This again

brings us back to the necessity of our giving the very best that is in us, to become active agents in this work of social regeneration, basing our tactics and methods upon material economic conditions, such as we find them.

Comrade Chase complains that our movement is progressing too slowly. "Can it be," says he, "that the progress we are now making is all that is possible?" That our methods of propaganda may be improved is too obvious to need comment. Any suggestions Comrade Chase may offer will undoubtedly be appreciated. But the comrade does not seem to see any result to speak of from the twenty years of the existence of the S.L.P. He who would build a house upon the site of an old structure must needs tear down this structure and clear away the debris, etc. What would we say of a man who deprecated the "waste" of time of destroying the old on the ground that no evidence of the wished-for new structure appears while this process goes on? The position of Comrade Chase is precisely that of such a man. The S.L.P. has been doing this "clearing-away" work these many years and the wonder is, not that we have not done more, but that we have accomplished what we have and yet preserved our existence. I, for one, hold that on the whole, and "with the material at hand, and considering the conditions we are contending against, we are doing what can be done." The language of Comrade Chase differs very little from that of the Utopian who is always wishing certain things done and, wishing hard enough, fondly imagines that some way or other it will help matters along.

With all this it is not yet clear to me why Socialist (Marxian) principles should need reconsideration and, of all things, in the light of a Bergson! I venture to suggest that Comrade Chase is confounding the basic principles of the movement with the application of those principles. This brings us down to the real "salient point": the law of value—Marxian Economics. (This, then, and not his "exhortation in favor of creative, vital, conscious action on the part of the Socialist Labor Party . . ." etc., is the "salient point," the "exhortation" being the general burden of the lecture.)

First—as to value. Whenever Marx uses the word value he means **Exchange value**. This value (in commodities) is, as stated, determined by the quantity of labor-time socially necessary for their reproduction. The value of commodities, however, can not be realized before they have proven themselves to be utilities, **use values**. The **use value** of a commodity consists in its quality of satisfying a certain want. Value (Exchange value) is a congelation of abstract human labor. This value, however, has no existence separate and apart from material objects—nor is it possible to discover it as one discovers the chemical properties of material objects. It does not, of course, add to the matter existing, but simply transforms that matter. Remaining isolated, accordingly, the exchange value of a commodity, could not assert itself; it is only by being brought in relation to each other as exchangeable objects that the value of commodities can be realized.

Comrade Chase may object to using the word value as exchange value. Political Economy, however, has settled that question. Not only do Ricardo and Marx use it in that sense, but even John Stuart Mill says: "The word value, when used without adjunct, always

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means, in political economy, value in exchange; or as it has been called by Adam Smith and his successors, exchangeable value, a phrase which no amount of authority that can be quoted for it can make other than bad English. Mr. De Quincey substitutes the term Exchange value, which is unquestionable.”

Comrade Chase may also object to my distinguishing between use value and exchange value. Realizing the impossibility of doing justice to this subject within the narrow limits of a newspaper article (if, indeed, I possess the ability) I should like to make a few quotations, which may make the matter clearer to the reader. Chase has manifested a predilection for the Ancients by invoking the shades of Plato and Heraclitus. I shall invoke that of a man to whose genius Marx has paid the most unreserved tribute—Aristotle. Says he: “Of everything which we possess there are two uses: both belong to things as such, but not in the same manner, for one is the proper, and the other the improper or secondary use of it. For example, a shoe is used for wear, and is used for exchange; both are the uses of the shoe. He who gives a shoe in exchange for money or food to him who wants one does indeed use the shoe as a shoe, but this is not its proper or primary purpose, for a shoe is not made to be an object of barter. The same may be said of all possessions, for the art of exchange extends to all of them. . . .” (*Politics*, translated by Ben. Jowett. Colonial Press Ed., pp. 12–13.)

Ricardo quotes Adam Smith, saying: “The word Value has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called **value in use**; the other **value in exchange**. The things which have greatest value in use, have frequently little or no value in exchange; and, on the contrary, those which have the greatest value in exchange, have little or no use in value.” Ricardo continues: “Water and air are abundantly useful; they are indeed indispensable to existence, yet, under ordinary circumstances, nothing can be obtained in exchange for them. Gold, on the contrary, though of little use compared with air and water, will exchange for a great quantity of other goods.

“Utility then is not the measure of exchangeable value, although it is absolutely essential to it. If a commodity were in no way useful—in other words, if it could in no way contribute to our gratification—it would be destitute of exchangeable value, however scarce it might be, or whatever quantity of labor might be necessary to procure it.”, (Ricardo, *Principles of Pol. Econ.*, p. 1.) So much for that.

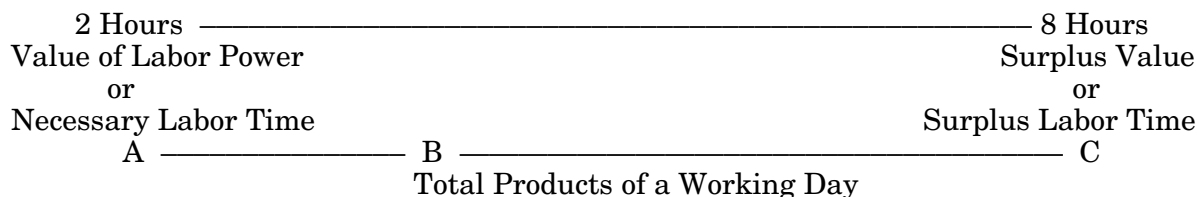
Now as to Comrade Chase's definition of value and his objection to the report on this particular point, I am not going to quarrel with him over that. Though I am reasonably sure that he made the statement as reported, I am willing to accept his correction. I cannot see, however, how that is going to improve his case. First he says (as quoted in my previous article): “It is not labor which gives a thing its value. Labor is applied to a thing because it is valuable.” (Incidentally, this is decidedly a rejection of the Marxian law of value.) Now he says: “Value is the importance a man attaches to a good.” This importance, he says, is determined “by other things, among which are the availability of such goods; that in general . . . the importance to be attached to any unit of such goods will in general depend upon

its cost of production——” We have then: Value is importance, etc.; importance is determined by availability, etc., i.e., supply and demand, ergo, the value of a commodity is determined by supply and demand!

Further—First we are told that labor is applied to a thing because it is valuable. Value is defined as importance attached to a commodity. Later we are told that importance depends upon the cost of production, i.e., labor applied; and labor is applied, etc.,—and here we are back where we started, reasoning around and around in a vicious circle.

Immediately following the last quotation (ending, “cost of production”) Chase says, “and thus we arrive at the conclusion accepted by Marx from his predecessors.” If this means anything, it must be that Marx’s conclusion is that the value of a commodity is determined by its cost of production. I know of no such conclusion. I stated before that the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of socially necessary labor time required for its reproduction which is the Marxian “conclusion.” Now, “socially necessary labor time” and cost of production are two distinct things. In “cost of production” is included among other things wages; it would follow, then, that the higher the wages the capitalist pays, the greater the value of the commodity and, conversely, the lower the wages, the lower the value. The capitalist has seized upon this apparent truth and worked it for all it is worth. Whenever the workers demand higher wages, he frantically appeals to the dear “public,” saying: “Look here, these wicked workers of ours insist on higher wages. Now, good folks, if we have to pay more wages, it will add to the cost of production, and we shall have to demand higher prices for our goods.” And protesting their utter dislike for any such thing, they beat the workers into submission and, if conditions are at all favorable, raise prices, anyway, to the extent they can do it.

Labor is the source of all social values. But labor power, i.e., the workers’ ability to perform a useful social function of some sort or other, is a commodity. This commodity labor power shares the characteristics (with but one exception) of all other commodities. It presents itself as a use value and as an exchange value. Its exchange value is determined by the quantity of social necessaries, required to maintain and reproduce the worker in his status of wage worker. Its use value, however, is its capacity of producing more use values than it itself requires for keeping alive and working—in other words, it produces values over and above its own exchange value—surplus value. If we suppose that at a given time social necessaries needed by the worker require 2 hours for their production and the working day is one of 10 hours, the proposition may be presented as follows:



Line A to B represents the time necessary to produce the necessaries for the workers, which

accordingly constitutes his exchange value; line B to C represents the use values produced in excess of that value and which is expropriated by the capitalist—it constitutes surplus value or unpaid labor. Now it will be clear that if the workers manage to raise their wages (other conditions remaining unchanged) it can only be done by removing B nearer to C—in other words by cutting into the wealth which the capitalist has robbed the working class of.

Comrade Chase disagrees with me when I say that if supply and demand determine the value of commodities it follows that when supply and demand are equal, and the difference in the relation between them, which supposedly determined their value having ceased to be, then the commodity would have no value. He says that “supply and demand are equal” has no meaning unless a certain ‘price’ is understood.” This is exactly the point. Notwithstanding the fact that supply and demand are equal it still has a certain “price,” and it is for this reason that the supply and demand theory is absurd. When Chase puts “price” in quotation marks he indicates that he does not mean price in the real sense. What then is this “price”? It is nothing but the value of that commodity. In the long run all commodities sell at their value—the price or money form of that value indicates the perturbing conditions in the market, which at one time causes a commodity to sell below, and another time above its value. Hence, we see that despite Comrade Chase’s dislike for the Marxian value theory, he is compelled to fall back upon it to sustain his argument, even though he does call it “price.”

Just one more consideration of the theory that “it is not labor which gives a thing its value, but labor is applied to a thing because it is valuable.” Are not air and water “valuable”? Are they not, indeed, absolutely necessary for the existence of life? Yet we do not find labor being applied to them, except, perhaps, under very extraordinary circumstances. Exchange-value neither possesses. Now, Comrade Chase regards these “technical discussions” as “practically a vice because unproductive of genuine agitation or organization.” The implication is that these theories of economics may be good or bad, right or wrong, but they have no real connection with the revolutionary movement. I decidedly disagree with Chase here. Marxian economics forms the cornerstone, the basis for our entire movement. To the extent the Marxian principles are refuted, to that extent is the impossibility of Socialism proven. Remove this basis, and your movement collapses. “Socialism is nothing if it is not scientific,” as Comrade Daniel De Leon said at the Cooper Union First of May meeting. Hence it is of prime importance that we understand these economic theories, and he who rejects them, cannot logically call himself a Socialist. The inseparable connection between Marx’s economics and the Socialist movement is best shown by the persistency and vehemence with which the professorial hirelings of capitalism attack the law of value and the conclusion which the Socialist draws therefrom. And the discussion of these Chase calls a vice!

Apropos, it seems that anything Chase disagrees with is either “vicious,” “superstition” or “provincialism”—I submit that the employment of such expressions indicates a denunciatory, rather than an argumentative and reasoning spirit. They might as well be dispensed with.



Chase says: "If a capitalist economist's economics is designed to teach a capitalist to make millions of dollars while his workers work for \$2 a day, why that will furnish a perfectly adequate basis for your argument with the \$2 a day worker against the capitalist system and in favor of industrial democracy."

**First:** No system of economics is designed nor needed to teach a capitalist to "make millions"—he can do this excellently well, provided he has the requisite capital at hand and a glutted labor market. The usefulness of the work of the capitalist professional economist is in helping the capitalist to preserve and maintain his stolen millions by blinding and confusing the exploited wage-slaves with false economics, thereby preventing them from understanding their true position in society, and keeping them dis- or unorganized with the perpetuation of the capitalist system as a consequence.

**Second:** The mere fact of there being in existence, on the one hand, a small class, possessing all the wealth of society and performing no useful function; and on the other, a large class of propertiless beings, possessing nothing of this world's goods—the further fact that the society is reeking with rottenness and corruption—all of this is, taken by itself, no reason why Socialism should be the next logical step. In ancient Rome we find all the wealth of that time concentrated in the hands of a small clique of Patricians and rich Plebeians; we find a large mass of propertiless freemen and slaves clamoring for more of those "worldly" things. Political corruption, immorality, in short, rottenness and general corruption were as rampant then as now. Yet no one in his senses would say that Socialism might have followed immediately upon the dissolution of the Roman Empire. We know that society had to go through that painful, though necessary, process of serfdom and wage slavery, so that the productive forces might be developed to a point where plenty could be supplied for all with but a minimum of exertion. The potentiality for such a society is here. Therefore Socialism IS the next logical form of society.

**Third:** The mere fact that a capitalist makes millions and a worker only \$2 is in itself no proof that the worker is being exploited, nor that the capitalist is not entitled to his millions. To be sure, it arouses the suspicion that something may be wrong. But it must be proved.

According to Chase's argument, it would be just as logical to say that because one set of workers is making, say \$50 a week, and another set about \$5, therefore the \$5 ones are being exploited and should establish the industrial democracy. It is only because we know that it is labor and labor only which imparts value to things, that we know that labor is robbed, and that consequently the capitalist is as useless to society as potato-bugs are to the growth of potatoes. Useless—nay, to-day, harmful. And it is only through the Marxian principles of economics that we can prove this.

When Comrade Chase says that the discussion of these "technicalities" is a vice, I would call his attention to the fact that it was **he** and not the present writer who started this discussion. And that it was not an accident, but a deliberate act of his is proven by his persistency in returning to the subject at the lecture every time he strayed from it. So if we take

Chase's word for it that it is a vice, he is the sinner, not I. Is it not so, Chase? "In your own conscience, now?" as Captain Fluellen would say.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to my statement about the universities:—There is no doubt that these have always been more or less influenced by the powers that happened to be at any given time. But is Comrade Chase prepared to say that these institutions in the past, particularly during the period of growth of the bourgeoisie as a class were not, relatively speaking, of far greater use, and importance than now? In other words, considering the limitations of scientific knowledge and the results attained and comparing that with the present vast knowledge in universal and human matters and the benefits to society flowing therefrom, is he prepared to maintain that the institutions of learning to-day are, relatively speaking, as useful as those of the past? That there is some good to be found in them to-day I shall not deny. And to the extent that it can be turned to good use, the Party should do it provided it does not do it at the expense of more important work.

Finally as to the "burlesque" on Bergson's name—really, I can see nothing unworthy or wicked in it. But even if my phonetic spelling of Bergson's name were prompted by pure deviltry, will not Comrade Chase admit that a certain sense of humor is sometimes a saving grace?

I believe I have covered all of Chase's points—and have this time refrained from considering our friend's motives. Nevertheless, in conclusion I would say that even if the intentions were the best, intentions are not everything. The road to hell, we are told, is paved with good intentions. And we shall require the aid of Marxian economics to keep us on the right side of that River Styx, which separates the Socialist from the Capitalist Hades.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded August 2015

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<sup>2</sup>[William Shakespeare, *Henry VI*]