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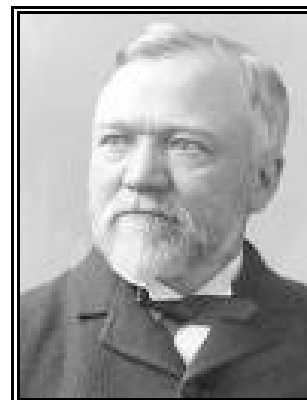
EDITORIAL

INDIVIDUALISM AND PROGRESS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT is axiomatic that the possession of enormous wealth is not an indication of great intellectual endowment. A man may be a keen thinker, yet poor withal, due to a temperamental or moral disinclination to apply the brutal principles of present-day accumulation. Andrew Carnegie is reputed a man of many millions; but his latest utterances reveal him to be no exception to the well-established rule. Arguing in favor of the graduated taxation of inheritances, Carnegie says, "If the writer thought it favorable to Socialism or communism, or in the least degree opposed to individualism, he would oppose it, for of nothing is he more fully convinced than that in individualism lies the steady progress of the race."

Carnegie here, parrot-like, mouths phrases that are highly erroneous in their implications. In the first place it is an error to imply that we are now living in individualism. Individualism presupposes industry, government, property and development by, for and of the individual. If these are examined one by one they will be found to be by, for and of the trusts and their owners, the ultra-capitalist class. They will be found to be a species of inverted Socialism, in which individuals are molded, combined and governed in the interests of a capitalist plutocracy. The latter owns the implements of production and distribution, through which it controls the state, church, press, university and "public opinion," and insures its own supremacy. All talk of individualism under such conditions, is the senseless repetition of phrases whose meaning has long departed. It is empty, non-essential and inapplicable.



ANDREW CARNEGIE
(1835-1919)

In the second place, it is a fallacy to imply that progress is dependent on individualism, real or imaginary. The race has progressed amid a diversity of

systems; so much so that dependence on any one of them is a token of reaction instead of growth. Prehistoric communism witnessed a progress unequalled by that of modern civilization. It saw man emerge out of savagery, create a consciousness of self and kin, subdue certain of the elemental forces of Nature, like fire, discover the sources of food supply, invent pottery and the alphabet, and lay the broad foundations for modern arts, sciences, property and government. Man entered prehistoric communism little less than infantile; modern society inherits the race experience gathered during vast cycles of time. In the first, momentum had to be slowly gathered; in the second, man is sent forward with the velocity of a projectile fired from the 12-inch gun of a modern warship.

Medieval feudalism also made vast contributions to progress. Its renaissances and reformations, its inventions, like the printing press, and discoveries, like that of America, gave a tremendous uplift to the race, destroying old forms of government and property in order to inaugurate new. Coming out of the chaos of barbarism, on the one hand, it evolved, on the other, the rude beginnings of Mr. Carnegie's ideal "individualism." And this, in its turn, by substituting large concentrated production for small individual manufacture—by compelling co-operative instead of isolated action—is heading for real Socialism, the system in which industry, property, government and development shall be by, for and of the people, instead of a few plutocratic capitalist overlords, as at present.

With such a trio of social systems, each following on the heels of the other, with greater rapidity and such marked tendencies, who, but an axiomatically stupid millionaire will have the sublime idiocy to affirm that the steady progress of the race is dependent on Carnegie's "individualism," i.e., capitalism? Reasoning from the pre-historic, as well as the historic, facts in hand, it would be safer to conclude that progress depends on getting out of capitalism with all the haste possible.

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

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