

*Daniel De Leon*

## **Editorial: 'Oddities' of Life in Maine**

Day by day events occur that should admonish the believers in the methods of the pure and simple trades union that the ship to which they have confided their lives is water-logged beyond redemption, and that unless they take to the life-boat of New Trade Unionism they are bound to suffer disastrous shipwreck.

Ten, even fewer, years ago it might have been pardonable ignorance to believe that that stage of capitalism that brings forth the trade union would remain permanent, and that by gathering into such organizations, even if not all, even if not a majority, yet a large minority of the workers, they could be educated up to the point of realizing the inherent slavery of their situation, and of moving onward to their deliverance. To indulge such views today is a mark of crass superstition.

The machine which has been coming on slowly but steadily is now rushing forward with blinding rapidity; it is invading every branch and sub-branch of industry; the skill required in production is approaching more and more that level that can be reached in a few hours' if not a minute's experience; the strength required is sinking more and more to the level of that of the puniest child. Hand in hand with such development goes the widespread displacement of hands: the machine, gifted almost with human intelligence and possessed with the muscular power of thousands of workers, renders these superfluous; and the army of the unemployed, thus conjured

*Daniel De Leon*

into life from the ranks of labor that the machine invades, makes itself felt in all other ranks of labor, even in those where the machine does not directly take possession. Wages tumble everywhere and hands by the thousands lie idle.

Caught in the vortex of such an economic development, the Old Trade Union is dragged to the bottom; to imagine it possible under such circumstances that it is feasible to resist the employer by Old Trade Union methods is insanity. New floods of unemployed sweep down like avalanches upon whatever union is bold enough to dare resistance, its chances of success become less and less, and in the crash that comes the Old Trade Union is triturated, worn into dust. This is becoming truer and truer everywhere in the capitalist world, but nowhere is it truer, hence nowhere is the doom of the Old Trade Union more palpable, than in the United States—the most thoroughly capitalist country, infinitely more capitalistic than even England, the old classic ground of capitalism.

What the present accelerated development of machinery is leading to, together with the stubborn superstition of Old Trade Unionists in refusing to take up the sword of the Socialist ballot, i.e., of New Trade Unionism, to free themselves, appears from a report from Lewiston, Me., which naively describes as “oddities” of life in the Maine factory villages a class of men who can appropriately be called “housekeepers.” Numbers of such men, the report says, can be seen in almost any town where much manufacturing is done. If one calls soon after mealtime, he will be likely to find them with aprons on washing dishes. At other hours they may be seen sweeping up, making beds, cleaning and washing the children, cleaning house, or cooking. Whether any of them do the family sewing is not so certain. These men are housekeepers for the simple reason that their wives can earn more, however little that may be, working in the mill than they can, and it becomes a matter of money-saving to let them do it.

The suffering offspring of these pure and simple workingmen have a tremendous score to settle with their superstitious

*'Oddities' of Life in Maine*

parents, who, armed with the weapon of the ballots, whereby they could bequeath a paradise to their children, cast their vote into the ditch of the Republican, Democratic or any other party of Capital and thus bequeath to their children a prison-pen for their home.

But superstition, strong as its claws are for a time, has a way of lifting suddenly like the mist from the waters. Any day the social conditions may rouse the working proletariat; that day is sure to dawn and economic freedom is bound to be.

To hasten that day is the noble mission of the New Trades Unionists and Socialists.

*The People* Vol. III, No. 50. Sunday, March 11, 1894

## **'Oddities' of Life in Maine**

*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the  
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

*Uploaded October 2002*