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SECOND EDITORIAL

PRESTO, CHANGE!

By DANIEL DE LEON

“Socialism will never appeal to the American spirit while the American imagination kindles over the chances of individual success.”

Thus the New York *Press* gives utterance to a truth more profound and more completely crushing to its views than its editor wots of. He is lauding the departed pirate, [Huntington](#), as the “greatest exponent of American Individualism” and extolling the system which produces such “Triumphs of Success,” and in endeavoring to do so he effectually but unwittingly, demonstrates that capitalism is tottering to its fall.



C. P. Huntington
1821-1900

As long as it was possible for the young man with nothing but push—honorable or otherwise—to force his way up from the ranks of poverty to affluence the seeds of Socialist propaganda fell on barren soil. While there was yet a chance to escape from the propertyless proletariat by any road, the work of organizing that class to accomplish its mission progressed slowly. So long as the lists were open to all comers to do battle for the possession of the prize—the productive tool—, with the prospect of victory perching on any banner, in other words, before the means of production became concentrated in a few hands, capitalism could laugh at Socialism.

To-day, however, things are different. The very example on which the *Press* depends to prove that “Socialism will never appeal to the American spirit,” illustrates the conditions which to-day exist and which will cause the “American spirit” (because the American spirit is no fool) to appeal to Socialism and that soon.

C.P. Huntington acquired his wealth by owning railroads. Setting aside and saying nothing as to the methods he used; admitting that he did only as his rivals in the race for wealth were willing to do and that he only beat them at their own game;—yet the game was then open. It was possible for any of the other contestants to win. It is no longer so. The game is no longer an open one. No longer can the “hustler,” starting with nothing, acquire railroads. And this is true of every department and avenue to wealth. To-day the young American finds that there is no hope for him to rise from the depths of proletarian misery, and, as a salve for the soreness of failure, the upholders of the social system that thus condemns him hurls in his face the mid-century maxim which has outlived its truthfulness: “In America every man may rise.”

If there is one thing distinctive of the American spirit it is hatred of a master, and a chafing against restrictions which hold back from freedom and comfort the great body in which that spirit makes its home: the American people. In days ago that spirit burst the trammels with which custom and presumptuous rulers had fastened it, and that spirit will no more brook the beastly rule of King Capital than the bullying of King George III.

The “American imagination” having ceased to “kindle over the (lost) chances of individual success” will burst into such a flame over the certainty of collective success via Socialism, that the buccaneer class for whom the *Press* speaks will think the theological end of the world has come. But it will only be the real end of their world—Capitalism.

“Presto, change!” says the young American to-day when he reads of how poor men made fortunes in the mid-century and sees how hopeless it looks for him now. “Presto, change!” he will say when he hears the Socialist gospel of wealth for all, and the American spirit tears off the outworn robe of Individualism and stands revealed, the Spirit of Socialism.

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