EDITORIAL

CO-OPERATIVE COMMUNITIES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

It cannot have failed to attract the attention of newspaper readers how frequently of late mention is made of the starting of some new co-operative community. They are cropping up North, South, East and West. To some this is an encouraging sign; to us it is not; at least it does not appear to be an unalloyed good.

In so far as the starting of such colonies may be taken as a barometer of the Socialistic sentiment that is now leavening the land it certainly is cause for joy; nevertheless, in so far as such sentiment is manifesting itself in the starting of such colonies it is an evil; at least it is a dangerous thing—more likely to lead to harm than to good; and, furthermore, indicative of a very unripe understanding of Socialism.

Socialism, i.e., the movement that demands the collective ownership of the people’s machinery of production, springs from that development of industry that renders peoples dependent upon the other. Time was when the family could be the unity of society. That was the time when small production was in vogue. At that time the family was substantially self-supporting; the town or township was absolutely so. Under such conditions Socialism could not suggest itself. But with the introduction of machinery and its perfection the social basis was revolutionized. Not only did the machine force co-operation upon hundreds of families within one industry, but it subdivided labor to the extent of forcing co-operation upon whole countries, whole States and, finally, upon the whole nation. To-day the New Bedford or Fall River spinner is not an independent entity resting on his own bottom; he is a link in a long chain that spreads through the whole

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country that makes him dependent upon the shoemakers of Auburn, Me., the
miners of Ohio, the farm hand of Kansas, the shippers of California, the cottonfield
workers of Texas, the hatters of Danbury, the sugar workers of Louisiana, etc., and
each and all of these dependent upon him and interdependent upon one another.
When production has reached that point Socialism is demonstrated and becomes a
necessity.

The co-operative community is based on a denial, at least on a disregard, of that
fundamental principle of Socialism that establishes the idea of integral co-
operation, i.e., of the necessity of modern society to co-operate in all the fullness of
production. The co-operative community ignores the extensive interdependence man
has reached; it accordingly ignores the Socialist conclusion that to-day the Co-
operative Commonwealth must be co-extensive with the nation’s boundaries.

Societies of this sort are, accordingly, wrongly poised and cannot last. The work
of Noyes on American Socialisms, giving an account of all the communistic
settlements in America and the cause of their failures, is valuable reading at this
time. These communities are either in the nature of cloisters to which men flee for
asylum—and then they draw forces from the struggle that is going on where all the
available forces are needed; or they are meant to be miniature demonstrations of
Socialist theory—and then they are fraught with danger because their wrong
construction insures their failure, thereby rather injuring than promoting the cause
they have at heart.

Socialism is a national evolution; like the eagle that needs the wide expanse of
the dome of heaven to spread its wings, and could neither develop nor be “exhibited”
in a rat hole, so does the Co-operative Commonwealth need for its field the full
extent of a commonwealth of the broad dimensions that modern civilization
requires, and never could thrive or be “demonstrated” within the narrow compass of
a “community.”

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