

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 5.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JULY 5, 1907.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

AN OPEN LETTER TO EDWARD LAUTERBACH, PRESIDENT NATIONAL LIBERAL IMMIGRATION LEAGUE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

EDWARD LAUTERBACH,
President National Liberal Immigration League,
150 Nassau St., New York.

Sir:—

We have and hereby answer your letter stating the purposes of your organization and requesting the co-operation of this paper.

You say your organization lays stress “on raising the standard of citizenship.” In the very next paragraph this sentence occurs: “We welcome immigrants to pave our streets, build railroads and dig subways. We welcome even more willingly the illiterates, as they are more fitted to do hard work.” Are not the two sentences contradictory? Do they not kick each other to pieces?

The immigrants whom the country receives the country should be anxious to see graduate into fit citizenship. An illiterate starts hampered towards that goal. If, then, besides such initial difficulty in the immigrants’ path towards American citizenship, the uses you intend him for are the uses of “hard work”—paving streets, building railroads, digging subways—it follows that the date of his graduation into American citizenship is intended to be indefinitely postponed, if not altogether shut off. The scanty wages and the conditions under which “hard work” is done, and the “hard worker” is forced to live, leave no opportunity except for some exceptionally vigorous mind and body to pull out of the ditch. It follows, finally, that the purpose of your “Liberal” organization is to flood the country with a mass of labor, the misfortune of whose initial illiteracy is to be exploited, aggravated and confirmed so

as to prevent them from ever having a word to say over the social-political conditions in which they toil. The establishment of such a herd of human brutes, and the keeping of them down in that low social layer, can only have the effect of dragging down the layers above. The elimination of skill in improved machinery—a blessing if the machine were owned by the workers—is a sufficient curse now that the machine is owned by the idlers: the elimination of skill in privately owned improved machinery would help to feed the social human corral that you contemplate setting up. Did you ever hear of a “high standard of citizenship” in a nation whose economic structure is deliberately planted upon the backs of a mass of “hard workers,” and is calculated ever to thin out into a tapering point the beneficiary class of such a scheme? Sir, your organization will not, cannot, promote a “higher standard of citizenship”—no more than chattel slavery, which degraded both the slave and slave-holder.

Sir, you are a member of the Society for Ethical Culture—a leading member, we are told. Is such a scheme compatible with ethics? Or, is such a scheme the product of the ethical culture instilled by your society?

Sir, we must, with all the emphasis that politeness allows, decline to lend the co-operation of the organ of the Socialist Labor Party to a movement the purpose and effect of which is repellant to good civic morals.

—ED. THE PEOPLE.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded October 2009

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