

# DAILY PEOPLE

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EDITORIAL

## OPEN LETTER TO PAUL LAFARGUE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**D**EAR Comrade—It has been said of your distinguished countryman, Montesquieu, that he was luminously instructive, not only in that in which he was correct, but also in that in which he occasionally erred. It is in this spirit of admiration for the talent you have bestowed upon the Social Question that we desire to call your attention to a certain false, at least imperfect, conclusion that you slipped into in the course of your article “Les Trusts Americains” (The American Trusts) in the issue of *Le Socialiste* of last January 25. Summing up the gigantic powers—economic, political and religious—that are lodged in the hands of the Trust magnates, you say:

“The press, which manipulates public opinion in the interests of the capitalists, is in their [the Trust magnates’] hands. They hold back telegraphic dispatches; that journal, foolhardy enough to attempt to shake off their yoke, would find its telegraphic communications suppressed; and that is equivalent to a decree of death. A DAILY PAPER IN THE UNITED STATES CAN NOT LIVE WITHOUT THE LATEST DISPATCHES.”

No doubt, much in this passage is true. That, however, the passage is not wholly correct is evident from the circumstance that the columns, through which it is our privilege to address you, are the columns of “a daily paper in the United States,” in the metropolis of the United States, at that,—THE DAILY PEOPLE; that the paper has been in uninterrupted existence, now close on three years; that it has a WEEKLY, and more recently started a MONTHLY edition; that it thus reaches not less than 30,000 readers; and finally, and above all, that this “daily paper in the United States” is not merely the organ, but the property of the Socialist Labor Party,—that body of the Socialist Movement in America that *Le Socialiste* of the first instant justly acknowledges to be “the most advanced wing” in this country,—accordingly, that under no circumstances

could the neck of this “daily paper in the United States,” for one, be found under the telegraphic or journalistic yoke of the American Trust magnates. And yet THE DAILY PEOPLE lives, and grows. This is an important circumstance. It points to a needed qualification of your otherwise correct conclusion. The facts that you correctly cite; the conclusion you draw from them, in so far as it is correct; finally, the fact that compels a qualification of your conclusion;—all these, taken together, throw a valuable side-light upon the situation. To the militants at home, no less than to those abroad, a clear appreciation of this situation will be of interest.

The mental domination of the capitalist over the working class is exercised in the matter of “news,” as powerfully as in other matters. Socialist education must aim at snapping these mental shackles. No positive progress is possible before. The wise tactician never loses sight of the means at his command. Sticking in this communication to the matter of “news,” the fact readily leaps to sight that no Socialist daily could possibly compete in “news” (as the term is commonly understood) with the capitalist dailies:—it necessarily lacks the funds thereto. This fact, once apprehended, dictates the policy to pursue to wit, to sedulously cultivate a taste for, and occupy a field on which capitalist journalism could not, if it would, and, above all, would not, if it could, seek to compete with a Socialist daily. The mass of the working class, mentally dominated by the capitalist class, feels at a loss unless its morning daily keeps them posted on the latest sneeze of the Tsar of Russia, the latest snicker of the brat of Duchess Consuelo Vanderbilt of Marlborough, the latest escapade of the roue husband of Countess Anna Gould of Castellane, etc., etc. All this, no doubt, is “news”; and in the volume and freshness of such news capitalist journalism is not to be competed with. But is it news that contributes rightly to atune the workingman’s mind towards his emancipation? Assuredly not. On the other hand, accurate information on the plots set on foot by the capitalists, aided by their “Labor Lieutenants,” the labor fakirs, against the workingman, these and all such kindred matters, unquestionably “news,” are of prime importance to the proletariat. Accordingly, the tactical move of relinquishing the field of capitalist “news,” and occupying that of labor “news,” apart from achieving the ideal of weaning the workingman from the poisonous teat of capitalist trash, achieves the simultaneous object of placing the neck of a Socialist daily beyond the reach of the yoke of the Trust-

controlled telegraphic dispatches. The daily, to which the suppression of such telegraphic news is a decree of death, might as well die, for all that the Socialist Movement cares: its very dependence for existence upon such sources marks it useless, if not harmful to the workingman. On the other hand, the daily that is as the breath in the nostrils of the working class can not succumb to any such “decree of death,”—it is beyond and above the reach of such bolts, the eagle poised on his mountain top eyrie is not safer.

This explains why, despite your correct statement of the facts touching the power of the Trusts over the “news” dispatches, their power can not affect, and so little does affect a Socialist daily, that THE DAILY PEOPLE is here and will continue to be,—uncompromising, defiant.

The daily press of the Socialist Labor Party is builded like the Socialist Labor Party itself:—nothing short of physical force can affect it; and if and when that should be attempted, the attempt will be but one of those boomerang shots, that are never fired but from a camp whose own imminent destruction has rendered it utterly senseless.

We speed the day!

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