
The Story of the Egg.

by Morris Hillquit

Published in the *Milwaukee Leader*, v. 8, no. 302 (Nov. 28, 1919), pg. 12.

A country can be educated, led, and transformed into Socialism, but it cannot be driven, lured, or bulldozed into it. The Socialist conception of the world process is evolutionary, not cataclysmic. Socialism has come to build, not to destroy.

The spectacular and sanguinary outbreaks, which sometimes accompany radical economic and political changes, are purely incidental — they do not make the social transformation.

Thus in England the revolution, which transferred the actual control of the country from the nobility to the capitalists, was accompanied by gradual and peaceful stages, without violence or bloodshed.

In France the same process culminated in the ferocious fights of the Great Revolution of 1789.

But who will say that the transformation in England was less thorough and radical than in France? As a matter of fact, street fights do not make a social revolution any more than firecrackers make the 4th of July.

It is sometimes helpful to elucidate an abstract principle by a concrete and simple example. The manner in which the present order is to change into Socialism may be illustrated by the familiar process of chicken hatching.

A normal chicken egg will be converted into a live chicken if kept 21 days in a temperature of 98.5 degrees.

Now observe some of the most striking phases of the process.

An egg is entirely and radically different from a chicken in form. Under ordinary circumstances, it can be readily determined whether an object is one or the other. But after the egg has passed a few days in the life-producing temperature radiating from the hatching hen, its identity is no longer so clear.

The embryo of the chicken may be discerned in the contents of the egg. And every day thereafter the substance of the egg continues changing — every day it becomes a little less egg and a little more chicken, until on the last day nothing is left of the egg but the form. The substance inside is a live, complete, and fully organized chicken.

Similarly the feudal order of society is quite distinct from the capitalist order. Europe of the 15th Century presents a system of unalloyed feudalism; Europe of the end of the 18th Century is just as unmistakably capitalistic; but Europe of the 17th Century is like the egg in the early periods of hatching — it represents a feudal form of government with a decided capitalist embryo inside of it.

And so likewise the capitalist egg has been set to hatching generations ago, and today it contains a noticeable Socialist embryo, notwithstanding the deceiving appearance of the egg shell.

Further: during the entire process of incubation the shell of the egg has remained intact. Every drop of its fluid contents has been changed into flesh, bone, and feathers, but the shell has not been absorbed or modified by the process — it has obstinately persisted in holding within its

grip the new substance, instead of the old. Now for a loose and liquid egg, a hard shell is a very convenient cover, but it becomes rather a nuisance to a young, enthusiastic chick.

As soon as the latter develops sufficient strength and sense, it just cracks the old shell from the inside. The shell breaks into a number of fragments with great noise, the rebellious chick jumps out, and to the superficial observer this act appears to be the revolution which has converted the egg into the chicken. As a matter of fact, however, the actual revolution has taken place in the gradual growth of the chicken embryo at the expense of the egg substance.

The breaking of the shell was but a manifestation of the accomplishment of the more significant process inside. Had the shell been soft and yielding, it would not even have to be forcibly cracked.

The street fight, barricades, and armed conflicts which occasionally accompany a social revolution are the cracking of the superficial shell — the revolutions themselves are slowly accomplished within the industrial substance of society.

The breaking of the shell becomes a useful and liberating act only when the chicken is fully developed within it. When that point is reached, the chicken itself takes care of the shell. The hen

has nothing to do with that part of the performance. It is her business to sit on the egg the full period of time required for hatching, to supply the proper heat and not to shirk her task for any period of time.

Should the hen become impatient or get into her feathery head a syndicalist notion to “hasten the process,” and should she attempt to break the shell before the time, she would only destroy the embryonic life of the chicken.

And finally, the process of incubation may be used to make clear the relation of the Socialist propaganda to the process of natural economic evolution. To hatch a chicken, the hen must have an egg, an object containing the germs of a chicken. No amount of hatching will turn a stone into a chicken.

On the other hand, an egg will remain an egg forever unless deliberately taken by the hen into hatching.

No system of society can be transformed into a Socialist commonwealth unless it has in it the germs of a social order, and on the other hand, no system of society will grow into a Socialist state unless planfully directed to it.

The capitalist state is the egg — the Socialists do the hatching.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.