

Editorial: Evolution of C.A. Dana

It is not long since the *Sun* held that workingmen had as good a right to combine as capitalists might have, and conversely. In the opinion of Charles A. Dana, ex-Socialist, the exercise of this right by both classes was highly beneficial, and the failure of one to exercise it would prove highly detrimental to the economic interests and general progress of the country. The apprehensions concerning trusts and syndicates on the one hand, and labor organizations on the other hand, were groundless, he said, for the aggregation of capital was necessarily tending to a better administration of industry and cheaper products, while the aggregation of labor would inevitably secure to the working masses a reward proportioned to the constantly increasing result of their exertions. It was best, therefore, to let those two great economic forces—Capital and Labor—operate freely, unfettered by legislation and undisturbed by politics, the province of which should be narrowed down more and more to questions involving merely the efficiency and cheapness of the administration of the police powers; so that, upon such simple issues as might be raised by differences of opinion concerning the requirements of “good administration” under a government so limited in its functions, the two old parties afforded ample room to citizens of all classes; there was no occasion for a third party, and especially for a class party, since the class struggle was by the nature of such a government removed from the political and confined to the economical field.

Daniel De Leon

In other words, Charles A. Dana was no longer a Socialist, but he was still a trade-unionist “pure and simple”, and while in this capitalistic world Jay Gould had become his *beau ideal*, in the labor world Sam. Gompers was his hero.

Lately, however, and for the third time in his eventful life, Charles A. Dana saw a new light. Trade-unionism, he now says, is abject slavery; capitalists alone have the right to combine.

This may seem to some a great step backward; yet no greater than we should expect from a mind so obviously crab-like in its evolution, and the various, successive states of which have merely been, after all, a faithful reflex of the evolution of capitalism itself.

For, if we take an historical view of the development of capitalism, we find it, at first, not truly socialistic, not transforming government into an agency of industrial organization for the benefit of all, but “State Socialistic”; that is, using the powers of the State to vest in the capitalist class alone all public property, public franchises and public functions. Having thus divided among the members of that privileged class everything of social value and thereby reduced government to a mere political phantom, we next find capitalism advocating and actually favoring the utmost freedom of combination; because, under the new conditions of its own making, the combinations of the weak not only must prove impotent against the combinations of the powerful, but must help the latter in annihilating their non-combined competitors. Lastly, the trusts having established their sway, the right of the working class to combine is denounced in the name of freedom, the “right to labor” is invoked in favor of enforced idleness and starvation wages, and the police powers—the only powers left to the government—are called upon to suppress organized labor if in the struggle forced upon it and upon its members for existence it dares to do more than bare its breast and receive its death blow.

There is, indeed, no consistency in the moral evolution of

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Charles A. Dana, that is not the inconsistency of capitalism itself, of which he is the high priest and oracle. But the old fiend has now a foot in the grave and his idol, we trust, shall not survive him.

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

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