

EDITORIAL

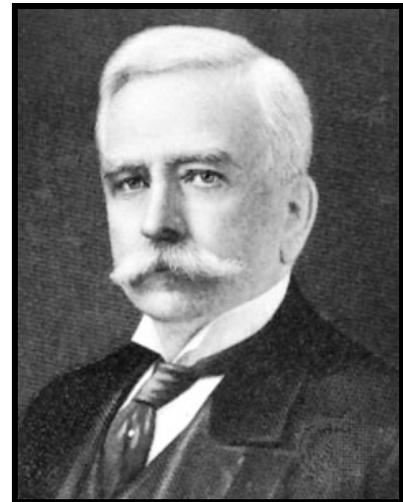
## WHAT IS THE USE?

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE *New York Times*, commenting upon the death of Marshall Field, says: “The opportunity to do what he did is still open to every beginner, of native or foreign birth, in this great and happy land. What is the use of talking about ‘proletariats’ and ‘classes’ in the face of such an object lesson that the opportunities of American life are still as open as they ever were?”<sup>1</sup>

“What is the use?”—every one of Marshall Field’s 3,000 employes can become a Marshall Field, if they want to. True, if they did there would be no Marshall Fields, but—Oh, “What is the use?”

“What is the use?”—the census of 1900 shows that there are 512,276 manufacturing establishments in the United States employing 5,314,539 wage earners. This is an average of ten employes to every establishment. That is, accepting the delusive average as correct, for the sake of argument, we find there is one chance in ten of the workingman becoming an average capitalist,



MARSHALL FIELD (1834–1906)

not to mention anything about his becoming a Marshall Field. But—well, “What is the use?”

“What is the use?”—The same census, if examined a little closer, discloses the fact that out of 529,191 establishments, 232,716 employ from one to five men; 112,120 from five to twenty; 32,403 from twenty-one to fifty; 8,475 from 101 to 250; 2,804 from 251 to 500; 1,063 from 501 to 1,000; 443, from 1,000 upwards. Thus, the chances of a workingman becoming a Marshall Field grow beautifully less than they

<sup>1</sup> [“Marshall Field,” *New York Times* editorial, January 17, 1906.—R.B.]

seemed at first sight. And the higher up the industrial scale we go, the lesser do they grow. But—oh, pshaw! “What is the use?”

“What is the use?”—John Moody, in his authoritative work, *The Truth About Trusts*, finds that in the United States there are 400 industrial, franchise and transportation trusts. These have a capitalization of one-fifth of the wealth of the country, which a score of men control; and, so controlling, control also the source of supplies, the avenues of distribution and means of exchange. With the power thus conferred these men crush the middle class, as Armour did the cattle and fruit growers, snap their fingers at the state, as Rogers is now doing in Missouri, and crush labor unremorsefully, as Peabody did in Colorado. Consequently, it is easy for every beginner to become a Marshall Field, and all talk of “proletariats” and “classes” is a fallacy. So “what is the use of talking” about them? Why not read the *Times* and enjoy a good laugh? Life will be found richer for it, and you will be helped to become a Marshall Field by just that much. “What is the use?”—there is a good deal of use in a laugh.

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

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)