

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 11, NO. 113.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1910.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

“OPPORTUNISM.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT would be difficult to find a term by which people, who boast of its application to themselves, castigate themselves more severely than by that of “Opportunism.”

To see some folks wrap themselves in the mantle of “Opportunism” one would imagine that the thing is something rare; something difficult to cultivate; a thing to be educated in only with great pains. It is nothing of the sort.

“Opportunism” is as much instinctive with man as the act of throwing up one’s right hand to ward off a blow, or the act of putting forth both arms to break the force of a fall. There is no man outside of the lunatic asylum who is not an “opportunist,” and most of those inside have wit enough left them to practise the trick. Only the stark mad know nothing about “Opportunism.”

The man looking out of a sixth story window, and who makes up his mind to go out on the street, the first thing he does is to turn his back to that very street that is his goal, and, following the windings of staircases, land whither he started. The woman who, living up on Park avenue, wishes to do some shopping on West Twenty-third street and has no time to waste, will walk eastward to board a Third avenue “L” train. And so forth. In each and all these instances opportunism is exercised. It is exercised instinctively.

“Opportunism” is the conduct that combines a goal with the material facilities, or means to attain it. “Opportunism” is so commonsense a practice that it is applied in large things as in small. It is applied in daily life; and it is applied in great historic Movements.

It should seem from this that whether a person boasts of his “Opportunism,” or not, “Opportunism” is so good a thing that even the boasting over it can not throw the thing itself into a bad light. Not so.

It happens with “Opportunism” what happens to many another thing. When proper, it is not boasted about; when boasted about, the boast is meant to cover impropriety. An extreme comparison will illustrate the point.

The man woman or child, who, being hungry, and deprived of all opportunity to satisfy the want, steals a loaf, is a very different being from the one who raises theft to a principle of action. The former regrets the act, the latter glorifies it; the former will avoid falling into the practise of thievery, the latter will seek for the opportunity. In short, the former may remain pure of mind, the latter will sink to Slummery. So with “Opportunism.”

As a sane, instinctively human and legitimate act, “Opportunism” is the individual’s surrender to necessity; none will boast of that. Everyone will prefer descending to the street without first winding around corridors: he will never think of boasting of the act. When, however, the winding about to reach a goal is boasted about, then the boast partakes in all essentials of the glorification of theft.

The fact is seen in the Socialist or Labor Movement. The bona fide “Opportunist” never boasts of his “Opportunism.” He recognizes facts, surrenders to the dictates of these and pursues his goal. The mala fide “Opportunist,” he with whom “Opportunism” means to “take it easy” in devious ways, struts with the feather of “Opportunism” in his cap.

Boastful “Opportunism” answers in sociology the biologic purpose of the rattle attachment to the rattlesnake: it at once attracts its kind, and warns man.

Follow principle, said Jefferson, and the knot unties itself.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded November 2011

slpns@slp.org