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EDITORIAL

## TOM JOHNSON.

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**E**XCEPTIONAL is the opportunity offered by the election of Tom Johnson for Mayor of Cleveland, O., to study the “Boring from Within,” or, which is the same, the “Opportunist” method “for the promotion of a cause,”—a method quite in vogue, and very much under discussion just now.

The “Hit from the Without” method, otherwise “Frontal Attack,” or “Straight Course” that the Socialist Labor Party adheres to, and which the Party sets up as a test of the sincerity and character of a Movement, is variously opposed. With most of its opponents, their unqualified failure is a complete answer. But simple failure, however crass, does not do full justice to “Opportunism.” The genius of “Opportunism,” or “Boring from Within,” is best comprehended when scrutinized in the state of what it calls success. Such a state Tom Johnson’s election now presents.

The Single Tax, as a Movement, started in New York. The ’86 Mayoralty campaign in this city was only a first tentative step. It was not until the State campaign of the next year that the Single Tax made its debut as a Movement. How did it manage? True to the S.L.P. test of sincerity, the Single Taxer of that year said what he meant, and meant what he said. He believed in the Single Tax as the solution of the problem of “Involuntary Poverty.” His creed was summed up in the slogan: “Abolish the landlord, then capitalists and workingmen alike will flourish like the green bay, the formers’ profits will be a hundred fold, the latters’ earnings will rival the capitalists.” The fallacy, the worse than fallacy of such tenets, has been often exposed in these columns. This is not the place to go into that. The point is that the Single Taxer was not ashamed to utter what he believed, and to take his stand by what he uttered. The Single Tax flag was run up the mainmast; those on board, who did not believe in it, were thrown overboard. No “Opportunism” there; no thought of “Boring from Within.” It was a “Hit from Without,” “Frontal Attack,” “Straight Course” policy. The Single Tax went down in that campaign, never to rise again. Its absurdities broke its back. But while gazing at the wreck, the smile of

derision over its silly theory would die away to make room for the admiration always due to convictions sincerely held, and, being so held, brought to the touch.

With the break-down of the Single Tax Movement in 1887, there were left only fragmentary manifestations, some odd, others odder: There were Single Tax “campaigns” reported in Delaware, then landing in jail and being photographed; there were Single Tax colonies reported elsewhere; and more recently there was, in the opinion of the St. Paul of the Single Tax, Thos. G. Shearman, that cloud-burst of Single Taxism in the Transvaal, carried on the point of the British bayonets. Hand in hand with these signs of physical decline, the signs of moral decline were perceived in the Single Tax Movement. As it happens with all fallacies, a rebuff demoralized its Single Tax upholders. The one-time bold Single Taxer grew craven; the one time frank and out-spoken apostle of the gospel of profits became double-faced. “Opportunism” became his device; “Bore from Within” became his slogan. And what that means has been just exemplified in Cleveland, O.

Tom Johnson, the Mary Magdalen of Single Taxism, ran for Mayor on a platform that ignored the Single Tax; he ran in a city which led all others in the heels-over-head fad of so-called “Good-Government,” that is to say, the fad that the rottenness of municipal government can be cured by separating its elections from State or National elections; in other words, he sailed on the crest of a wave that repudiated Single Tax thought: The Single Tax theory implies not merely State but National legislation; the “Cleveland theory” excludes both State and National issues. While so running; while supported by Single Tax circulars that had, for their sole Single Taxism, Henry George’s bust; while commending himself to and drawing his vote mainly from the capitalist and other Labor fleecing wards of the city, and losing heavily in the Labor wards;—while doing that, Tom Johnson and his agents “let it be known” that he was a Single Taxer. In conduct, everything except what he claimed to be, Tom Johnson was elected, and his election is heralded, justly enough, as a triumph of “Opportunism.”

He who says “Opportunism” implies the abandonment of principle, and the opportunity of the individual to promote his own private ends together with those of his pursuivants; he who says “Boring from Within” implies the admission that his own ship is wrecked, and that he takes refuge on board the enemy’s galleon.

Bona fide Movements know no “opportunity” but that of grabbing the foe by the throat and despatching him.

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