

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 147.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1907.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

“BOSSISM.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE critical days that are facing the Labor Movement demand accurate use of terms. Accurate use of terms requires their proper understanding. Among the numerous terms used wildly, and yet whose exact sense it is of importance to know, is the term “Bossism,” or “Boss.” The occasion for the considerations here presented in this week’s article signed “Under the White Terror No. 4,” in which a fourth member of the local Socialist party organization turns a fourth flashlight upon that boss-ridden abortion that styles itself “the S.P. of New York.”¹

Where confusion exists about a term, clearness can not be introduced by the direct method of definition. The path for definition must first be cleared by the removal of the false conceptions that a loose using of the term has caused to cluster around it. The first thing to do is to ascertain what “Bossism” is NOT.

In the archives of this office is the letter of an Anarchist, who charged the Socialist Labor Party with “intolerable Bossism,” and the Editor of *The People* with being “a boss, before whom Dick Crocker, the boss of Tammany, fades into nothingness.” The Anarchist in question must be spoken free of dishonest intent. Had he been dishonest he would have stopped there, and not explained. He explained his meaning. Said he: “One can not breathe under your iron rod of $2+2=4$. I want to be free to say $2+2=\text{what I please}$.” The archives of the Movement record in authentic printed form the incident that Peter Burrowes, once a member of the S.L.P., left the organization to the tune of “Science spells tyranny.” More lately, as appeared from the Letter-Box, a member of the S.P. declared: “I hate *The People*, its logic is too perfect.” These instances should suffice.—Sense is not “Bossism”; license

¹ [To be appended at a future date.—R.B.]

is not freedom. The man, who is both honest and intelligent, gladly surrenders his freedom to Reason. Only then can he really enter into the full fruition of freedom. To him “free will” is a misnomer. The “will” of the both intelligent and honest man is a glad vassal to Reason. Accordingly, the exercise of Reason, and the rigid insistence upon Reason, is not “Bossism”: it is the homage to Fact: it is the promotion of order, without which organization becomes a chimera, and progress an impossibility.

What, then, is “Bossism”? As its name implies, it seems to partake of qualities inherent in Reason, Logic and Science, in that, like these, it implies absolutism. That the identity in this respect does not make Reason, Logic and Science the synonyms of “Bossism” is obvious. “Bossism” has led the path to human enslavement and degradation; Reason, Logic and Science have lighted the path to human freedom and Civilization. It must be, with Reason, Logic and Science, on the one side, “Bossism,” on the other, as with man and the duck. Both man and the duck have two legs—that does not render them identical. What, then, is the distinctive characteristic between “Bossism,” and Reason, Logic and Science? Is it perhaps a difference in manners? On this head also looseness of terms has promoted confusion. “Bossism,” in the popular mind, is frequently identified with rudeness. It is an error. Bossism may assume the gentlest of miens. Neatly did Montesquieu cover the point with the historic allusion that “Sulla roughly sought to drive the Romans to freedom, while Augustus gently led them to slavery.” The hand of “Bossism” may be gloved in velvet; on the other hand, Reason, Logic and Science are frequently austere. In what, then, consists the real difference, the difference that dignifies the latter, and that renders the former execrable. “Under The White Terror No. 4” quite distinctly points it out by pointing out the instrument whereby the New York S.P. is kept in subjugation. That instrument, like Tammany’s, is the wherewithal of physical existence for its agents. With Tammany, the wherewithal consists in political pap; with the New York S.P. it consists in privately owned Rand School pap in the various shapes of “Board of Managerships,” “secretaryships,” “librarianships,” “professorships,” and even plain “pensionaryships”—all of which are utter impossibilities within the S.L.P. All S.L.P. institutions being absolutely S.L.P. property, no individual, or set of individuals, in the S.L.P. can be truthfully

said to dispose of the existence of any of its members.

The Body is the vessel of the Mind. Reason, Logic and Science rule the Mind; “Bossism” rules the Body. Reason, Science, Logic elevate the Body by dominating the Mind; “Bossism” degrades the Mind by dominating the Body. The fulcrum for “Bossism” is the stomach, to the addling of the brain, and the crippling of character; the fulcrum of Logic, Reason and Science is the brain, to the invigorating of the body and the strengthening of character. The lever of Science, Logic and Reason is Knowledge—that dispeller of superstition and promoter of progress; the lever of “Bossism” is Physical Force—that inciter of Ignorance and promoter of reaction.

“Bossism” is that power which requires torpid minds for its exercise, and which, therefore, ever begins by rendering torpid its victims, or agencies, through obtaining control of their stomachs.—No control of stomachs, no Bossism.

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

Uploaded November 2009

slpns@slp.org