

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 188.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 1910.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

“THE PHILOSOPHY OF FAILURE.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

ABOUT once in every so often, someone comes along and administers a few whiffs of oxygen to the “Socialism is the philosophy of failure” mummy, and sends it out into the arena to do battle with the greatest growing movement in the world today.

“If Yale continually beat Harvard at football,” runs a recent recrudescence of the old argument, “and Harvard should apply for a change in the rules of the game as it was played, we should justifiably hold that Harvard’s failure to win was the motive of its seeking to change the rules. So in the case of Socialism. With everybody successful, there would be no Socialist movement.”

Nothing is truer than that statement as it stands; nothing is more false than the implication attempted to be read into it.

“With everybody successful there would be no Socialist movement.” Of course! Without any chattel slaves there would have been no Abolition movement. Without any oppression by King George there would have been no American Revolutionary movement. With everyone enjoying economic independence, good wages, comfortable homes, security for the future and ample leisure for self-improvement—what less than this can be called “success”?—naturally there would be no Socialist movement. But there is just the rub. Our present economic structure is so framed up that everybody cannot be successful. For a few to be “successful,” a vast number must be kept under. And hence comes the justice and necessity of the movement of the vast number to throw off the few and establish conditions which shall require the keeping under of none.

Again, with a free field and opportunities equal, failure may be a disgrace. But with a field obstructed by entrenched might, and opportunities pre-empted by those in possession, failure becomes not a disgrace, but the inevitable state of all those not

on the inside track. To-day the vast majority of us come into the world handicapped. Property-less and capital-less, we are also powerless against those who have already usurped to themselves the tools we need to live by. Under such conditions “failure” loses its shame, the charge of “failure” its opprobrium. Under such conditions the charge that “Socialism is the philosophy of failure” is not a point against it, but the strong point in its favor. That philosophy has a world to conquer.

Furthermore, the simile of the football game is absurdly beside the question. Football is not a matter of compulsion. None need tread the gridiron unless he so elects. He has full and free choice either to play the game as it is, or leave it alone. How is it, though, with the game of the struggle for life? Here one may not take it or leave it, as he pleases. With all its iniquities, with all its injustices whatsoever, it is forced upon him, and he must play. What better right can there be, then, than his to demand that its rules be framed so as to give him his equal chance?

“Socialism the philosophy of failure”? So is the desire for a drink the “philosophy of thirst,” and the desire for a fire the “philosophy of being cold.” And as thirst cannot be stilled save by a drink, nor cold dispelled save by a fire, so can the necessity of “failure” for the many in order to afford “success” to the few never be abolished except by Socialism. While its opponents worry its flanks with hoots of “Failure!” that movement marches on to Success.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded January 2011

slpns@slp.org