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# A Reply to Algernon Lee: Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, April 3, 1919.

by Moses Oppenheimer †

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Editor of *The Call*:

In your issue of April 2, Comrade Lee asks many questions as to the meaning of certain paragraphs in the letter, "A Basis for Discussion." As one of the 13 signers, I will endeavor to formulate a partial answer within the 500 word limit.

The dropping of "Immediate Demands" means a reaction from opportunist tactics of the last decade. It does not necessarily mean that the party should refuse support of genuine reforms in the interest of the workers — reforms that, in their nature, cannot be more than a patchwork of the outgrown social garment.

But under the opportunist leadership of men like Hillquit, Berger, Ghent, and Robert Hunter, the struggle for such reforms has gradually overshadowed and supplanted the demand for the abolition of wage slavery. More and more it has resulted in petty tactics for vote catching. Berger's Old Age Pension bill was a glaring exhibit of opportunist incapacity.

Lee mentions some of the planks that he deems of great merit and inquires what we are going to do about them. Yankee fashion, let me ask him a counter-question: What about the radical franchise plank adopted at St. Louis without debate and approved by referendum? Where and when have our representatives taken action in support of it? Where and when have any of the leading opportunists, including Lee himself, uttered one word pointing out the political

powerlessness of half of our workers? On the contrary, from that quarter we hear ad nauseam repetition of the stale formula that the workers by use of the ballot can achieve their emancipation.

This lame policy of the opportunists follows logically from their desire to be considered safe and sane and respectable. To act otherwise would be — to use a now historical phrase — "ethically unjustifiable and tactically suicidal."

Immediate demands are a tactical problem! Comrade Lee knows that tactics change with changed conditions. There was a time when the opportunists expected to win the votes of the bulk of AF of L workers. Hence the sugarcoating of the Socialist pill and three years of Chester M. Wright in control of *The Call*.

That is now ancient history, Lee could not repeat that chapter if he would. Nay, I believe he wouldn't if he could.

The powerful impulse from the movement in Europe makes itself felt over here. There is great need for re-forming our front, for re-casting our tactics. The old roar of opportunism led us nowhere, except to barren failure. If nothing else, the experience with our ten in Albany and our seven in the City Hall should open our eyes.

The time for picayune politics is irrevocably gone.

Moses Oppenheimer

†- Moses Oppenheimer was one of the longest-tenured members of the American Socialist movement. He was born in Bavaria in November 1848 to a peasant family and was active in the German Social Democratic movement from 1872. In Germany he was a candidate for the Reichstag and a newspaper editor. In America was a member of the Knights of Labor from 1886, Chairman of the Moyer-Haywood Defense Fund (1906-1908), Treasurer of the New Review Publishing Co., and delegate to the 1917 SPA Convention.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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