

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 11, NO. 191.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 1911.

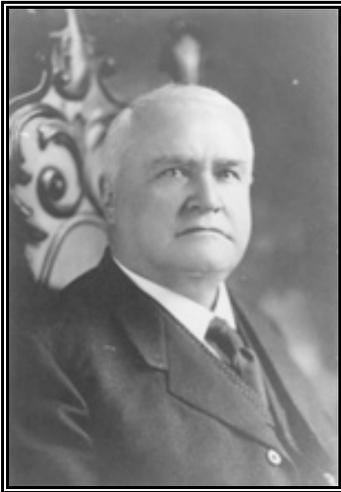
ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

STEPHEN B. ELKINS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT would be worth a good deal if some X-sound apparatus could divulge to the “vulgar” the whispered talks about Stephen B. Elkins, now being held among Senators and other political grandees at Washington.



STEPHEN BENTON ELKINS
(1841-1911)

The audible talks, reported in the papers, and expressful of “sorrow at the decease of the distinguished Senator from West Virginia,” is intended for public consumption; for the edification of the gullibles. ’Tis the whispered talk that really would edify.

The defunct Senator lived a “public life.” Born in Ohio, before he was 23 years of age he entered politics in New Mexico—and never left that sphere. Whether in legislatures, “in the Army,” or in business as a leading figure in the Tobacco Trust, or as a land speculator—in whatever sphere he moved, the Senator’s center of gravity was politics. Politics was at once his lever and fulcrum, with the net result of \$15,000,000 and the aspiration of an Italian Prince for son-in-law among his assets.

De Tocqueville, the keen French traveler and observer, was dead when Stephen B. was born, yet one would think that, in many a sketch of figures in the American ruling class of the early part of last century, the posthumous Stephen stood for a model to De Tocqueville. The skill of a portrayer lies in his ability to seize upon types. Dickens did so—and frequently got himself into trouble therefor, people he had never heard of charging him roundly with meaning them in his “calumnious portraiture” of So-and-So. Though Stephen B. Elkins was not yet born when De Tocqueville’s book was already in circulation, the Senator and multimillionaire to-be, with “ever cheerful words for his clerks,” with marked “politeness for

dependents,” with “considerate treatment of restaurant employes,” is seen stalking at life’s length through De Tocqueville’s pages in the American merchants and manufacturers who, with all the external marks of democratic conduct, plundered their employers {employees?}, held them in political trance, despised and hated them—and grew wealthy at their cost.

The stories in circulation about the “affable Elkins”—affable towards the poor—almost sound like the stories in circulation about John Wanamaker on the same head; the stories of the cold-blooded rapacity, that he observed towards the masses whom he exploited, in turn, match those of John W. of Sunday school fame; nor do the stories about Elkins’s sharp practices towards fellow speculators, especially in Western real estate, at all fall behind the “critique scandaleuse” on pious John Wanamaker’s methods, with politics ever as the starting point and boosting force.

The Washington Senators who are reported “shocked” at the demise of their fellow Senator from West Virginia are having ample material to whisper about.

And the whisper is not always free from envy at the “cleverness of Steve.”

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

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