

EDITORIAL

SELF-STULTIFICATION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE following paragraph, under the title “A White Elephant,” appears in the columns of “an esteemed contemporary:”

“While congratulating our German comrades on the decision of the German Government not {to} renew the mandate of prosecution against our old friend ‘the red postmaster,’ Julius Motteler, we cannot help thinking that the whole proceeding looks like a smart, not to say cunning, device of Count von Bulow to saddle the German Social Democratic party with a white elephant, to wit, Eduard Bernstein, under cover of a conciliatory act. One fancies that the German Chancellor must have had his tongue in his cheek when he gave the Social Democrats back their Bernstein, that journalistic pillar of aggressive capitalism masquerading as a member of the Social Democratic party. The recent article in praise of Eduard in the *Pall Mall Gazette* was certainly instructive as showing whose good opinion he has been recently cultivating. The converted Socialist whom ‘toleration’ still leaves a nominal member of the German Socialist Party will now have the opportunity, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* hints, of earning more laurels from his new friends by endeavoring to show that all capitalists ought to be brothers, and that the British raid in South Africa redounds to the ‘advancement of civilization,’ i.e., the spread of capitalism generally. Our comrade Motteler had to be let in to save appearances, but the man the German Government really had its eye on as likely to be of service in the new Anglo-German governmental alliance, by winning favor for British methods in South Africa in the eyes of the German bourgeoisie, was plainly none other than the late editor of the *Social Demokrat*, turned champion of the new imperialism.”

From what paper is this a clipping? From some Socialist Labor Party publication? Perchance from the organ of our Comrades in Ireland? Or is it perhaps a translation from some French Labor Party paper, or from some utterance in Italian by Ferri? In short, does it proceed from any of the sources that put their foot down emphatically at the late Paris International Congress against the apostate resolution of Kautsky?

No! Let everybody hold his sides lest he split laughing. The paragraph is taken from the columns of the London *Justice*, the organ of a body, whose delegation at that Paris Congress voted for that Kautsky resolution, voted, accordingly, for the quintessence of Bernsteinism, and one of whose members, Hyndman, was so enthusiastic for the Bernsteinism in the resolution, that, frequently, forgetful of all parliamentary decorum he went so far as to presume to cast the vote of the Irish delegation for the Bernstein apostasy—a presumption promptly resented and spurned by the sturdy Irish delegation, who, on the spot had their full vote entered plump and plain against the Kautsky resolution, and thus went emphatically on record against Bernsteinism and for the class-conscious Socialist Movement.

The Kautsky resolution embodies three points:

First, the denial that capitalist government is essentially class-government, and, consequently, uncompromisingly hostile to the working class;

Second, the adoption of the principle that the working class can not be wholly depended on, and must be first morally regenerated; and

Third, that progress lies along the path of nibbling reforms from capitalist rule via compromises and log-rolling.

There is, in all Bernsteinism, nothing more than that. The whole of Bernsteinism is comprised in those three points. Bernstein himself summed up his position well when, apostrophizing the German Social Democracy, he said to them: “Drop your revolutionary phrases, and be openly what you are in fact, a party of bourgeois reform: upon that line there is much to be gained.” And to-day Bernstein rubs his hands with satisfaction, and holds the noses of the now apologetic Kautskys to their own Paris resolution, which he justly declares expresses his views.

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Upon Bernsteinism and its echo, the Kautsky resolution, there needs to be said nothing more in these columns. The matter has been fully set forth. All further discussion thereon may be left to the cavilers. The point now of interest is a new one, suggested by the above quotation from the London *Justice*. Bernsteinism and its echo were now restated merely for the purpose of making that point clear.

The Socialist movement in Europe, with the exception of the French Socialist Party, but especially in Germany and Austria, degenerated, as has been pointed out frequently in these columns, owing to the circumstance that it had to struggle with debris of feudalism, left strewn in its path by the capitalist revolution that preceded

it. The capitalists having failed to carry out their own revolution, the Socialists had to supplement it. In this work of supplementing an unfinished revolution, the teeth of the Socialist Revolution were cut in those countries. One of the manifestations of this sad development is the reactionism that has set in, the virtual abandonment of Marxism, while still using its phrases. This manifestation has also been pointed out in these columns, and need not be enlarged upon now. The point raised by the citation from the London *Justice* suggests a second manifestation of no little interest to all those who realize that a movement does not depend upon abstract principle only, but upon the people who handle it.

What means this emphatic, this justified branding of Bernstein by the organ of a body, that, barely six months ago upheld Bernsteinism in Paris with the unbecoming enthusiasm recorded above, and that has since said not a word in condemnation of its delegation? It means this:

One of the manifestations of degeneracy in a Movement is its shrinking into a family affair. Personal sentiment then rises. Just as soon as the corroding acids of demoralization seize upon a Movement, personal sympathies and personal antipathies carry the day, and principle becomes either a toy or a cloak. The British body for which *Justice* speaks, has long conceived a personal dislike to Bernstein; often and long before this, it more than once severely chastised him. Whatever Bernstein said was condemned because it proceeded from him. The same thing, proceeding from others towards whom the “British family” had no animosity, was accepted without inquiry. Thus it comes about that Bernsteinism, supported by the Kautskys, was enthusiastically sympathetic for the same folks who justly, in this *Justice* article, condemn it, and hold it up to contempt.

No Movement can survive self-contradiction. Self-stultification is suicidal. The abandonment of principle as a living force to act up to, and the adoption of principles as mere lip-service, breed degeneracy; and degeneracy in Movements manifests itself in the gangrene of “families” or “cliques,” on the one hand, and sneak-desertion, on the other.

Living work, active work—these are essentials to keep pure and in strong pulse the blood of Principle coursing in a Movement’s arteries.

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