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EDITORIAL

A CHANCE MUFFED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. Edward Bernstein has missed his chance. Tho' the capitalist press—that has been expecting from him the complete scuttling of the Militant Socialist Movement, in Germany to begin with, by luring it into the bogs of bourgeois “reform”—, tries to keep a stiff upper lip and is placing upon his sorry intellectual and moral brow all sorts of praiseful garlands, it is not hard to perceive that that press is thoroughly disappointed, disgusted, and even sick in the stomach. This “hero” has turned out a hooting owl; the mountain of the capitalist press, after months upon months of travail, has brought forth only a very ridiculous mouse. No wonder the watchmen on the capitalist towers are “down in the mouth.” And well may they be. Their hero muffed his chance. Oh, how he muffed it! And what a chance!

When Bernstein and his “theories” were being torn to tatters at the Leubeck national convention of the German Social Democracy, his cue was to turn upon his critics and hold in substance the following language:

Gentlemen: Be fair, be honest. You assail me for my book and its contents; you cudgel me for my theories, spoken and written. Is that fair? You know it is not. Among those of you, who swagger into the lists to pluck me, is Karl Kautsky. Now, then, gentlemen, after you boil down all my theories, what is left of them but the essence of the notorious “Kautsky Resolutions?” Those resolutions expressly say that a capitalist Government can be impartial in the conflicts between the Working Class and the Capitalist Class. Drop all verbiage and filigrees from my utterances and writings, do they go further or say more? Surely not! That’s all I claim. Why, then, do you go for me, and leave him untouched? True enough, like a naughty boy and not over brave, he has tried to throw the blame upon others, and the “others” have been having a sort of game of tennis, with the “Resolutions” as the ball. But the fact remains that he introduced them and spoke for them. You know that. And you also know that his conduct on that occasion commits you to the abandonment of

the practical application of the Class Struggle in the tactics of the Party,—just what I recommend; nothing more. What is the difference between him and, for that matter, you his supporters, on the one hand, and me, on the other? Is there any essential difference? I pause for a reply. (Silence reigns in the convention.) And yet there IS a difference. The difference is in my favor. What does it matter how one theorizes, if he does not practice? Volumes of essays on the Class Struggle would not be worth a pinch of snuff if not followed up with a line of practice. Now, all I did was to theorize against the Class Struggle; he (and you his backers) have practiced the thing, are practicing it now in this very convention, as your order of business shows, which is loaded with bourgeois issues. Now, gentlemen, cease palavering, and be honest.

Had he had moral stamina to take this ground, Edward Bernstein, “the most intelligent head of the German Social Democracy,” as the international capitalist press styles him, would have earned the further appellation of “a nerve-ful servitor of Capitalism,” and been proportionally admired and feted. Instead, he succumbed. As it is, he is now despised.

As it frequently happens with apostates, who quail before that which in their hearts they respect, Bernstein quailed before the majesty of Militant Socialism, that in spirit hovers in this generation even over the gatherings of its outspoken foes. No wonder he muffed his chance.

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

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