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REPORT

## NOTES ON THE STUTTGART CONGRESS.

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### III.

#### The Trades Union Issue.

**I**NFINITELY more important than Herveism, because of its constructive bearing to the whole International Movement, is the Question of Unionism, "Syndicalism," as generally styled in Europe. How vital is this issue and how certain that it is bound to be the storm-center of the future in the Congresses is sufficiently evident from the circumstance that, although it has not yet any urgency in Europe, it is daily forcing itself forward for consideration, and is doing so with increasing intensity. It is no insignificant fact that the issue constituted one of the "orders of business" at Stuttgart.

A discussion of the merits of this issue has no place in these Notes, least of all in *The People*. Its columns teem sufficiently with articles, correspondence, etc., thereon, besides the reports from Stuttgart that I have previously sent in. Suffice it here to say, on that head, that the Union Issue is THE question of practical importance. It is that for a number of reasons, first among which is that IT and IT ALONE carries in its folds the answer to the question that is being put with increasing frequency to Socialists—How are you going to do it? It is a question which, like a flaming sword scorches at once the pure and simple Socialist politician who debauches the movement, and the pure and simple bomb-thrower who invites the police spy. It is a question that sobers the movement, drills and disciplines it to effective work, not declamation. By the light of the importance of this question the incidents I here wish to mention have no little interest.

The first is a series of short dialogues between Baer and myself. Baer is the editor of a metal workers' craft union paper in Vienna. He is a man of considerable

parts, and was pushed forward by the conservative German element as the drafter of the “Austrian Resolution,” the resolution, which, after a number of unmeaning amendments, became the majority resolution. Behind Baer was Kautsky, in and out of the committee. At the close of the discussion four minutes were allowed to the introducers of resolutions for a final say. Seeing that all the introducers of resolutions, except the representatives of the French majority, and those of the Socialist Labor Party and the Industrial Workers of the World, had withdrawn theirs and jumped on the band-wagon, the theory is justified that the move was a final effort at propitiation, in order to bring about a unanimously banale report of the Committee. The spokesman for the French majority was not to be propitiated; neither were Heslewood or I. The four minutes allowed to him and me I occupied with the statement that, even if we were at all inclined to forego insistence upon our position and yield to the desire for “unanimity,” there were two passages in the majority report which rendered compliance out of the question; the two passages referred to the political and the economic movement as of equal importance; this was a serious theoretical error, an error fraught with fatal results to the Movement; America, the leading capitalist Nation—economically, politically, mentally, morally and sociologically—had demonstrated the truth of the Marxian warning that only the economic organization could give birth to the true party of Socialism: useful, valuable, inestimable, NECESSARY though the Political Movement was, it could not be placed abreast of the Economic; the two clauses referred to in the majority report did so; they thereby placed the Economic and the Political Movement in a false perspective, they thereby induced a dangerously mischievous confusion of thought; that which was reflected could not stand on an equal scale of importance, however important itself, with that which reflected it; experience in America, which would one day be the experience in Germany, when Germany shall have reached American capitalist elevation, teaches the fatality of the error; the majority resolution was, accordingly, so structurally defective that it was unacceptable to the I.W.W. and the S.L.P. At the close of the four-minutes’ bout the vote was taken, the I.W.W.-S.L.P. resolution receiving the two votes of Heslewood and myself, besides the vote of the French majority representative, one vote from Italy and one from Switzerland, Mrs. Faas-Hardegger’s. The Committee broke up, and Baer came over

to me. The following dialogue ensued:

Baer—“You are mistaken in that quotation from Marx.”

I—“You don’t say so!”

Baer—“Yes; and I’ll prove it to you.”

I—“I’m all ears.”

Baer—“The proof that Marx never said any such thing is to be found in the fact that those two clauses which you object to are in my resolution. They never would have been there if Marx had said as you say.”

I—“Dear Baer [Lieber Baer] your chain of reasoning lacks an essential link. You must first prove to me that you have read all that Marx said. Without you prove that, such reasoning as you use amounts to nothing. Your statement that, if Marx had said so, then your resolution would not contain those two passages, is the strongest proof you can give me that your resolution is structurally wrong—Marx did say just what I claim. Read Marx in full, then call again.”

Baer walked away to pick up his papers. While doing so he seemed suddenly seized with a new inspiration. He returned and abruptly renewed the conversation:

Baer—“You see, the worst defect of your resolution is that it is cast too exclusively in an American mold.” [ist zu sehr auf Amerikanischen Verhaeltnissen zugespitzt.]

I—“That is not a defect, it is a virtue. I have read of commissions, appointed from Germany, from France and even from such a capitalist land as England, to proceed to America and learn there how does the American capitalist class manage to squeeze so much wealth out of the workers. I never heard of any commission from America sent to France, England or Germany to take lessons here in the art of exploitation. Do you see the point?”

Baer looks contemptulative {contemplative?}.

I—“I’ll tell you—what happens in the capitalist world of America is of international moment; what happens in Germany is not.”

Baer made a third attempt at converting me. It was on the morning of the day when the matter was to be threshed out in full Congress, he being the “reporter” for the Committee’s majority:

Baer—“There is a contradiction in your resolution.”

I—“Indeed!”

Baer—“Here it is [spreading the German version of the resolution on the table before us]: This sentence declares that the Union is ‘the present embryo of the Commonwealth of Labor,’ and this other sentence declares that neutrality towards Trades Unions ‘is equivalent to neutrality towards the machinations of the capitalist class’—that means that the Unions are machinations of the capitalist class. How can they be embryos of future society?”

I—“Dear Baer [Lieber Baer] tell Kautsky for me that if I decline to be neutral in the conflicts between my brother and a scheming thief, and I pronounce the actions of the latter ‘machinations,’ it does not follow that I thereby contradict myself in that I therefore pronounce my brother a ‘thief,’ and must treat him as such. Quite otherwise. You may add that one is justified to expect from delegates to the International Congress that they have a certain minimum of international information. In America—and it will be so in all other lands in the measure that they develop—we have two sets of Unions—the I.W.W. and, broadly speaking, the A.F. of L., the latter of which is a ‘machination’ of the capitalist class. To remain neutral in the conflict between these two Unions is to be neutral toward the machinations of capitalism.”

The above three flashlights—cast by the utterances of so able a continental Socialist as Baer upon a considerable area of present European Socialist mentality—may be fitly supplemented by a fourth flashlight cast upon the fuller European field by a British delegate.

No sooner did the Committee on Trades Unions break up, after taking the votes on the resolutions, than Mrs. Faas-Hardegger of the Swiss representation was pounced upon by several delegates. She, more so than the Italian and the French majority delegates who supported the I.W.W.-S.L.P. resolution, had incurred the animosity of the “conservatives.” The others had merely voted for our resolution; she spoke in its favor; and a rattling speech she made. Prominent among the “pouncers” was Miss Mary Macarthur of the British delegation. The Committee room was almost cleared when these two were still at it at one of the tables, surrounded by about a half dozen delegates, among whom, keenly interested in the bout, was Frank S. Budgen, of the British S.L.P., who attended the Congress as a wide-awake

“chief taking notes,” and the towering figure of Heslewood, his face wreathed in smiles, beaming down upon the scene. Miss Macarthur speaks only English; Mrs. Faas-Hardegger manages English with difficulty. In point of volubility of language the advantage was decidedly with the Briton; but the Swiss made up in sense for what she lacked in speech. With short, pungent sentences she was dealing blow after blow. She triturated “neutrality”; she punched hole after hole into pure and simple political Socialism; with excruciating deliberateness she exposed the ulcers of craft Unionism. Heslewood had exhibited in the course of his speech before the Committee a copy of a picture of the Civic Federation banquet with Gompers as a banqueter along with the leading capitalist magnates, and had also exhibited a copy of the Manifesto calling for the first I.W.W. Convention and pointed out the signature of A.M. Simons, who, just before him in the Committee, had sung the praises of the A.F. of L. and opposed the industrialist resolution. In the midst of the intellectual duel between the torrential firing from Miss Macarthur and the slow, steady, deliberate cannonade from Mrs. Faas-Hardegger, Heslewood injected the two documents. Simons, who had approached the group, quickly and quietly slunk away. The documents had, however, a more noisy effect among the two disputants. Mrs. Faas-Hardegger began using them with effect; Miss Macarthur became irate. “They are deceiving you! They are deceiving you, dear woman!” she fairly yelled. I had stood by for some little while. Miss Macarthur is a young and prepossessing maid—blond, white and pink, with prettily curved lips, and brilliant-bright eyes. Her rage added charm to her appearance. I could not but grieve at so much earnestness, worthy of a better cause, thrown away upon so harmful a set of principles as she was obsessed with; I could not but silently wish the great cause of Industrialism had the support, instead of the hatred, of so fair and fiery an apostle. “Why, they are mad [meaning the Industrialists and the S.L.P.!] They are mad!” she screamed with outstretched arms, and looking around her distractedly for sympathy. “They are mad! Do you know what they want? They want plumbers and switchmen and weavers and coal-heavers all in one local Union to transact their business together! They are m-a-a-d! They are m-a-a-a-d!!” The outburst of absurdity broke the spell of silent admiration in which I had been held. I blandly put in:

“Madam, you have been stuffed.” Miss Macarthur paused for the fraction of a second, turned around, and even more ravishing in her wrath than before, fired tremulously her answer, that was intended for a squelcher:

“Stuffed! Why, I’ve been in America! I — have — been — in — A-me-ri-ca! I’ve been in America!”

“Madam,” I replied unsquelched, “the hills of Mamaroneck were ‘in America’ long before you were there; and they have continued to be ‘in America’ since you left—and yet, you know, what those hills know about Industrialism is not worth the while to ascertain.”

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Thick as the thickest jungle is the jungle of misinformation, prejudice and false reasoning that Socialism has to cut its way through. Yet there is no room for despair. Capitalism raises and drills the soldiers that are to overthrow it. Itself acts as antidote to the errors it breeds.

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