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EDITORIAL

PRESIDENT PROUDHON BUTLER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

UPON those who know not Marx the speech delivered on November 27, 1911, before the Commercial Club of St. Louis by President Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University, and since made "Senate Document No. 238 of the 62nd Congress, 2nd Session," will make no impression whatever: those of them, who have an interest in perpetuating a Government that the Capitalist Class can bullyrag, will find in the speech not one new thought in favor of such a state of things to spur them on: those of them who object to such a state of things will find in the speech not one stupidity sufficiently original to stir them.

On the other hand people who know Marx will feel positively grateful to President Butler. His method of reasoning forcibly recalls one of Marx's most brilliantly satirical passages against M. Proudhon.

The present system of representative government President Butler considers pivotal to freedom, order, etc. Upon it is reared all that is good. Abolish representative government by direct government and chaos will ensue.

Parodying Proudhon's style of reasoning, which consisted in assuming that certain things are pivotal, and permanent, and "eternal truths," and upon the assumption to build a huge structure of conclusions to prove the assumption, Marx got up this:

"Chattel slavery [in North America] is the pivot of bourgeois industry, as well as machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton, without cotton you can not have modern industry. It is slavery which has given their value to the colonies, it is the colonies which have created the commerce of the world, it is the commerce of the world which is the essential condition of large industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the highest importance.

"Without slavery, North America, the most progressive country, would have been transformed into a patriarchal country. Efface North America

from the map of the world and you would have the anarchy, the complete decadence of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear, and you will have effaced America from the map of nations.”

Thus did Marx triturate Proudhon’s dialectics. Slavery, tho’ at a time the pivot of a vast social superstructure, was not necessarily an “eternal” affair. Social conditions, changing steadily, changed so completely that, altho’ the superstructure remained unchanged, and even improved, yet slavery was abolished.

And so with “representative government.” It may be and is all the pivot you please to-day, but it is a pivot that is of a piece with a social system that is wearing out fast. “Representative government” means representation of geographical demarkations. That sort of representative government, of course, repudiates direct government by making ever less possible the harmonizing of the conflicting social interests. Remove representative government,—does that wipe out the progress that rests upon it?

Representative government, like any other social or economic category, like slavery, for instance, can and will go, through oncoming social adjustments with which such a pivot does not square, and will go without plunging the land into the chaos that, Proudhon-like President Proudhon Butler reasons and imagines.

The long and short of the story is that, as Marx puts it, the bourgeois looks upon his institutions as “roots,” of all time and for all time, hence the bourgeois’ reasoning leads to the ridiculous Proudhonian reasoning that Marx so wittily parodied.

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