

REPORT

NOTES ON THE STUTTGART CONGRESS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

II.

Herveism.

THE Anti-Militarist Question was not the weightiest or the most pregnant Question handled in Stuttgart. By far the weightiest and most pregnant was the Question of Unionism. It happens, however, that the Question of Unionism has its center of gravity in America—accordingly, is, at present, of remoter international effect; the Question of Anti-Militarism, on the contrary, has its center of gravity in Europe—accordingly, is of immediate international effect. Hence the precedence here allowed to the latter.

There are two statements, of significance to the understanding of the Question, made, one each, by the two currents that clashed in Stuttgart. One was made by Herve. He said: "I know that nationalities are facts; I deny not those facts; shall never deny them—the cholera and the pest are also facts." The other statement was made by Vollmar, voicing the German Social Democratic sentiment. Said he: "Before I am a Socialist I am a German." With the issue between Herve and Vollmar—taking the two as opposing types—that has happened, and is happening, that happens but too frequently when opposing currents meet, to wit, the real issue is brushed aside and hidden under incidental issues which, in the heated course of the polemic, excessive utterances throw up. Herve is too sound a thinker to mean just what his words, quoted above, would imply; Vollmar is too thorough a Socialist to be taken at his word, literally. What, then, is the issue, in other words, what is "Herveism"? An inquiry into the genesis of the two slogans, or utterances, is the best road by which to reach the correct answer.

Herve's slogan would place Nationalities upon the same footing with cholera

and the pest. Such a position is untenable. No more than the Trust are Nationalities, or is the love of Nationality, inherently a pestilence. The same Trust that spreads devastation among a people could be a source of popular blessing. The parallel, broadly, between the Trust and Nationality is not correct. Strictly correct is the parallel between the two in point of ownership. The ills that flow from the Trust flow exclusively from its private ownership: as a collectively owned contrivance of production the sting and poison-bag are extracted from the Trust. So also with Nationalities. Parallels apart, the Herve slogan will not stand the test of evolution. Whether the near-to-a-score of Nationalities into which Europe is to-day cut up could, from the start, have been welded into one homogeneous Nationality like the United States, with so strong an impress of homogeneity as is implied in the speaking of one language—whether that would have been possible or not is, to-day, a matter for merely idle speculation. The fact is they ARE not; the further fact is that the world consists not of one Nation, but a large variety of them. To say that this is a fact like cholera or the pest would be to aim at the exact opposite from what Herve's aim is. His aim is to remove an evil. Cholera and the pest are removable. Are Nationalities also removable? Evolution says, Nay. The ancestor of Man and the Horse, paleontology teaches, was one. From that common ancestor evolution took place—along one line to the Horse, along another line to Man. Material conditions, geologic and astronomic, determined the divergent lines of the evolutionary process. The status Horse, once reached along one line, that of Man along the other line, the science of evolution teaches that, whether we share the view of Dean Swift's satire that the horse is the superior being, or whether we receive the more acceptable view that man is top-notch, neither could Man retrovolve into a houghnhum, nor could Horse retrovolve into Man. "Evolution" implies fixity of type. The geologic and atmospheric conditions that determined the divergent lines of ethnic evolution into National types from one presumptive original type stamped Nationality, in its essence, as indelibly as it did Horse and Man. Herve is surely aware of this. If an evil is admittedly unremovable, to attempt the feat would be visionary. Herve is no visionary. Accordingly he must believe the evil removable. What evil? The evil of National types, or of love for Nationality? The excessiveness of his language distorts his meaning. Herve can only aim at scraping off the superstitions that guile, helped

along by bad habits of thought, has fastened upon Nationality to the injury of the human race, and has arrogated to itself the designation of “Nationality.” No doubt Herve shares the just contempt that John Stuart Mill entertained for what he justly termed the “vulgar mode of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences on the human mind,” which consists in “attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural influences.” Whether the retrovolution of National types to the primitive type common to all is desirable or not—that is a matter of no practical importance. Whether the scraping off of the superstitions that have stepped into the shoes of “Nationality” is desirable—that is matter of practical importance. The importance of the practicalness of the attempt is all the more burning if the said “Nationality” superstitions have begun to work evil to the Socialist Movement. The removal of this evil is Herve’s object. The object alone does not yet define Herveism. The inquiry into the genesis of his slogan may be for a moment dropped to take up the genesis of the slogan of Vollmar.

As to Vollmar’s utterance—“Before I am a Socialist I am a German”—it calls for less minute investigation. The words can only mean that, if the alternative, Socialism or Germany, is forced upon him, he will choose Germany. Even if the alternative were not based upon a well nigh impossible supposition, Vollmar’s career should suffice to reject the obvious interpretation of his words. Vollmar, more than Bebel, typifies the German Social Democracy. Bebel’s esthetic-poetic nature typifies the aspirations of the Movement; Vollmar typifies its practical possibilities and capabilities. Bebel might yield to the poetic Utopia of all men speaking one language without even difference of accent; of all having one taste, one ideal; of all being administered by one international bureau;—an enlarged, world-encircling Arcadia. Not so Vollmar. The idea of Socialism which he pursues never lifts both his feet off the ground. We all have the vices of our virtues. The virtue “Practical” carries in its train the vice “Conservatism.” Now, then, with Vollmar, the vice “Conservatism” has to a great extent imbibed the superstition that German thought and capabilities must set the pace for the international Socialist Movement. When he says, Before I am a Socialist I am a German, what he has in mind is that before he can be a Socialist he must exist, that his existence is German, that Germany was the cradle of the modern Socialist Movement—consequently, that, if the Movement

were to march faster elsewhere, it would be marching faster than is good for it.

What is Herveism?

Herveism is the rising sentiment, vocalized in Europe by Herve, that, not all the unquestioned debt of gratitude, due Germany by other nations in the Socialist Movement, may blind these to the fact that German social conditions, together with all that thereby hangs, disqualifies Germany from the function of pace-setter. It is the rising sentiment that the magnificent vote-gathering machine, which the German Social Democracy has evolved into, has outlived its usefulness for the Movement in other Nations, even for Germany itself. Herveism instinctively seized upon the feature of the German feudal Empire—Militarism—that is at once the characteristic of the Empire, and also brings out clearest the impotence with which the originally useful, now harmful, craving for votes has smitten the German Social Democracy: Herveism seized upon that feature, and it cannot be denied won a substantial triumph—as a starter.

The Anti-Militarist resolution, unanimously reported by the Committee, marks the first shake-up yet experienced at the International Socialist Congresses since their reinstatement in the Eighties.

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Uploaded October 2009

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