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EDITORIAL

DID MARX ERR?

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A NEW York correspondent inquires: “Does not the course of events in Germany prove that even so great a man as Marx erred when he objected to the unity of the two Socialist parties in Germany? Does not the course of events prove that the unity of the two parties was beneficial, after all?”

Does it? Let’s see.

Marx objected to the unity that was brought about in Germany upon a platform which he characterized as bearing evidence that the Socialism of its framers was only “skin-deep.”

Had Marx’s advice been taken, or objections heeded, the result would, true enough have been that such a large mass movement as the present one, known as the Social Democracy, would, probably, not now be seen in Germany. That, in a way, would seem to be a disadvantage. Would it, on the whole, have been that?

Had Marx’s advice been taken, or objections heeded, the evolution of party formations in Germany would probably have taken the course of developing two parties out of the elements that now make up the Social Democracy.

With an eye solely to what would have been the types of each party, one would have consisted of radical, or revolutionary, bourgeois with a program exclusively intent upon removing the relics of feudality, still left obstructing the path of capitalism, or bourgeois rule. The planks of that program, framed, consciously or unconsciously, by the ultimate goal, would have been a series of demands for what is known as “bourgeois freedoms”—“free press” and “free speech,” “responsible executive officers,” larger measures of “civic rights,” etc., etc., etc. The other party would have consisted of Socialists, engaged solely and exclusively with the Socialist issues of organizing the proletariat and other useful members of the land for the conquest

and overthrow of the political State, and its substitution with the Industrial or Socialist Administration.

The separation of the radical or bourgeois revolutionary forces of Germany, with an immediate mission to perform—their separation from the Socialist forces, with a mission to perform that had first to await the event of the performance of the bourgeois mission—might, and perhaps might not (we incline to the belief that it would), have had for its consequence results that would have greatly redounded to the benefit of the Socialist Movement in Germany, and, through Germany, everywhere else.

With such a separation of forces belonging to different revolutionary stages, both sets would have been unhampered—each unhampered by the other.

Revolutionary bourgeois forces, called together by their own immediate class interests, and warmed with the idealism of their own class, usually have carried out their program, substantially if not completely. It is not probable that, in Germany, a revolutionary bourgeois political party could have “wiped the slate clean,” as it did here in the United States. The condition of the contiguous nations, especially to the East and the South-East, make against such a consummation. It is possible that a German bourgeois revolutionary party might have fallen short even of the mark reached by France. More probable is the supposition that it would have reached the present British mark, where feudalism, though not abolished, is reduced to a minimum.

On the other hand, with a political channel offered to the radical bourgeois elements, together with their nondescript affinities to exercise themselves in, a political party of Socialism in Germany could have planted, and would have had to plant itself upon its own ground, drawing its recruits and its inspiration from THAT source. Being the legitimate successor of a revolutionary bourgeois political movement, such a party of Socialism could have made but slow progress, at first. Its day of growth would have had to wait for the revolutionary bourgeois first to get in the saddle himself. Its path would have been arduous; it would have been traduced as “wild-eyed,” “Anarchic,” etc., etc.; it would have been pronounced “incomprehensible” and “impossible,” seeing that the “comprehensible” and “possible” goal, held out by the bourgeois party, was certainly in sight, and would as certainly be considered

all-sufficient. Nevertheless, in the measure that the bourgeois “got there” the Socialist task would have become easier. With the serious feudal impediments out of the way, and gotten out of the way without Socialist side-track, the political party of Socialism in Germany would have had a clear path before it, immediately after the bourgeois’ triumph, with problems to grapple, which, however serious, and difficulties to overcome, which, however tough, would be problems and difficulties germane to the great issue that itself raised, and, therefore, aidful in clarifying and promoting the same.

Things, however, happened otherwise.

The signal for revolution—sounded in Germany nearly two generations ago—was sounded, not by the bugle from which, historically, the signal was due, to wit, the radical bourgeois bugle. The signal came from a bugle that belonged to a later revolutionary stage, to wit, the Socialist stage. Sounded by men of tall intellectual and moral stature, the call took and kept the right of way—with consequences inevitable. The bourgeois Movement was kept from “coming to a head.” Bourgeois “demands” were, to use a medical term, “scattered.” All the same—exactly as happens with the physical body in which impurities, that have been prevented from “coming to a head” and have been “scattered,” are not thereby removed, but reappear elsewhere—the “scattered” bourgeois demands were bound to bob up, and did so bob up again. They bobbed up on the only spot possible—the Social Democratic camp. Thus the spectacle is explained of German Social Democrats— themselves, no doubt, Socialist, and not bourgeois radicals,—handling, and compelled by exigencies to handle, issues foreign to the Socialist program; issues that appertain to Socialism only in the sense that all conquests for civilization which were made, or should have been made, by previous social systems concern Socialism.

Us seems that such a development is injurious rather than beneficial to the progress of both the desirable bourgeois and the Socialist programs. For this view there is the confirmation of Socialist, besides bourgeois authorities. No less a Socialist authority than Engels considered it to be “the misfortune” of the German Social Democracy that there was no radical bourgeois party in Germany to draw to itself, and away from the Social Democracy, the radical bourgeois sentiments of the land. On the other hand, a leading bourgeois member of the Reichstag, and who, tho’ a

foe, had nothing but respect for the Social Democracy, sorrowfully declared at a recent Reichstag election that the Social Democracy impeded the success of needed (bourgeois) reforms. Nor could it be any otherwise. The “ultra radicalism” of Socialism scares away bourgeois supporters from their own demands advocated under the Socialist banner, and thereby operates as a drag upon needed reforms; and, contrariwise, the necessity to carve a path for bourgeois demands can not choose but dull the edge of the Socialist sword.

We are not so sure that Marx erred when he discountenanced the unity, upon a platform of “skin-deep Socialism,” of a party of pure Marxists with one that exhaled bourgeois sentimentality. We rather incline, even at the risk of the charge of “hero worship,” to the belief that Marx was right—as usual.

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