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EDITORIAL

SENSE AND NONSENSE OF BEBEL.

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THE cable despatches announce that the second day of the convention of the German Social Democratic Party was taken up with a discussion on of what there is called the “Academicians” in their ranks, or what is here known as the “intellectuals,” whose policy is to look for personal aggrandizement and correspondingly run the Social Movement into bourgeois radicalism. It would seem incomprehensible that such a topic can at all be subject of discussion among Socialists. It would seem that the first manifestations of the boil would be treated so summarily that there would be nothing to discuss about. Nevertheless, and in the hope that the consideration of the matter by the German comrades is not too late, the convention has taken it up in earnest. The spokesman against the baneful conduct of “intellectuals” is August Bebel. Condensed passages from his speech have been published. Parts thereof sound like pages and echoes from the Socialist Labor Party.

Bebel is reported to have said of these “intellectuals” that, for personal ends, they had placed themselves at the head of the party in Germany; that they had lost touch with the proletariat; that their articles were dishonorable and betrayed the principles of the cause; and that they were a cancerous growth on the party, requiring a severe operation.—Identical has been the language of the S.L.P. touching the “intellectuals” who sought to capture the Socialist Movement in this country and were foiled.

What the “intellectual” is after the requirements of his case speedily betray. Without exception he is vain-glorious; of course, he is hollow and superficial; the compound of these qualities produce a crook. The “intellectual” seeks personal aggrandizement; too trivial to navigate the waters of capitalism he seeks to navigate those of the Labor Movement. The moment he encounters his superior

there, where in his vanity, all were supposed to be hollowness like himself, he becomes envious and malicious. His course thereupon becomes one continuous streak of moral and intellectual supuration, baneful to the movement if tolerated. It did not take the S.L.P. long to detect the disease. As fast as the “A.M. Simons Editions,” {Editors,”?} the Jonases, the Hayes, the Owenses, etc., etc., were accurately diagnosed, the operation was performed. They were cut out ruthlessly as a cancerous growth. The S.L.P. earned by reason of this policy the title of “Pope,” “Tyrant,” “Boss,” “Spanish Inquisition,” “dealer in strait-jackets,” etc., etc. But that mattered not. It recognized promptly, and as clearly as Bebel’s words indicate that he now recognizes, the necessity of summary, severe measures with the cancer. All that Bebel says on that head is replete with sense, both in point of diagnosis and in point of treatment, and also in the expressiveness of his terms.

Not as felicitous was Bebel in another passage. He is reported to have said that the German Social Democratic Party is not like the German Army, commanded by Generals. To the extent that Bebel may continue in this erroneous belief to that extent will the body of his party continue exposed to the cancer of the “intellectuals” malfeasance.

The German Social Democratic Party knows no referendum. The action of the majority of its leaders in national convention is final. The convention decides, orders—and that’s the end of it. Had, for instance, there been a referendum when the infamous Kautsky resolution was adopted at the International Convention and voted for by the German delegation, these would have received such a drubbing that much subsequent trouble could have been spared their party. Nor can it be doubted that the “tolerance” manifested in national convention for the bolder Bernstein would have been repudiated. But that party recognizes no referendum, and thus many, if not a majority of its leaders, feel utterly free and superior—as free and superior as a Prussian General towards the soldiers in his Army. On this head it was not sense, but reversal of sense, that Bebel uttered. He can not too soon appreciate the fact, if the cancer of “intellectualism” is to be cut out to a purpose.

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