

EDITORIAL

A TIMELY INFORMATION AND LESSON.

By DANIEL DE LEON

The London despatch announcing the reconciliation of the Socialist, **Edward Bernstein**, with the Prussian Government, and the permission granted him by the latter to return home from exile, has in it much more than the mere desertion from Socialism and the Cause of the Working Class by an individual. Heinous as the deed is, desertion, even treason, is too well known a phenomenon for



EDWARD BERNSTEIN (1850-1932)

any individual act of that nature to either serve as a warning, or throw important light upon the character of the act. The conduct of Edward Bernstein, however, is rich with instruction for the Socialist Movement.

About three years ago, Bernstein, considered up to that time a pillar of Marxism, burst forth in the Socialist press of Germany with articles that denied one and each the cardinal tenets of Socialism. In these articles the historic decline of the middle class was controverted with clouds of alleged statistical figures, the class struggle was relegated with puerilities to the domain of abstract thought, the Social Revolution was scoffed at,—in short the Movement of the Proletariat was laid prostrate, its veins being cut wide open.

If one, reputed to be an authority on astronomy, were to burst forth with articles denying the established and elemental principles of that science; if he claimed that the sun did diurnally move around the earth, and that the stars were so many burning jets in a chandelier that hung from the roof of heaven;—if that were to happen, the man would simply be pitied, and he, together with his

“discoveries,” would be left aside, in deserved neglect. Not so with Bernstein’s “discoveries.” Instructive to say, his articles created great interest, became the subject of much discussion in some Socialist quarters.

Why so?

In the answer to this question lies the valuable information and lesson gathered by the Movement’s experience with Edward Bernstein.

From whom would the astronomer, who were to-day to return to the Ptolemaic system, get a hearing? From Rev. Jaspers only. Surely no trusted astronomer would at all bother about him, and most assuredly none such could feel in the least shaken in the scientific principles that guide his action. That Bernstein’s articles created the commotion they did in quarters styled Socialist is, accordingly, an evidence that those quarters were not Socialist at all, or, if abstractly Socialist, were, like himself, ready for desertion, ready to give up the Revolutionary Movement of the Proletariat. The subsequent Kautsky resolutions—throwing overboard the class struggle while turning to the Christian Socialist theory of “moral regeneration,” and proceeding, as they did, from and supported, as they were, by the very element that, like setting hens, had fluttered over Bernstein’s “discoveries”—went far to prove this fact. Bernstein, in close embrace with the Prussian Junker, now demonstrates the proposition.

The Movement for the emancipation of the proletariat owes two debts to Edward Bernstein:

1. He has lightened the work of the militant Socialists by his conduct. Henceforth sympathy will no longer lame their striking arm. He stands as an early century horrible example, warning that the only attention that comrade deserves who repudiates the tenets of Socialism, is to be forthwith stripped of the insignia of comradeship, and drummed at the double quick out of the camp.

2. He has raised the veil that covered a dangerous superstition. To him is due the exact knowledge that militant Socialism now has of the number of its forces, and of their location. Once imagined to spread at least over the continent of Europe, with weak imitations in America, militant Socialism now discovers that it is in force there in spots only, with France in the lead, and that America is one of its strongholds. The estimate of the future, together with the nature of the work now requisite, can not choose but receive new direction by the light of this revelation.

Edward Bernstein did not live in vain.

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