

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 5, NO. 129.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1904.

TWO CENTS.

ARTICLE

FLASH-LIGHTS OF THE AMSTERDAM CONGRESS.

[Rather than try to give a condensed report of the Amsterdam Congress and what I saw of the European Movement in general, I shall present a series of articles under the above general head, subdivided under special heads. This flash-light method will be on the whole better. It will deal in detail with persons and things; and the flash-lights will, in the end, be seen to run into one another and portray the scene more effectively.—DANIEL DE LEON.]

VII.

ENRICO FERRI AND BULGARIA.

UNABLE to find among my notes the name of the Bulgarian delegate on the Committee on International Political Policy, whom I wish to consider in connection with Ferri of Italy, I shall herein designate him by the name of his country—Bulgaria.¹

As is commonly known, there are two conflicting wings in the Socialist Movement of Italy—the Ferri wing and the Turati wing, the former being considered the radical, the latter the opportunist element. The Italian delegation at Amsterdam was entirely Ferri-ist, indicative of the fact that the principles of the Ferri element are dominant in the Italian Movement. Based upon this fact, together with its correlative, that there is no split in the Socialist Movement of Italy due to the tactfulness of both wings, Ferri made a scholarly speech at the committee.

He argued: Principle is an essential element to action; without principle action is worthless. On the other hand, principle is inoperative without organization, and organization implies tactics or conduct. Accordingly, to declare correct principle and

¹ The delegate's name was Krastyo Stanchev, which he later changed to Christian Rakovsky.

disregard its application is folly. The application of principle thus assumes prime importance after the principle is set up. Arrived at this point the real difficulty arises. Common experience, however, points the way. The captain who receives his sea-letters knows that he is to leave a certain port and make for a certain other. His sea-letters are his "principle." They determine the general direction of his motion. His tactics thereupon come into operation. What particular tactics he may observe from day to day, from hour to hour, cannot be dictated to him. They are in a general way dictated by his sea-letters: he may not adopt tactics that will head him for some other port in some other direction: but within the scope of such general directions, the details of his manoeuvres must be left to him: he will choose them according to the exigencies of surrounding circumstances, and also according to the dictates of his temperament. What his sea-letters are to a captain, principle is to a Socialist Movement. It tells us whence we come, and directs us whither to go. No more than in the case of the captain's sea-letters, does or can principle prescribe the details of action, the tactics, of a Socialist Movement. They also depend upon the exigencies and accidents of the field, together with the temperament of those engaged in the movement. Summing up these thoughts, and expressing the apprehension that there was a tendency in the committee to precipitate a rupture, Ferri proceeded to reason as follows: Though different tactics may not be equally good, there is not, generally, any that is unqualifiedly bad from its inception. Herein lies the fatality of ruptures; a rupture fatedly drives the conflicting tactics further and further apart, further and further away from their own incipient element of soundness, until they both degenerate into extremes, into excesses, into caricatures of themselves. This is fatedly the result, and the result is ever fatal to the cause that they both hold close to their hearts. Hence, he said, his efforts in Italy to avoid a rupture, and his joy that his efforts were successful. That was the essence of Ferri's scholarly speech.—All of which is very true.



ENRICO FERRI (1856-1929)

When the turn came of Bulgaria to speak, the delegate, a young and forceful

man, grappled with Ferri's line of reasoning. Without rhetorical flourishes, but tersely and to the point, he argued: The experience in Bulgaria shows the folly of preventing a rupture between conflicting tactics. There had been two elements in the party. One believed in a clip and clear propaganda, and uncompromising tactics; the other believed in a policy of opportunism, of "co-operation of classes," of fusion, and of compromise—in short, of general radicalism. The two wings earnestly sought to compose their differences, and keep together. It was found impossible. Hours upon hours, meetings upon meetings were consumed with nothing but debates. The issue was discussed from all viewpoints—



DE LEON'S "BULGARIA"

Krastyo Stanchev (1873–1941), later adopted the name "Christian Rakovsky."

scientific, theoretic, practical. The longer the discussion lasted, the tighter was the tangle. In the meantime agitation stood stock-still. Finally the rupture ensued. It was as if a nightmare was lifted from the Socialist chest. The time-consuming, nerve-racking polemics ended. Revolutionary Socialism regained its strength; its striking arm was free; it sailed in to do work. The straightforward agitation started. Instructive, because straight and uncompromising, literature sprang up. The work of propaganda began in good earnest. Since then real Socialist enlightenment has spread. Progress has been made.—All of which also is very true.

Ferri and Bulgaria, in juxtaposition, point to what I consider the one, if not the leading fault of these international congresses, as conducted by our continental comrades. The picture that the two, in themselves superb speeches condensed above, throw upon the canvas, is the picture of the mind that lacks evolutionary perspective. Each said a truth, but a truth applicable only to a certain stage of development, inapplicable to any other. In other words, they are truths that can not stand abreast of each other. They rank in successive order in the evolutionary scale.

It is undoubtedly true, as Ferri stated, that two opposing tactics may each have an element, a starting point of soundness; that, for the sake of saving those elements of soundness to the movement, rupture should be avoided; whereas rupture has fatedly for its effect the driving of the ruptured tactical elements to

such extremes from their own premises that they become self-destructive. True; but the evolutionary stage, where such a policy of conciliation is possible, always presupposes a previous stage. It presupposes the stage where the clash of conflict has pounded to dust the heavy incrustations of error that tactics, often the best of them, first make their appearance in. The indispensable preparatory work of clarification having been gone through during that previous stage, a country's Movement is then, and not before, ripe to enter into the next evolutionary stage, the stage that Ferri had in mind. Consequently, it is also undoubtedly true, as Bulgaria stated, that opposing tactics, held together, only palsy the Movement's march; that time and energy, needed for agitation, are wasted in irreconcilable polemics; and that only rupture can set the movement a-going. Again, true enough, but, as explained above, true only of an earlier evolutionary stage than that which Ferri had to deal with in Italy; true only of the evolutionary stage that Bulgaria had just been experiencing. At the earlier stage rupture is an element of progress; at the second, harmony. Of the truth of this synthesis the Movement in America has had, and is still having striking proof.

Here, two conflicting policies were wrestling in the Socialist camp. The one was called "Narrow," the other "Broad." As terms of distinction, tho' not of demarkation, the two names will do as well as any other. The issue was essentially one of organization. It took two external manifestations—one on the Party's attitude towards the Trades Unions, the other on the Party's attitude toward Reformers. The two manifestations finally merged into one—the Trades Union policy. In the language of Bulgaria, the dispute palsied the Movement's work. It lasted nearly nine years, from 1890 to 1899. In the end the opposing elements were as two spent swimmers, that cling together and choke their art. They broke away. Rupture ensued. It was inevitable. No amount of purpose would have brought it on; no amount of "wisdom" could have prevented it. The Movement had entered upon the evolutionary stage described by Bulgaria. The clarifying conflict, the conflict without which clarification is not possible, was in the evolutionary cards. It broke out, and progress, the progress of clarification, immediately set in. Each side, the Socialist Labor Party and its rival, that sprang into being with the rupture, developed its practical principle unhampered. If there be any grain of help to the

Socialist Revolution in the policy of not exposing a Gompers, a Mitchell, a McGuire or any of the leading labor lieutenants of the Capitalist Class, caught red-handed in their crimes, lest “offence be given” to their duped rank and file; or in the policy of not awakening the Socialist conscience against Unions that deliberately exclude members of their trade so as to keep the shrinking jobs to themselves, and thus rip the Working Class in twain; or in the policy of not turning the X-rays upon strikes that are instigated by competing capitalists against each other, and are to be dropped the moment the capitalist “agent-provocateur” has gained his purpose, or that fakirs incite and keep up for the sake of strike jobs that the bleeding rank and file is taxed out of; or of echoing the cry of “Scab!” raised by scab-breeders against their victims; or in the policy of tolerating as “Socialist,” addresses and articles on subjects that are no part of working class demands; or in the policy of shutting the eye to dickers and deals with the bourgeois politicians; or in the policy of encouraging the insolence of the presumptuous,—all for the sake of general propitiation and of votes; in short, if—upon the theory that there always is some virtue even in the deepest-dyed villain—any grain of help to the Socialist Revolution should lie concealed in such a policy; and, on the other hand, if—upon the theory, again, that there always is some vice even in the most angelic man—any grain of harm to the Social Revolution should lie hidden in the opposite policy, the conflict will bring out both. Pounded between the upper and the nether millstone of the S.L.P. and its rival, whatever incrustation of serious error either’s policy is coated with will be ground to dust and blown to the wind. Then will the Movement in America enter upon the evolutionary stage of harmony, and it will be in condition to do so only because it passed through the purging evolutionary stage of rupture—two distinct evolutionary stages, that, being successive and not simultaneous, reject identical treatment, as our continental comrades seek to administer.

At this place it will be aidful to the point under consideration to refer to the resolution that I presented in the name of the S.L.P. for the repeal of the Kautsky Resolution, and which was given in full in my preliminary report. A continental comrade, who witnessed the transactions of the committee, amusedly remarked to me that the effect of the S.L.P. resolution was like that of a stone thrown into a puddle—all the frogs leap up. Nothing was further removed from the comrade’s

mind than to express contempt for his European fellows. It was only a witty way of describing a scene, of portraying a frame of mind. The witticism indicates the light in which the S.L.P. resolution was looked at. And that is the point. In point of fact the S.L.P. resolution was the most moderate and conservative of all those presented. By expressly stating what is unallowable in “fully developed capitalist countries, like America,” in contradistinction with “countries not yet wholly freed from feudal institutions,” the S.L.P. resolution avoided the one-sidedness of both the Ferri and the Bulgarian stand. It took cognizance of the different stages of development that the several nationalities are now in, and thereby it avoided the error of uniform treatment for different evolutionary stages of different societies. The false habits of thought of our continental comrades caused them to disregard the soundness of poise of the S.L.P. resolution; while, unconsciously acting obedient to another and equally false yet with most of them habitual notion, they were startled at the idea of America presuming to condemn point blank the production of Kautsky, one of their own! In their international congresses America is not supposed to fill any role other than that of wall-flower.

As in the sky the star-world reveals to us formations in various stages of development, from the nebulous, the half-formed and up to the full-orbed luminary; as in the woods specimens are seen from the tender sapling up to the wide-branched monarch of the forests; as all around us humanity teems with individuals at different stages of growth from the infant up to the robust adult,—so likewise in the firmament of nations different societies are to-day moving in different evolutionary epochs. And, just as in the astronomic, the botanic and the human instances, a knowledge of the lower evolutionary stage aids in {knowing whence the higher proceeded, and a knowledge of the higher aids in}² understanding whither the lower tends, so with the different Socialist Movements of to-day. It is positive as aught can be that but one party of Socialism will eventually be seen in Bulgaria or America, as is substantially seen in Italy to-day. The revolutionary stage of harmony is as inevitable a stage as that of adult growth from infancy—provided life continues; and, just as {infancy is an inevitable precursor of adult}³ manhood, the

² [Bracketed words dropped from all pamphlet editions.]

³ [Bracketed words dropped from all pamphlet editions.]

evolutionary stage of rupture is the inevitable precursor of unity—the unity in which, full scope being allowed for the differences in temperament unavoidable in mass movements, the individual units are held together by a double bond: the bond of principle and that of tactics purged of error by experience.

It is the leading fault of these international congresses, as conducted by our continental comrades, that they proceed upon the Procrustean principle. They seek to fit movements of unequal evolutionary size into beds of equal length or shortness. The result is confusion. Men who push resolutions inapplicable to all nations, fatedly invite sophistical arguments to escape the result of their own ill-thought decrees. The Kautsky Resolution of 1900 was an instance in point; the Dresden-Amsterdam Resolution is no exception—as I shall presently show.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2007

slpns@slp.org