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EDITORIAL

## RATHER WARNING THAN MODEL.

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**T**HE Paris *Revue Internationale de Sociologie* (International Review of Sociology) publishes an address on “Germany, its Socialism and Unions,” delivered by the German Social Democrat Dr. Robert Michels in Paris on February 12, 1906, before the Free College of Social Sciences. Pity the whole address cannot be reproduced in these columns.

After sketching the gigantic proportions, numerical and scientific, of the German Social Democracy, the lecturer proceeds to unveil “the obverse of the brilliant medal.” He treats that obverse under two heads. The first head may be briefly summarized. It has been often dwelt upon in the columns of *The People*. It is the still arch-feudal type of German institutions, a circumstance that hampers, if it does not hamstring, the revolutionary activity of the Party. The second head to the “obverse of the brilliant medal” has never yet been more than hinted at in these columns. In these days of Union reconstruction in utterly capitalist America, the subject is of prime interest to militants in the American Labor Movement. A few extracts from under that head of the address will furnish the facts and the moral:

“The aim and the essence, aye, the quintessence of the German Unions is best expressed in the sentence with which one of their own leaders endeavored to define them accurately: ‘The German Unions are organizations that have set to themselves the task of obtaining, within the present State, the greatest gains possible for the working class; as such, they have, down to date, declined to consider questions appertaining to the political-economy of the future.’

“In conformity with this tendency the German Unions are not SOCIALIST. They are adherents of no political party and of no order of ideas. Although, with few exceptions, their most energetic and active centers; and although almost all their leaders belong to the Socialist party, within which some of them usually play, as deputies, a very important role; and although the large numbers over whom these dispose constitute the

most reliable Socialist aggregations, even if not organized in a class party nevertheless gathered in the fold of electoral Socialism;—all this notwithstanding, these Unions carry their political neutrality so far as to endeavor to distinguish themselves from the Socialists even in most trivial external matters. At their meetings, instead of calling themselves ‘Genossen,’ that is, comrades, after the Socialist fashion, they frequently prefer the pompous title of ‘Kollege’—colleagues.

“Entirely opposite to the French Unions, the German Unions entertain a horror for political issues. The question of militarism and anti-militarism, of war and peace—none of these interest them. They conceive their mission to be purely corporative. Being politically indifferent, they pursue, within the framework of the capitalist system, immediate and material interests. In lieu of the great struggle of class against class, Labor against Capital, they conduct a long series of factory skirmishes against individual employers. Lacking, accordingly, the Socialist spirit and philosophic conception of history, they frequently ally themselves at strikes with the ‘Catholic Unions’, to which they do not hesitate to entrust even the chief leadership in their operations.”

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“The large Unions of Germany—the metalworkers, the miners, the compositors, the carpenters, the bricklayers, etc., persist in beating the tom-tom of Union neutrality towards all questions that do not strictly concern the affairs of the workshop. The circumstance is but additional evidence of the extent to which large centralized and wealthy organizations become drags upon the class struggle. By adopting the prejudices of calmness and prudence, borrowed from the world of the bourgeois, their mechanism grows rusty, and the qualities considered as the moving springs of all progressive movements—versatility, energy of action, and the sense of self-sacrifice—, vanish. However admirable by reason of its organizing and financial spirit, the bureaucracy of the Unions cannot escape the evolution to which all bureaucratic organism is doomed—the fear of losing the treasured hoards, together with the organization itself upon which that bureaucracy depends and from which it draws its living.”

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“Organized in such wise, it may be easily understood that the German Unions constitute the delight of many an inveterate foe of Socialism, especially among the University elements who see in those Unions, whether rightly or wrongly, we shall not venture to say, a wholesome counterweight to the Social Revolution, to the Socialist party itself.”

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The facts are robust, the consequences obvious. The economic organization, that “adheres to no order of ideas” and “lacks the Socialist spirit and philosophic conception”, is fatedly bound to borrow its inspiration from “the world of the

bourgeois”; such an economic organization, NO MATTER WHAT ITS LEADERSHIP, is bound to become a caricature of bourgeoisdom, it is bound to become “conservative”; it is bound to act obedient, not to the spirit needed for the proletariat to emancipate itself, it is bound to act obedient to “the fear of losing its treasured hoards”; finally such an organization, NO MATTER WHAT ITS LEADERSHIP, cannot choose but “constitute the delight” of “inveterate foes of Socialism.” As in Germany, so here, and vice versa.

Dr. Michels says brilliantly: “It may be said without fear of exaggeration that the International Congresses are, in the life of the German Party, its only moments of intoxication and of intrinsic strength. Returning victors to their own country, these same men find themselves reduced to a role that does not correspond to their International Socialist hegemony. Back to Germany, the German Social Democrats find themselves, despite their formidable fund of intellectual forces, of party membership, and of electoral victories, more impotent than the smallest of Socialist bodies abroad.”

With the Socialist Labor Party exactly the opposite happens of what happens to the feudally hampered German Social Democracy. While the latter triumphs at the International Congresses, thanks to its finding there the only opportunity to give a loose to its revolutionary sentiments, but upon returning home, is forced to play a timid role, with the former, its language has been calm and deliberate at the International Congresses, could not be said to “triumph,” but, returned home, its revolutionary sentiments found work to do, and has steadily done it, in accord with the aims and principles of International Socialism.

The German situation furnishes a warning against, rather than a model to emulate. No wonder the Volkszeitung-Berger party dotes upon the UN-revolutionary posture of the German Social Democracy at home, but smites, with its “backward races” bills in America, the PRO-revolutionary posture of the same German Social Democracy at the International Congress.

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