

REPORT

NOTES ON THE STUTTGART CONGRESS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

VI.

The “Delegate from Australia.”

ON the whole the Stuttgart Congress presented an imposing, it may even be said an inspiring aspect. It did that even more so than its Amsterdam predecessor, which, itself, was a marked improvement upon the Zurich Congress of eleven years previous. Ridiculous scenes were numerous at Zurich, so numerous that, at this distance of time, they are the incidents that stick out prominently on the tablets of the mind. It was otherwise at Amsterdam. The circumstance that the then all-absorbing Committee on Political Attitude consumed most of the time and membership of the Congress, did much to detract from the majesty of its appearance. There was nothing of that nature to detract from the appearance of the Stuttgart Congress. It seems, however, that where many people are assembled, how serious so ever their purpose, there is bound to be some “clown in the performance.” Amsterdam had its clown in the tragic-comic appearance and stunt of the British Social Democratic Federation delegate Dadabhai Naoroji. Stuttgart had “the delegate from Australia,” a young man, V. Kroemer by name.

Kroemer, even at a casual glance has the aspect of a dreamer, a visionary, perchance a woolgatherer. Five minutes’ conversation with the youngster conveys the idea of an absent-minded man. It was not that his talk, in conversation, is rambling. He answered to the point, well enough; but his eyes had a “distant look.” In the course of a talk I had with him in the Congress Hall on the night of the concert at the American table where he visited us, his eyes wandered away so persistently that I asked him whether he was looking for a friend gone astray in the gallery. He answered in the negative, with a faint suggestion of a sigh, and then looked up towards the lighted chandeliers that hung from the lofty ceiling. His voice

is suave, his manners suaver, and he has a trick of waving his arms in a way suggestive of a wizard's wand. I saw him afterwards frequently moving etherially among the delegates in the Congress Hall. To which of the four leading Committees he appointed himself I know not. On the Committee on Unionism he was not.

On the fourth day of the Congress, no other Committee being yet quite ready to report, the Bureau had agreed to allow free lee way to speeches on the Colony Question, the Committee in charge of the same having done its work quickest. There was neither time limit, nor limit to the number of speakers. Chairman Singer almost looked disappointed when a speaker got through: he seemed to fear the list might be exhausted prematurely. The German delegation availed themselves of the opportunity to air their personal grievances. Edward Bernstein spoke, arousing by his mere appearance some hisses and some applause from the German tables; Ledebuhr, an eloquent and satirical speaker, followed and took a dozen falls out of Bernstein; David took the tribune next and roasted Ledebuhr; Kautsky presented himself, received his ovation, bowed modestly, and then proceeded to roast Bernstein and David. Speaker after speaker followed from other nationalities, the delegate from Australia among them. Nobody guessed what was coming. At Amsterdam, when Dadabhai faced the rump Congress, everybody knew what was up, and, according to their differing tastes for that "number" on the program, either walked out and took a look at the Dutch canals, or settled down to take in the show. There was no such warning at Stuttgart when V. Kroemer stepped into the tribune. He spoke English. What he said for the first two or three minutes was too irrelevant to recall now. The buzz in the Congress was beginning to grow general, and take in even the American and the British tables, when order was again speedily restored. It was noticeable that even the Hungarian, the Bohemian and the Russian tables, where English was least understood, to say nothing of the French, German, Belgian, Italian and other tables where English could boast of having some appreciative delegates, were suddenly hushed in silence. The whole Congress had its eyes on the speaker in the tribune. The delegate from Australia looked for all the world like a transe-medium at work. With eyes raised, and looking clean through walls and roof into the space beyond, and with arms outstretched and slightly vibrating, V. Kroemer was uttering, in limped language, words to suit his appearance. He was prophesying. He said in substance:

"The Social Revolution is at hand. Three years will not have passed before the

tyrant classes, the world over, will have been pulled from their high places, and the people will have come to their own, every man sitting under his own fig tree and his own vine, in a land flowing with milk and honey. Peace will reign in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Australasia. Work will be light, happiness general. The Revolution will begin in Australia. The fleets of England, sent to suppress the Revolution, will be swallowed up by the sea. The Armies of America, Germany, France and all Europe will mutiny, and lay down their arms. Earthquakes will be felt in Hungary and will shake up Russia, Spain and—” At about this point the prophecy was brought to a stop. The Congress, which, when Kroemer started, was about to break up into general private conversations, and which, soon as Kroemer’s ecstatic appearance announced something; in keeping therewith, was hushed in attentive silence, could stand the stunt no longer. Impatience had begun to manifest itself along several tables considerably before the earthquake passage. With the shaking of Hungary, Russia, etc., the impatience became general. On many faces could be seen a sense of humiliation at such a performance on the stage of an International Congress of Socialism. Chairman Singer, who had sunk his head on the table and was for some time looking askance at the speaker, took the hint from the delegates. He rose, pulled the delegate from Australia by his coat-tail; pulled him several times until he woke up, or came to, and induced him to come down. Those in search of sport must have felt deprived at not learning how far the earthquake, that was to start from Hungary, would spread. All others looked the way skeptics look when the medium has subsided, and the lights are turned on. They looked relieved.

How did Australia come to be so misrepresented? However cut up the Labor Movement may be on the Island Continent, and whatever one may think of the intelligence of some of the factions,—fools they are not; nor, not being fools, could they be suspected of an intention to trifle with the Congress by playing upon it the practical joke of afflicting it with such a delegate. Kroemer, if found out so quickly in Stuttgart, must have been well known where he came from. How could any body of Labor, however untutored in economics and sociology; how could any body of Socialists, however Utopian, elect such a man to represent them at any place, let alone an international Congress? The fact is Kroemer was not elected at all. He was “going to Europe, anyhow.” Emerson counsels man to hitch his car to the stars. Australia hitched her car to a mole.

Mischievous is the opinion of “rather being represented somehow, than not be represented at all.” The mischievous opinion is widespread in the Socialist or Labor Movement. Sometime the fallacy seeks to justify itself with the argument that the “delegate” will be “given an opportunity to learn.” To send a man “to learn” is no bad plan—provided others are sent along to keep him from discrediting his constituency, if not from doing the positive harm that immaturity of mind, inflated with the self importance of office, is but too often seen to inflict. Vacancy cannot begin to do the mischief that unfitness does every day.

It is to be hoped the delegates who witnessed the distressful performance of Kroemer at Stuttgart, will not allow him to have lived in vain. It is to be hoped they will all have carried with them the recollection of “the delegate from Australia,” and thenceforth set their faces as flint against any proposition whereby their organizations are to be “represented” by a “make-shift.” The chances are too heavy to take.

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