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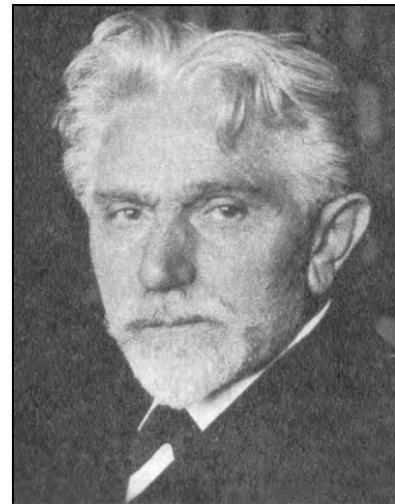
EDITORIAL

## PARTY TACTICS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**O**N the 2d of November, 1894, August Bebel, the leading spirit of the Socialist movement in Germany, delivered an address in Berlin wherein he gave an account of the stormy convention of his party, held shortly before in Frankfurt. The speech concerns almost wholly party tactics. This may seem at first blush to render it uninteresting outside of Germany. And yet not so. Party tactics are, in a movement like the Socialist, as international as its economics. Moreover, in the light of recent events in Europe, and of others in this country, this speech, pronounced about nine years ago, acquires special importance. For this reason it is here reproduced.

“It cannot be denied that since the party’s existence there were, I shall not say two hostile, but two parallel running currents. The one was called radical, the other moderate. More than once did the two run foul of each other, extensive explanations of their respective policies took place, but in each case reconciliation followed. Now, however, it is not to be denied that in the course of the last years many elements have entered the party that must be designated as ‘moderate.’ During the last years we have increased considerably in quantity, but—I state it frankly—we have not improved in quality. (Hear! Hear!)



AUGUST BEBEL (1840–1913)

“It has come so far that elements take part in the deciding of party matters, who do not even possess a clear idea of what the party wants or what Socialism is.

“It is from these very circumstances that I derived the unfavorable impressions which I carried away from our last party convention in Frankfurt. I shall say, frankly, that impression was at times so strong that I decided to take no office in the management of the party. I argued, as things

are going on, we shall have no end of conflicts, and I desire to keep my hands free. I shall not conceal the fact that, in my opinion, the party is being watered; that it is being switched on the tracks of opportunism; that the class struggle is being lost sight of, and that the result of it all is a tendency to deal and bargain with all manner of bourgeois reform thought. If my impressions are founded on facts, then this tendency should be combated with full force. Not until several of my friends had earnestly urged me to reconsider my decision did I consent to retain my place in the party executive, but I cannot guarantee how long I shall remain there.

“That which from the start of the convention made upon me a disagreeable impression was the large number of propositions which revealed, at least partly, that a number of comrades impute to us things that are no part of Socialism, and all of which would have received short shift {shrift?} from a party convention that was aware of its mission.

“The worst impression of all was produced upon me by the debate on the party dissensions in Baden. Whoever has followed our development will notice that it is the contingent from South Germany in our party that generally deserves the name of ‘moderate.’ Far is it from me to blame our South German comrades for this. What it behooves us to do, in accordance with our methods of going to the root of things, is to inquire whence it comes that such a phenomenon manifests itself—a phenomenon which I am constrained to consider fatal to our party. The reason why in South Germany the influence of the ‘moderates’ is even stronger is to be found in the fact that there the middle class is stepping into our party in increasing numbers. The middle class looks upon Socialism from a viewpoint wholly different from that of the purely proletarian element. Again, in South Germany the middle class is very strongly represented, for the simple reason that in South Germany capitalism has not developed to the point that it has in North Germany. As a matter of course, this middle class exercises there a strong influence upon our party, and will become an even greater hindrance to its development. How great the danger is we are aware of since the convention at Erfurt, where, through Vollmar’s speech, it became clear to us the degree to which the middle class had influenced our comrades there. But in North Germany also this spirit is gaining strength; first, because certain elements in our party have been compelled into the category of middle class men, seeing they were becoming victims to their own convictions; secondly, because NOT A FEW OF OUR AGITATORS MUST BE TAKEN FROM A CLASS THAT ENJOYS RELATIVE INDEPENDENCE. Such social positions easily blur the purity of proletarian principles. There is a third reason for this: A large number of comrades who hold leading positions in the party are, despite their sense of duty, unable to post themselves upon all the burning questions of the day. Their means and their time deprive them of the requisite time for further education. Nevertheless, the present dimensions of the party render it a matter of the very highest importance that the spokesman of the party be chosen from among those only who know exactly what the Socialist Labor

Party is after.

“Thirty years ago every Socialist in Germany could be considered a paragon of knowledge as against our adversaries. Whoever in those days had made himself familiar with the works of Lassalle and had some oratorical powers could stand up before any mass meeting, quite certain that he could floor his adversary. To-day, however, these oratorical encounters are not the principal work before us. To-day the battle rages with all the greater intensity in the domain of the press; it is carried on by journals, pamphlets, leaflets and such literary productions. In order to be now able to assert our cause with the requisite sharpness and vigor, our agitators of to-day must be much better equipped than they were thirty years ago. It should be kept in mind that in this interval our adversaries have not lain idle. Many are the persons among the capitalists who are devoting much attention to statistics, political economy and sociology. Our adversaries have at their disposal a large scientific quarry from which to draw; their equipment is to-day far superior to what it was formerly. Under these circumstances it is the party’s duty to render these scientific treasures accessible to our agitators. Nevertheless, I fear me that, as things seem to be going, such work would be left unused.

“This leads me to another point. It is on the part of many AN UNFORTUNATE DESIRE NOT TO EXPLAIN OUR THEORIES AND TO ENLIGHTEN OUR PEOPLE WITH SERIOUS AND EARNEST PROPAGANDA, BUT TO GAIN RECRUITS AT ANY PRICE. (Hear! Hear!) To gain this point concessions are made in all directions, and {the} pure proletarian character of the party is blurred, and not infrequently the class struggle itself is laid away. (Hear! Hear!) By these means large accessions are gained for the party, but these remain far from Socialism; they do not promote, they only retard our work. (Hear! Hear!) I say openly I prefer by far a smaller number of class-conscious comrades, who are clear upon what they want, than a large number of followers who do not know what they want, nor what the purposes of the party are.”

It matters not that the conditions in Germany compelled and compels the Socialist forces to turn from the direct forthright. On the contrary. The circumstance adds value to Bebel’s warning in a country such as these {this?} where no such compelling forces exist, and where a turning from the direct forthright can only be artificial and for corrupt purposes.

Every sentence in that address should be carefully studied. Besides serving as guidance here, it will help to understand events that are approaching in Germany.

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

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