

EDITORIAL

THEOLOGY IN SOCIALISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AND now we have Mr. Wilfred McNabb, of the New Jersey Socialist party, who condescends to straighten up the “multitudinous contradictions and absurdities” in “the self-styled Unity Conference Manifesto.” Seeing that the Conference was decided upon and its membership chosen by a general vote of the Socialist Labor Party and of Mr. McNabb’s own party, the application of the term “self-styled” to the Conference and its work denotes the gentleman either intentionally inaccurate or loose of thought and, consequently, in the use of words—in either case unworthy of consideration. Nevertheless, in honor to the important subject which he tackles—no less a subject than the historic and sociologic relation of the political to the economic power—Mr. McNabb may be turned to the useful purpose of furnishing an opportunity to point a useful moral and adorn a useful tale.

The New Jersey Unity Conference held that the political power flows from and is the result of economic power; that the capitalist is entrenched in the political government as the result of his economic power; that, as a consequence, the day of the political success of a Socialist political movement, unbacked by the proper economic organization, would be the day of its defeat; and that as a deduction from these combined facts, a political movement of Socialism should not if it could, and could not, if it would, remain neutral in the economic struggles of the working class. With this reasoning Mr. McNabb is at odds. It is “contradictory” and “absurd,” says he. And he promises to knock it out with authorities.

The first authority mentioned is none less than Marx himself. Mr. McNabb promises to prove that Marx shows precisely the contrary of that which the Unity Conference held. He promises to prove that “the whole effort of *Capital* is put forth to show that it is owing to the possession of the powers of government that the

capitalists are enabled to exploit the working class.” Such a statement produces the effect of a blow upon the mind’s stomach. One holds his breath wondering what the passage can be which, according to promise or threat, is to be fished out of Marx himself to prove such a balderdash, such a bourgeois and anti-Marxian principle of social evolution. Relief, however, immediately sets in. While Marx is the authority promised as proof with a heavy rhetoric intended to convey the idea of intimate acquaintance with Marx’s “epochal work,” not Marx is quoted, but someone else—Deville. Affidavits are not lobsters. Deville is not Marx. Mr. McNabb defaults in his promise. This unbecoming trick is serious enough. But Mr. McNabb’s Cause is so desperate that it indulges in a trick within a trick. The passage quoted from Deville as a “comprehensive summary” of the Marxian position in no way bears out Mr. McNabb’s contention, in no way affects the position taken by the Unity Conference. Indeed, Deville was too intelligent and honorable a man to summarize Marx with such a caricature of Marxism in general, of the materialist conception of society in particular, as that, not the economic, but the political power is the root of capitalist exploitation.

As to Marx’s own views upon the subject they are summarized by himself in the passage: “It is not because he is a leader in industry that a man is a capitalist; on the contrary, he is a leader of industry because he is a capitalist. The leadership of industry is an attribute of capital, JUST AS IN FEUDAL TIMES THE FUNCTIONS OF A GENERAL AND JUDGE WERE ATTRIBUTES OF LANDED PROPERTY.” (*Capital*. Swan Sonnenschein & Co. edition of 1896, p. 323, lines 4–9) The economic power, that is, the ownership of the necessaries for production, acquired either through the mysticisms of theocracy, or the mailed hand of feudalism, or the chicanery, coupled with the brute force, of capitalism, ever has been the foundation upon which class government was and is planted, and from which its political filigrees are the varying reflections. It does not follow from this that the resulting class government, or political power, is a mere ornament. The fact must never be lost sight of by the intellectually honest seeker for truth that there is no effect imaginable which, in turn, does not react back upon its cause, and thereby intensify it. The intensification of its cause by the reacting effect is so constant a process of evolution, in society as well as in nature, that the superficial observer is

often duped by appearances. To distinguish actual cause from reacting effect is the power that distinguishes the scientist from the quack. The possession of the powers of government is the result of the possession of capital; this result, however, reacts back upon its cause, and thus reacting protects, incites and stimulates it. It is the distinct contribution of Marxism to social science that it recognizes and proves economic power to be the basis, government or political power the superstructure. As in feudal times the functions of general and judge, governmental or political functions, were the attribute of LANDED PROPERTY, so to-day, in capitalist times, the function of government, or political leadership{,} is the attribute of CAPITAL. Nor does the Deville passage, quoted by Mr. McNabb, to the effect that it is the historic mission of the proletariat “ORGANIZED AND DISCIPLINED IN THE VERY MECHANISM OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION,” to proceed to wrest “FIRST OF ALL” the political power of its adversaries, remotely affect the principle held by the Unity Conference, least of all does it substantiate Mr. McNabb’s topsy-turvy contention that “the whole effort of *Capital* is put forth to show that it is owing to the possession of the powers of government that the capitalists are enabled to exploit the working class.” Indeed, the passages that precede and follow the passage quoted by Mr. McNabb, and which appears in Deville’s preface to *The People’s Marx*, refute any such absurd contention. For instance, on page 18 of Deville’s preface (International Library edition, 1900) this passage occurs: “Man is dominated by the material conditions of life, and these conditions, and therefore the mode of production, have determined”—what?—“have determined and will determine”—what?—“human customs, ethics and INSTITUTIONS—social, economic, POLITICAL AND JURIDICAL.” This is sound. No sane reasoner can construct out of this the theory that that which DETERMINES something else is effect, and that which IS DETERMINED is cause. The passage, quoted by Mr. McNabb to confirm his theory that, not the possession of economic power, but the possession of political power is the cause of capitalist exploitation, is a passage that concerns itself, not with the theoretic, but clearly with the tactical part of the Movement only. That passage, like the other passage that Mr. McNabb quotes from Kautsky’s *Social Revolution* to the effect that the measures that “proceed from the class which has been economically oppressed and who have now captured political

power” are “the results of revolution,”—these passages state an obvious thing, obvious wherever society has attained the political-parliamentary stage. The obvious thing that these passages state is the necessity of the political movement in all such countries in order to give a chance to the civilized methods of dispute, in order to give a chance to the peaceful solution of the Social Question. Obviously the theory none will gainsay that “once the proletariat is in possession of the political power,” assuming the theoretic proposition that the capitalist class will surrender its political burg to the political ballot of the working class, the proletariat will proceed to legislate the revolution into Law. Obviously, “first of all,” in the connection in which it occurs does not and can not mean the theory that the political and not the economic power is the groundwork of exploitation; obviously neither the Deville nor the Kautsky quotation even remotely purport to deny the necessity of the economic organization of the working class to insure the success of its political triumph; least of all do these quotations justify “neutrality” towards the economic movement, or pure and simple political Socialism. The trick within the trick, indulged in by Mr. McNabb, of mentioning an authority, and then quoting someone else, is to make quotations that are wholly irrelevant to the subject under discussion, or to the contention of which the quotation is heralded as proof.

King Solomon threw, many hundred years in advance, both Sappho and the convivial Anacreon into the shade with a song to one of his 900 sweethearts. It is an impassioned, erotic ode. He dilates upon her hair as a “flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead”; upon her eyes like “doves’ eyes within her locks”; upon her teeth like a “flock of shorn sheep which come up from the washing”; upon her lips like a “thread of scarlet”; upon her temples like a “piece of pomegranate” within her locks; upon her neck like a “tower of David, builded for an armory, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men”; upon her “two breasts, like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies”; and, in closing transports, he prays his paramour to admit him to the garden of her charms, and invokes the winds to fan him in that garden. The song is quoted in full in the King James version of the Bible as chapter 4 of the “Song of Solomon,” and is published in support of the heading: “Christ setteth forth the graces of the church. He showeth his love for her. The church prayeth to be made fit for his presence.” Not Marx, and

not Deville, not even Kautsky, is the authority or model for Mr. McNabb. The gentleman's authority are the compilers of the King James version of the Bible, who produce texts wholly irrelevant to headings.

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