

EDITORIAL

SCHURZ'S CONFESSION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE history of the German disturbances, some call them the Revolution of 1848, forms the substance of an autobiographic sketch by Carl Schurz, now running through *McClure's Magazine*. As to the subject itself, it has been dealt with often before, not infrequently better. In so far, however, as the sketch is an autobiography, it is of exceptional value. Since the days of Montaigne, whose philosophic essays are substantially autobiographic, the value of autobiographies



CARL SHURZ (1829-1906)

has been in exact proportion to the truthfulness with which they reproduce the author's secret sentiments, and thus give others an insight into their own and themselves. The foundation of human sentiment is one, mankind over. Autobiographies being essentially "Confessions" any true autobiographer's confessions are human confessions. A passage there is in these Schurz confessions of inestimable value, inasmuch as it furnishes the clue to understand class "feelings", and the proof of Marxian wisdom. The passage relates to Marx, whom Schurz, then a young man of about nineteen, met at the Cologne convention. Speaking of his impressions of Marx, then about thirty, Schurz says:

"Marx's utterances were indeed full of meaning, logical and clear, but I have never seen a man whose bearing was so offensive and intolerable. To no opinion, which in the slightest degree differed from his, he accorded the honor of even a condescending consideration. Everyone who contradicted him he treated with the most abject contempt; every argument that he did not like he answered with biting scorn at the unfathomable ignorance that had prompted it, or with opprobrious aspersions upon the motives of him who advanced it. I remember most distinctly the cutting disdain with which he pronounced the word 'bourgeois'; and as a 'bourgeois' that is as a

pitiabile victim of the most depraved mental and moral tendencies, he pronounced everyone who dared oppose his opinions. Of course the propositions advanced or advocated by Marx in that meeting were throughout voted down because every one whose feelings had been hurt by his conduct was rather inclined to support everything that Marx did not favor. It was very evident that he not only did not win any adherents but that he repelled many who otherwise might have become his followers.”

Even if Schurz had said that such were his impressions during the salad days of his green and inexperienced youth—even then the confession would have been valuable. It would have illustrated how the spokesmen of class interests, even when enthused with the fumes of college ideology, resent as “offensive”, “opprobrious” and “intolerable” the utterances that, being “full of meaning, logical and clear”, hurt, and cannot choose but hurt, the interests which they, even though unconsciously, happen to represent; it would have illustrated how the mere advocacy of given class interests, though the advocate may not himself be well aware of them, identifies him with them; causes him to be instinctively repelled by the arguments leveled at such interests, all the more if the arguments are “full of meaning, logical and clear”, that is, hit bull’s-eye; induces him to consider impolitic him who uses such shots; and misleads him into the illusion of opining that suaver language, that is, arguments less “full of meaning, logic and clearness” would have turned hostile class-interests into adherents. In short, the confession would have illustrated the fact that, even unconsciously, Aspiration is ruled by Material Interest. The confession would have been the illumination by a riper mind of its own status when still immature. The Schurz confession, however, is fuller than that. Seeing he confesses his present sentiments to agree with the ones originally formed; seeing that all the experience he has since made—the wreck of his own “revolution”; the impotence with which all the opposites of “intolerance”, of “offensiveness”, of “impatience to contradiction”, of “scorn”, of “aspersions”, of “disdain”, in short, how all the methods of conciliation and compromise dashed themselves against the stubborn class-interests of the American slave-holder, which he himself later had to struggle with—seeing that all that has gone for nothing with him, the confession is prime. For one thing, Marx’s temper is vindicated against the aspersions of the autobiographer by the autobiographer himself; for another, and most important of

all, the Socialist principle, learned from Marx, is demonstrated—class-interests are not to be cozened; their heads must be staved in; only ruthless shots, ruthlessly “full of meaning, logical and clear” are equal to the task. All else is a waste of breath.

No coy maiden is more sensitive than class interests; none is as quick to take offence; nor is any hypocrite more dexterous in translating an argument against himself that is “full of meaning, logical and clear” into “blackguardism” than class-interests, that are battered with acts of their OWN DOING. The battery that is “full of meaning, logical and clear”, may not, at a certain, time, triumph; but then the time is not ripe for the triumph of its Cause. Its day will come. The fly-paper tactics for a Revolution will fail forever. Their day never dawns.

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Uploaded February 2009

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