

EDITORIAL

TO FRANZ MEHRING.

By DANIEL DE LEON

TO Franz Mehring,
Stuttgart, Germany.
Fellow Socialist—

We wish to thank you, in the name of the Socialist Labor Party, for the exposure you have made of John Spargo's unfitness as a biographer of Marx and an expositor of Marxism. The exposure was so complete that we reproduced it last week in these columns in English garb.¹ We also wish to congratulate you upon being the first of the comrades in Germany to publicly exemplify his freedom from the mental domination of that queer thing, known in this country as the American bourgeois bluff.

Plechanoff preceded you by about five years on the continent, among the Russian Socialists. Ernest Unterman—like Spargo a Socialist party member, and, like Spargo, a European immigrant of that sorry type of immigrants that is incapable of acquiring the virtues of American, hence readily adopts the vices of the American dealer in wooden nutmegs—chucked the American bourgeois bluff of writing on the philosophy of the Movement. His production being translated, Plechanoff took it up; tore it to shreds; and, like you now with Spargo's book, threw the bits into the face of the bluffer, with the contempt that he deserves who, without intellectual fitness for so grave a subject, presumes to trifle with the Movement by trying to bluff it into admiration for himself.

After that, and until you now broke the ice, a number of other men in the leadership of the party named "Socialist" in this country chucked their American bourgeois bluff in the shape of "books" on the Social Question a la Spargo—and took in

¹ [To be appended.]

our unsuspecting Comrades in Germany.

There was, first on the list in chronological order, Robert Hunter with a book in which the science of biology was insulted with the novel theory that, if the original 3,000,000 American colonists had only been left to themselves, the country would now be populated with their own descendants to the number of the seventy and odd millions who now inhabit the land; and in which book the flood of European immigration—an immigration that certainly saved our present population from being the mentally and physically feeble aggregation of people that they would otherwise be, had the original small number of colonists been left to any such intensive in-breeding,—is insulted with the designation of degraded foreigners, and with the novel theory, to match, of laying to their own door the practice of infanticide, for which the chauvinistic portion of the “old stock” American is noted.—That bluff was translated in Germany by a Social Democrat with praises for “the great American sociologist.”

Next came Morris Hillquit—better known in his original home as Moses Hilkowitz—with sundry “bluffs,” also in the shape of books, one of which, calling itself the history of Socialism in America, was also translated by a German Social Democrat,—a work that will convey to the German reader, who has only such a source of information on America, as topsy-turvy an idea of the Socialist Movement in America, men and things, as Spargo’s slap-dash work conveys of Marx; or as the books on the history of the republican Rome, that we are informed are gotten up in Russia by the agents of the Tsar for consumption among the ignorant.

And now, to skip minor instances, comes Spargo’s book upon Marx, and is also translated in Germany.

In its report to the Stuttgart Congress, the Socialist Labor Party stated that the battles of the American Movement will have to be fought on American soil, and not in the columns of papers abroad. The principle is true; but all is not said when that is said.

International Capitalism has brought about an International Proletarian and Socialist Movement, greatly promoted by modern facilities of communication and transportation. It goes without saying that, under such conditions, the Movement in any one country cannot remain wholly unaffected by the Movement in any other.

The magnificence of the Movement in Germany—where, owing to still surviving and powerfully surviving vestiges of feudalism, the Social Democracy is compelled to complete the unfinished progressive program of the German bourgeois revolution; and where, despite the tangle, the tactfulness of the Social Democracy has rendered it the “summa summarum” of all the progressive aspirations of Germany—cannot fail to affect the Movement in America. That fact the Hunters, the Hillquits, the Spargos seek to utilize to ends of their own.

Your criticism of Spargo’s book as “a worthless compilation,” a “thing that workmen’s libraries should be prevented from throwing their good money away on,” an “insulting disregard of International Socialism,”—that criticism fits all those other books, or wooden nutmegs, “bluffs,” for short. Yet their authors rush to Europe, Germany with preference; bluff the German Comrades; get themselves translated; and then parade in this country with “the endorsement of the Social Democracy.”

The psychology that renders our European Comrades so liable to succumb is readily understood. In their anxiety to see a powerful Movement in America, and having their own hands full with the vast issues that confront them there, they have little time to weigh things American. The dealer in Socialist wooden nutmegs catches them unawares. The “bluff” succeeds. The net result to the Movement in America is that an all the greater burden is thrown upon the shoulders of the militant Socialists of the land.

That you, a distinguished personality in the Social Democracy, have stood up, the first of our German fellow Socialists and condignly branded the American bourgeois and bluffer, earns our congratulations to you; at the same time our thanks.

May others, for the sake of Socialism, follow your example.

With Socialist greetings,

ED. DAILY PEOPLE.

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