

ARTICLE

FLASH-LIGHTS OF THE AMSTERDAM CONGRESS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

X. CONGRESS MISCELLANIES.

MY memoranda on the Amsterdam Congress proper, together with kindred matters in Europe, contain a large number of notes on subjects not yet touched upon. These subjects—with the exception of the “International Bureau,” the “Situation in Belgium” and the “British S.L.P.,” which will be treated separately—are mostly fugitive in their nature. Some, however, will materially aid in obtaining the proper “color” of the Congress. These I shall cursorily take up now.

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Such is the slovenliness with which all the official reports of the Amsterdam Congress, that I have so far seen, are gotten up that the Socialist Labor Party’s delegation is credited with only one delegate. The delegation consisted officially of four members, and was so entered by me in the official blank furnished by the Bureau. The S.L.P. delegation consisted of myself, elected by a general vote of the Party, and of three others to whom the National Convention empowered the National Executive Committee to issue credentials. They were Moritz Poehland, Dyer Enger and Jules Ferrond. Of these only Poehland put in an appearance. He joined me on the third day of the Congress. Enger wrote to me from Norway that he was detained away; while Ferrond, due to an odd series of unfortunate coincidences, remained in Belgium, disconnected from me, although ready all the time to proceed to Amsterdam.

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What with the confining work on the Committee on International Political Policy, and my being alone on the first two days, the S.L.P. report to the Congress was not distributed until the third day. In respect to "Reports," I noticed a marked difference between Amsterdam and Zurich in 1893. At the latter Congress, the nationality that had no report was the exception; at Amsterdam, the exception seemed to be the nationalities that had reports. As to the report of the S.L.P., the method adopted at Zurich—printing the report in one volume, with the English, French and German versions in parallel columns—had proved clumsy and was discarded by our National Executive Committee. At this Congress the method would have proved still clumsier, seeing the S.L.P. report was in four languages—English, German, French and Swedish. While the separate method is on the whole better, it entailed in this instance the labor of folding—except the French translation which I caused to be printed in France and was neatly bound in a red cover. On the third day of the Congress, Poehland having arrived, we buckled down to the work. With the aid of the five comrades of the British S.L.P., the folding and distributing was disposed of in short order. We could have disposed of twice the number—250 in each language, except the French, of which there were 500. They were all taken with interest, in many instances several copies being demanded. In not a few instances, especially along the tables of the German and Austrian delegations, the S.L.P. report produced astonishment (*Ueberraschung*) as one of the delegates put it; the false reports about America in their countries had caused him to believe that the S.L.P. had ceased to be (*besteht ueberhaupt nicht*), as he expressed it. They all learned better. The reports of the Australian S.L.P., in my charge, were also distributed, and let some light into dark corners.

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The building in which the Congress met, the Concert Gebow, was a vast improvement over Zurich. The hall was spacious with broad galleries above; the appointments were excellent; the drapery and foliage—with one exception that I shall presently mention—was tasteful. For all that, the Congress presented the aspect of a stock exchange.

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The stock exchange appearance of the Congress arose from the Babel of languages. If, out of five persons gathered at a meeting, only two at any time understand the language spoken by a speaker, the other three must be positively and wilfully rude before any confusion is created. At Amsterdam there were close to five hundred delegates, without counting the thickly packed galleries. It is safe to say that at no time did more than two hundred understand the speaker of the moment. Even the involuntary rustling of three hundred enforced non-listeners will create a buzz. That three hundred men—unable at any time to understand what was being said from the platform where sat the three presidents, their aides and the translators—will not simply rustle is obvious. They engaged in conversation, walked about, paid mutual calls on old acquaintances, went in and went out, and slammed the doors.

It was simply impossible to understand the daily announcements made from the platform. At the close of the Thursday session an announcement was made regarding the procedure of the next day. Although the notice was given in English, German and French, and the translators had good, strong voices, I could not make out the details from the distance of the table of the American delegation. I walked forward and inquired from three delegates, who sat nearer the platform across the passage way on whose further side sat the American delegation. None of the three could give me information. I then continued to walk towards the platform and inquired from each delegate who gave me a chance. I then cared less for the information I had actually started in search of. What I then aimed at was to test how near to or far from the platform the announcements could be made out. In that way I ran the gauntlet of a good portion of the German and Austrian, of the Swiss, the Italian and the Belgian tables. I questioned twenty-three delegates by actual count,—not one had been able to catch enough of the announcement to know just what was said. It was not until I climbed up the platform and inquired from Vaillant himself that I found out what I wanted. It was a stock exchange pandemonium.

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To the American eye there was one unfortunate incident in the decorations that aided the stock exchange illusion. The incident was in plain view of the Congress, even ostentatiously so. At the foot of the platform, but considerably above the floor, rose the speakers' tribune. It was draped in gorgeous red and its front bore the initials I.S.C., standing, no doubt, for "International Socialist Congress." The three initials were, however, contrived into an unfortunate-looking monogram. The S. was made to twine itself around the upright that stood for the I, and the combination of the two was placed within the C, giving the monogram the appearance of the \$ mark, accentuated by the broad C. For all the world, it looked like a loud "Dollar and Cents" sign, rendered all the louder by its color—yellow on a blood-red background.

Considering that this Congress, differently from all others, charged 10 francs (\$2) from every delegate, and half a guilder (20 cents) from the visitors per session, it looked as if the proverbial thrift of the Hollander was emblematically and practically illustrated.

As against this, the Amsterdam Congress compared favorably with the one of Zurich in still another aspect—the appearance of the women delegates. At Zurich, the Cynthia Leonards of the olden days of the "Socialistic Labor Party"—those Aspasia without either the charm or æsthetic qualities of Aspasia, those George Sands without either the character or talent of that great woman—were conspicuous in point of sight and in point of sound. At Amsterdam, if they were at all around, they escaped my notice. The Movement has certainly cleansed itself.

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A curious incident occurred on the morning of the opening of the Congress. I happened to be among the earliest delegates in the hall. The sign "America" readily led me to our table. One of the two seats at the head of that table was taken. I took the other. As I sat down, the occupant of the other and opposite seat, rose and cheerily reached out his hand to me saying: "Comrade De Leon, I think?" He was a young man of open, pleasant face, with Jovian locks and a generous, flowing red necktie. I told him that was my name and accepted the proffered hand. He shook it

enthusiastically and proceeded to explain:

“My name is Nicholas Klein. I am a delegate of the Socialist party. I’m from Indianapolis. I’m here also as the reporter of the *Appeal to Reason*. Whenever I meet a Socialist I feel that I meet a brother.”

The gladsome greeting turned aside whatever rapier I might otherwise have raised against a political foe. Nevertheless his mentioning of the *Appeal to Reason* drew from me the answer:

“As you are a reporter of the *Appeal to Reason* I would suggest to you, that next time you see Wayland, you ask him for me whether it is not about time for him to reproduce that tombstone of mine under which he claimed to have buried me five years ago. People may forget that I’m dead, they may think he romanced.”

Klein smiled jovially and observed: “Socialists should not fight.”

I thought so too. And that being neither the place nor the time for a controversy on American affairs, I switched off the conversation on general matters. After a minute or so, leaving my satchel and traveling cap as symbolic possession of my seat, I walked over to the nearby table of the British delegation, where I noticed that the British S.L.P. delegates had just taken their seats. While there, talking with them, I presently heard my name uttered behind me in what seemed to be a short but animated little spat. Turning around I saw that several other members of the “Socialist” or “Social Democratic” delegation had arrived; they seemed disinclined to respect the symbols of possession I had left behind at the desirable seat. But Klein insisted that that was “Comrade De Leon’s” seat, and they desisted. Klein had shown himself loyal, though an adversary.

I shall presently have another occasion to do justice to the young man’s character.

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The Swedish reports of the S.L.P. caused me to fall in with Hjalmar Branting, the editor of the Stockholm *Social Demokraten* and member of the Swedish Riksdag or Parliament. Branting is the acknowledged leader of the Movement in Sweden. Theoretically I knew as much; Funke, now in Sweden and until recently editor of the S.L.P. Swedish paper, *Arbetaren*, had furnished me with details—Branting is a

Jauresist, and has all the Jauresist antipathy for such S.L.P. views as the *Arbetaren* expresses. His paper and *Arbetaren* had shivered many a lance against each other's armor.

I told him that Funke had translated for me several letters from France that appeared in the *Social Demokraten*, and whose descriptions of Guesde reminded me of the pictures that Goethe said Roman Catholic prelates circulated of Spinoza. In those pictures the gentle Spinoza was represented with the face of a fiend. I remembered and repeated to him one of those descriptions in particular, where Guesde's hair, eyes, nose and beard were described with special venom, and the man himself as a cross between a Jumping-Jack and a Mephisto.

Branting is considerably more than a six-footer, with the rotundity of girth and facial features indicative of profound phlegma. I had ample time to watch his thoughts formulate an answer. His looks indicated that he felt I was accurately posted. He did not venture to deny the statement. Finally he remarked, smiling good-naturedly: "Funke may have somewhat exaggerated in the translation," and, breaking off suddenly, he proceeded along another tack. "Do you know," he said, "I have a son, a stepson, in America; and he writes to me things are there entirely different from what they are in Sweden. He is an enthusiastic S.L.P. man." I told him I knew the young man, and certainly agreed with him that the situation in America would not justify Jauresism. That conversation closed with his expressing a strong desire to be able to follow events in America more closely than his time allowed.

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Illustrative of how true is the statement made to me by one of the European delegates that "America is a *terra incognita* to us," the following incident may be cited.

The editor of an Austrian paper, a man bearing the earmarks of study and who even spoke enough English to be understood, came to me as I sat in my seat and asked:

"John Mitchell, the President of the Miners' Union, he is in Europe; I would like to see him. He surely is in the American delegation?"

This Socialist editor had just information enough about America to mislead him. The absurd, even criminally negligent and false reports furnished to the European Socialist papers by their correspondents from America had nursed in his mind such a picture of that “labor lieutenant” of Mark Hanna’s that the picture naturally made him expect to see Mitchell in the delegation from America at the Congress, all the more seeing that Mitchell was known to be at the time in Europe in attendance on a miners’ convention, and all the more seeing that other editors of European Socialist papers, *De Werker* of Antwerp among the lot, spoke of him as “Comrade Mitchell” (Genosse Mitchell)! The Austrian Socialist editor in question did not even know that Mitchell had so speedily rendered himself impossible, that even the “Socialist,” or “Social Democratic,” party, which at first boomed him as a “great champion of Labor,” found him too much of a load to carry and has been forced to drop him. Of course, the innocent Austrian Socialist editor in question did not know that there was at all (ueberhaupt) a Socialist Labor Party in existence, least of all that that Party had from the start exposed Mitchell for what he is, never misleading any workingman into leaning his confidence upon that broken reed.

When the Austrian Socialist editor in question asked me the question whether John Mitchell was in my delegation, meaning, of course, the supposedly one American delegation, I answered emphatically:

“No, Sir; not in my delegation;” and gravely waving my hand towards Klein, who sat opposite me, added: “Not in *my* delegation; but he may be in the delegation of that gentleman.”

Klein threw up his hands and hastened to put in: “Not in mine, either!”

“It is about time, high time you dropped him,” I retorted.

The Austrian Socialist editor in question looked perplexed. To this hour he may not have recovered from his astonishment (Ueberraschung).

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Another Scandinavian delegate whom I had the pleasure of meeting was Olav Kringen, the delegate from Norway, who attended the convention with his wife. Oddly enough, one should say, Kringen, as well as the Norwegian delegate to Zurich, eleven years ago, had been in America, Minnesota. At Amsterdam, outside

of the representatives from America and Great Britain on the Committee on International Political Policy, Kringen was one of the two who addressed the Committee in English. The other was Katayama, of Japan.

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Among the droll incidents at the Congress, one that was not merely droll but suggestive withal, was an incident to which my fellow delegate Poehland nudged my attention.

It was late on the Thursday afternoon session of the Congress. The Committee on International Political Policy had closed its labors. The report to the Congress was to be submitted on the following morning. The report was to recommend the adoption of the Dresden-Amsterdam Resolution as presented by the Socialist Party of France. With Poehland opposite me, temporarily occupying the seat of Klein, I was in my seat busy writing my preliminary report in time for the American mail. Presently I felt the paper, on which I was writing, gently pushed. Looking up I saw Poehland with a grin from ear to ear, nodding to me to look down our table. The spectacle to which he called my attention fully deserved his grin.

A yard or so below from where we two were sitting at the head of the American table stood Herman Schlüter of the New Yorker Volkszeitung Corporation and Mrs. Corinne S. Brown of Chicago—both of them members of the delegation of the “Socialist,” or “Social Democratic” party. They stood on opposite sides of the table, and were engaged in a heated altercation. The lady looked composed, benign, firm and dignified; Schlüter looked red, heated, embarrassed and sheepish. What was it all about?

The resolution, as adopted by the Committee on International Political Policy, was, as I have stated before, the resolution presented by the Socialist Party of France, and this resolution followed closely that adopted at the Dresden national convention of the German Social Democracy. The Dresden Resolution “condemned” Jauresism. The resolution presented by the Socialist Party of France retained the word “condemn.” The supporters of the Adler-Vandervelde Resolution, having failed in the Committee, were now going about agitating in its behalf for the tussle the next day; and the point upon which they now centered their opposition to the

resolution that prevailed in the Committee was the word “condemn.” By attacking that word they expected to bring about the defeat of the proposed Dresden-Amsterdam Resolution and the triumph of its Adler-Vandervelde substitute. Mrs. Brown was captured. She objected to “condemning”; she was not there to “condemn”; she did not believe in “condemning”; to “condemn” was “un-Socialistic”; etc., etc. Schlüter, on the contrary, favored “condemning.” He argued that, if you disapprove a thing, you “condemn” it; with a silly facial expression he tried to combat the notion that to “condemn” was harshly “un-Socialistic”; etc., etc.

Theoretically, Schlüter was right; theoretically, Mrs. Brown was wrong. And, yet, the lady’s poise and manners were those of conscious truth, while Schlüter’s poise and manners were those of conscious falseness. What was it that imparted to the picture presented by the two disputants the aspect of sincerity to wrong, and of insincerity to right? That was the rub! Mrs. Brown, wrong though her posture was, was consistent with the premises from which she and her party had started, and along which she and Schlüter finally landed in the same camp; whereas Schlüter, right though his posture was, knew he was inconsistent with the premises from which he started, and to the tune of which he finally coalesced with Mrs. Brown. When the Schlüters set up the yell of “S.L.P. harshness!” they knew the falseness of the slogan. They knew full well that theirs was but a manoeuvre of false pretence intended to avail themselves of Utopianism with the hope to down the S.L.P. which they had not been able to corrupt, and which CONDEMNED their practices. Mrs. Brown was but clinging to a principle to which she adhered from the start—hence her posture of sincerity. Schlüter was stealing a page from S.L.P. principle which he had affected to oppose—hence the sheepishness of his posture and looks, especially when he noticed the S.L.P. delegates enjoying his plight.

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As I stated before, there was another occasion during the Congress when Klein’s character showed to advantage. It was in the matter of the Immigration Resolution.

There was a proposition signed by Van Koll, of the Holland delegation, restricting the immigration of “inferior races.” The Committee on Emigration and

Immigration elaborated the matter, and finally a proposition was formally introduced bearing six signatures, those of H. Schlüter, Morris Hilquit, and A. Lee—all members of Klein's "Socialist," or "Social Democratic" party delegation—among the lot. This proposition disingenuously dropped the word "inferior" and substituted it with the word "backward" races, and sought to explain it by placing in parentheses the words "such as Chinese, Negroes, ETC."

Such a posture was perfectly in keeping with the working class-sundering, guild-spirit-breathing A.F. of L., which dominates the eastern wing of the party that furnished three out of the six signatures to the proposition, all the three signatures being from the East, from New York, at that, and two of the three (Schlüter and Lee) employes of the New Yorker Volkszeitung Corporation, while two (Schlüter and Hilquit) are stockholders of the said corporation. How much in keeping with the anti-Socialist Gompers A.F. of L. the proposition was may be judged from the language of the "Labor" Mayor Schmitz of San Francisco, in his salutatory address to the annual convention of the A.F. of L. that was opened in San Francisco on the 15th of this month (November, 1904). He included the Japanese (!!) among the races to be proscribed; and his recommendation was adopted by the convention. The "ETC." in the proposition presented at Amsterdam begins to be elucidated. Moreover, how wholly in keeping with the spirit of the Eastern wing of the said "Socialist," or "Social Democratic" party, the proposition was, is a fact that stood conspicuously advertised in the late Presidential campaign. On the bill-boards of the city of Troy, N.Y., there were posted during the recent Presidential campaign huge posters on behalf of the Social Democratic party. In the center of the posters were the pictures of Debs and Hanford; between them appeared the motto from the *Communist Manifesto*: "WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!"; and above it all, in commentary of {on} the party's interpretation of the great Socialist motto, there was an exordium to the workers enumerating, among the atrocities of the capitalists, that "THEY WANT UNRESTRICTED IMMIGRATION"—evidently ranking their party on the side of restricted immigration, and seeking support from such an anti-Socialist sentiment.

The proposition being put in print and circulated in the Congress, the canvassing commenced. The bulk of that day I was elsewhere engaged and did not

appear in my seat. Imagining he could take advantage of that and secure both the American votes for his A.F. of L. guildish resolution, Schülter approached my fellow delegate, Poehland, and sought to rope him in. Of course he failed egregiously, and found out that the S.L.P. consists not of one man but of a solid body of Socialists. Poehland repudiated Schülter's request for support: repudiated it with scorn. Of course: Where is the line that separates "inferior" from "superior" races? What serious man, if he is a Socialist, what Socialist if he is a serious man, would indulge in "etc." in such important matters? To the native American proletariat, the Irish was made to appear an "inferior" race; to the Irish, the German; to the German, the Italian; to the Italian—and so down the line through the Swedes, the Poles, the Jews, the Armenians, the Japanese, to the end of the gamut. Socialism knows not such insulting, iniquitous distinctions as "inferior," and "superior" races among the proletariat. It is for capitalism to fan the fires of such sentiments in its scheme to keep the proletariat divided.

When the proposition came up for debate, be it said to the credit of Klein that, ungullied by the insidious wording of the resolution to conceal its nefarious purpose and entrap acceptance, he repudiated the work of his colleagues. With flashing, inspired eyes, the young man declared he "would feel ashamed, as an American citizen, to vote for such a resolution!"

Upon the howl raised in the Congress the proposition was withdrawn.

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There is just one more miscellany that I shall here report.

The Congress adopted a proposition that goes by the name of "Unity Resolution." The same empowers the International Bureau to offer its good offices to all nationalities in which the Socialist Movement may be divided to the end of unifying it, in order that the bourgeois parties of each nation be confronted with but one Socialist party. The proposition was submitted to the Congress by the Committee on International Political Policy, which adopted it unanimously at the end of the session.

Immediately upon the adoption of this Resolution, Vaillant announced that the Socialist Party of France, standing upon the Dresden-Amsterdam Resolution just

previously adopted, stood ready to unify with all French Socialists who likewise would plant themselves upon the principles therein enunciated. Towards the end of Vaillant's speech I also announced myself to the chairman for the floor. By that time the Committee was fast breaking up. The large lobby had merged with and now sat in among the members of the Committee. A member of the French delegation, who happened at the moment to be seated near me, seeing I had announced myself to speak, suggested that I repeat exactly what Vaillant had said. I answered him I would, in the main, only "with an American variation." In the hubbub that followed, the subject of the Unity Resolution was brushed aside, and I had no chance to speak on it. I shall here say what I meant to say, but had no chance:

"Mr. Chairman: As a delegate from a country in which there are two parties, both of them represented on this Committee, as you know, I wish to endorse in the name of my Party, the Socialist Labor Party of America, what Comrade Vaillant has said, and to add this: One of the lullabies, a favorite one, that heralded the advent of the second party in America was that 'Germany once had two Socialist parties, France has several, why should America have only one?' The second party was thus ushered into being in imitation of Europe. Now that Europe decides there should be but one Socialist party in each country, I trust the second party may be as ready to follow the European lead in the matter of unity as it was to follow European example, as it imagined, in the matter of disunity."

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