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ARTICLE

FLASH-LIGHTS OF THE AMSTERDAM CONGRESS.

[Rather than try to give a condensed report of the Amsterdam Congress and what I saw of the European Movement in general, I shall present a series of articles under the above general head, subdivided under special heads. This flash-light method will be on the whole better. It will deal in detail with persons and things; and the flash-lights will, in the end, be seen to run into one another and portray the scene more effectively.—DANIEL DE LEON.]

III.

JULES GUESDE.

THE “Parti Socialiste de France” (Socialist Party of France) is frequently referred to as the Guesdist party. I have frequently done so myself in these reports. The term is wrong. It is accountable only by the circumstance that, of the four organizations, among which is Vaillant’s or the Blanquists and which now constitute the P.S. de F., the Guesdists were the first to rise against the Jaures-Millerand combine. Vaillant’s and the other three organizations also protested. But at the start they seem to have been of the opinion that there still was help in the Jaures organization, and met with it at the convention of Lyons—the first convention after that of Wagram Hall, which, taking place immediately after the International Congress of Paris of 1900, where the fateful Kautsky Resolution was adopted, established the first schism between the then united factions. Guesde’s organization, the Parti Ouvrier Socialiste (Socialist Labor Party) bolted outright. Vaillant’s and the others in a measure remained. Added to that came another circumstance. The great Lille debate took place immediately after the Wagram Hall rupture, and there it was Guesde who crossed swords with Jaures,

and wounded Jauresism in its vitals, just when it boasted that it would mop the earth with its foes, and, by the noise that it made, seemed in a fair way to do so. It is to this sequel of events that the error of calling the present P.S. de F. the “Guesdist party” is due. The error is natural. But still an error. Vaillant—as all who know him intimately agree in saying—is a sage and a man of action combined. If without Guesde the P.S. de F. would not and could not be the nervy organization that it is, neither could it be that without Vaillant. In fact, from watching the present P.S. de F. at its recent national convention, just before the International Congress, and noticing the large number of talented men that it embraces, the conclusion forced itself upon me that even such a designation as the Guesde-Vaillant party would be a misnomer. I single out Guesde in this serial because his activity in Amsterdam was the most conspicuous.



JULES GUESDE (1845–1922)

Whosoever has derived pleasure and profit from a careful observation of heads—especially if he has had occasion to notice the sawed-off back of the head of Alexander Jonas of the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, and to take cognizance of the gentleman’s characteristics—will appreciate the warning to be cautious lest he fall into an error by a hasty glance at Guesde’s head. The characteristics of the head, sawed off at the back and giving it a sugar-loaf appearance, are absence of moral fibre—a weak morale and flimsy intellectuality, in short, the worm-characteristics. At first glance Guesde’s head looks sawed-off in the back. It is an optical illusion. So high is the dome of Guesde’s head that the robustness of his back-head is at first glance concealed. Intimate acquaintances and admirers of Guesde’s, Lafargue for instance, tell me that Guesde is of such frail health that his robust physical and mental activity is solely the result of stupendous moral energy. In no manner detracting from Guesde’s moral vigor, I hold his acquaintances to be in error. Frail as Guesde’s health is, the man has the physical vigor of a bull. Planted upon such ground, Guesde’s sterling intellectuality, backed by the solidity of the back of his head, gives promise of phenomenal results. Some one at Amsterdam said to me

Guesde was too good looking a man to be a revolutionist. Guesde's conduct at the great Committee on International Political Policy told a different tale. He displayed the true revolutionist's tactfulness, alertness, vigor, aggressiveness, and, withal, the surprising intellectual powers that culminated in his short speech tearing Jauresism to pieces, and that was crowned with the adoption of the Dresden-Amsterdam Resolution—no slight victory, essentially the fruit of his labors at the Congress, and, long before the meeting of the Congress, labored for by the P.S. de F. But, again, I must not anticipate. Leaving the role played by the P.S. de F. in bringing about the Dresden-Amsterdam Resolution for when I reach that subject, I shall limit myself under this week's head to the conduct of Guesde at the Congress or committee itself.

Strictly speaking, and as I originally reported, Guesde opened the debate. In point of fact what he then said could hardly be called the opening of the debate. He merely explained some of the terms of the resolution adopted by the P.S. de F., and pointed out some of the errors that had crept into the slovenly version of the resolution as published by the International Bureau. He also stated that the P.S. de F. disclaimed any purpose of "seeking international aid for itself in the internal strifes of the movement at home"—another subject to which I shall have occasion to revert when I reach the subject of the Dresden-Amsterdam Resolution. Altogether, Guesde did not then speak five minutes. Jaures started the ball rolling. From early that Monday afternoon till late in the afternoon session of Wednesday the debate proceeded. No member of the P.S. de F. took part. Its two delegates, Guesde and Vaillant, on the committee sat silently watchful, and watchfully silent. Equally self-restrained were the party's numerous delegates to the Congress in the committee's lobby. Finally Jaures rose to speak, the last one on the list. Many an obviously cruel thrust did he make at the P.S. de F., and many more and venomous thrusts was I informed he made, only not perceptible except to those intimately acquainted with French affairs. Throughout all that, Vaillant and Guesde sat impassible. Finally Jaures made allusion to the decline of the P.S. de F.'s vote in Lille. Whether that thrust was really more aggravating than any, or whether it was that Jaures' speech was drawing to the end and the opportunity had to be promptly seized for preconceived plans,—whatever it was, at Jaures' thrust in the matter of the Lille

vote, Guesde jumped up and demanded that he be given time to reply to that statement. This action on the part of Guesde furnished an all around fit wind-up to the committee.

Upon Guesde's interruption violent applause broke out, also a good deal of disorder. But both subsided speedily. Jaures proceeded with his remarkable speech, and brought it to a close amidst thunderous plaudits. The Jauresists were well represented in the lobby, and their sympathizers on the committee were not a few. Soon as the applause subsided, Guesde rushed forward to address the committee. Tumult ensued. There were violent protests against his taking the floor; more violent protests against the protesters. Members of the delegation of the P.S. de F. exchanged compliments with their adversaries of the Jaures party. Lucien Roland, the poet-songster of the P.S. de F., with some of whose beautiful poetic effusions *The People's* readers will be made acquainted, a man of set, impressive and expressive features, mounted a chair, and in resonant voice shouted to his party's adversaries: "You have heard us insulted! WE HAVE NOT HAD THE FLOOR IN THIS COMMITTEE! Will you refuse to hear us!?" In between these cross-ejaculations Guesde shot off a word or two. Troelstra, as a member of the Holland delegation, the country in which the Congress was held, was the chairman of the committee. He, for that matter, all the Holland delegates whom I had opportunity to speak to or observe, is a through-paced Jauresist. I saw not one who would not break a leg to be minister. Troelstra, accordingly, looked for support from the committee, from the audience, from the air to refuse Guesde the floor. The demands for Guesde increased in volume and determination. I was doing my share. Presently Guesde was heard saying: "I shall not take long! I need but a few minutes!" Troelstra seemed to see a way out of his dilemma. "Very well," said he, "if it's only a few minutes you want, I now give you the floor." These words were a serious slip; nor was Guesde slow in profiting by it. Raising himself to his full six-foot height, he looked at Troelstra with indignation. "Not for that reason!" he exclaimed; "Not for that reason! I demand the floor as an absolute right! I have the right to be heard at the International Congress of Socialists!" The ringing, thunderous applause, accompanied with cries of "Guesde!" "Guesde!" drowned all contrary demonstration, if there was any. Troelstra surrendered cleverly; he himself joined the applause.

Guesde got the floor as a matter of right.

Jaures' speech was reared on three posts. First, that his policy had saved the republic;—Guesde denied point blank that the republic was in danger, and showed upon Socialist ground why not. Secondly, that his organization was larger as shown by its large vote and many more deputies;—Guesde denied that; he showed that what Jaures claimed as “his” vote and “his” deputies was a vote cast for candidates nominated by the prefecture, and he challenged him to name one exception. De Pressense, in the audience, here broke in: “I, for one; I was not nominated by the prefecture.” “I am glad to hear that you, De Pressense, are an exception! It is the exception which proves the rule! Name another! I dare you! I challenge you!” he cried out to Jaures. “You can not name another! That makes only one! None of ours is a nominee of the prefecture!” Thirdly, Jaures had charged the P.S. de F. with also supporting the ministry;—Guesde illustrated the difference between an incidental vote cast for a bourgeois ministry in danger of falling under parliamentary blows of jingoes thirsting for war, and the constant support through thick and thin of a bourgeois government, including the voting for its army and navy appropriations, as the Jauresists had done. The three posts were knocked from under the grandiose superstructure of Jaures' speech, and the speech itself lay a heap of ruins. It was all done within twenty minutes—a feat never to be forgotten; in itself worth going to Europe to witness, enjoy and profit by. I was told that, attacked by a chronic infirmity, after the vote that overthrew Jauresism, Guesde shook by the hand a friend, who called upon him, saying: “I can not now speak, but my heart rejoices.”

I make no question that among the many notabilities in the Socialist Movement of the Continent, Jules Guesde is the most pregnant. Should the evil genius of Bebel eventually prevail over the genius that, so far, has been exceptionally good to him, and preserve him alive when the crash will come upon Europe, it will be Guesde, not Bebel, that will dominate the day as the “deus ex machina” of the situation;¹—but of this more anon, when I shall reach the “Belgian Situation” of this serial.

¹ [See Editorial Note, below.]

EDITORIAL NOTE.

August Bebel died in August 1913, one year before the outbreak of World War I. Guesde lived on until July 1922, by which time he had betrayed all that he had stood for before the war broke out. Soon after his death, the *Weekly People* of August 26, 1922, reprinted this "Flashlight," in which "we see Guesde through the eyes of so keen an observer as De Leon, depicting him and his work in the heyday of his power." In what may be described as an obituary on Guesde, the *Weekly People* added: "Yet, keen as De Leon was, he could not possibly foresee what would happen to men when the catastrophe of the world war fell upon us, when, so to speak, the world was taken by the scruff of the neck and shaken like a terrier will shake a rat. In such crises, the unexpected often becomes the reality; seeming towers tremble and fall, and other men, scarcely heard of before, come to the front.

"It has often been observed that some men live too long for their own good. It was so with Guesde. Having stood for so many years, a tower of strength against the Jaures-Millerand-Briand-Viviani coterie of 'collaborators,' the irony of fate would have it that Jaures was killed at the very outbreak of the war, because of his attitude in opposition to it, while Guesde, the non-compromiser, the logical reasoner, the austere Marxist, joined the crowd he had always fought, became a social patriot, entered the French Cabinet—and "collaborated," though without portfolio. The first, a born straddler, died with the odor of sanctity upon him, martyred for having taken an uncompromising position against the war; the other, the very counter-type of the first, cast aside all he ever stood for, and, apparently befuddled by the imperialist propaganda for 'democracy,' used the last strength of his last years to help confuse the working class of Europe and destroy, for a time at least, the movement he labored so hard to build. The utter tragedy of this stands out the more glaringly when this act of self-destruction is considered in the light of the aftermath of the war to end war.

"Jules Guesde died on July 28, 1922; he was 77 when he died; he was 69 when he fell; he was 25 when he took a firm and decided stand against the war of Napoleon the Little in 1870—and went to jail for it, just as did Bebel and the elder Liebknecht on the other side of the border. This is proof conclusive that Guesde

lived too long; he outlived himself. The fates were much kinder to Bebel; they let him die before he could undo himself—as he surely would have done.

“It is in the light of these observations that the closing sentence of the present monograph by De Leon acquires a strange significance. We read: ‘Should the evil genius of Bebel eventually prevail over the genius that, so far, has been exceptionally good to him, and preserve him alive when the crash will come upon Europe, it will be Guesde not Bebel that will dominate the day as the “*dues ex machina*” of the situation,’—a cast-up of the two men that was true to life at the time, but ceased to be true in regard to Guesde when the supreme test came.

The good that men do to often dies with them; the evil that they do too often lives after them. The Guesdes, the Herves, the Kautsky’s, etc., in time to come will be chiefly remembered for the evil that they did to the labor movement.”

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

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slpns@slp.org