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EDITORIAL

## DEBS-BERGER.

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**T**HE leading portion of the defense, just made by Mr. Victor L. Berger to his conduct in the matter of the late Milwaukee election, strongly recalls, by contrast, the most remarkable passage in the speech made by Mr. Eugene V. Debs a year ago when he accepted the nomination of his party for President. Seeing that the two men are distinguished figures in their party, the two utterances should be paralleled, and carefully contemplated.

In accepting his party's nomination for President Mr. Debs said: "Hitherto we merely repeated and followed others. To-day, for the first time in the history of the American Movement, have we found an American expression for this Movement." It matters not that the platform, to which the passage refers is unworthy of the praise thus bestowed upon it, nor does it matter, in the point at issue, that the statement is in other respects inaccurate. In both respects allowance may be made for the exultation of the moment felt by a candidate upon whom a nomination has just been conferred. But while the exultation of the moment may have driven Mr. Debs into expressions that will not stand close scanning in point of fact, it did elevate him to the utterance of a noble aspiration—noble because sound. A revolutionary movement that follows and parrots is in its babyhood: it has not yet got its bearings. Even in Europe where the several nations are so closely dovetailed that most of them are at substantially the identical evolutionary stage socially and politically, each impresses the stamp of its own individuality upon its own Movement. The stamp of its own individuality must be infinitely more marked upon the Movement in America. The stamp on the Movement in Italy may differ from the stamp on the Movement in Germany by merely the difference of climatic temperament, but the stamp on the Movement in America must differ from the stamp on any and all the countries of Europe for the weighty reason that America is head and shoulders

above all other nations in capitalist development—politically and socially, as well as economically. The stamp on the Movement in America must, perforce and accordingly, be, not merely superficially different, but radically so; it must present the difference between the fully developed flower and the bud yet in several stages of greenness; to follow and parrot were, on the part of America, to fall below, to be untrue to her mission, to the duty that social evolution has devolved upon her. The aspiration that found utterance, however wrongly applied it was, in Mr. Debs' words was, accordingly, admirable; it is the attitude of the Socialist Labor Party; it is a light that leads upward and forward.

Downward and backward, on the contrary, is the aspiration, if such can be called "aspiration", that found utterance in the main portion of Mr. Berger's defense. It was "other European countries, Germany, the classic land of Socialism, they all have done and still do what I did when I, a reputed head-light of Socialism, recommended a capitalist candidate in default of a Socialist for the suffrage of the Working Class"! This is a crimping of the Movement of full-blown capitalist America into the backward feudal conditions that the ruling class of Europe is keeping their country in; this is to ignore the improved, and therefore different conditions that prevail in America; this is to "follow" and "parrot"; this is to allow to go to waste the higher social evolution of America, and to set one's pace to and take his cue from a lower development; this is as if the eagle, in his flight through the air, were to take his cue from the hampered locomotion that the lower stage of evolution binds the lizard to.

Different elements in Social Movements find their voice in certain different individuals. The element that is vocalized by Eugene V. Debs tends in one direction; the element that is vocalized by Victor L. Berger tends in the opposite. In such cases, when two such elements find themselves, or develop in one and the same party, either rupture or gangrene is inevitable.

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

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