

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 305.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

A SIGN OF THE TIMES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Modernists' movement in the Roman Catholic Church has reached the point of drawing widespread attention to itself. It is everywhere considered "one of the most significant signs of the times." So it is. Its theological aspect does not concern Socialism, which is wholly foreign to theology. There is, however, another feature of Modernism that is purely terrestrial, and as such falls well within the province of Socialist science. It is in this respect that Modernism is, indeed, "a significant sign of the times" to the Socialist.

The Modernists deny the charge made against them by the Pope that they start from a certain system of philosophy and that that system dictates their critical methods. They say that, on the contrary, it is the critical method that dictates their system of philosophy. The Modernists, for instance, point out that there was a time when the Bible was regarded by the Christian world as a divine revelation, true in every part, and inspired by God working directly through human instruments such as Moses and Joshua, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; but that criticism, by proving that the Pentateuch could not possibly have been written in its entirety by Moses, and that the Gospels are not the work of the authors to whom they are attributed, thereby compels them, and should compel the Church, to "speak the language of their age", that is, adapt its philosophy to the revelations of criticism. No doubt the Modernists are perfectly sincere in their declaration that it is not their philosophy that controls their criticism, but critical facts that control their philosophy. They nevertheless err. It is in this interesting, unconscious error that lies the deep significance of Modernism.

Homeopathy has made its own a principle quite general in medical science, to wit, that results do not depend upon the size of the dose only, but also upon the physical condition of the patient. The same principle is fundamental in Socialist

science. Results are dependent, not upon aspirations only, but also and essentially upon material conditions: not all the sense of brotherly love could bring about the Co-operative Commonwealth before the instruments of production and the methods of production had reached that point of perfection where man is compelled to work co-operatively and where production then becomes so fruitful that arduous toil ceases to be a necessity. The truth of this proposition is found in biology as well as in sociology. Long before the Modernists yielded to the revelations of criticism and gave up one philosophy to take up a new, these revelations of criticism had been made. The present Modernists did not then adopt the revelations. They do now. What has happened between now and then? What happened is that the material conditions have changed so powerfully that the physical condition, so to speak, of the Modernists has become sensitive to the dose, so to speak, of criticism.

It is in this respect that the phenomenal strength, numerical and intellectual, of Modernism is truly a “sign of the times.” Its strength is a gauge by which to measure the depth and width of the physical and material foundation upon which all philosophy must in the end rest. It is in this sense that the Modernist outbreak may be and is justly regarded as one of the leading signs of the times. That the Modernists themselves, however unconscious of the physical moving spring which sets them in motion, nevertheless act obedient and responsive to it, appears from the question which they put to the present powers of their Church: “Is her [the Church’s] mission to be limited to a suspicious vigilance over the rude and simple faith of her rapidly dwindling followers?”

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

Uploaded January 2010

slpns@slp.org