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EDITORIAL

## THE SKEPTIC IN THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT.

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**T**HE renewed outbreak in the Socialist press of Europe against Edward Bernstein is one of the evidences of the backwardness of things social and political in Europe, compared with America. Europe has one Bernstein, and he creates a sensation; America has scores of them, they barely “have their day.” This notwithstanding, the meaning of the apparition that may be termed “Bernstein,” is interesting enough to deserve a moment’s close attention. Once understood many a surprise is forestalled, many a disappointment is avoided, and many an outbreak of rage is escaped. “Bernstein” is a psychological manifestation in the world of socio-political activity that has its exact and well-known counterpart in the world of activity in the natural sciences.

The human race may be roughly divided into two main sections from the viewpoint of intellectual and temperamental qualifications. One section, by far the larger, is torpid; it does not “perceive facts;” it takes notice of them only when they fall over its ears like a pile of bricks; then it flies to the other extreme, its former conservatism being transformed into the swiftness of a torrent. The other section may be termed the “sensitive” portion of society. It quickly feels and perceives, and as quickly sets itself to the task of redressing wrong. But this “sensitive element” is not of one sort. In its turn it falls into two sets, of characteristics so distinct and yet, for a time at least, so alike, that it is of no little moment to distinguish them in time.

The sensitiveness that is typical of this element proceeds from remotely different sources with its two component sets. With one set, the sensitiveness draws its sap from a constructive bent of mind; it manifests itself along with more vigorous physiques; accordingly, it is persistent and tenacious. Evil it justly looks upon as destructive. With this active element in its make-up, it is unflinching in its repulsion of evil, and unflagging in its determination to seek for constructive redress. In a rapid sketch of these constructive spirits, Huxley points out how systems of Theology, of Philosophy, or epoch-making Poems are the fruits of the

restless, constructive mind. Fantastic conceptions may spring from their midst, but never do they give birth to the deserter.

It is markedly different with the second set of which the sensitive element is made up. With them, not constructiveness is the active principle: For that they are of too weak an intellectual and physical fiber. The active principle with them is skepticism. It is not that evil repels them; when they array themselves against evil they are moved by the barrenness of incredulity; consequently these end in “the infidelity which asserts the problem to be insoluble.” The deserter is the plentiful fruit of this set. That fruit is “Bernstein” in the domain of socio-political activity.

Despite the seeming likeness of the two sets they can be easily distinguished long before they have borne fruit. The well-grounded information of the one is ever lacking in the other; the solid blows that come from the one, are substituted with the superficial sneer that ever denoted the latter. Resistance soon wears out the mere skeptic; with him, discouragement alternates with vaulting fits of unwarranted expectation. The time is certain to arrive when, as in the instance of Edward Bernstein, he gives the problem over as insoluble, and under a thinner or a thicker cloud of dust, deserts, like Edward Bernstein has done, over to the enemy he had fought in company with the constructive Socialist minds of whom he was mistaken to be one.

No surprise need ever be felt in the Labor or Socialist movement at the turnings of Bernsteins. Whoever is taken in by the gentry has none to blame but himself. The skeptic carries the brand of Cain on his brow and on his words.

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