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FIRST EDITORIAL

THE BELGIAN TURMOIL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

INFORMATION is yet too sparse, and the situation of so small a country as Belgium—whose very independence needs the guarantee of its powerful neighbors—is too subject to sudden lurches either to form an accurate opinion of what is up, least of all forecast the result. For all that, certain broad outlines are clear. Within these lines certain conclusions are now safe.

Unquestionably there is a deep and far-reaching turmoil in Belgium. Troops are out to check thousands upon thousands of workingmen and other people. Brick-bats and shots fill the air. Not a few have been wounded and killed. What is it all about? Is it for the emancipation of the proletariat, in short for Socialism? The leader of the Belgian Socialists, Emile Van der Velde, addressing a large concourse of workingmen, is reported to have said on the 18th instant:

“The Catholic Party ignores the popular will. If his Majesty grants the demand for universal suffrage, while preserving our ideal, we will for the present set aside all idea of realizing it.”

In other words, not Socialism but the ballot is the issue, and the forces that really are facing each other just now are the workingmen and small bourgeois, on the one hand, and the Clericals on the other. From this two interesting facts leap to sight.

1st. The Socialist Movement, almost all over Europe, finds itself tangled up in bourgeois issues. The bourgeois, hardly anywhere in Europe completed their own revolutions. The path over which Socialism must march is there strewn with obstacles of feudal nature, left untouched by the bourgeois revolution. Of course these obstacles must be first removed. But equally evident it is that a revolutionary Movement that has to lay by its own ideals so as to first carry out important ideals left unaccomplished by its predecessor, is bound to travel on a zig-zag road, that can

in no way serve as a map for the Movement in this country, where the bourgeois revolution made a clean sweep of all feudal encumbrances. It is clear that the Socialist Movement of Europe, as a whole, can neither set the standard nor mark the path for the Socialist Movement in America. Socialism in Europe can{,} to-day, be at best an aspiration. Not so here.

2nd. There is quite extensively a notion that the organized Catholic Church is a barrier to Socialism. The language of many a dignitary of the Catholic Church justifies, and the language of the Depews: "The Catholic Church is the best police" tends further to strengthen the notion. Probably the attitude of the Catholic or Clerical party in Belgium may be quoted as further confirmation.

We hold otherwise. What is going on in Belgium is proof that the Catholic Church, much as it would like to, cannot for all time control the masses to their injury. The masses in Belgium, now out in general strike, and the many more in sympathy with them, have been brought up Catholics, at least most of them. A time was when these clericals controlled all these people. Do they to-day? Nay, more, are not these formerly priest-ridden Belgians further emancipated from their former "spiritual" masters than the parson-ridden proletariat of Protest England, across the Channel?

Obviously no priestly or other pulpiter influence can for all time dominate the masses. The "police" upon which the Depews lean to scuttle Socialism in America will at the right moment be found by them to be a hollow reed to lean on.

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

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