

International Socialist Congress 1904 Bebel's Answer to Jaurès on "Political Tactics"

When the German Social-Democracy discussed at the Dresden Congress the proposition that is being now debated, nobody thought of bringing it before the International Congress. Nevertheless I am pleased that the Parti Socialiste de France have submitted it to the consideration of the bodies which form the great International Socialist Party, because, contrary to the opinion of Jaurès, this proposition is applicable, in the same manner as it is to Germany, to Belgium, France, Holland, and all other countries.

When Kautsky and Singer drew up the Dresden proposition they took into consideration not alone the conditions under which things exist in Germany, but also certain circumstances that are inseparable from the social ambient created by the system of capitalist production in all the countries where it reigns.

Jaurès pretends that there is such an enormous difference between Germany and France that it is absolutely impossible that an International Congress could adopt rules of Socialist conduct practised with success in one of these nations so as to apply them to the other. Jaurès suffers from a sad error, because although there are differences between France and Germany, they are not so great as he supposes.

I must point out that in the treatment of this question I do not consider it from a particular standpoint which the country where I live supplies me with, but from a general standpoint. *All nations may see themselves very soon attacked by this illness that we want to put an end to now, Switzerland as Holland—*

Troelstra (Holland): We are not ill.

Bebel: You are not, but you could be so tomorrow, and it is necessary to avoid this happening.

Two perfectly defined tendencies exist in the German Social-Democracy. The two were discussed in the Dresden Congress, and afterwards the proletariat decided in favour of that one which it considered as having best hit the mark. Once the subject was resolved upon, nobody has been found wanting in respect to what was agreed, nobody has produced disagreements in our great party. In France the situation is very different; between Socialists there are serious disputes which do not exist in Germany.

Jaurès admits, like ourselves, the class war, and considers its antagonisms as irreducible; but he also believes that the proletariat ought to work with the radical elements of the middle class, to ensure its own emancipation, if these elements lend themselves to help them in their struggle for liberty. These words of Jaurès enclose a censure for those who do not march in unison with the so-called "progressive" forces of the middle-class, since we spurn a means of serving the cause of the proletariat.

The censure is not just; we avail ourselves of all means for bettering the condition of our comrades the workers. We do not spurn reforms; but what we do refuse, and that in the most explicit manner, is the coming to an agreement with any faction whatsoever of the middle-class, no matter by what name it may go. An agreement of this kind cannot be of any other consequence than to make Socialism responsible for the oppression which the capitalists exercise over the masses of the working-class. Besides, this agreement would give rise to an error that being persevered in by the workers, would lead them to abandon the saving camp of Socialism to throw themselves with closed eyes into the abyss of anarchism. The policy adopted by the French Socialist Party has had two effects: *to throw from its bosom the best elements for the fight*, the most self-denying, and give entrance to those who accept the attitude of this party in relation to the Minister Combes in order to reach high political posts. As you see, the results of the Revisionists' policy could not be more disastrous.

In the most flourishing period of French Ministerial Socialism, France has given spectacles which incite the passions of all those who feel the flame of Socialism burning in their breasts. Millerand, the Socialist Millerand, who received, as the most correct of courtiers, during his occupation of the Ministry, kings and queens visiting Paris on the occasion of the Exhibition of 1900, did not remember that an international Socialist Congress was about to be held at approximately the same date; more, he

consented that the free exercise of the right to public demonstration should be denied the Socialists, a thing that was permitted to them in 1889. Strange paradox. The *Liberal* Ministry of Waldeck-Rousseau did not permit in 1900 the exercise of an individual right which the Conservative Ministry that ruled France in 1889 authorised! I cannot understand [with great indignation] how all the delegates did not arise possessed of the same anger, to protest against the cynicism of those governors that call themselves “democratic”—

Adler (Austria): If you refer to what occurred in the Père-Lechaise demonstration, I must state that the Congress had already concluded its tasks.

Bebel: That is true, but it does not matter; the delegates who were still in Paris and the French Socialist Party ought to have formulated that protest.

Jaurès, in order to explain his reasoning on the diversity of proceedings that should be applied in France and in Germany, tells us Germans: You cannot compare your situation with ours. You live under an Imperialist regime, while the regime to which we are subject is the Republican. The observation is correct. We must confess that did it depend on us, the Imperial Government of Germany would not have another instant of life. But this does not justify the attitude of the Ministerial Socialists, because the proceedings of the French Republic are so dull and arbitrary that I find myself in the sad necessity of becoming an advocate of the Monarchy.

In Germany we have liberty of union and of association, which the Authority respects. In our strikes armed force never intervenes. On the other hand, in France the liberty of union and association is constantly being trampled upon, and in all strikes, and under any pretext whatever, the Government sends infantry, cavalry, and even artillery to the field of action. Now, before this conduct which shows how great is middle-class precocity, I ask Jaurès: How is it possible to explain that a Government which proceeds in this manner has included amongst its number an individual Socialist, and now has the aid of a Parliamentary minority?

The exterior clothing with which the Monarchy clothes itself does not hide its pretensions. At first sight all of us know what a Government of the capitalist class symbolises. Nevertheless, sometimes conscience pricks, and abandoning being logical with itself, realises acts of justice to the workers, which injure the masters.

The bourgeois Republic decks itself out in raiment which cajoles the masses, lulls them with fine words, makes them promises which are on the lips but not in the heart, and this acts so that later, when workmen are assassinated in Châlons-sur-Marne, in France; in Colorado of the USA; or in Vale, of Switzerland, the cynicism, the shamelessness and criminality of these actions appear in greater relief. As you can observe, there is not the difference that Jaurès establishes between the Monarchy and the Republic. And this, I say, in reference to the economic system, takes place as well with militarism, clericalism, and other problems.

After acts such as those I have related do not be astonished that I deduce that there is an *absolute incompatibility of the office of Minister to a capitalist government with the character of a militant socialist*.

The force of working-class emancipation has taken root in the class-consciousness that the workers possess. I remember very well when on a certain occasion Marx and Engels were asked how was it that England being a country where industry was so developed and having so liberal and progressive a Government, how was it that under such conditions Socialism was so little evolved? They answered that the English middle-class was so astute and intelligent, that they had arranged everything so that historic and social acts were mystified, introducing confusion and division into the ranks of the working-class.

I think it to be my duty to affirm that in questions of greater importance, in those of more interest for public life and national prosperity, Germany has nothing to envy France; on the contrary, in what concerns the navy and colonial question, etc which affect the productive classes in so great a manner, France has made no concession whatever, and in Germany, yes. Further, in the fiscal system, the income tax in Prussia is an ideal compared with what exists in France.

Although it may appear strange, on account of what is now going on in France, the capitalists will never destroy clericalism, because it is an arm which in crucial moments can be used against the workers. I agree and applaud the work now being accomplished in France, but it must not be forgotten that in thirty years' time nothing worthy of note will have been done in this sense.

If a fight of this nature were undertaken tomorrow in our country we would assist with vigour, but we would take good care not to contract any compromise that might diminish our independence, and would not abandon the defence of working-class interests, not even in moments when the struggle may be hottest. *The Jaurès method is of use only in making anarchists.*

It cannot be denied that this Congress is competent to give judgement on the question of tactics. Jaurès himself maintained this opinion when the Kautsky resolution was voted upon at the Congress of 1900. Moreover, if we can discuss protection and free-trade, the general strike, etc, why cannot we treat of tactics?

With respect to the design which guides us in asking that the Dresden Proposition be voted upon, everyone who knows us will say what is true, that we do not attempt to whimsically impose an opinion, but to give an advice, to furnish a rule of conduct that is the outcome of thirty-six years of experience.

Tactics may be modified, but the idea will never disappear which inspires the Dresden Resolution, an idea that the proletariat will never abandon, because it is the only one capable of carrying it to the close of its day's labour—the expropriation of the dominant class.

(translated from *El Heraldo de Madrid*)

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