

Dear Sorge

This morning I carried the last corrected proofs of the Preface [\[1\]](#) to the publisher and now I am at last rid of this nightmare. I expect to be able to send you a copy of the translation in a fortnight. The day after tomorrow Mrs Liebknecht is coming here to wait for her husband who only left New York the day before yesterday.

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The Henry George *boom* has of course brought to light a colossal mass of fraud and I am glad I was not there. But despite it all it has been an epoch-making day. The Germans have not understood how to use their theory as a lever which could set the American masses in motion; they do not understand the theory themselves for the most part and treat it in a doctrinaire and dogmatic way, as something which has got to be learnt off by heart but which will then supply all needs without more ado. To them it is a *credo* [creed] and not a guide to action. Added to which they learn no English on principle. Hence the American masses had to seek out their own way and seem to have found it for the time being in the K(nights) of L(avour), whose confused principles and ludicrous organisation appear to correspond to their own confusion. But according to all I hear the K. of L. are a real power, especially in New England and the West, and are becoming more so every day owing to the brutal opposition of the capitalists. I think it is necessary to work inside them, to form within this still quite plastic mass a core of people who understand the movement and its aims and will therefore themselves take over the leadership, at least of a section, when the inevitably impending break-up of the present "order" takes place. The rottenest side of the K. of L. was their political neutrality, which resulted in sheer trickery on the part of the Powderlys, etc. ; but this has had

its edge taken off by the behaviour of the masses at the November elections, especially in New York. The first great step of importance for every country newly entering into the movement is always the organisation of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers' party. And this step has been taken, far more rapidly than we had a right to hope, and that is the main thing. That the first programme of this party is still confused and highly deficient, that it has set up the banner of Henry George, these are inevitable evils but also only transitory ones. The masses must have time and opportunity to develop and they can only have the opportunity when they have their own movement--no matter in what form so long as it is only *their own* movement--in which they are driven further by their own mistakes and learn wisdom by hurting themselves. The movement in America is in the same position as it was with us before 1848; the really intelligent people there will first of all have the same part to play as that played by the Communist League among the workers' associations before 1848. Except that in America now things will go infinitely more quickly; for the movement to have attained such election successes after scarcely eight months of existence is absolutely unheard of. And what is still lacking will be set going by the bourgeoisie; nowhere in the whole world do they come out so shamelessly and tyrannically as here, and your judges have got Bismarck's smart practitioners in the German Reich brilliantly driven off the field. Where the bourgeoisie conducts the struggle by methods of this kind, things come rapidly to a decision, and if we in Europe do not hurry up the Americans will soon be ahead of us. But it is just now that it is doubly necessary to have a few people there from our side with a firm seat in their saddles where theory and long-proved tactics are concerned, and who can also write and speak English; for, from good historical reasons, the Americans are worlds behind in all theoretical things, and while they did not bring over any medieval institutions from Europe they did bring over masses of medieval traditions, religion, English common (feudal) law, superstition, spiritualism,

in short every kind of imbecility which was not directly harmful to business and which is now very serviceable for making the masses stupid. And if there are people at hand there whose minds are theoretically clear, who can tell them the consequences of their own mistakes beforehand and make it clear to them that every movement which does not keep the destruction of the wage system in view the whole time as its final aim is bound to go astray and fail--then many a piece of nonsense may be avoided and the process considerably shortened. But it must take place in the English way, the specific German character must be cut out and for that the gentlemen of the *Sozialist* have hardly the qualifications, while those of the *Volkszeitung* are only more intelligent where business is concerned.

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In Europe the effect of the American elections in November was tremendous. That England and America in particular had no labour movement up to now was the big trump card of the radical republicans everywhere, especially in France. Now these gentlemen are dumbfounded; Mr Clemenceau [\[2\]](#) in particular saw the whole foundation of his policy collapse on 2 November. 'Look at America', was his eternal motto; 'where there is a real republic, there is no poverty and no labour movement!' And the same thing is happening to the Progressives and 'democrats' in Germany and here — where they are also witnessing the beginnings of their own movement. The very fact that the movement is so sharply accentuated as a labour movement and has sprung up so suddenly and forcefully has stunned these people completely.

Here the lack of any competition, on the one hand, and the government's stupidity, on the other, have enabled the gentlemen of the Social-Democratic Federation [\[3\]](#) to occupy a position which they did not dare to dream of three months ago. The hubbub about the plan — never

intended to be taken seriously — of a parade behind the Lord Mayor's procession on 9 November, and later the same hubbub about the Trafalgar Square meeting on 21 November, when the mounting of artillery was talked of and the government finally backed down — all this forced the gentlemen of the SDF to hold a very ordinary meeting at last on the 21st, without empty rodomontades and pseudo-revolutionary demonstrations with *obligato* mob accompaniment — and the philistines suddenly gained respect for the people who had stirred up such a fuss and yet behaved so respectably. And since, except for the SDF, nobody takes any notice of the unemployed, who constitute a fairly numerous group each winter during the chronic stagnation of business and suffer very acute hardships, the SDF is winning the game hands down. The labour movement is beginning here and no mistake, and if the SDF is the first to reap the harvest that is the result of the cowardice of the radicals and the stupidity of the Socialist League, <sup>[4]</sup> which is squabbling with the Anarchists and cannot get rid of them, and hence has no time to concern itself with the living movement that is taking place outside under its very nose. Incidentally, how long Hyndman <sup>[5]</sup> & Co will persist in their present comparatively rational mode of action is uncertain. Anyhow I expect that they will soon commit colossal blunders again; they're in too much of a hurry. And then they will see that this can't be done in a serious movement.

Things are getting prettier all the time in Germany. In Leipzig sentences of as much as four years *penal servitude* for 'sedition'! They want to provoke a riot at all costs.

At present I still have seven small jobs in my desk — Italian and French translations, prefaces, new editions, etc — and then I shall start working unflaggingly on Volume 3.

*Your old*  
*FE*

