

The Fight in Germany and the International Situation

By R. Palme Dutt (London)

The events in Germany throw a heavy responsibility on the working-class movement in every country. The international counter-revolution has struck its blow against the strongest working-class movement outside the Soviet Union. We must be prepared for a speedy extension of this offensive in every country and against the Soviet Union. The criminal folly of all the illusions of petit-bourgeois democracy are revealed to the widest masses throughout the world. The hour calls for the unification of the proletarian forces in every country for active struggle against the fascist offensive and against war.

What is the international significance of the Hitler coup ?

First, it carries forward the struggle of the working class against capitalism to a new plane on a world scale, marking the end of the conditions of stabilisation and the mortal blow to the social democratic illusions which were built on the basis of stabilisation, and confronting the working class with the barest alternatives of revolutionary mass struggle or defeat.

Second, it brings a new series of relations into the world situation, sharpening and intensifying every antagonism and leading to a position pregnant with **war** at every point.

Both these aspects of the new situation need the closest examination and understanding by the international working class.

Taking first the widest political significance of the Hitler coup, it means the direct **break with legality** by the bourgeoisie. The case of Germany, that is, of the most advanced capitalist country in Europe, with the most developed working-class movement, where the workers' revolution had already won power and social democracy had only been able to persuade the workers to surrender back power to the bourgeoisie in the name of establishing "the freest republic in the world"—the final outcome of this whole process in the smashing of the constitution by the bourgeoisie, the establishment of a fascist dictatorship and the violent suppression of the working-class movement, has a decisive world significance going far beyond the Italian example. Germany has been throughout **the central ground of the theory and practice of the Second International**; and it is through Germany that the heaviest lesson has been taught to the working class of the whole world what is the consequence for the workers of the policy of the Second International.

Fifteen years ago the workers held all power in their hands in Germany. Kautsky could write (in the 1931 Preface to the third edition of "The Proletarian Revolution"):

"In November, 1918, the Revolution was the work of the proletariat alone. The proletariat won so all-powerful a position that the bourgeois elements, to begin with, did not dare to attempt any resistance."

That was fifteen years ago. Where is that power to-day? What have the leaders of social democracy done with that power which the German workers won by their blood and their sacrifice and hopefully entrusted to their hands for the fulfilment of the socialist revolution? The leaders of social democracy gave the power back to the bourgeoisie. In the name of "democracy" they gave the power back to the bourgeoisie, disarmed the workers, armed the officers' corps, suppressed the workers' councils, drowned the workers' resistance in blood, chained the workers' organisations to the service of capitalist restoration, and on this basis proclaimed the victory of "freedom" and "peace." To-day we see the outcome of this policy for the working class.

There is no middle course between the Workers' Dictatorship and the Iron Heel of Reaction. That is the lesson of the German Revolution, as of every revolution since 1848. Because the majority of the German working class were not yet ready in 1918, when power was in their hands, to follow the Bolshevik

line and set up the Workers' Dictatorship because they followed the social democratic party leadership and put their hopes in the promises of "democracy," their reward is—Hitler and Von Papen. That is the iron logic of these fifteen years. Step by step, the circle is completed. First, social democracy occupies the leading governmental role, so long as it is needed to suppress the workers' revolution. Second, this task completed, it passes to a junior coalition role for the tasks of capitalist reconstruction. Third, with this task also completed, it is contemptuously thrust aside from government to perform the role of "voicing" and paralysing the workers' opposition. Fourth, even the bourgeois democrats and centre are pushed on one side, and the handful of militarists, junkers and fascist leaders openly proclaim their power and announce the "end of democracy."

The fascist dictatorship in Germany is a sign, not of the strength of German capitalism, but of its extreme weakness, of the intensity of the crisis destroying all stability, of the rising revolutionary discontent of the masses, of the impotence and failure of all the previous methods of deception to hold in that rising discontent. It is a stage opening new struggles, not closing old ones.

The Mussolini coup of 1922 took place at the close of the post-war revolutionary wave, when the world situation was passing to the period of capitalist reconstruction and stabilisation. Therefore its regime could share in that partial stabilisation. To-day the world situation is the opposite. The capitalist crisis is extreme, increasing, and insoluble by peaceful means. We move into a new era of wars and revolutions. In this situation the Hitler coup represents **not the close but the opening of New revolutionary struggles**. What receives its mortal blow is the illusions upon which social democracy is built. The working class receives the most powerful impetus to revolutionary consciousness and to revolutionary unity.

Just for this reason the international bourgeoisie views with manifest apprehension the consequences of the Hitler regime, despite all their delight at the blows against the proletariat. Not only the consistently cautious City organ the "**Economist**" gives characteristic expression to these fears (March 4th, 1933):

"It is a dangerous road. True, the Communist movement has grown to formidable proportions. One thing, however, is sure, and that is that the present developments will strengthen it and drive Germany towards both extremes. And if the Right in its present temper seizes power, what of the future? After all, it was not Communism, but the Wilhelmian compound of Junkerdom with Commercial Imperialism, that was responsible for Germany's supreme disaster in 1918. No thinking person can fail to ask himself whether like causes will not produce like effects."

But even the extreme Right militarist "**Morning Post**" is no less open in its alarm (24th February, 1933):

"It will be impossible to enforce working-class submission for ever. . . . The Nazis are driving the working class into unity and creating for the first time a real revolutionary danger."

In the same way the "**Temps**" expresses its anxiety:

"No one can tell what is reserved for the German people after to-morrow. The only fact that can be established is that the German crisis, which has been developing for months, is now degenerating into a civil war, and is pushing a great nation still further into anarchy and political chaos. No one in history has yet succeeded in establishing order in a durable manner through disorder."

The Swedish liberal "**Stockholms Tidningen**" expresses in all simplicity the basis of alarm:

"The German government is destroying just those democratic forces which are best capable of combating the red danger."

That is, social democracy is the indispensable basis for the maintenance of bourgeois rule against the workers' revolution. Too great a weakening and discrediting of social democracy raises at once the danger that the majority of the workers will become revolutionised and pass from its control.

Thus from left to right the international bourgeois press expresses the same alarm, that the Nazi regime will result, not in the suppression of Communism, but in the **enormous strengthening of Communism** and eventual victory of the Communist revolution.

But the immediate fight confronting the working class, in the face of this blow of fascism, is serious and urgent in the extreme. The offensive of reaction will not rest for a moment, but will use its hour of victory to push forward its positions to the utmost, while the workers' forces are still unprepared and disunited owing to social democracy's refusal of the united front. The question of **the advance to war** now comes immediately to the front rank.

In general, the advent of the Nazi-Nationalist regime means the intensification of all international antagonisms. The French-German conflict advances to a new stage. The days of the Daladier Cabinet are manifestly numbered; the ground is prepared for the transition to a government of national concentration, wiping out the remains of the "left" election victory of 1931, and the German events will hasten this process, leading to the direct confrontation of Right nationalist governments in France and Germany. This process goes with the ever sharper definition of the antagonistic blocs of France and the Little Entente against Germany, Italy and Hungary. At the same time the Polish question comes acutely to the front.

But at the present moment the strength of the wave of international reaction and the intensity of the capitalist crisis raises still more basic questions. The nationalist line represented by Von Papen (as against von Seeckt), the line of the bargain with France and Britain for the common front against the Soviet Union in return for Germany rearming and other possible compensations or revision of Versailles, is now strongly to the front and is reflected in Hitler's virulent anti-Soviet speech. German fascism still makes prominent display of hostility to France; but this may easily be the precedent to a bargain. It is sufficiently noticeable that the direct violation of Versailles by Germany in respect of the official arming of the Nazi storm troops as auxiliary police has aroused so far no protest from the French government, nor even strong comment in the French press. The sudden journey of MacDonald to Geneva is directly connected with the question of German rearming. There is even talk of a possible joint meeting of MacDonald, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini. It is more than ever necessary to be prepared for a sudden advance of the anti-Soviet plans of imperialism, parallel to the Japanese offensive, with British-French support, in Jehol and open threatening of Manchuria.

At this point the question of **American policy** is of critical importance for the future development of the world situation. There are undoubtedly strong forces and financial interests associated with Roosevelt which are pressing towards recognition of the Soviet Union, all the more in view of the intensity of the antagonism against Japan. But the extreme present phase of the crisis in America, and strong fears of the internal situation, may lead to sudden and violent turns of policy. There was never more need for the working class forces to be prepared for a situation of extreme menace in the immediate future.

The decisive need is the building up of **the united working-class front**, not only in Germany, but in the countries outside Germany, and especially in Britain and France. The lesson of the German events must be learnt by the workers in every country. At each successive stage of the crisis and of the building up of fascism the social democratic party leadership has refused the successive proposals of the Communist Party for a united front of struggle against fascism, has declared the moment not ripe for action, has advocated the policy of the "lesser evil," and so has led the workers to ever greater surrender after surrender to the bourgeoisie. This path must be ended, not only in

Germany, but in every country. Only the united workers' mass struggle can end the ever-increasing advance of fascism and of the drive to war. The responsibility of the workers in Britain and France, the two countries responsible for the maintenance of Versailles, and the two countries where the open fascist weapon has not yet been brought into play by the bourgeoisie, is especially strong to enter into the closest solidarity with their German comrades in the common struggle, and to bring all their forces into play to check the advance of reaction.

The issues of the present situation are serious and urgent in the extreme. Every delay and every weakness are heavily paid for. But the path of united struggle, to which the workers are inevitably and increasingly awakening under the force of events, will lead to rapid transformation of the situation. We must exert every effort to hasten this forward.

Germany After the Elections

The first manifesto of the so-called National Government, **Hitler's** latest speech in Koenigsberg, both proclaimed that the object of the elections was to "shatter Marxism." In **Herr Goehring's** announcement of victory, in which this central figure of the fascist dictatorship in Germany triumphantly enumerates the results of the elections, there is no mention of Marxism having been shattered. There is very good reason for this omission. The 5 million votes polled by the C.P. of Germany, this proclamation of allegiance by the best proletarians to the party of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the party which is the deadly enemy of fascism, pierces like an arrow into the flesh of the fascist masters of Germany. The victor in these elections is the Communist Party.

For under what conditions were these elections carried out? The leaders of the national socialist "labour party" staged a large-scale criminal provocation by means of the fire in the Reichstag. They stirred up among their supporters, and beyond them among the whole of the bourgeoisie, a savage pogrom-mood against the Communist movement. A state of emergency was proclaimed over the whole country. Thousands of functionaries of the Communist Party and of the revolutionary mass organisations were thrown into prison. The whole of the press, all the election addresses, all the election placards of the Party were prohibited. All legal activity of the Communists was forcibly prevented. Savage terror against the revolutionary working class raged in the streets. Innumerable workers were brutally beaten or foully murdered by the national socialist terrorist bands.

On election day itself methods of fascist terror were employed which can only be described as Balkan methods. Everywhere heavily armed fascist brown-shirts came on the scene as guardians of the "election freedom" "guaranteed" by Hindenburg. Fresh arrests of revolutionary workers took place throughout the whole country. Many thousands of workers were placed under observation; they were not allowed to leave their houses during the time of the election. Hundreds of thousands of votes cast by revolutionary workers were declared to be invalid. Hundreds of thousands of bogus votes were placed to the credit of the national socialists.

That was the situation, that was the civil war atmosphere in which the "free elections" took place. That is how the national socialists managed to record an increased vote of 5½ million. That is how the Communist Party "lost" a million votes compared with the November elections.

The fact that in spite of the monstrous terror 5 million toilers cast their vote for Communism cannot be too highly appreciated. These 5 million votes are a determined challenge to the fascist Hitler government, to the German bourgeoisie.

The social democracy, which, even if many of its newspapers were suppressed, was able to continue its election agitation up to the last, was able to maintain its position. This was to a large extent due to a demagogic manoeuvre: the social democratic leaders sought to persuade the masses that it was useless to vote for the Communists, as in any event the Communist seats would be annulled. This manoeuvre was not without effect on certain strata of the working class. These masses will, however, very soon realise how much "worth" are the votes they cast for the social democratic party.

Thanks to the furious terror against the working class, the two fascist government parties have, as a matter of fact, obtained a narrow majority in the Reichstag and in the Prussian Diet. The procedure of the fascists in **Hamburg, Bremen, Hessen, Baden, Wuerttemberg, Saxony and Bavaria**—in each case a coup d'état—clearly shows the line of further development. Hitler's storm troops occupy the Ministries and town halls, and where they encounter a weak resistance the Reich's government intervenes and transfers the executive power to the S.A. leaders. President Hindenburg, whom the social democratic party elected as the "guardian of the Constitution," gives his signature to all these coup d'états. In the South German states the centre and the Bavarian people's party have capitulated. In actual fact the Hitler-Papen government is all-powerful to-day in Germany. But even this omnipotence does not suffice in order to "exterminate Marxism."

The position of the German nationalists in the government has been very weakened as a result of the election success of the national socialists. Whilst up to 5th March the differences between the two government parties were easily bridged over, as for the time being they were pursuing the common aim of crushing the working class and securing their position, these differences are now again coming to the forefront. Very symptomatic of these differences was General **Blomberg's** proposal to proclaim a **military** state of siege, i.e., to transfer the whole executive power to the Reichswehr, which suggestion, however, Hitler promptly rejected.

The most important thing to be taken into account in judging the immediate future development is the fact that the world crisis of capitalism has again become further aggravated as a result of the American financial crisis. The intensified world economic crisis is bound to have an effect upon Germany. The class antagonisms, and also the differences within the bourgeoisie in Germany, will again increase on the shaken economic foundation; the economic misery among those sections of the working people who support the national socialists, and whom Hitler cannot and will not give either bread or freedom, will act as a factor disintegrating the fascist ranks.

The second most important thing is the **extreme aggravation of the foreign political antagonisms**. The strained situation in Danzig caused by the landing of Polish troops on the western platte has sharply raised the question of the eastern frontiers of Germany. The increase of the fascist apparatus of power by the Nazi auxiliary police and certain developments in the Reichswehr have not remained unobserved in Paris, and will undoubtedly not fail to have an effect.

The third and most important thing to be borne in mind in judging the immediate development is the **fight of the German working class**. Here it should be noted in the first place that the social democracy is still continuing its policy of capitulation. It surrenders all positions to fascism without a fight, endeavours to dissociate itself as much as possible from Communism, and seeks with all means to oppose the Communist efforts to lead the masses into the fight against fascism, and this in spite of the fact that fascism continues to suppress organisations of the social democratic party. The national socialists already threaten to take possession of the reformist trade union organisations and convert them into auxiliary organisations of fascism. A part of the workers are becoming rapidly revolutionised and demanding fighting measures; another part are still defeatist and console themselves with the hope that fascism will make "a mess of things."

For the German working class, however, the most important thing will be how far the Communist Party will succeed, in spite of the monstrous persecutions, which have been increased since the elections, in carrying on its work among the masses and setting up the **united front of action**, above all in the factories and workshops.