

Reform in Germany?

By LUDWIG LORE

Reform in Germany? What the struggles of years could not accomplish, fear of a desperate people has brought to pass. The Russian Revolution, like the handwriting on the wall, to the terror-stricken Junkers of Germany and the unspeakable sufferings at home, have opened even the dried-out brains of the German bureaucracy to progressive ideas. Hunger is threatening to overthrow even German discipline and the stormy demands for peace are forcing political reform. The

flood has risen to the throats of the ruling class; and in order to save their valuable lives, and their still more valuable property, they are lending a hand, to a lying and rotten compromise.

First there came, on April 8, the famous "Order" of the Kaiser to the Chancellor, proclaiming the abolition of the class suffrage laws—"after the return of our warriors"—and the reformation of the Prussian Landtag.

"After the tremendous War accomplishments of our whole people"—so we read in the most pregnant portion of the proclamation,—“there is no room in Prussia for a class election system.” The proposed bill will provide, moreover, for direct and secret parliamentary elections.

Those who are unfamiliar with German political history can hardly grasp the significance of this proclamation, for they do not know that a real reform of the Prussian electoral system is practically synonymous with political revolution in the greatest and most important German State, and therefore, in Germany. When we say that this proclamation is one of the most important political occurrences that the world war has produced, we are, in no wise exaggerating its importance. Only he who knows the strength and labor that has been expended in the last twenty-five years in the struggle against the three class shame of Germany, who knows how the question, again and again, has stood in the center of the whole Prussian and German political arena, can appreciate the pressure that must have been brought to bear, to accomplish this change of policy of the German rulers.

The struggle against the Prussian class election system for many decades has been going on, a system that is to-day the most reactionary in the whole civilized world.

The whole Prussian Junkerdom fought against the overthrow of Germany's shame with unparalleled fervor and intensity. Even on the twenty-ninth of March, 1917, the Chancellor most decidedly objected to a discussion of Prussian election reform, during the war, although the Government had, in principle, already declared in its favor. And now, on Easter Sunday, comes the proclamation, marking out the general lines for a new electoral system, and giving it form and content.

We need hardly emphasize that this change of front was not the result of a God-given inspiration. Nor was it gratitude "to his brave, able, and highly developed people" that led the Kaiser to assume this new role; the explanation lies deeper. The ruling class has realized, that it is impossible to hold the fortress of class suffrage, in view of the present conditions in Germany. They fear that the sparks of the Russian Revolution may fly from Petrograd to Berlin, may bury all Germany in its flames. In spite of "closed doors," the dullest of Germany's subjects must needs stumble over the obvious ludicrousness of the fact that the people of barbarous Russia possess democratic rights, while the Roman Empire of Germany still cowers under the whip of the Prussian Junker. Just as the Russian Revolution of 1905 was so strongly felt in Austria, that the government, in fear of a popular uprising, granted the general direct, and secret ballot, so the present Russian Revolution has brought in its wake the fall of the class election system in Prussia. The free, the civilized German people set out, when the war began, to overthrow Russian Asiatic barbarism in the East. To-day Berlin is painfully limping along behind the accomplishments of the men who fought behind the barricades in Petrograd.

The willingness of the German Government to relent in the important question of election reform proves that conditions in Germany leave much to be desired. Hunger is fermenting among the German people—and the rulers know it but too well. For a conference on the question of the national food supply recently heard from an official source that "the morals of the German people had suffered gravely." The government has chosen the lesser of two ends, and is trying to infuse new vigor into the "popular morale," by sacrificing a pint of blood, in order to save its life.

The following instruction that was sent to the food-commissions in April, 1917, presents a graphic picture of the suffering in Germany, and openly acknowledges the inability of the government to cope with it: "In accordance with the wishes of His Excellency Micheles, State Commissioner for public food distribution in Prussia, you are hereby called upon to communicate

at once with your subordinate bureaus and to call their attention to the exceedingly critical conditions under which the urban population, and particularly the ammunition industry, are suffering at the present time. The food-commission must, through those of their members who are themselves farmers, and through others whom they may deem fit to undertake this work, explain the importance of this appeal to every farmer in their respective districts. Written instructions are of little value; neither will large meetings accomplish the desired result. Only by word of mouth can our message be carried. *Teachers and clergymen* particularly, must be pressed into service.

"Every farmer must be made to realize that every pound of corn that he consumes over and above the measure that is absolutely necessary for the management of his own estate, is a wrong done to the whole people, and aids the enemy. Every potato and every turnip that is fit for human consumption must be sent to the city. No healthy adult in the country should drink unskimmed milk. Milk is for children and for invalids and for the manufacture of butter. Calves shall be raised for breeding purposes only and shall receive full milk for not more than one week after birth."

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Under such conditions bromides in the shape of election reform declarations cannot be particularly effective; the people are demanding more than promises, are insisting on actual reforms, are demanding deeds instead of words. Thus the Reichstag has been forced to take action by appointing a committee for the revision of the German Constitution, with special instructions to thoroughly revise the paragraphs concerning relations between government and parliament. This committee—with Philipp Scheidemann as its chairman—is already in action and has adopted a number of motions, proposing a certain curtailment of the powers of the Chancellor and State Secretaries, and increased responsibility of these officials to the Reichstag. According to the proposed revision all proclamations and official acts of the Emperor must be countersigned by the Chancellor, who then becomes directly

responsible to the Reichstag, and, together with the State Secretaries is held liable for all important government actions. Radical as these proposals may sound, even the liberal "*Berliner Tageblatt*" admits, however, that there is actually little gained so long as the Parliament has not the right to unseat a Chancellor who refuses to abide by its decisions, or, on the other hand, to keep in power an official who has incurred the displeasure of the Emperor, against his will. The above-mentioned newspaper regards the decisions of the Reichstag-Constitutional Reform Committee as purely decorative in effect and openly declares that "we are now, after the adoption of these decisions, as far removed from parliamentary form of government, and as deeply imbedded in a pseudo-constitutional regime as ever."

Still more important are a number of other decisions of the Commission, which, however, must also await the final ratification of the Reichstag as well as of the Bundesrat before they become effective. They provide for a reapportionment of the Reichstag election districts upon the basis of 200,000 inhabitants. This new division of Germany would have the identical political effect that awaits Prussia when once the three-class election system has gone forever—the power of the conservative Junker will be broken, the "liberal" capitalist class will step into his place. When, almost fifty years ago, the national constitution of Germany was drawn up, Germany possessed about one-half of its present population. At that time 100,000 inhabitants were apportioned into one election district, the industrial centers and large cities were treated somewhat niggardly and the agrarian districts a little more liberally, so that, in this way 397 election districts were organized, the great majority sending agrarian representatives to Parliament.

What at that time meant a direct advantage for the Junkers who controlled the great landed population, to-day represents a distinct balance of power in favor of the landholding class, during a time of unparalleled development in industry, a situation that must needs lead to unbearable political conditions. More than once this conflict between two mighty classes, wrestling with each other for political supremacy, has made the threatening clash in

the inner-political life of Germany seem imminent. So, for instance, when the Russo-Austrian commercial treaties (*Handelsverträge*) were signed, the opposing interests became involved in a bitter controversy. At that time the National-liberal party, the representatives of the steel and iron and manufacturing industries demanded a re-apportionment of election districts. Only their still greater fear of the power of the Social Democracy, whose parliamentary representation would have been decidedly increased by such a measure at that time held the Liberals in check. Since then political conditions in Germany have greatly changed. Since the beginning of the war the majority of the Social-Democracy has become so tame that it eats from the hand of its erstwhile enemy, William, and, for the price of a cosy tête-à-tête of civil peace, throws its "shocking" republicanism into the scrap heap, to the rest of the principles it has sacrificed. The bourgeoisie may therefore take up its old battle against the Junkers without fear. The "unfortunate political constellation" that once prevented it from grasping the supremacy of Germany is no more. The Prussian election reform, and the reapportionment of the German Reichstag election districts mean as a matter of fact, only the establishment of the German manufacturing industry as the most powerful factor in the political future of the German Nation. But the seed too is planted, from which will grow, with ever-increasing bitterness and relentlessness, the struggle between capital and labor. The seed is planted. But its fruit can ripen only with the coming of the social revolution in Germany.

As we have seen, the capitalist class of Germany is better prepared for this final conflict, which can break out with full force only after the war is over, than ever before. The concentration of capital has made incredible progress in the last three years. Tens of thousands of small, hitherto independent manufacturers have been hurled into the ranks of the proletariat, or have been relegated to complete industrial insignificance. The circle that represented the real power behind the throne, the real rulers of Germany, has been drawn closer and closer. It has organized its forces in strong manufacturers and trades associations wielding enormous power; organizations that

possessed more influence over the decisions of Bethmann-Hollweg during the war, than the once so mighty Junker court camarilla. The Court-Jews have pushed aside the old Court-Nobility.

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The condition of the German working class presents a sad contrast. It will emerge from the war, weakened in every respect. Its numbers are decimated, its industrial powers of resistance broken, its political strength practically gone. The German labor unions to-day possess hardly one-third of their former membership, and that in spite—or because?—of the fact that they patriotically resolved, on the second of August, 1914, to discourage all strikes for the period of the war, and to sustain the civil peace on the political field, by suspending the class struggle on the field of industry. The law of forced industrial service has deprived them of the right to strike that they had won after a struggle that has lasted more than a hundred years, and adding insult to injury, has commandeered the labor unions to help in the enforcement of its despotic measures.

The industrial organizations of the German laboring class ceased—just as did almost all national labor groups in the other belligerent countries—to be fighting organizations, and became instead benefit societies, go-betweens between the government and the laboring masses; their functions had undergone a fundamental change. It is true, things will not remain thus after the war is over, for the bourgeoisie does not need the complete annihilation of the right of all workers to strike. For the millions who are employed in transportation and ammunition industries, and directly by the state, the prohibition of strikes will continue—and this alone will make labor conflicts on a large scale, an impossibility in the coming years. The impoverishment of the labor movement, and its complete exhaustion will yet be much more effective preventatives.

The political situation is still more hopeless. The policies of the majority, with its metamorphosis from a fundamental opponent of every capitalist government, and its imperialistic aims

to a bodyguard and protector of the Emperor, which not only in the August-days of 1914 fell into the lying trap of the government, but even now, when the true character of this imperialistic war for conquest stands openly revealed still remain the voluntary prisoners of these capitalistic-imperialistic enemies of the people, and frankly proclaim their shame from the housetops, made a split in the German Social Democracy, the pride of the International Social Democracy, inevitable. To the undying honor of Karl Liebknecht it will be remembered that he first found the courage to say openly in the Reichstag, and in the Prussian Diet, what many thousands felt and thought with him, nor has it ever been sufficiently appreciated, that comrades like Franz Mehring, Klara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, Otto Ruehle, and others, from the first day of the war, bravely and unafraid, exposed the military camarillas of Germany and Austria as the real peace disrupters of Europe.

It must not be overlooked that the caucus of the Social Democratic group, that met before the first Reichstag vote on the second, third and fourth of August, 1914, showed a minority of fourteen deputies who opposed a vote in favor of the first four billion dollar war loan. They refrained from open protest to preserve the outward "unity" of the Reichstag group that had become a dogma in the German movement. Even Hugo Haase, who as chairman of the Reichstag group, read the declaration of assent adopted in this caucus before the assembled Reichstag, was a member of this minority group, and led the fight against the majority in the caucus. When the second war loan came up before the Reichstag Liebknecht voted against it, while fifteen of his colleagues demonstratively rose and left the hall as a protest against the loan. In the caucus meetings the number of these opponents to a governmental policy increased, and soon we found a new group in the Reichstag, the Socialdemocratic Labor Community (Sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft), which elected Hugo Haase and George Ledebour as their chairmen, and were being actively supported by Eduard Bernstein, who at first belonged to the members of the majority, but in a very short time broke loose from them and became one of the most energetic adherents of the opposition,

Arthur Stadthagen, Emanuel Wurm, F. Geyer, Adolf Hoffmann, of the Prussian Diet, and Karl Kautsky, the editor of the "Neue Zeit," the famous scientific weekly of the German Social Democracy. Karl Liebknecht and Otto Ruehle, who were excluded from the majority group for insubordination, did not join the new group, but remained independent.

At first it seemed as if the strife that immediately broke out between the opposition headed by Haase, Kautsky, Ledebour, and the Gruppe Internationale (International Group) Liebknecht, Ruehle, Mehring, Luxemburg, Zetkin would create such bitterness of feeling, that a united opposition against the majority group would be out of the question. The Sozialdemokratische Arbeits Gemeinschaft had intimated, in its first declaration before the Reichstag presented by Geyer, that it recognized the duty of fatherland defense, and had, in so doing, completely alienated the sympathies of all truly radical elements. Fortunately this grave mistake was rectified when this group sent two delegates to both the Zimmerwald and the Kienthal conferences. Both of these conferences, representing the International Affiliation of those who had remained true to their Socialist principles, repudiated all wars—of defense and of offense. As the manifestos published by these conferences, expressing the position of the determined opposition, were signed by both Ledebour and Adolf Hoffman the delegates of the S. L. C. open conflict between the two groups in Germany was avoided. Then too, the increasing antagonism between the majority and the minority groups in the Reichstag called out a more radical note from the members of the S. L. C. The abyss between the two groups became so wide that in the easter days of this year, the opposition was fused in a conference held at Gotha—the city which in 1875 had given to Germany, when the Lassalle and Eisenach wings had united its first Social Democracy, into the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands).

Besides these two groups there is a third opposition organization headed by Julian Borchard which is, however, of slight importance.

The two opposition groups that deserve serious attention have thus united, in Gotha into one unified fighting organization. This result was not easily accomplished. Organization and unification alone cannot produce a complete fusion of all divergent views. There will be friction, differences of opinion, and conflicts on questions of tactics and of principle. But the unification shows that these divergencies are not so deep, nor so impossible as it has oftentimes appeared.

On the problems of Imperialism and the attitude of the Social Democracy to international disarmament, and compulsory international arbitration, the forces of the opposition have found common ground, relentless opposition to the government as well as to the majority party, of which today no one can tell whether it is the majority or minority group of the German socialist movement, have been made a part of its immediate program while all collusion with the Scheidemann, Suedekum, Ebert group has been most emphatically repudiated. Two sentences, which once formed a part of the program of the "Gruppe Internationale" and whose general significance was embodied in the program of the Gotha conference will serve to illustrate the fundamental attitude of the Independent Social Democracy, and will show the absurdity of the claims of a certain American Socialist who has branded the German minority as the tool of William Hohenzollern:

"The war has shattered the Second International. Its inability to erect a bulwark against nationalist disruption in time of war, its failure to carry out a uniform tactic and action of the proletariat in all countries, have proven its insufficiency. In view of the betrayal of the aims and interests of the working class by the official parties in the leading countries, in view of its surrender of the proletarian International to their imperialistic capitalist rulers, the creation of a new International has become a necessity, a new International that will take up the fight and the leadership in the revolutionary class struggle in all countries, against Imperialism."

"In the International lies the center of gravity of the class organization of the proletariat. The International decides in

times of peace the tactics of its national groups on questions of militarism, on colonial policy, trade questions, May demonstrations, and the tactics of its national entities in times of war. The next duty of the socialist movement is the mental liberation of the proletariat from the guardianship of the bourgeoisie, and the shackles of the nationalistic ideology by which it has been bound. The national sections must direct their agitation in the press, and in their parliaments, against the old nationalistic phraseology, and must denounce it as a part of the supremacy, as an instrument of mental oppression of the ruling class. The only defense of real national liberty is to-day the revolutionary class struggle against Imperialism. *The Fatherland of the proletariat, to whose defense all other considerations must be subordinated is the Socialist International.*"

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When peace has come the political change that has relegated the conservatives in Germany to the second rank, and has placed the big capitalists in its place, will have been accomplished. The brutal bourgeoisie, emerging from the war, unshackled and all-powerful in its autocratic oppression of the laboring masses whom the war has left torn, disorganized and helpless in its power, will weld the proletariat, in a few short years into a fighting whole with new ideals and new methods. This will be the beginning of the most relentless struggle between capital and labor, whose equal, in bitterness and in magnitude, the world has never before witnessed. This must be understood when we hear the overthrow of *monarchial* Germany proclaimed—by Socialists, we regret to say, as well as by others—as the war aim of the democratic nations of the world. They do not understand that the German bourgeoisie, although it gained its victory over the conservative Junker, with the help of the proletariat, cannot be compared to the capitalist class of Russia or of Italy. Its economic power is so vastly greater, its understanding of the problems that it must face so incomparably keener. It knows the struggles that lie before it, knows the prize for which it is fighting with the working class. The German bourgeoisie has been and al-

ways will, be the most trusted supporter of the monarchy, because it knows, that it needs its help. Like every other capitalistically highly developed bourgeoisie, it will rather sell its soul to the devil than become socialistic, would open the gates of the nation to "hated" England, rather than consent to a new industrial system. So it will bear with the monarchy, even though monarchial rule will hamper its activity here and there, and will combat, with every means at its command, a republican form of government. There are no bourgeois republicans in Germany. The fight against the monarchy is an integral part of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, and can be won only by the working class, against all other classes.

He who hopes for a German revolution during the war will be bitterly disappointed, the fourth of August, 1914, and its consequences, have buried these hopes, once and for all. Still the day is not far distant, when Germany will see the social revolution, a revolution whose growth was augmented by the hot-house atmosphere of the war. Then, and only then, will German culture be more than a vain phantasy.
