

The Task Before *the* Socialist Labor Party in Germany

By
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THE political situation in Germany has advanced beyond the realms of speculation. The recent State election in Hessa has made it clear to even the most stubborn supporter of German republicanism that the days of democratic rule in that country are counted. Representatives of the German Republic here are already preparing American governmental circles for the coming change, and are themselves setting their sails to weather the storm. Meanwhile the inexorable voice of public opinion will force Bruening to include the victorious Fascist and nationalist elements in his government and by that token, to shake off the last remnants of a defunct democracy that still clings to his regime.

In the Hession election of November 14, the National Socialists (National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei) united 291,000 votes on their candidates, as compared to 138,000 in the Reichstag election of September 1930. The Social Democratic Party, which, in the Reichstag election of

1930 polled 215,000 votes, emerged from the present struggle for supremacy in Hessa with 186,000 votes, its losses having chiefly benefited the Communist Party which experienced an astounding increase from 85,000 to 107,000. Besides the Nazis and the Communists, the Centre (Catholic) Party was the only party that recorded election gains.

This produces a situation that is the inevitable precursor of important political developments, for the elections to the Landtag will ultimately determine the make-up of the new government, by its power, in each state, to appoint the representative to the Reichrat, the upper House of the German Parliament.

Public opinion will demand that the parties hitherto excluded from governmental responsibility be given adequate representation. In the Hessian Landtag with its 70 deputies, the Hitlerites have 27 representatives, (one in the old Landtag) while the Centre has 10, and 6 other bourgeois parties one each. This opens up two possibilities—a gov-

ernment of the united capitalist parties (Nationalists, Centre and the remaining fragments of bourgeois political ideology) or a government controlled by Social Democrats (15 deputies) Communists (10) and the Center (10)—two possibilities of which the latter is too fantastic to be seriously considered.

The Centre will not hesitate long before it takes the decisive step. The reception of Hugenberg by Bruening and of Hitler by Hindenburg were not mere accidents. Quite the contrary. These circles have been waiting for months for a favorable opportunity to make their peace with the Harzburg (united Fascist) front, and to bid a glad farewell to their old ally, the Social Democracy. Whatever doubt there may have been after the elections of Hamburg, Mecklenburg and Anhalt have been effectually dispelled by the new Hessian victory of the Fascist forces. Today the Centre, restive under the unnatural dominance of the Social Democracy and the numerically weak Democratic Party (until recently

Staats Partei) knows that the Prussian Landtag session to be called in December will bring the defection of the Volkspartei into the Hugenberg-Hitler camp, placing the Braun regime before new difficulties. The Prussian Landtags election which is to take place in May 1922, would in any event have sealed the doom of the Social Democratic-Centre coalition in that State. As in Hessa, this unnatural political marriage is irrevocably on the rocks, the Hessian election having but served to bring the entire situation to a premature crisis.

In this hour, so fraught with significance for the entire German people, but above all for its working masses with their political, trade union and co-operative movements, the latter face decisions of incalculable import. It would seem that all differences and hatreds must needs vanish before the overwhelming menace of fascist nationalism gone mad, to give way to a new epoch of united opposition on the part of a politically schooled working class against Fascism and its open and secret supporters. But the outlook for such a union is anything but bright. By its recent cooperation with Fascist elements in the national referendum for the dissolution of the Prussian Landtag, the Communist Party of Germany obliterated the clear line of political demarcation between itself and the Hitler Nazis, and in the eyes of the public identified itself with them.

The Social Democratic Party, on the other hand, with its disastrous "toleration policy," has made itself even more directly responsible for the overthrow of some of the most cherished achievements of the German working class, for only its unshaken support of the Bruening policies made the wage cuts and the reductions in social insurance possible. The Social Democratic Party, after disarming the German worker, has delivered him, helpless and defenseless, into the clutches of Bruening and his industrialist backers, and in so doing, has given to the very Fascists it purports to combat, an open road. Thus, by their past mistakes, the labor parties of Germany have built up an insuperable barrier to effective and united resistance, while the bitterness that divides the great organized working class groups has assumed such proportions that not even a Fascist coup d'etat can bring them together. Certainly not under the leadership of either of the two existing parties.

In this seemingly hopeless situation the appearance of a new factor on the political scene seems to offer the only

ray of hope, though at the first glance it may seem to still further complicate an already desperate situation. This new factor is the creation of the Socialist Labor Party to which we have already briefly referred in the last issue of LABOR AGE. Called into being about two months ago by the expulsion of the leaders of the Social Democratic opposition from that party for their refusal to condone what they considered a wholesale betrayal of working class interests, this new party has already drawn large numbers of those disaffected ex-party members into its ranks, whom valuable intelligent workers in the cause of labor though they were, the two major parties had from time to time catapulted off into political oblivion in their mad hurtling through German post-war life. The very fact that the S.D.P. and the C.P.D. press, far from ignoring this new 'political monstrosity', devoted columns daily to its destruction, would seem to indicate that the claims to continued success of the Socialist Labor Party are well founded. Certainly no new party can hope to establish itself in the German labor movement unless it can cope with the herculean task of bringing back into a new political alignment those class conscious men and women who have left the old parties in disgust and discouragement. For, however great the number of those may be who against their better judgment still remain in one or the other of the two old parties these cannot be immediately counted on to supply the back-bone of this new venture. They will come, but only when and after it has proven its right to existence.

If straws show which way the wind blows, this assurance is already given. There are, for instance, the two independent ex-socialist groups, those die-hards that remained intact after the Independent Social Democratic Party, which grouped itself about Liebknecht and Luxemburg at the close of the war, returned to the mother fold. Neither of these groups is numerically important, but each stands on a program of constructive revolutionary action, the one behind the old war-horse Georg Ledebour, the other behind Theodor Liebknecht, brother of Karl, both respected and beloved in the German labor movement.

What has been impossible hitherto—to bring these two exponents of socialist revolutionary ideology together—the S.L.P. seems to have accomplished, evidently without particular effort on its own part. But of greater import-

ance still, because of greater moment for the organization of the new movement, is the fact that a not inconsiderable portion of the right-Communist "Brandler" group has come out in favor of working together with the new S.L.P. after the majority had refused to take action in this direction. The leaders of this group, the Comrades Froehlich and Walcher, are well known in American labor circles, the former as the founder and first organizer of the Spartakus Bund, the most intimate co-operator of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, and the historian of the war and post-war revolutionary epoch in which these two found their tragic end; the latter as the labor union expert of the German communist movement, whose conflict with the Comintern and the Red Trade Union International ended in an open rupture on the "split the trade unions" issue.

The theoreticians of that group, Brandler and Thalheimer, both of whom are still strongly disposed in the direction toward Moscow, will sooner or later effect their return to the official Communist movement, once they have rid themselves of Froehlich and Walcher, both of whom enjoyed the particular hatred of the communist leadership. The recognized ability of these men as organizers and propagandists, and their years of experience should make them a valuable asset to the new movement, the importance of which can hardly be overestimated. If the S.L.P. of Germany can succeed in gathering the enormous energies that lie latent in the German proletariat into an army against Fascism and the German industrialists that stand behind it, it will become that proletarian factor with which the German bourgeoisie has long since ceased to reckon, the revolutionary leader of a united working class.

Harlan Needs Relief

With the acquittal of William Barnett, there still remain 42 defendants indicted for murder by the coal barons of Harlan, Kentucky. Funds for defense should be forwarded at once to the Kentucky Miners' Defense and Relief Conference, P. O. Box 109, Station D, New York, N. Y.