

# A New Beginning

A review of the secret manifesto issued by a group of socialists who are working underground in Germany.

By LUDWIG LORE

IN London there has just appeared an English translation of the pamphlet "A New Beginning" which was issued in Germany last October by the Prague Executive of the German Social Democracy and has since given rise to much discussion and comment in the international labor movement. "A New Beginning" (Neu beginnen) was published over the pseudonym "Miles" but the Messrs. Wels, Scheidemann, Vogel, Breitscheid and the rest who are ostensibly responsible for its being, had little enough to do with the contents of this "Basis for a Discussion of the Question at Issue in the Socialism of our Epoch." They were instructed by Friedrich Adler, the Secretary of the Socialist Labor International, to sponsor its publication and were in no position to decline. The pseudonym "Miles" conceals the identity of a group of activist Socialists, former members of the Communist and Socialist Parties, active workers from the German labor movement who have decided to cast their lot with what is left

of the German Social Democracy because they believe that it offers greater possibilities for the propagation of their views than any other political labor organization.

The members of this group who are still in Germany are engaged in a secret organization campaign in which they hope by slow but intensive work, to rally their comrades and friends to the standard of a new movement. They have consistently refused to issue or distribute leaflets or newspapers or to carry on any other form of public propaganda that might attract the attention of the Gestapo, Germany's Secret State Police, to their activity and interfere with their organizational endeavors. One may or may not approve of their tactics in the present crisis, but it cannot be denied that the rebuilding of the radical labor movement in the Fascist nations is a task distinct and separate from illegal propaganda activity, if it is to be crowned with any measure of success.

An objective and critical discussion of "A New Beginning" must presuppose, of course, that its authors were motivated by

an honest desire to find new paths for the German labor movement, that there is no intention of concealing the old and rotten foundation and structure behind a glittering facade of radical phraseology. Although I am personally more than ever convinced of the impossibility of building a new revolutionary labor movement within the framework and under the name of the Social Democracy, I respect and admire the political integrity of the group that stands behind this attempt and of its important members and believe in the absolute sincerity of their intentions. They are not paid party leaders but men and women out of the rank and file of the various German proletarian organizations who are working without recognition, without funds, face to face with need and danger, risking imprisonment and the horrors of the concentration camp. The work that they are doing is devoid of thrills and the gratification lies in the successful cheating of Goering's terror squads. It is dreary, thankless, unexciting Jimmy Higgins work, the sort of work that only a deep sense of duty and an abiding recognition of responsibility toward the labor movement can bring forth.

The pamphlet itself is a sweeping condemnation of the attitude and policies of the Social Democracy in the past. "Not the Marxism of the Socialist Parties has failed. They themselves have failed because they have not been Marxian enough. The more firmly the Socialist Parties base their theories and practice on Marxism in the future, the more readily and the more surely will they be able to solve the great problems of their historic mission." On another page the pamphlet continues: "Because these labor organizations found it impossible to work in the sense and in the spirit of the Marxist philosophy, they were overcome by the great destructive social forces which are the emanations of a decaying capitalism. A renewal of the Socialist Labor movement of Germany is possible only in the spirit of Marxism."

**B**UT this statement of "A New Beginning" offers more than generalities, is more than mere platonic lip service at the altar of a Marxist creed. "The German Social Democracy," it states more concretely, "could not betray principles it has never possessed." "In the period that followed," it observes in a critical evaluation of the practical activity of the Socialist movement, in the period of the Weimar Republic, the Social Democracy remained what essential-

ly it has always been, a party which affirmed the bourgeois state and the capitalist system. To protect this bourgeois republic against the rebelling working masses, to defend it against those forces which were striving toward a 'complete revolution,' it disarmed the proletariat and placed the power of the state into the hands of the officers of the old Imperial state, the reactionary citizens' guard and the Freikorps, in short all those counter-revolutionary organizations out of which the National Socialist movement has gone forth, which was ultimately to drive that same party leadership out of the country. In every critical situation, in the inflation, in crisis after crisis, in every reactionary attack by the bourgeoisie against the interests of labor it placed the interests of the bourgeois state above the interests of the proletarian class struggle, and boasted, withal, of its sense, of responsibility." "They have been right," the pamphlet says in closing, "who saw the essence of activist Socialism not in tolerance, not in submission, but in the active struggle against capitalist society."

All this has been said a thousand times. But never before in an official publication of a Social Democratic Party. It is, more, therefore, than a negation of the party's past. It is the—perhaps unwilling—confession of that party's leaders that their policies are bankrupt and their methods discredited. It recognizes that the class-conscious German proletariat submitted so supinely to its defeat of January 1933 not only because it feared the brutality of its opponent and was crushed beneath the terrific weight of a total dictatorship. It succumbed because of its passive trust, its uncritical capitulation, its willful blindness to the mistakes of the leaders of its organization. The masses had neither the time nor the leadership necessary for a new orientation when the crisis came.

The onslaught of Hitlerism simply revealed what had been apparent to outsiders since August 4, 1914 that the tragic debacle of the Social Democracy facilitated, perhaps made possible, the victory of Fascist dictatorship.

It is the purpose of the "New Beginning" to formulate the departure of the Social Democracy from reformism to revolutionary Socialism. We will speak of the implications of the positive program as it is outlined here in the later issue, of the contradictions and the misapprehensions that in our opinion, it contains.

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But for all that "New Beginning" is a hopeful sign for the future. The labor movement in all countries of the world is undergoing a process of regeneration and reorganization, a process that neither the Social Democratic nor the Communist Parties have been able to stem. The pamphlet under discussion is a manifestation of this movement, and as such should be welcomed by all those who have sought and found a spiritual home in the revolutionary labor movement.

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N. B. Translation from "New Beginning" appearing in this article were made directly from the German, since no copies of the official English translation are as yet available in the United States.

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