
The Russian Revolution and the Germans

[excerpt]†

by Eugene V. Debs

Excerpt reprinted from *The Social Builder* as “Socialists Must Change War Position, Says Debs”
in *The New Appeal* [Girard, KS], no. 1,172 (May 18, 1918), pg. 1.

The war situation now is radically different as it affects the Socialist Party from what it was a year ago. The Russian revolution has changed the face of Europe, and its possibilities, now trembling in the balance, challenge the Socialist movement to demonstrate its faith in and loyalty to the principles of international democracy.

The German war lords, their junker allies, and the military hordes that do their bidding, no longer are in disguise with reference to the Bolsheviks. They have shown to the world beyond cavil that they propose to annihilate social democracy in Russia and reduce that great people to a nation of vassals. That is their naked, shameless purpose, in violation of their own treaty, and with but feeble protest on the part of the German people.

The Russian proletariat under Lenin and Trotsky looked hopefully to the German Social-

ists to follow their example and overthrow the Kaiser, as they had overthrown their tsar. But, alas! instead of rising in their might against the infernal Hohenzollerns, they suffered themselves to be used by the Hohenzollerns in invading Russia and crushing freedom there to make impossible their own freedom.

We have patiently hoped for something to come out of Germany. We had been led to believe that the great social democratic movement of that country was but waiting its opportunity to strike for liberty. But nothing has come or is likely to come in the way of revolution from the German social democracy. It has been demonstrated over and over again that the German movement is anchored to nationalism and is ready to shed its blood at any time and for any purpose the Kaiser may decree for the glory of the “fatherland.”

The Kaiser first and Socialism next, expresses

†- In light of the pro-war histrionics of *The New Appeal* during the spring and summer of 1918, as well as the tendentious introduction and title assigned to the piece, it seems likely that “inconvenient” content may have been omitted in this version. The full introduction, by editor Louis Kopelin or managing editor Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, reads as follows: “*Knowing the fine devotion of Eugene V. Debs to the true precepts of Socialism and internationalism, The New Appeal is not surprised to see that beloved Socialist veteran raise his voice in protest against the continuation of the futile policy of the Socialist Party regarding its relation to the war. In the current issue of The Social Builder, Mr. Debs calls for a revision of the Socialist Party platform and says, in part:*”

In the wake of *The New Appeal's* intimation that Debs had changed his position on the European war, rumors immediately began to circulate in the capitalist press to the same effect. This, in turn, brought forth a formal denial in June by Debs that he had “changed front” and “become a pro-war advocate.” Instead, Debs indicated that he now sought a national convention for a “more complete restatement” of the party’s position on the war with a view to clarity in the coming elections. In his June statement, Debs quite adamantly opined that “the party leaders and many other comrades have been indicted and are now in prison or out on bail pending trial for being true to our cause. They are charged with being pro-German, disloyalists, and traitors, and if they are guilty, so am I. But they are not guilty, and their alleged disloyalty is to the real traitors of this nation, and will be written to their everlasting honor.”

their attitude in fact if not in words. They are so completely cowed and terrorized under Prussian militarism that they dare not take a revolutionary stand on any issue in the present war. If the rank and file venture out on strike to paralyze industry as a beginning of social revolution, their frightened and intimidated leaders hastily order them back again for fear of being shot like dogs by their own Socialist comrades, the military hirelings of the brutal Kaiser. And all this for the fetish of nationalism and the glory of the Kaiser and the "fatherland."

The Russian revolution may be crushed, the unarmed proletariat overwhelmed, and the noble and aspiring peasants and workers reduced to vassals; the Bolsheviks may be overthrown, and the nascent democracy may lie weltering in its own blood and ruins; province after province may be wrested from a subjugated and helpless people; Poland may be outraged, Finland seized, and Bohemia persecuted; Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg

may be thrown into prison; every Socialist aspiration may be strangled and every blood-bought democracy ground beneath the iron heel of the Kaiser, but the German people may not audibly protest. The much-vaunted social democratic movement of Kaiserland is as helpless as if it consisted of so many babes. It is sad to say, but against this atrocious situation there appears to be nothing to hope for from the inside.

The German people, Socialists included with but few exceptions, not only are disinclined to rise, not only refuse to throw off their yoke, but they allow themselves to be used for the base purpose of refastening the yoke upon their revolutionary neighbors who have cast it off.

That is the situation with reference to the majority of the German Socialists in the present crisis. There is no use trying longer to excuse or extenuate it. Whatever the cause, that is the fact and it is vain and worse to try to conceal it.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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