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NOTES ON SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

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The second issue of a Socialist "Year-book," recently published at Zurich, presents us with a formidable body of reports concerning "the progress of the Socialist movement" in all the countries of Europe and in the United States of America. One turns with curiosity to a long article on Great Britain, which, however, on examination, calls to mind the celebrated chapter on the snakes of Ireland, the sum of it being that Social Democracy is still nonexistent in our country. Not that the hospitable metropolis contains no representatives of the party which has recently frightened Prince Bismarck into measures of strange severity. They have, in fact, five London centres; small clubs of German working men which produce anything but a threatening impression, and are in no sense secret societies. The visitor who has been duly introduced finds himself in a comfortless tobacco-reeking club-room, where politicians of both sexes, at times accompanied by children, sit at tables, dividing their attention between the orator on the platform and the refreshments steadily renewed by the obliging *kellner*. All have put on their best attire, and in their mutual intercourse prevails a pleasant courtesy: when rising to speak they mention each other by the title of "citizen." In the quality of the speaking a fastidious taste will find little to approve, save in the case of a few leaders, who possess striking powers of emotional oratory, and might well be conceived firing the populace ere they rushed to the barricades. But the majority, it must be confessed, are given to ranting at the expense of good German as well as of good sense, and the debates, at times prolonged till almost dawn, have seldom any result save that of confirming the speaker in his prejudices.

Notwithstanding their avowed international character, it is difficult to believe that these clubs will ever become sources of anxiety to the English capitalist. On the other hand, they are not unimportant in relation to Continental politics. The Yearbook's reports of Social Democracy in Germany, France, and Russia contain very substantial matter indeed. In view of the scantiness of information afforded on the topic at home, and the very extravagant ideas afloat concerning the movement in general, it may not be uninteresting to inquire briefly what the ends of the Social Democrats really are, how they propose to attain them, and what, if any, would seem to be their chances of success.

The stoutest upholder of free and unlimited competition in the productive world will scarcely maintain that, under its régime, the condition of the actual producers is all that could be desired. He will probably admit that, on an average, half the population of our great cities subsists in a moral and material slough disgraceful to our civilization; but at the same time he will bring out his Political Economy, and convince you that it is all the result of laws over which we have no control. Now, in reply to this, the Socialist says:—I grant you your uncontrollable laws, but only as applicable to a state of economical anarchy, such as now exists. What does civilization mean, if not the conscious regulation of our political and social state? Let us *regulate* production, and banish from among us this brutal struggle for the necessities of life. He would then probably refer you to the important work of Karl Marx on "Capital," where it is shown that the miserable state of the working classes is due to the accumulation of the *means of production*—land, raw material, tools—in the hands of the few, who are thus able to compel the poor to sell their labour for a sum which can never appreciably rise above what is just necessary to support existence. The evil is one which grows with time. If commercial enterprise proceed in its present path, before long capital will be gathered into the hands of a few immensely rich traders, all the small masters being reduced to mere "hands." Is that a desirable state of affairs, and, if not, how can it be prevented?

From Germany comes the loudest and clearest answer. There, as early as 1848, Karl Marx issued his "Communist Manifesto," asserting that only by a violent reformation of political and social life could a better state of affairs arise. The Social Democratic party, however, was first organized by Ferdinand

Lassalle in 1863; and in the following year the movement assumed a prominent character by the foundation of the "International Working Men's Association," the statutes of which declare that "the economic emancipation of the working classes is the great aim which every political movement must subserve;" ending with the aphorism—"No rights without duties; no duties without rights." Lassalle himself was essentially moderate in his views, hoping to effect great changes by peaceable reforms, and this attitude of his speedily occasioned the independent formation of a more revolutionary party. When at length, in 1875, the schism was for a time healed, there was drawn up what is known as the "Gotha Programme," to which we must attend for a moment, as the most complete and practical assertion hitherto of Socialist demands. This begins by stating that labour is the source of all wealth and culture, and that it is the duty of every member of the social order to work, receiving his share of the general product according to his reasonable needs. As the monopoly of the means of production by capitalists is the source of poverty, such means must be made common property; the State must monopolize production, and regulate it according to demand. By every legal means the party will strive for the removal of every political and social inequality, never forgetting that its aims extend to all countries. As a preliminary step it demands the formation of societies for co-operative production, by means of a loan from the State, the gradual increase in the number of these to bring about universal Socialist co-operation: Its political demands are: universal suffrage with secret voting; direct legislation by the people; the establishment of a national militia in place of the standing army; perfect freedom of speech; universal free education; a progressive income tax in place of all other taxes; fixed hours of labour; sanitary control of workmen's dwellings and of manufactories, &c.; and a few minor demands of like kind. We may notice, in passing, that legislation has already secured to the English operative such of these reforms as more immediately affect him in his every-day labour; whilst our poor laws, theoretically, embody something like a Socialist principle. Compulsory education we have; but our individualism still holds out against making it universally free, thus leaving the monopoly of higher culture to those who can afford to purchase it.

The ends here expressed are (in essentials) those still aimed at by the larger section of the party, though, as we shall see later, the leaders differ among themselves as to the course to be pursued in bringing about the revolution. For that nothing less than a revolution, political, social, and economical, is ultimately involved is clear on the face of the programme. This circumstance, together with the enthusiasm which has led individual Socialists to an extravagantly minute description of their future ideal State, has given the party, especially in England, its character for dangerous fanaticism. But, be the views of the individual agitators what they may, it must not be forgotten that the theory of Socialism rests on the purely scientific inquiries of cultured minds. Recent German writers, such as Marx, Dühring, Schaeffie, Adolph Wagner, are neither mere enthusiasts nor demagogues; their convictions regarding the evil of our present economic system are the result of historical and practical knowledge which commands respect. Nor is the party in German solely composed of those who would greatly benefit by the revolution; long before the time of the October law, the writings of the men we have mentioned were exercising great influence among the student, and even the professorial classes; and among the lower State officials there are numbers of (unavowed) Socialists. The extent to which the movement is propagated by literary exertion may be in some degree estimated by the fact that between the 21st of October and the 21st of December, 1878, no fewer than forty-four newspapers and 187 books and pamphlets were suppressed. The political activity of the party, while yet in theory it exercised equal privileges with the numerous other parties, is expressed by the fact that at the elections for the Reichstag in 1878, out of a total of five million and a half recorded votes, nearly 500,000 were given to Socialist candidates, nine of whom were elected. In the previous Reichstag they had twelve members.

In the nature of things these last figures can only afford a very rough idea of the spread of the party principles, for we have no means of numbering those whom a multitude of considerations always withhold from an open declaration of their views. And this remark especially applies to the cultured classes. We must remember that, long before the enactment of the suppressive measure, Socialist writers and speakers were assailed by every application of the existing *Strafgesetz* which ingenuity could

contrive; any word construable as offensive to the Emperor or Prince Bismarck, for instance, proved an excuse for the inffiction of severe penalties. The police were everywhere on the watch; not even a meeting of a *Freie Gemeinde—an* assembly very similar to Mr. Moncure Conway's congregation in South-place Chapel—escaped their vigilance. This intolerable suppression of free speech was an embitterment of the wrongs of which the Socialists complained; and it needed only the law of October 21, 1878, to fill up the measure of rage and hatred.

At the state of things which ensued thereupon we must glance in a second paper.

"Jetzt geht die Sauhatz los!" ("Now for the pig-sticking!") Prince Bismarck is said to have exclaimed upon the passing of the Socialist law; and the simile was appropriate both to the man and the measure. The second attempted assassination of the Emperor had led to the dissolution of the Reichstag, and the new Assembly, elected at the end of July, was quite prepared to pass a stringent measure against the party whose existence was declared "dangerous to the community." Already between the attempt and the date of the elections some 520 persons had been tried for speaking ill of the Emperor, and sentenced to terms of imprisonment varying from six months to four years' duration. When the bill was at length passed—October 21, 1878—it prohibited all associations, meetings, publications—every possible form of propagandism which could be employed by the Social Democrats; the police authorities having the duty of enforcing the decrees. When the Emperor returned to Berlin in November, the town was put in a state of siege, and no active Socialist was allowed to reside there for the space of one year (a period afterwards renewed). Happily, it is not easy for us in England to realize the state of affairs which ensued, and which is still in existence. Immediately upon the passing of the bill forty societies dissolved themselves spontaneously, and in the course of the following month 135 more were forcibly suppressed; among these, by-the-by, being thirty-six musical and four theatrical clubs; also twenty-one trade unions. It is indeed marvellous that, amid all this, no single instance occurred of lawless excess on the part of the oppressed people. Their numbers, especially in the great centres of industry were larger than ever; in Berlin, whereas the Socialist voters at the 1877 elections had numbered 31,576, in 1878 no less than 56,336 had gone to the polls. This vast increase in the great towns is generally attributed to the number of dismissals from the manufactories ensuing upon the attempts at assassination, the harsh injustice of which measure could not but excite wide sympathy and drive the sufferers to extremes. And—to have done with the statistical part of our subject—despite the utter inability of the party to adopt methods of organization, chance elections continued to show how ineffectual the law in reality remained. At Breslau, in July, 1879, the Socialist candidates received 5,404 votes, losing only by 200; at Magdeburg in December, 7,312 Socialist votes were recorded against 8,453 given to the Liberal party. In March of the present year a Socialist was elected to the Reichstag for a manufacturing town in Saxony with 8,225 votes, against 7,256 Conservative; and about the same time an overwhelming victory was gained at Hamburg, which had never hitherto returned a Socialist.

It is difficult to speak with moderation of the way in which the German police acquits itself of its duties under the Socialist laws; on the other hand, we cannot well exaggerate the meanness and brutality daily exercised against the proscribed party. That such a state of affairs should be possible in the land which boasts of its world-famed philosophers and men of science leads to discouraging reflections on the extent to which our civilization is still ruled by material force—aided on the one hand by a deficient sense of public duty among intellectual men; on the other, by an ignoble conception of prestige swaying the masses. Throughout the land, no privacy is sacred against the intolerable espionage of the paid agents of the police. Upon the most absurdly trivial homes are entered and searched for compromising papers; a man's nearest relations are unscrupulously trapped into the disclosure of something which may condemn him, and very often a mere word may entail heavy fines or months of imprisonment. Seizures or banishment of heads of families have in hundreds of cases reduced unfortunate women and children to absolute helplessness, and the police, by their unceasing vigilance, do their utmost to prevent the misery from being relieved, as it is made a criminal offence to subscribe money for such a purpose. Taverns are peremptorily closed on the merest suspicion of harbouring Socialists; printing offices are

suppressed, and the type, &c., seized, if anything the most distantly resembling a Socialist publication is found to issue from them; individuals suspected of receiving condemned publications are tracked and hunted down like dangerous beasts. Many, of course, have fled from Germany, and sought freedom in Switzerland, France, or England; but recent events have shown that France, Republican though she boasts herself, offers but an uncertain refuge to those whose crime is the love of liberty. Even at the very moment when the amnesty called back the exiled Communists, numbers of German and Russian Socialists were on the mere evidence of *mouchards,* with no reason assigned, conveyed, amid circumstances of gross brutality, from Paris to the French frontiers, which they were forbidden to repass. The English press has had little to say on this topic; perhaps it was as well.

Common-sense tells one that Social Democracy is far more likely to grow than to disappear under such treatment as this, especially where there exist so many special circumstances favouring the spread of the doctrines. Though any such thing as the printing and publishing of a Socialist organ within the German frontiers is practically impossible, papers are now being published in London, Zurich, and the United States, which, with infinite difficulty and danger, are conveyed in considerable numbers to sympathizers in Germany, helping to keep alive the zeal of the party. Singular stratagems are resorted to in order to elude the vigilance of the authorities; thus, for instance, the *Freiheit,* an organ published weekly in London, was for a time sent on to the Continent under a different name, each week, it being thus possible to circulate a number of copies before the paper could be examined and condemned. One issue was called the *Bismarck* (pleasant satire!) another the *Tessendorf* (a public prosecutor very active against the Socialists before the law), and yet another bore the curious title of *????* And how, it may be asked, is it discovered that a man is in the habit of communicating with exiled Socialists, or receiving forbidden publications? The answer discloses a degree of infamy which could not easily be surpassed; in short, correspondence is handed over by the Post Office to the police, and examined before delivering ! Thus in the town of Breslau the police have at present a list of about 3,000 persons whose correspondence is daily dealt with in this manner.

"Ich will Sie an die Wand drUcken, bis Sie quielschen!"— "I'll squeeze them against the wall till they squeak"—is another characteristic remark, reported to have been used by the Reichskanzler; and doubtless he flatters himself that the "squeaking" point has been almost reached. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—it is not the avowed Socialists alone who feel the pressure of his hand. In the German military system exists an unfailing source both of popular discontent and of direct aid to the Social Democrats' political and economical views. The aid is found in the fact that, by binding the German youth to a fixed place just at the period of their lives when numbers would seek abroad a congenial sphere of activity, the military conscription increase the pressure upon the wage-earning classes, and renders more and more acceptable to them the protective schemes which the Socialists propose. That the army is a source of discontent needs little proof for any one who has heard the experience of the ordinary *dreijdhriger* (three-years' server). Not to refer to what might be esteemed suspected quarters, the report of a recent trial at Wurzburg of certain officers for ill-treatment of their men disclosed such circumstances of every-day brutality, such unspeakably barbarous treatment become a mere matter of course, that one seemed to be reading a passage from mediæval history. It is well known that every year numbers of common soldiers destroy themselves from inability to bear their lot.

After this rapid survey of the external conditions, the internal state of the Social Democratic party at present calls for some final remarks; and with this part of our subject we may deal in a future paper.

Threatened with annihilation by the *Ausnahme-Gesetz,* the question of tactics became of supreme importance to the Social Democrats. At first there appeared a danger lest the policy of waiting, recommended by the chief leaders, should too much resemble a surrendering of principle, and damage the cause with the masses. True, the party still had its representatives in the Reichstag, and the laws contained no word against the future election of Social Democrats; but it had already been made apparent how skilfully the machinery of the German Parliament could be applied to close the mouths of objectionable speakers, and even the passing of the famous "Muzzling Bill" could scarcely have resulted

in less freedom of debate than at present exists. However, in their determination to fully disprove the existence of the least connection between the tactics of Hödel and Nobiling and those of the party, the leaders set their faces even against secret propagandism by books, papers, &c., or the establishment of secret societies, utterly disclaimed all aiming at violent revolution, and asserted that, in the nature of things, their views must continue to attract adherents; that time itself would bring about the revolution they desired.

This exclusively negative attitude could not endure, and the establishment of a central organ for the party was rendered absolutely necessary by the appearance of two papers claiming to be such—the *Lanterne,* edited by Carl Hirsch in Brussels, and the *Freiheit,* put forth by Most, a former party member of the Reichstag, in London. The former had but a brief existence, and was objected to chiefly on account of its pamphlet form and feuilleton style; against the latter there were stronger grounds of opposition. Herr Most could by no means uphold negative tactics; he advocated propagation of Socialist views by every possible method, even that of violence. Consequently there was founded in Zurich what claimed to be the central party organ— a paper called *Der Sozialdemokrat.* Henceforth the constant opposition between the *Freiheit* and the *Sozialdemokrat* is of importance, affording a clear notion of party movements and party prospects. The standpoint of the new paper was clearly indicated in its first number, whence the following sentences are taken:—"The main basis of our action will be the widely known Gotha programme." . . . "Now, as then, the Social Democratic party is, in the true and best sense of the word, a revolutionary party. Now, as then—or rather more than ever—shall we energetically set our face against that plausible, but in reality foolish and ruinous revolution-making, to which one might well be tempted through despair at the all but intolerable pressure of the reactionary party. We, too, know very well that the radical reformation of society can never be brought about in a perfectly smooth way by mere ministerial action. But this conviction is diametrically opposed to the 'making,' or rather 'botching-up' of revolutions, for revolutions come about indeed, but cannot be 'made.'"

Truly, there is but little of the "Red Spectre" about a declaration such as this, and, though the *Sozialdemokrat* is not always quite consistent, it still adheres in the main to what we may call the constitutional attitude. And this is the attitude assumed by the Socialist members of the Reichstag—save in one instance. We have before us a *Flugblatt,* dated June of the present year and signed by eight of these members, which declares that they are henceforth at war with their colleague Herr Hasselmann, owing to a speech made by the latter in the Reichstag on the 4th of May, in which he said:—"I regret that the Russian anarchists have been spoken of in this House by certain Socialists as a party wholly disconnected with their own. For my part, I claim them as allies. For already it is becoming a firm conviction of the people that the time for parliamentary chatter is gone by, and the time for action is at hand!" In the same sheet Herr Most is likewise condemned for the independent and violent tone of his paper, and, from the writer's standpoint, with reason. From the first, however, the *Freiheit* has progressed in the advocacy of strong measures; and it would appear as if the climax had been attained in a manifesto which it published in January of the present year. Herein the demands of the Gotha programme were endorsed, but as regards mode of action, it was distinctly asserted that the revolution must be brought about by violent means, all others having proved useless. This, it will be seen, was a return to the "Communist Manifesto" of 1848. Moreover, whereas religion had hitherto been left as a matter of purely individual concern, it is now declared that atheism is essential. The manifesto ends with the words—"We are Communists, Republicans, Atheists, and Revolutionists." Surely a comprehensive definition! Can our worthy citizens go to their repose in peace knowing that Herr Most and his *Freiheit* are among them? Nay, we may add yet another instance of the uncompromising proposals of the exiles who walk our streets. Here is a small sheet addressed "To Our Brothers in the Barracks," strenuously advising the German soldiers to forthwith shoot down their officers and declare for the Social Democratic party, and ending with the emphasized words, "Down with discipline ! Rebellion for ever!"

One certainly cannot sympathize in any way with instigations such as this, seeing that, if only individual soldiers are Socialists, the shooting of officers will be of absolutely no avail, whereas if the whole army become converted, nothing need be done beyond suddenly refusing to obey orders and

triumphantly proclaiming the Social Democratic State. Clearly, the army is the as yet insurmountable barrier in the way of a successful revolution; and that Prince Bismarck well knows this the twenty-six millions sterling of extra taxation imposed during the past year are satisfactory evidence. At all costs, the iron hand of military despotism must retain its hold on the people's liberties. But that there comes a day when the pressure has reached explosive point, it is scarcely possible to doubt; and if the Socialists sincerely believe that by means of a violent and bloody revolt a vast alteration for the better can be at once brought about, are they not justified in adopting almost any means to shorten the period of agony? Mr. Gladstone has remarked, with regard to Socialism, that, should it contain a solution of our difficulties, it will be sure to effect its triumph, and in that case it is foolishness to oppose it; while, on the other hand, if there is nothing in it, it may safely be allowed to go its way to its own especial limbo. The remark was representative of the "practical" English standpoint with regard to the movement—in the case, that is, of those Englishmen who think about it at all. The ordinary English capitalist looks upon Socialism, Communism, and kindred movements as something so essentially foreign as to be beyond the sphere of his active interest. Nor are the working classes more interested in the revolutionary propaganda of Continental schools, however much the latter may claim an international activity. Radical though they may be, their Radicalism is still based upon ideas of personal independence and freedom of competition. Trade unions are, it must be admitted, a small step towards economic reorganization, and lead us to suppose that some day greater advances will be made in that direction; but, strictly speaking, they are not of wide operation, and look as yet to nothing beyond a fair regulation of hours and wages. The idea of an utter abolition of the wage system is one which our working-classes are not ready to grasp.

And, we may well ask, how far are the theories of scientific Socialism really grasped by the masses of German revolutionists? It needs little special inquiry to convince one that the vast majority are only following a vaguely luminous ideal of material comfort which flits before their eyes like a Will-o'-the-Wisp. Let us suppose that the Socialist State was proclaimed tomorrow; how many working-men would be found possessed of that self-reliance, self-control, self-respect which such a society inevitably presupposes? The Socialist agitators lose sight of that terrible *vis inertioe* against which human progress struggles so hard, attaining such slow and imperfect results. Before the Socialist state is possible, the masses must be taught what they really need, why they need it, and how they must act to obtain it; in other words, it is not enough to agitate them with vague ideals: they must be, in every sense of the word, educated to progress. That none the less their material condition calls for improvement must be plain to all. Human beings who live from day to day under much worse conditions than our cattle reared for slaughter are scarcely in a promising condition for the reception of intellectual and moral truths.

Since the above was written a Congress has been held at Zurich by the supporters of the *Sozicildemokrat,* whereat it was resolved to proceed in future not by "any *legal* means," but by "*any* means." This amounts to a justification of Herr Most.

THE END.