

The Counter-Revolution in Germany

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By Louis C. Fraina

THE Ebert-Noske-Bauer Government, shorn of Noske and Bauer, is again in power. The streets are still a mass of barbed-wire entanglements erected by the counter-revolutionary troops against the Government and now used by the Government against the revolutionary masses; Government troops, armed with rifles, sheath-bayonets and hand-grenades, patrol the streets prepared to shoot down the workers (scores have already been shot) — the identical troops that did not fire a shot in defense of the city against the counter-revolutionary invasion of Luttwitz-Kapp. The old apathy is again dominant in the streets of Berlin — that cold, hopeless apathy which immediately impresses the observer in Germany. In the "high life" districts, in Unter den Linden and Friedrichstrasse, the swirl of frightful gaiety again rushes on; while in the proletarian districts there is sullen resentment, tempered by partial anticipations of a new struggle.

Five days ago it appeared as if this new struggle might start immediately. The proletariat of Berlin was still on strike, in spite of the Ebert Government and the trades union bureaucracy having issued orders to end the strike. In city after city the workers used the opportunity of the crisis to usurp power, developing the General Strike beyond the limit imposed upon it as a strike in defense of the Government. In Westphalia and the Rhineland, in the Ruhr mining districts, the working class, while not yet wholly clear on means and purposes, was in complete control, seizing government power and organizing an active Red Army of 30,000 men, with 50,000 in reserve. But, for reasons which will develop later, these hopes are now a thing of the past; the Government is preparing an offensive against the Red Army, which has been compelled to accept an armistice: disaster and massacre will come in the Ruhr.

These are the inescapable facts of the situation: the Ebert Government is in power, but the military coup d'etat has partially conquered since it has compelled the Government to compromise and move more to the Right; the Government is withdrawing its concessions, or rather its promises of concessions to the masses; the interests behind the military coup are securing concessions as against the proletariat which rallied to the Government's defense; the Government is compelled to rely more than ever on military force; while the Cabinet is being reconstructed according to the policy of the Right and not according to the demands of the Left. The proposal of the Independent Socialist Party for a "Socialist Government" (Cabinet coalition of Independents and Social

Democrats) has been contemptuously rejected — a rejection accompanied by a new Terror. The Socialist-bourgeois Government having and choose between the proletariat and the reaction, again chose reaction.

The revolutionary crisis produced by the military coup, developing conditions for the final struggle for power, is being converted into a Cabinet-parliamentary crisis, with the Independent Socialist Party manipulating the situation to secure Cabinet concessions and parliamentary power: the Independents having, all through the crisis, acted not with an eye to the revolutionary seizure of power, but with an eye to (1) the reconstruction of the Cabinet on a "Socialist" basis, and (2) the coming elections in which they anticipate becoming the majority Party; while the Communist Party of Germany (as represented by the Reichszentrale) is assisting the conversion of the revolutionary crisis into a parliamentary crisis by not measuring up to the requirements of the situation and by rendering criminally opportunist encouragement to the Independents in their proposal for a "Socialist" Government.

And the masses? The masses are stirring uneasily, baffled and betrayed; and they may yet, under the pressure of events, initiate a new struggle, compelling the hesitants and the moderates to accept revolutionary action.

1 — The Collapse of Democracy

The Ebert-Bauer-Noske Government was directly responsible for the military coup d'etat. The coup was made by troops recently returned from the Baltic provinces, where the Government allowed a concentration of the most reactionary troops of the old German army for use against the Revolution and against Soviet Russia — troops which, with the connivance of the Socialist Government, surreptitiously assisted Col. Avalaff-Bermont in his counter-revolutionary campaign against Petrograd. The coup had been discussed for months and open preparations made; but the Government did nothing. On March 11 General von Luttwitz met President Ebert in Conference and issued an ultimatum, but von Luttwitz was not placed under arrest; while Noske, actively or compliantly, allowed the reactionary troops to prepare their coup. Late in the evening of March 12 Noske issued a statement that the fears of the Left concerning a military coup were unfounded — six or seven hours later 10,000 troops invade Berlin to the strains of martial music and the plaudits of a crowd; the Government troops firing not a single shot in defense of the city, while the Government itself fled in an automobile...

There was no power of resistance in the Government — no resistance in democracy and the parliamentary regime. Aggressive and relentless against the proletarian revolution, the Government was weaker than a woman's tears against the counter-revolution. Democracy and the Government had been compelled to rely upon the most reactionary forces, upon the military of the old regime. Democracy and the Government did not act uncompromisingly against the military, since antagonizing or weakening the military meant weakening the basis of their own power; hence the Government supinely allowed the preparations for a coup to proceed. A revolutionary Government would have answered the threat of von Luttwitz to march upon Berlin by mobilizing the armed proletariat and by general arrests of reactionaries, by mass-Terror against the bourgeois Junker reaction; but the Socialist-bourgeois Government had disarmed the proletariat, while aggressive measures against the reaction would have meant an open break with the Right, and the collapse of the Government under pressure of Right and Left. At a meeting of the National Assembly on March 18, Socialist Chancellor Bauer said: "After mature deliberation the Government decided not to enter into a bloody struggle with the Kapp upstarts, and therefore determined to leave Berlin, thereby avoiding violence." (Against the Communists there never was any thought of "avoiding violence"!) But that is miserable equivocation. The Government had at its disposal in Berlin alone 30,000 troops and 50,000 armed civilians, and about 300,000 in all Germany; yet the Government evaded a struggle with 10,000 counter-revolutionary troops. Why? Because the Government knew that its troops, reliable in crushing a Communist uprising, were completely unreliable as means of defense against a reactionary uprising. Moreover, an open military struggle would compel the Government to arm the proletariat, thereby developing the forces of proletarian revolution. The Government, accordingly, chose to retreat and compromise; never for a moment did the Socialist Government of Ebert, Noske and Bauer forget the menace of a proletarian revolution; concession to the Right rather than permit the revolutionary proletariat to conquer!

Democracy and the parliamentary regime, acclaimed as the final symbols of the Revolution and the means to Socialism, broke in pieces. Democracy? It was, in the persons of the Government, fleeing to Dresden in an automobile; and there issuing proclamations about law and order, right and the constitution — at a moment when the issue was power against power and might against might. The Parliament, the National Assembly?