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The German Revolution in Action

By Ludwig Lore

THE news from Germany is contradictory. Now, as always, the correspondents cable and the papers print what they consider satisfactory, regardless of the truth. There is doubt, accordingly, concerning the state of affairs in the old Empire.

But the Revolution is on—that is certain. How far has it penetrated? And how deep?

Considering the dearth of information, it is naturally difficult to form opinions. Whoever follows the cable reports will observe that for the greater part they are fabrications. Petty, immaterial occurrences are reported again and again in the most varied forms, while presenting no picture of the situation as a whole.

But two facts in the reports, if they are facts, challenge our scrutiny. The one is the report that the old Prussian generals, for example Hindenburg, are still at the head of the armed forces, and that they are against the general arming of the workers. It is apparent that these generals of the old regime, however they may emphasize their loyalty to the new state of affairs, would eagerly welcome a return to the glory of the Junkers and the Hohenzollerns—even though tarnished by defeat. This retention of the old generals is actually a challenge to the Hohenzollerns to make the attempt at a counter-revolutionary seizure of power. The old generals are tools of the Hohenzollerns, and there is the danger of a coup-d'état in their retention as heads of the army. And if the revolutionary government strives to maintain "discipline" among the troops returning from the front, it actually works into the hands of the counter-revolution. A disciplined army, under the old leaders, means a weapon in the hands of the foes of the republic.

Accordingly, replacing the army administration by reliable men of the new regime should have been one of the first tasks of the new government.

Equally, the government should have armed the workers, which is the only class of the people upon which a revolutionary government can depend. The disarmament of the soldiers should proceed with increased speed, because there is no proof that these present revolutionists under the old leaders will not be counter-revolutionists to-morrow. And the arms, which are taken from the soldiers, should be turned into the hands of the workers; they alone are the guardians of the Revolution and of the new order of things.

One appreciates the enormous difficulties which the revolutionary government has to face. The enemy is at the frontier, and every regulation of affairs within the old Empire which does not suit him may prompt a march into the country and impose his will by armed force. This must be considered. But action must still proceed, the dismissal of the old generals and government officials, and the arming of the proletariat.

But these are isolated events. They are, probably, not characteristic of the whole situation. Revolutions develop, and as they develop acquire definite expression. The whole situation must be considered.

Revolutions are not made. They come as spontaneous outbreaks of an intensely dissatis-

fied people, they are the product of unbearable political and economic conditions. Nevertheless a successful revolutionary uprising cannot come as a bolt from the clear blue sky. Mere dissatisfaction with existing conditions, no matter how violently it may be expressed, can neither be successful in its initial onslaught nor can it remedy the conditions that were the cause of its outbreak. Such a revolt may have the effect of overthrowing one class of oppressors in favor of another. It cannot completely do away with economic oppression, because the oppressed and rebellious class is not prepared to assume the control over its own destinies. Only when the masses have become inculcated with an intense spirit of class solidarity, only when there has been created within them an indomitable confidence in

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their own powers can they hope to reap the fruits of the great revolutionary struggle of which they have been the bearers.

When the World war first broke out, nothing seemed further removed from the range of possibilities than a revolution in Germany. The complete defection of the Social-Democratic Party, the incredible war madness that had taken possession of all classes of the German people drowned the voice of the handful of men and women who upheld the international position of the Socialist movement. For many months, in the face of the severest persecution, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Klara Zetkin, Franz Mehring and Otto Ruhle fought the bitterest battle that men could fight, the struggle against attacks, ridicule, the persecution of their own comrades.

Later this small group of radicals was joined by another, the so-called "Moderates," the Centre of the German movement under Karl Kautsky, Hugo Haase, George Ledebour and Eduard Bernstein, who severed their connection with the Scheidemann majority group, but rather because of their opposition to the war and because they were unwilling to become partners to the complete abdication of every class-conscious activity that characterized the regime of the government-Socialists.

The outbreak of the Russian Revolution once more aroused the hopes of the whole world in the German proletariat. Surely now they would arise! Surely a proletariat with its glorious past

could not be deaf to the wonderful appeal that lay in the great Russian uprising. There were a few strikes in Germany and in Austria. But they were betrayed by the Scheidemann group together with the Legien trade unionists, the men and women of Germany settled back for another period of warfare. They looked passively on while their masters, at Brest-Litovsk, committed the shameful crime upon the Russian Revolution. They failed to respond to the impassioned plea of the Russian proletarian leaders. Nothing seemed able to arouse them out of the deadly apathy into which they had fallen.

But the revolutionary ferment that the Russian Revolution had brought into Germany was working. The new, wholesome virile methods of the Russian proletarian government, the Soviets, held an appeal that the purely political, doctrinaire program of the Moderates could not accomplish. The revolutionary propaganda that was conducted with the help of the Russian Ambassador Joffe fell on fruitful soil. Starvation and misery at home fanned the flame of resentment against the government into a conflagration, a conflagration that swept over the armed forces at the front and broke the last shred of the famous "morale" of the German troops. The great ship of the German Revolution had been launched.

It is true, hunger and war-weariness are the forces that are driving its engines. But far from foundering blindly about, it will steer directly forward to its ultimate destination, held true to its course by the revolutionary understanding of the masses. The theoretical Marxism training that the German movement gave to its rank and file in the past, the understanding, that, in spite of all political accomplishments, the complete overthrow of capitalism alone can achieve the liberation of the working class from exploitation, will save the social revolution in Germany from many bitter and costly mistakes. With a clearness and inflexibility of purpose that recalls the German movement under August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, it has gone through three different phases of development within a short period of time: from bourgeois ministry with the co-operation of three social-patriots, to a coalition ministry of Socialists and Liberals under Socialist domination, to a Socialist ministry representing all wings and groups of the Socialist movement, under the direct control of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils.

The Revolution in Germany is still developing, and if the future realizes present promises, will ultimately place the revolutionary elements of the German Socialist movement where they belong—at the helm of the German Socialist Republic.

Socialism sweeps Europe, brushing kings from their thrones as the autumn winds blow the over-ripe fruit from the trees, uprooting capitalism as the winter gales lay low the blight-struck trees of the forest. Mayor Hylan of New York hears a faint echo of these dread happenings and prepares to guard the citadel of mammon. He bars the Red flag.

What a pity the Czar and the Kaiser didn't think of that!