

Socialism and Reaction in Austria

By Friedrich Adler

(From Adler's speech in court at his trial for the assassination of Premier Stuergh.)

I DESIRE to declare that I deny all responsibility for any statements made here by my attorney and that I am determined to oppose, most emphatically, any attempt on the part of my counsel to present an insanity plea in my favor. It may be the duty of the attorney to take care of my body but it is my duty to protect my convictions, which are more important than the hanging of one man more in Austria during the war. The case is a much more serious one than that which is engrossing my attorney here. I desire, therefore, to say from the start: I did not commit this deed in a fit of mental darkness, but after ripe consideration; I have considered it for a year and a half, have weighed all its effects, from every side.

In the whole of Austria, no one is competent but the ministers and they have turned the constitution into a scrap of paper and have refused to be called to account. I ask you, therefore, what is to be done when there is no institution through which these eleven people may be called to account, what method remains but that of force? What other possibility is there, when a ministry rules by force, to call it to account, except the methods which they themselves are using? Does not, under such circumstances, force become a necessity, just as you have always said of war? In a state, which is called an orderly society, under such circumstances is there anything left but force? I will not speak of the right of revolution. The Social Democratic Party, upon whose program I have always stood and still stand today, does not deny force and has not condemned its use. It has declared in its program that it will use, for the realization of its aims, all effective means that are in accord with the natural sense of justice of the people.

The state's attorney intimates that I am an enemy of Austria. The state's attorney mentions that I accused the Arbeiter Zeitung of patriotic excesses, that I attacked Dr. Renner for his Austrianism. I do not claim to be a patriot. I have never made this claim, neither before nor during the war, nor will you believe that I, in order to gain your sympathy, will throw my convictions aside and say, "I am a patriot." You will see later that an entirely different train of thought has guided me. I have heard the word patriot frequently used in Austria as an abuse and this is not surprising, for patriotism in Austria is a peculiar thing. Long before the war Austrian patriotism was denounced not only by social-democrats, but even by bourgeois as something inferior. The intelligent bourgeois was everywhere not patriotic but nationalistic; I need only call your attention to the fact that those people of the Deutsche National Verband, who to-day are so indignant at the unpatriotic activity of the Czechs, at one time called us the "k. k. (imperial) social democracy," to express their deepest contempt. At that time, the German bourgeoisie openly declared that its ideal was not Austria but the national state, that it belonged to the state of its nationality.

But in the course of developments this war has evolved a change of functions in the conception of Fatherland.

In former times there were no fatherlands, but simply nations which had to be governed. Since the 70's the ideal of a national state has come to life in the bourgeoisie and so Austria was looked upon as a remnant of olden times, that was expected sooner or later to fall apart into its separate national entities. Now this idea of the fatherland has met a new conception, one that is no longer based upon nationalist lines, but upon questions of economic interests. The bourgeoisie has discovered its interest in the conservation of the economic field of Austria; an interest not only in Austria but in the foundation of a great Central European empire with the King of Prussia, of course, at its head, to whom Austria shall be subservient. Its ideal is no longer national independence but national rule. They are no longer satisfied with the class rule of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat, they aspire to establish a kingdom from Berlin to Bagdad, over which the German people, i. e., the German bourgeoisie, shall rule.

Since the beginning of the war the same national and economic policy has made itself felt in other nations. We have seen that among the Czechs, too, economic interests have come into a sharp conflict with national interests. But the same change of functions has taken place within the Social Democracy. When Belbel attacked Bismarck most violently, it was not because he had created the German Imperial government in place of a German Republic, but because he had created a Prussian Germany in place of a Greater Germany, for which the German democracy of that time and with it the labor democracy had been fighting. Now we see in this war that the labor

movement has deviated from this old national principle, that the Social Democrats have adopted the imperialist mode of thought, and are defending a program in which they do not defend the German national state—which would correspond with the national defense of the French and the Belgians, but the integrity of the German Empire, including even its colonies. There was a period in the war when Social-democrats sacrificed the international character of their movement by openly supporting a policy of might and strategic securities. There have been Social-Democrats who have gone so far as to surrender themselves to the shameful policy of conquest of Imperialism.

The party has always maintained that Austria can exist only as a federation of national states; much energy was spent in the effort to spread recognition of the necessity of democracy in the nation. I cannot, of course, foretell what will become of this nation in this war. There are only two eventualities, and I have furthered neither of these eventualities, but have, rather, occupied a strictly neutral position toward Austria. The Socialist cause, I have always maintained, is far greater than any temporary state formation, and we must therefore refuse to compromise or bind its fate by an intimate identity with the fate of a nation, a mistake that was made in the past, I regret to say, by a number of my former friends. Little as I shall claim the title patriot, I nevertheless refuse to be termed anti-patriot, particularly when this is a part in my motives, not the national, but the moral existence of Austria, the Austrian spirit.

It is the state's lack of principle that has bred in me a hatred, not against Austria as a country, but against Austria as an immoral entity, against its lying spirit. This Austrian spirit exists in all of its parts and in all of its nations; all are degraded by it, and in all it is being fostered by lawlessness. And if you wish to understand what brought me here, it was that this lying spirit has entered into my party, that Dr. Karl Renner, who is nothing less than the Lueger of the Social Democracy, has brought this readiness to humbug into our movement. I have become ashamed of the odium that it reflects upon us.

In this whole crisis I have tried in vain to shake off the filth that has been spewed by these politicians on that which has always filled my whole being. I have attempted again and again to get away to place myself in opposition to those who have betrayed the spirit of my party. That is the real cause for my deed. It was a protest against this spirit that has entered our movement.

I have, all my life been a revolutionist. I have seen in the daily political activity of the party a weapon for the revolution and have never regarded revolution as a catch phrase of political activity. Had I spoken of revolution seven months ago you would have laughed at the idea of a revolution in times of war. The counsel would have called for alienists and you would have thought him justified. But today, not only the Arbeiter-Zeitung but the entire capitalist press rejoices over the Russian revolution. To be sure, these gentlemen have ever been enthusiastic for freedom in other countries. And to-day even the Arbeiter-Zeitung celebrates the revolution in Russia.

It makes a great difference, whether you look at the world from the walls that separate the nations from one another, from the walls that the war has built, or whether you see it from the wall that to me has always been the most important, the wall of the classes that separates the exploiters from the exploited.

We Socialists have always looked upon the world from the point of view of the class struggle—until the war began—and have subordinated everything else in the whole world to this highest point of view. We have looked upon the International as supreme, and yet there are people who say we must change this point of view; in peace the struggle between classes, in war the struggle between nations.

I went through an exhausting struggle to bring back my comrades to the International position. The position of the International looks exceedingly naive. It is the same position that Marx described, when he said in 1864, that it is simply the attempt to establish the simple laws that regulate relations between private individuals as the highest law in the relations of nations to each other. This morale of revolutionary democracy which was first formulated in the Great Revolution is promulgated in the Constitution of 1791: "The greatness of freedom lies in the maxim—'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'" Naive as it may be, that is the morale of democracy, the morale that has again been taken up by the Russian revolution in opposition to land-robbers,

that has been handed down from generation to generation with the principle of equality of all people, by working for peace without annexations and indemnities.

I am convinced that the great majority of Social-Democrats went into this war only because they believed it to be a war of self-defence, and from the point of view of national defence it is to be understood that the nation should defend its entity. That is still Social-democratic. But then the idea of visiting the defeat that we were trying to avoid, with all its horrors and all its misery, upon others, took possession of us. It was the idea that found expression in the Arbeiter-Zeitung on the 5th of August in the words, "However the die may be cast, we hope, from the depths of our hearts, that it may be cast for the victory of the holy cause of the German people." This word victory was emphasized more and more strongly as time went by, and it became the main point of difference between us, for, as Socialists, we must oppose those who seek to profit from this war. Just as the man who is attacked in the forest by robbers and uses all his strength to throw them off, would not think of robbing his attacker when he has him in his power, so should we refuse, in our relations with other nations, to sink down to the level of street robbers. But when I insisted at the national conference last March that the party executive should demand emphatically of the Central Powers a bid for peace without annexation and indemnities, I was laughed at and had only sixteen of the 100 delegates on my side. At first I feared that a short victorious war would anchor absolutism firmly for decades to come. But the long months of war, with its horrible ravages and destruction, have awakened in the people a realization of its misery, have inoculated the organism of the people with its anti-toxin, have created the sentiment of which Goethe speaks when he says: "He who desires war in times of peace, has lost, forever, the joy of hope." A short war would have been followed by decades of chauvinistic frenzy on both sides; war, out of itself, so to speak, creates true pacifism. For the lessons that the war has taught will stick in the minds of even those who, like Funder and his ilk, praised war as a bath of steel.

It was a terrible disappointment for me to discover that the Austrian Social Democracy, which has been the highest thing in my whole existence, was but a blind leader of the blind in Austria. I cannot measure the Socialist party by capitalist standards, but alone by the standard it has set itself in its own glorious history. And it hurts me, that this party should have adopted the evil traits of its opponents. I came into conflict with the Party Executive Committee particularly because it has become more and more a counter-revolutionary institution. The conviction has grown upon me that a revolution in Austria can come only against the will of the Executive Committee, which will always be a hindrance to the revolutionary movement. And for this Executive Committee I had to work as its first secretary and to attend all of its meetings. I realized then more and more clearly: when once matters become serious, my position will bring me into a sharp inner conflict between my duties as secretary and my own personal convictions. I came to the conclusion that our movement can recover only if it is given an entirely new leadership. Seitz particularly always harped upon responsibility. Violent methods must be persecuted, for the Executive Committee must bear the responsibility for the blood that is shed. But I maintain that this responsibility must be borne. The secret of this whole inner conflict lies in the fact that the party, in these long years of peace has developed organizations, writers, political representatives, in short a whole civil staff, but lacks officers; in the fact that nobody in Austria has realized that, under certain circumstances, force must be used. On the contrary, they have always made it their duty to prevent disturbances. Dr. Renner struck the note that dominated this whole attitude of the party regarding the use of forcible measures. I saw that the idea of force was to be discredited in the eyes of the working class.

This opposition drove me to individual action because the party and its leadership had lost the revolutionary feeling of the working class. What I wished to prove was that only over the heads and against the will of the party authorities in Austria can a real revolutionary upheaval in Austria come, that only by disregarding them will it be possible to use the force that must be used to overthrow the rule of force upon which our government rests. Now Dr. Renner will prove to you at once that individual action is in opposition to social-democratic principles, that it is an-

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