

In Germany During the First Revolution

By A French War Prisoner

RUMORS in the air—rigorous suppression of all outside communication by the prison camp authorities,—here is something for informed souls to reflect upon, and for people who, by reading the papers up to that time, knew that military affairs were going from bad to worse, and that owing to the bad economic situation, a calamity indefinite as yet, but certain, threatened the monster of Capitalism and German autocracy.

Coming from some unknown source, on the evening of November 9, arrives this bit of news:—"The armistice is signed. It's all over at that." It was too good. After waiting so long for this news, no one could believe it. I leave to your imagination what kind of a night the captives passed, in anxious expectation of a confirmation. The morning of the 10th, the news was confirmed, and we prisoners were not the only ones to rejoice. The natives, with whom we were on good terms, were overjoyed—our guards forgot their duty, and all faces were beaming with happiness. But some drew back, and, not wishing to disturb the celebration, went off quietly, hiding their tears and thinking of the numberless victims—those whom they should never see again.

And yet the gaiety did not last—a cloud was spreading over the scene—other events of more serious import were expected, and soon we knew what to rely on. The revolution had first broken out in Berlin and was spreading from place to place. The sailors headed the movement vigorously. Councils of workmen were being formed everywhere. Men came into the foreground, grouping the scattered forces about them, and led the way. The army itself lost the aspect of a flock of sheep. Discipline relaxed, the authority of the leaders was disputed, Soldiers' Councils were set up in every district. Then, inevitably meeting, these two elements,—the army and the people—united and formed Workers' and Soldiers' Councils everywhere:—*Die Arbeiter und Soldaten Rate*.—The revolutionary movement was winning. The Emperor and all his suite were fleeing to Holland. The old autocratic society was crumbling, the great military chiefs, whose strategy had failed, shrank into the background, and those who only yesterday bore such an arrogant air towards the "Gemeine," the masses, lost all dignity in their downfall.

This was the revolt of those who had been baffled, hungry, and sent out as cannon fodder, when at last their voices became too loud and too disturbing to the peace and quiet of those in power,—the revolt of those who, in the harsh undertaking of militarism, had let themselves be led too passively to the slaughter—(like many more, alas!)—and the glorious outcome of it all was the establishment of the sovereignty of the unhappy people, who now became the masters of their own fate—for which they had been considered so unfit.

What a lesson....

Such events could not be met with indifference by the prisoners of war, especially the revolutionists, who themselves were looking forward to a similar emancipation in their countries. The excitement burst forth in our camp. The new situation led us to decisive action. The revolution which had just overthrown the hateful rule of the sword, must now free us. At a meeting of all the prisoners, we drew up our demands: immediate release of all captives, lifting of the censorship, delivery of letters and parcels, information concerning the measures to be taken for our repatriation.

We were granted the first three demands, and in addition, the management of the camp was handed over to the French, with the promise of a favorable reply about repatriation after a necessary preliminary understanding with the "Soviet" of the region. In fact, a few days later, a delegation headed by the "Kommandatur" arrived, and read before the assembled prisoners a proclamation beginning with the word "Comrades!"—assuring us that we were free, urging us to maintain a standard of dignity and order, and to stay in the camp until our return. Moreover, they assured us that we should be repatriated as soon as possible, at the same time leaving those who wished to go back at once free to do so. Needless to say, many did not stay long, but went off without worrying about the difficulties of such a trip.

A few comrades and myself decided to take advantage of the opportunity of seeing what was going on with our own eyes. With a knowledge of some of the rudiments of German we set out to study and watch the revolutionary movement at close range. Our aim was to gain instruction from the events that were developing. To this, we took up our quarters in the nearest town, Ludwigsburg, where a "Soldiers' Council" had been established. There we were received by the president of this committee, and thanks to a de-rated lieutenant who had gone over to the side of

the revolutionists, and who spoke French remarkably well, we could discuss things. The representatives of the committee failed to produce any strong effect on us. We expected to see different men among the German revolutionists.—Indeed, some of them were different....—And on the question of the revolution these men spoke to us above all of the necessity of an understanding with the bourgeois classes, of class cooperation, of reforms, etc. (It is quite probable that these Social Democrats were acquainted with the program of our C. G. T.) They made it perfectly plain that what they feared most of all was "Bolshevism."

Seeing our astonishment, the de-rated officer added: "That's the way we feel here, at any rate, but if you

Turn to the Left!

Resolution of Local Queens County, Socialist Party (New York City) adopting the Left Wing Manifesto and Program:

Whereas, we desire to clearly place ourselves on record for, and openly and actively align ourselves with the revolutionary proletariat the world over, as at present expressed by the policies and tactics of the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviki), the Communist Labor Party of Germany (Spartacans) and other parties in harmony with them, be it

Resolved, That we, in Local Queens in Party Membership meeting assembled this 7th day of April 1919, adopt as our official expression the Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party Greater New York; and be it further

Resolved, That we pledge both financial and moral support to the Left Wing Propaganda, working to the end that the National Organization conforms with the policies of this Program; and be it further

Resolved, That all delegates, committees and officials of the Local Queens adhere strictly to this Manifesto and Program; and be it further

Resolved, That Local Queens will not countenance or compromise with any half way measures, but that change in policies and tactics must be complete even if it necessitates the severance of relations with those constituting the right.

want more information, if you want to meet the active leaders of the revolution, go to Stuttgart, to the central committee of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Wurtemberg."

We agreed to this proposition, and, supplied with a passport, we set off for Stuttgart. It was a chance that proved of value to us. Our only guide was an address and a passport, but in the same compartment with us on the train, among a group of civilians and soldiers who should have great sympathy and consideration towards us, there was a young man, strong, well-built, shabbily clothed, who talked during the whole trip without stopping. He was giving a real lecture in favor of the revolution to those around him. He spoke of what the sailors had done in the last few weeks (he was one himself, in spite of his civilian clothes) and of the victorious march of the revolutionary movement across Germany. But from his point of view, actions must not stop there—the struggle was to be carried on until the social revolution became an actual fact.

This statement made such an impression on us, that when we arrived at Stuttgart, we went up to him frankly and told him the purpose of our journey. Immediately his face lighted up, and holding out both hands to us, he declared himself ready to take us wherever we cared to go. We walked across the city with him, talking and making ourselves understood after a fashion, and went to the Wurtemberg Chamber of Deputies—now the seat of the Central Committee of Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils. It was too early to see the secretary, so we made an appointment for later on with the members of the bureau, who received us as good comrades, and in the mean time our guide took us to see his aged mother, who seemed to get great pleasure from our visit. You may be sure that we were deeply touched by our warm reception.

Our guide, after donning his sailor's uniform, went back with us to the "Landtag," where, at the appointed time, we were brought into the presence of the secretary of the revolutionary party, a Liebknecht man. But since our command of German was most imperfect, and our German comrades knew no French at all, conversation, naturally, was not easy. Accordingly, after a somewhat limited exchange of ideas, which no one understood very well, a suggestion was made to put us in touch with Klara Zetkin, the famous German Revolutionist and Internationalist, who spoke French. They telephoned her to say that we wished to see her, which pleased her and we arranged for an interview that very evening. An automobile was placed at our disposal, and, still accompanied by our sailor

friend, we went to see Klara Zetkin. Since she lived in the suburbs of Stuttgart, in a distant villa, we had to cross part of the town, and go up along the mountainside through the woods. The night had already fallen, and we could look down over the great city as it lay spread out below, glittering in all its lights. After about half an hour's journey at fairly good speed, we reached our destination. When we rang, Klara Zetkin came to the door. Our sailor comrade introduced us, warm hand-clasps were exchanged, and we were led into a simply furnished dining room. On the walls hung pictures and silhouettes of workers at their toil. A huge dog and a great black tom-cat lay stretched out on a rug looking up at us curiously. They offered us chairs, and made us feel at home at once. "Comrades," said Klara Zetkin, "you are welcome, and I am glad to be able to talk with you. Come now, what would you like to know?"

Then we explained that we looked most favorably upon the Russian revolution, and that before going back to France, we wanted information on the causes and aims of the German revolution for our French comrades.

Here is the substance of Klara Zetkin's reply, which seemed to us that evening to be most pessimistic. She, with her long militant experience, did she foresee the bloody riots of Berlin, the death of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, and the massacre of the German Communists by the troops of the Social-Democrats, the momentary defeat of the Spartacides?...

"For the causes of the revolution, you must see into the sufferings of the people, suffering greater than one can imagine, suffering endured since the beginning of the war, by the people who have had to reduce their needs more and more. Ah! Among the well-to-do classes, the misery of the destitute was not perceptible, although they did suffer somewhat from the shock. So much the better. Yes, it must be said that our people have suffered, and it is the excess of this suffering which made the revolution possible. A great evil for the sake of a great good... who knows?..."

"You are aware, comrades, that with us, as with you, treachery and renunciation by most widely known members of the Socialist movement, produced consternation and doubt among the masses of workers, and it is this which allowed the great crime to continue for so long. These men are largely responsible, you see, and the treachery of some of them was a great surprise to me.

"Fortunately, for the glory of the party, for the Internationale, and for Humanity, others have been able to raise the flag and to fight for the principles of human brotherhood in spite of everything. As for me, I feel that I have always done my duty as a Socialist. I have stood by the German minorities, and we did not spare our suffering, nor could persecutions and imprisonments hinder our propaganda. Wherever it was possible, we have carried the good word into the French, Russian, and Italian prison camps. And can we now hope that good results will crown our efforts?"

"The regime of autocracy has fallen indeed, the revolution seems to be victorious everywhere, but can one say how far the impulse that is behind it will carry it?... Foolish indeed would be anyone who would make prophecies under such circumstances.

"The great military chiefs cling to their privileges and influence, and are still counting on a large part of the army. The bourgeoisie is always in the foreground, and finds among our Social-Democrats invaluable aids in safeguarding its privileges. And for the struggle against the dangers which threaten the popular revolution, we are but a handful. But you can count on us to do our duty to the limit. The Spartacide groups will know how to be on the watch. And if there are people in other countries who seem to scoff because until now the revolution has been too peaceful... let them wait a while. The day when the forces of social conservation and domination try to get the upper hand, the day when our bourgeois, backed by yours, awakened from their stupor, shall try to stifle the legitimate aspirations of the people, that day, which is not far off, I am sure, they will find us before them, and there will be bloodshed. It is not to be wished for, but it is inevitable. That is why we are preparing for these coming struggles, what will be the outcome, the future alone can tell....

"As for our aims, they are yours, comrades,—we are fighting for a single cause: the abolition of empires and of armies, the absolute emancipation of the proletariat, the wiping out of the parasite class, and the union of all the workers in the Internationale, where there will be no antagonism, no rivalry of interests."

"However sincere, however courageous we may be, we cannot succeed unless we have help from other countries. May the workers everywhere throw themselves into the revolution, and by their own progress aid us in our effort. Well, good-bye, comrades."