

An Interview With His Majesty

By H. K. Moderwell

He is a middle-aged man. Even after four years of war-bread he is fat, and his flesh moulds itself lumpily into his arm-chair. He has not recently shaved, and the dirt on him is not wholly the honorable grime of toil.

He invariably receives a visitor with a suspicious grunt:

"You want — —?"

Having learned what his visitor wants, he grumbles a bit and then slides by degrees into the matter in hand, or out of it, according as the request pleases him. He regards the affair with ponderous seriousness. No smile ever enters his features.

He is His Majesty, the Majority Socialist Bureaucrat of Germany.

He is a trade union organizer, a party secretary, or an editor; since the Revolution he is likely to be an officer of one of the more conservative Workmen's Councils. He is in every city and nearly every village in the land. Twenty or thirty years ago he was a young workman. He was looking about for his share of adventure in life and he saw the Socialist Party, which had then just won its first great victory in forcing the repeal of Bismarck's Socialist suppression laws. In the Party propaganda he found spiritual compensation for all his humiliating experiences in the *caserne*, in the workshop, in the neighborhood police station, under the Junker regime. He put the ardor of his youth into party work. He became a great man in his factory, in his branch meeting. He felt the thrill of marching in step with the battalions of his own comrades.

The Socialist movement became important, and he became important with it. He discovered in himself a talent for receiving orders and giving commands. He found that he could make men obey him. He rejoiced in the strength of the movement which in the impulse of first manhood he had chosen as his own. He rejoiced in the martial organization of the party, in its scores of fine buildings, its plump money chests, its printing shops and its newspapers. He promised himself that he would help make the army of the working class ever larger, ever more firmly united. And so he became organizer, or secretary, or editor.

The day came when this army had become so important that the Kaiser could not get on without it. Socialists must be called into all important conferences. Socialists must be given offices, even the vice-presidency of the Reichstag. Social legislation, under pressure of the workingmen's battalions, became ever wider and more inclusive. The organizer, secretary, or editor, became ever fatter and more important.

Then the day came when the Socialists were called to the most important conference of all. A great war was to be declared, and the money must be voted. The Socialists in the Reichstag said "Yes." They passed their "Yes" down to the Party secretaries, who passed it down to the Party organizers, who passed it down to the Party editors, who passed it down to the Party members. German Socialism as one man replied "Yes."

There arose soon a group of Socialists who tried to break the battalions, calling upon the workers to throw out the organizer, secretary or editor, who thereupon became first indignant, then shifty and crabbed. At last came the Revolution, and the Party put on shoulder straps and issued commands to the whole empire. Editors became secretaries, and secretaries became chairmen, and chairmen became

ministers. Every saddle-maker carried a monarch's sceptre in his kit.

It is now the business of His Majesty to defend the empire he has conquered. About once a week he retires to a safe corner and shakes his fist at the Junkers, who do not even notice him, being busy with their own designs. Otherwise, his whole occupation is explaining to the German workman that somebody else, not the Party is to blame for all queer things that happen, and that the Germany they live in is a different Germany from that of the Hohenzollerns, and somehow a better one. The necessity for too much explaining has made him petulant. There is no longer any fight in him. There is only a grumbling anger.

He received me with no more than his accustomed graciousness. After once being persuaded to talk he could not be persuaded to stop. The interview which I transcribe, being a composite one, does not perhaps retain quite his exact words, but it follows accurately the sequence of his thought as he expressed it to me.

"Why has the Socialist government not done any socializing?"

"What is there to socialize? The peace conditions have ruined us. Our factories are working at a loss. Our public utilities are already a burden to the state. Our best coal mines are taken away. We must depend on the Entente for our raw materials. The German economy has collapsed. How can you socialize an economy that isn't working? And now, as though things weren't bad enough, the Independents come along and stir up the workmen to demand high wages and a shorter work-day."

"Does the Party intend to insist on socialization in the future?"

"Future? What future has the Entente left us. We are *morituri*—do you understand me?—about to die. What is the good of making plans for the future? The Independents talk about socialization, but if they had our job they would see that nothing can be done. Socialization, Marx explained, can only take place when the national economy has attained the apex of its development. If the Independents—"

"What about the reserve rights of the various German states, for instance the Bavarian post and railroads and army, which Prussia has taken over? Doesn't the Party object to Prussia getting control of all this, especially the army?"

"Reserve rights? What good are Bavaria's reserve rights to her? The post and telegraph are losing money. The Bavarians ought to be glad to let Prussia have them. As for the army, what does Bavaria want with an army? The Entente has left her nothing worth defending."

"What about the Workmen's Councils? Does the Party object to the army dissolving them and dictating the method of elections?"

"The workmen's councils aren't democratic. They are controlled by the Independents. They ought to be dissolved. Now the new elections which the army is dictating will be democratic."

"What is the new method of election?"

"I don't know. But it will be democratic. It is the method by which the *Centralrat* (General Council of the Soviets) is elected. The *Centralrat* gives a majority for our party."

"Just what will be the effect of the peace conditions on the economic condition of the

German working class?"

"Ruin. The enslavement of the German working class. Why didn't Wilson give us the Fourteen Points, as he promised? Why doesn't the American people protest? Why doesn't the proletariat of the world help us?"

"What did your party do for the proletariat at the time of Brest-Litovsk?"

"What did we do at the time of Brest-Litovsk? We *couldn't* do anything. Foreigners don't understand that. We weren't the majority of the Reichstag. We were only the strongest party in it. What could we do?"

"You must explain this in America" he continued. "We were in a coalition government, with the *Centrum* and the other moderate parties. Of course we didn't approve of the Brest-Litovsk peace. But if we had voted against it we would have gone into the opposition and had to leave the government. Then what would have happened?" He paused, then dramatically answered his own question: "*The Junkers would have come into control.*"

I refrained from asking whether the Junkers were not in control of everything anyway. It would have occasioned another half hour of torturous explanations. I mentioned, however, that the Independents had opposed the Brest-Litovsk peace.

"Yes, and what good did it do? They had only a handful of votes."

"But if the factories—the strikes?"

"Yes, what good did it do? The agitators were sent to the front trenches. We were practical and stayed in office."

I couldn't help reflecting that if the present Majority Socialist party made any effort to live up to its promises, say in regard to socialization, it would go out of office tomorrow. So I relented in my questions.

"What does the Party expect to do for the working class?"

"There isn't anything we *can* do. If we had a majority we could do something. But we haven't got a majority. Impractical people on the outside are always complaining that we don't do anything. But it isn't so easy when you get into office. What do they know about it, anyway?"

Then with a sudden fury: "I just wish the Independents would win some election and find out how hard it is. I couldn't wish them any worse luck."

"They have fine theories, oh, yes. But a practical politician has to deal with all sorts of difficulties that the theorist never thinks of. For instance, what chance is there of putting through socialization when the middle class have all the administrative posts? They never think of that. The middle class must have the administrative posts. They have the technical training for it. The working class isn't educated. They won't be able to fill those positions for another generation at least."

"We, who have been doing the practical work of the Party for thirty years, understand these things. But these theorists like Neurath come in, without any practical experience, and think they can become minister and begin socializing right away. A practical man, qualified to fill that office, would see the difficulties and not try to do anything. It takes thirty years of political experience in these *things* to become a practical man."

With this I regarded the subject as clarified and insisted that the interview was at an end. Promising that I would explain the difficulties of a Majority Socialist in Germany, I left the office to get a breath of fresh spring air.