

The German Revolution — First Stage

By Anton Pannekoek
Of the Communist Party of Holland

THE logical result of the collapse of German Imperialism following the military defeat, was the revolution.

On November 4, the revolt in Kiel occurred. The ferment manifested itself first among the sailors. Rumors of revolt among the sailors were heard during the past year, and the Independent Social Democrats defended themselves against the accusations of complicity. Now it broke out anew, stronger and more general, "by mistake" as the *Vossische Zeitung* said. Revolutions often occur through such mistakes—the conviction amongst the sailors that the fleet was ordered out to hopeless combat.

The sailors organized a council, arrested their officers, hoisted the red flag and presented their demands to the government. The social-patriot, Noske, arriving in Kiel, attempted to stop them but in vain.

On November 5, the movement extended to Hamburg, where the dock-workers declared for a sympathetic strike; traffic ceased and the soldiers joined the revolution. Within the next few days the movement spread to Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, Lubeck and throughout the northern regions generally, while Wolff's Bureau sent out vague reports of the revolt and the prediction that it would be quickly suppressed. In Berlin the intrigue of new ministries continued. Max von Baden disappeared, the Social Democratic Party presented an ultimatum to the government and the *Vorwaerts* entreated the workers to remain "calm"—counter-revolutionary to the last. Meanwhile the revolution continued to spread; in Cologne, Munich, Stuttgart, throughout Germany.

Everywhere workers' and Soldiers' Councils sprang into being and imprisoned the officers and officials of the old regime, except those who declared their willingness to assist the revolution. Everywhere the new Republic was proclaimed, kings and princes abdicated and disappeared and finally on November 9, Emperor Wilhelm abdicated. Berlin, which remained calm until the last, went over to the revolution, the Soldiers' and Workers' Council took control without bloodshed and the police of the old regime disappeared from the streets. The movement extended to the Western front and Wilhelm was forced to flee from the General Staff Headquarters at Spa to the Netherlands.

With scarcely any resistance, in one assault, the revolution was victorious. This proves that the old system was already crumbling and had lost the entire sympathy of the masses, whose sufferings had reached their climax through the war and whose fear of the old regime was banished through the military defeat. This inflammable situation, where one spark spread the flames everywhere, enabled the secret preparations of the groups of the Independents and the extreme left for an armed uprising to break into action and thus leaders sprang up everywhere to take command. So with the fall of German Imperialism also fell the political form wherein it functioned: the absolutistic, feudal, militaristic, police state was replaced by the democratic republic.

Through its rapidity and unanimity the revolution rested on the surface of civil society and could not as yet penetrate into the depths of the people's masses. For those who accomplished it, the revolution, as all modern revolutions, is a proletarian revolution. But in its objects and results it is, as yet, only a purely political and therefore a bourgeois revolution. This is evident from the fact that the social-patriotic leaders, Ebert and Scheidemann, were selected to function as the heads of the provisional government.

It seems at first glance unaccountable, that the masses, driven to desperation on account of the war and its horrors, should overthrow and expell those responsible for the war and at the same time allow their accomplices, who always supported the war policy, to take the helm. But this is simply the result of political incompetence and traditional adherence to the old Social Democracy. The four years of war, through the pressure of the battle-field and the activity of the censor, made political development, except in small groups, impossible. The masses have destroyed the machinery that crushed them, they have won their political liberty, and now the political development, the orientation of what they further desire, can be started. They are still impressed with the naive illusions of the first days of the revolution—even as in Paris in 1848; these later revolutions must first go through the development of former revolutions—the illusions of the people's unity, of liberty and democracy.

The various denominations and reflections of these fantastic illusions: we speak of the People's Republic, the rulers are called the People's representatives, we pass motions against all discord and dissension. The reality of society, the class distinction of bourgeoisie and proletariat seems to have disappeared. As this reality again becomes apparent the class struggle will

burst forth anew. It will be sharp and violent in Germany because both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are strong, their class consciousness is forceful and production is highly developed. This will be the next stage of the revolution, it is even now developing. (This was written in the latter part of Nov., 1918.)

How are these contending forces arrayed? In normal times the bourgeoisie rules through its powerful and perfectly organized state apparatus, whereas the masses are divided into separate groups and thus are powerless. Revolutions occur when the masses are spontaneously inspired by one will and thus find power in their unity. New individuals take the helm, different forms of government come, but then the masses resume their daily tasks, the inspiring fire of one powerful will evaporates, they again fall apart as individuals and groups, while the bourgeois apparatus, that remained and was deprived of its power only temporarily, retakes its old position unopposed by any organized force, and again becomes the stable organization of rule. So, through the storms of the revolution, class rule grows and becomes stronger as the experience of the revolution teaches it to pretend, to adopt the external forms of democracy, the dress of people's rule—the rulers change but the rule over the masses remains. To destroy this rule it is necessary to break the old government's organization, the old bureaucracy, and to strengthen the temporary organization of the masses into lasting power. This happened in Paris in 1871 by the Commune, and in Russia in November by the Soviets.

In Germany the workers have created such an organization, the same as took place in Russia, in the formation of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. These councils gave the revolution a direct power, which led to its initial speedy victory. They are the new instrument of power for the masses, the organization of the proletarian masses as against the organization of the bourgeoisie. They do not, as yet, know what they want, but they are there—not their program but their very existence has revolutionary significance. A revolutionary government, which wishes to be the organ of the Socialist proletariat, should commence now to remove the old functionaries and abolish their functions.

The government of Ebert, Scheidemann and Haase has done the contrary. It has attempted to force the Soldiers' Council into a subordinate commission of advice and to restore the disciplinary powers of the officers, which has resulted, in many places, in strong resistance and refusal by the soldiers. It has maintained the old bureaucracy and allowed it to continue its rule: it had done the same as every bourgeois party does when it assumes control—taken for itself the best positions and left all else in status quo ante. It has continued the old generals in command of the army and has made no attempts to further revolutionary propaganda amongst the soldiers. Thus by allowing the apparatus of the ruling class to remain intact, it openly encourages the counter-revolution. Already the bureaucrats openly denounce the "government of dilettantes," the generals at the front order the red flag hauled down, every reaction is encouraged.

The bourgeoisie is entirely satisfied with this government, especially since it announced that no change will be made in property rights and that the banks will not be nationalized. The reason for these announcements is that the government is trying to rely upon the whole population, upon the workers and the bourgeoisie alike, thus, upon the cooperation of the classes, it hopes to be the government of the "continued God's peace." This is a reflection of the unconsciousness of the masses, and will become increasingly impossible with the more forceful awakening of the class struggle.

For the time being the government swings between the classes, it has conservative deeds for the bourgeoisie and revolutionary phrases for the workers—because the bourgeoisie is alertly class conscious and not easily defrauded, while the workers are not yet fully awakened. The first part, the appeasement of the middle classes, is taken care of by Ebert and Scheidemann, while the nice radical speechmaking is the task of the so-called "Left Wing," the Independents: Dittman and Barth, who were included in the government for this reason.

The majority Socialists lack confidence in Socialism and in the ability of the proletariat. They do not dare to socialize society against the bourgeoisie, they are afraid to rule without the old bureaucracy. The rule of the workers appears to them—even as to the bourgeoisie—to be chaos; their own theoretic inability

makes them fear the gigantic task which the historical situation imposes upon the German proletariat. For this reason they want a National Constituent Assembly, at the earliest possible moment, to relieve them of responsibility.

The middle class also wants the convocation of this assembly, because through it they hope to restore normal conditions, the establishment of a "stable" government which would send the councils of workers home with expressions of thanks for services rendered. This has made part of the workers' reflex and, especially among the Independents, they begin to doubt and strive to delay the convocation of the assembly. The Independents occupy in the coalition, the place which the social-patriots formerly occupied in the bourgeois government, namely, to prevent the workers from rebelling against the government. But they are compelled, on account of the revolutionary tendencies amongst the workers, to resist the ultra-conservative dealings of the government.

This explains the growing friction between Kurt Eisner [since assassinated], the leader of the Bavarian Councils, and Barth on one side, and Ebert and Scheidemann on the other. The Independents also propose plans for moderate socialization—not all at once, no experiments! They propose beautiful plans for the upbuilding of Socialist production upon the basis of great industries and great agriculture whose support they must have. They do not think about the fact that Socialism is not a question of the nationalization of industry, but is a question of the power of the proletariat—in the theoretic writings of Kautsky nothing is said about this! The result will be that when the bourgeoisie again assume power it will make an end of all these plans, or realize them in its own way as State Socialism.

Besides, the Independents already go arm in arm with Jaffe, the Bavarian professor of economy, who during the war outlined a project for extensive State Socialism, which is better called State Capitalism. The two parties, the majority Socialists and the Independents, will without a doubt unite with the radical bourgeois parties upon this State Socialism program, provided the proletariat does not intervene. While the government is only concerned with externals and the maintenance of order—which in reality becomes increasingly chaotic—the friction between the classes develops. The bourgeoisie organize White Guards, the workers form Red Guards, and in secret reaction conspires and prepares for civil war. And while the arrival of the troops strengthens the reactionaries, the revolutionary spirit flames amongst the workers.

The great struggle which must develop will be between the bourgeoisie, openly or covertly represented by the Social Democratic and the Independent parties, and the revolutionary movement now called the Communist Party but which during the war was embodied in the Spartacus Group and the Bremen Internationalists. Although, as an organization it is not yet distinct and apart from the Social Democracy and the Independents, the Communist Party is in direct opposition, it defends the dictatorship of the proletariat as against democratic parliamentarism and is opposed to the convocation of the National Assembly; it demands the abolition of Capitalism and the annulment of state debts. It represents the ideal of Russian Bolshevik party although not directly connected with it, on account of friction between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin. By the bourgeoisie and the Social Democracies the Communists are represented as being the Bolsheviks and all the denunciation and misrepresentation directed against the Russian Bolsheviks are also directed against them. Many motions adopted by the Soldiers' Councils—especially at the front where they are least developed politically, and where above all they desire rest and peace—express their abhorrence of Bolshevism. As yet the Communists are but a small minority and the social-patriots and the bourgeoisie use this fact to consolidate their forces. The influence of the Communists upon the workers, however, is growing by leaps and bounds.

The international situation, the threatening food shortage and the menace of the Entente troops are great obstacles to revolutionary developments in Germany. From a military point of view Germany is absolutely at the mercy of the Entente and economically she is also dependent upon the Allies. Her stores of foodstuffs are very small and she is dependent upon the goodwill of the Poles for grain from the Eastern provinces. Through the loss of Lorraine Germany has not enough iron ore to supply her industries. The Entente had already notified her that the delivery of grain depends upon the maintenance of order and the establishment of an orderly government. The Entente,

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