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The Situation in Germany

Charlotte Wilson

April 1890

The result of the last elections in Germany, the success achieved by the Social Democrats and the defeat of Bismarck, the last move of the German emperor and his flirtations with the workers, are often the subject of lively discussions in this country. Not so lively, however, we must say, and certainly not so enthusiastic as they might have been expected to be, just as if a certain feeling of distrust was awakened amid the workers by the intrusion of imperialism into their struggle against the exploiters. In fact, the present conditions of Germany are of so complicated a nature, so many factors must be taken into account, that the lack of enthusiasm at the last victories of the German Social Democrats is fully justified. "What maybe the outcome of all that?" is the question generally asked, and we shall do our best to sum up the elements for the answer.

The last great revolution was in France, the foretaste in this country. In both it had the characteristic of breaking down the power of autocratic rule—and autocratic rule means the rule of the courtiers, in both countries it meant the advent to power of a more or less democratic middle class in lieu of the landed and Court aristocracy; and in both countries the revolution, before

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resulting in constitutional parliamentary rule, passed through a period of Republican rule. Both in France and Britain it also was the result of two distinct elements: the growth of a powerful middle class, consequent on a sudden development of industry and commerce on the one side; and on the other side of a great movement of thought and awakening of consciousness among the poorer classes, both converging together to break down the powers of landed aristocracy and Court rule.

But, while having so much in common, the French revolution evidently was a step in advance as compared with the revolution of 1640. It had the advantage of that great philosophical movement which was born on the soil of liberated Scotland and England during the 18th century, and the French encyclopedists, as well as the revolutionists of 1789-93, were nurtured with ideas which were the outcome of the English revolution. It also had the benefit of the experience of the English revolution, and that of an additional hundred and fifty years in the general evolution of Western Europe—not to speak of the genius of the French nation giving a further and more harmonious development to the ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The movement, on the whole, was imbued with loftier ideas; it was free from the puritanical religious element; it stirred the masses much deeper and it embraced a larger part of the population. It thus developed with greater rapidity and it cleared the way for a more rapid further evolution. Therefore, sixty years had hardly passed since 1789 before France had 1848—the first move of the industrial proletariat—and 1871, which was the first revolutionary attempt at the municipalization of property and the break down of the centralized State.

Coming a hundred and fifty years later than the English revolution, it naturally made 9, stop more in the enfranchisement of the masses from the bonds of State, Religion and Capital.

It so happened that in the slow progress of industrial civilization, from West to East, Germany was the next country to assimilate the results of the two revolutions. She inherited most

if we take into account that the German army is the German nation—we must conclude that a republican revolution is ripe in Germany. The days of the Empire are numbered, and all that a war against Russia could do by reviving German jingoism, would be to prolong imperial rule for a few years more.

Germany rapidly marches towards a Republic, and a Republic in Germany would mean the United States of Central Europe. It will also mean, as we said, attempts on a large scale at expropriation of certain branches of industry by the State. That would be the beginning of the Social Revolution. As to how far it would go in Germany, nobody can predict. All that our German friends have to do is, to abandon their tactics of Bismarck-fighting which has absorbed them until now, and openly, plainly and energetically set to work for the spreading of the so long forgotten Socialist idea. Not the authoritarian Socialist idea they indulged until now, but the Anarchist Socialism, without which their revolution in so heterogeneous a country as the German Empire would be sure to be drowned in blood,

Two parties have made sudden progress in February last—the Radicals who have added 42 seats to the 38 seats they had before, and the Social Democrats who have won 37 seats instead of 11. Both together they have 117 deputies, out of 347; and, whatever the shades of opinion among the deputies, we may say that one-third of the German electors have voted for the Republic, and that nearly one-third of the Reichstag is already republican,

That is, in our opinion, the chief lesson of the last elections, and that is what so much alarmed the Government and induced the Emperor (who foresaw it, though not to that extent) to seek among the workers for the Support Of some 'Social Democrats against the Republicans. Just, as on former occasions, in Lassalle's times, Bismarck resorted to the support of the Socialists in order to defeat the Liberal bourgeois. To endeavor to win the support of the workers was the last anchor of salvation to be out out against the growing wave of Republicanism.

That manifestation of republican feeling has nothing to astonish us. In 1878, after Hoedel's and Nobiling's attempt against the emperor, several hundred men were condemned to many years of imprisonment for having openly, in public houses and public thoroughfares, expressed their regret at Hoedel's and Nobiling's failures. Such an expression of republican feeling, seven years after the great war and against so old a man as Wilhelm I was the more significant; and the present elections fully confirm it.

If we take into account that all men less than 25 years old and having less than a six month's residence in their district have no Voice in the elections, and that few Social Democrats do reason as Liebknecht is reported to have reasoned at Brunswick (he is said to have promised the emperor the support of one million and a half of Social Democrats) -1 if we remember that the emperor ran do nothing for improving the conditions of the workers even if he obtains a Zen hours law from the Parliament (the eight hours already have grown to ten) and finally,

of the industrial development, the philosophical thought, the institutions which were the outcome of 1640 in England and 1789 in France. Though Italy (which only quite recently has conquered her independence), Spain, Austria, and even Russia have also shared to a certain degree, the fruits of the new stage of civilization inaugurated by England since 1640, nevertheless Germany was the nation which has most advanced in that direction. And, as the end of each century has been marked for the last five hundred years by a great revolution, it appears most probable that the next great revolution will have for its met Germany. Germany is the country which, in all probability, will soon offer us a movement analogous to those of 1640-88 and 1789-95.

But, as we often have pointed out in Freedom, no revolution can remain any longer confined to one single country. It was natural for England not to make a further move while France was undergoing the tempest of 1789, and even to join the counter-revolution. Her insular position and the extreme limitedness of international intercourse at that time rendered it so. It was also possible for all governments to the East and South of France to join in an alliance against the Great Revolution because at that time their respective countries were entirely in the bonds of Serfdom, Aristocracy and the Church. But steam and a hundred years of steam-civilization have totally changed all that. Neither in the West, nor in the East and South, would the German revolution find enemies: on the contrary, it would find either allies or elder brethren also marching onwards. The two great revolutionary steps which France made in 1848 and 1871 the rapid growth of the powers of Capital and its internationalization: and, above all, the development of international Socialist thought—all there are such important factors in our present life that no revolution can happen anywhere without being echoed all through the civilized world. So it was in 1848; it will be the more so at the next conflagration.

In fact, Germany may or way not make her revolution, but Italy is bound to do it, and precisely on the same lines. Royalty is dead in Italy; the land question is ripe; the factory slaves already in open revolt. Spain and Portugal are simply waiting for favorable circumstances for sending away their kings find courtiers, and the proclamation of a republic in Spain will be the signal for provincial independence, for communes being proclaimed, for land being seized from the landlords, and so on. Vienna is as revolutionary a center as Paris is; and the autocracy in Russia is on its death-bed. As to the "elder brothers," whatever may be the state of affairs in middle Europe, France cannot avoid a Communalist Revolution which necessarily must become Communist; while the old rotten institutions of this country can stand no longer, especially in face of the breakdown of an industrial system based on benefits ripened from the rapidly decaying export trade. The change must come, and all that can be said is, that the two countries which have made their revolutions in 1640 and 1789 have most chances of achieving the greatest results with the least amount of foolish resistance and bloodshed; while Germany and the other continental nations are sure of meeting with plenty of that same foolish resistance which resulted in Cromwell's and Robespierre's Terror.

The French revolution was in advance of Cromwell's revolution. So also the German revolution must be in advance of that of 1789. In its economical life Germany already has made the step which the French peasants imposed upon France by burning the chateaux. Serfdom was abolished in Germany after 1848. So also in her political life Germany has obtained what France strove for in 1792. She has representative government, manhood suffrage and middle-class rule, and the attempts at Cesarism now made by Wilhelm II. can only be the means of accelerating the crisis. Having thus middle-class rule, and having put an end to serfdom, Germany strives now, in politics, for a republican form of government, and in economics for Louis

Blane's State management of production. She is where France was in 1848.

As to the economical views of the Social Democrats, no one who is acquainted with their writings will doubt of the close analogy between their program and that of Louis Blane's *Organization du Travail*. Their ideal is the State ownership of the chief branches of production.

As to the republicanism of Germany, it is not so generally noticed as it ought to be. An English Social Democratic paper wrote the other day that one million Germans have voted in February last for common property. But that is a great mistake. The thirteen hundred thousand voices given to Social Democratic candidates are a most heterogeneous aggregate, and we have no means of judging what their opinions as to common property am. That question has long since disappeared from the S. D. electoral program as well as from their writings. The question at issue during the last elections was not common or private property, but-Bismarck or not; the Cartel (the alliance of parties which support him) and exclusive legislation against the Socialists, or not-"Down with the Cartel," and nothing else, was the official watchword launched by the Council of the S. D. party before the ballots.

Certainly we know that there is a considerable number of real Socialists in Germany, and we know perfectly that a very great number of them are revolutionists; we know and appreciate their devotion to the cause, their powers of joining together in common work, their cheerful and steady activity. Precisely, therefore, we are sure that the coming revolution will have a Socialist tint as pronounced, and possibly even more pronounced, than the revolution of 1848. But we maintain that the voices given to S. D. candidates represent the greatest possible variety of programs, aspirations and political tendencies. The real meaning of the last elections must be looked for in another direction, and we see in them a great and important manifestation of Republican feeling.