

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



The Strike Movement in Germany

Freedom Press

June, 1889

Freedom Press
The Strike Movement in Germany
June, 1889

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 3, No. 31, online
source RevoltLib.com, retrieved on May 8, 2020.
Freedom Press (ed.)

theanarchistlibrary.org

Recent events in the country of the Kaiser have been most encouraging for all those who really wish a happier time for the workers, an for Anarchists especially. In all parts of Germany we have had strikes and rumors of strikes, and although the demands made have not been very important, the general effect of the movement has been excellent and the attitude taken up by the German Emperor and the Prussian capitalists very instructive.

The idea of a general strike continues to grow in popularity on the Continent and faith in political agitation and methods is giving way. The workers are getting tired of waiting for the parliamentarians to do something for them; they are making tip their minds to do something for themselves. Hence the spread of the idea of a general strike. At the lowest estimate the strike is a means of improving the present condition of society much more efficacious than the -visionary palliatives the Social Democrats propose to obtain in the dim and distant future by -legislative means. Our comrades of the S. D. F. here in England admitted that in a practical way when they supported with such comparatively good results the strike of

the match girls employed by Bryant and May. The strike is in fact a method of resisting the encroachments of the capitalists which experience has proved to be effective. The trade unionists of this country have won their position of superior well-being among the workers chiefly by -strikes. and the nine-hour day and the Saturday half holiday are due to strikes. In America, too, it has been, admitted by the official labor statistician that strikes on the whole have resulted in a gain to the striker. Moreover the strike is an independent, self-respecting method of enforcing demands, a straightforward, direct attack upon the capitalist position. Consequently the exploiters fear it far more than any amount of talk about bills for reducing the hours of labor. But the general strike to which the worker. of the Continent begin to look forward would I* the commencement of the Social Revolution, as the capitalist, very well recognize. the day of small things and small demands is not yet over, but it is nearing its end. Now the workers on strike only ask for a reduction of hours, a slight increase of pay. But the example of a body of workers in one spot is followed by other bodies of workers in other places, and the demands grow as the strikes become more numerous and the solidarity between the workers is move apparent. The workers begin. to rely upon one another. They begin to say, Why should we be content with only a slight increase in our wages? why pay tribute to the robbers at all?

In Germany at present the demands made are small and the Emperor recommends the employers to grant them while at the same time he threatens the workers with assassination at the hands of his hirelings. He feels timid, but thinks it wise to keep up the swagger of the bully.

The miners in Westphalia have demanded an increase of 15 per cent. in their wages, which will increase them to 2s. 6d. for the lowest paid, and 3s. 4d. for the highest, a day. They also want to reduce their working day to 8 hours. Over one hundred thousand men have been concerned in this affair, and the government has not hesitated to murder several persons. According to a Berlin tele-

gram, on May 9th at Bochum the strikers assembled in the interior streets of the town and the troops were called out. The miners retreated slowly before the military as far as the railway station, and there halted and faced the troops, but made no attack. Just at this critical moment a train arrived in the station, and the passengers, not knowing what was going on, walked as usual into the street towards the troops. The officer in command, believing, it is said, that these inoffensive persons were strikers about to attack his men, ordered the troops to fire. The volley killed a platelayer and a gentleman who had just arrived by the train. Two other men, one woman, and a boy were seriously wounded. Blood has also been shed at Brackel, where the troops fired on a meeting, killing three, and wounding several others. A Dortmund telegram of May 12, stated that the whole of this district was in a terrible ferment. A telegraphic message reached the commander at Dusseldorf at midnight, upon receipt of which the whole garrison was alarmed, and called to arms. Another of those conflicts with the troops which have already resulted in several deaths occurred in the neighborhood of the Schleswig pit. The miners attacked the foremen of the works. There were then no troops in the immediate neighborhood, and by the time a detachment of the 13th Infantry had arrived from Hoerde, the crowd had reached large proportions, and had become very threatening. The troops came up at the double, steaming with perspiration, but in perfect, and compact order. At the sound of their approaching tread the people divided into two separate bodies and made a rush for the shelter of a neighboring railway embankment. On the other side of this is a large "beer garden," kept by one Buser, and much frequented by the miners. Here they made a final stand, and from behind this cover assumed defiant attitude, hooting and jeering the soldiers, 'it whom they repeatedly hurled the opprobrious epithet "sandhasen" a slang term equivalent to "cowards" or "white livers." Lieutenant Pape, in command of the troops, thrice summoned the rioters to disperse, but his warning was received with further ridicule. The ominous drum-roll, accompanied

with trumpet-blasts, was then ordered, and twice repeated, the preliminary to the firing of a volley. Still the crowd did not move. The word to fire was then given, and a hail of bullets fell among the crowd. Six persons instantly dropped dead, among them a child of four years old, who was in the front row of the crowd. Shrieks from among the compact mass showed that many others were wounded, but these were instantly removed by their comrades in an inexplicably secret manner. One woman was found wounded, but the other- were carried away, no one knows where. The other half of the crowd maintained their defiant attitude, and with singular daring faced the troops.

At this moment Director Hahne, willing to save further bloodshed, shouted at the top of his voice, whilst pointing, to the other body of rioters, "There lie six corpses; will you hazard the same fate?" The people then slowly dispersed. The bodies of the dead were removed by their comrades.

At the time of writing it appears that many of the colliery owners have yielded, or in other ways induced many thousands of the men to return to work. Probably the threats of the Emperor have also had their effect upon the less determined section of the miners. A Berlin telegram of May 25 says that it is stated in the Rhenish newspapers that the proclamation of martial law may be looked for. A miner named Weber, who is the President of the Strike Committee in Bochum, has been arrested on account of a speech in which he is alleged to have used the words, "War against capital-victory or death." This was regarded by the authorities as a Socialistic utterance.

In Saxony, Silesia and elsewhere the mining strikes extend and telegrams are continually appearing in the daily newspapers that troops are being sent to the various districts. In Silesia there has been loss of life, Strikes are also being started in other industries. On the 21st of May 3000 masons at Berlin came out demanding that their wages be raised from 5d. to 6d. all hour, that their hours of work be reduced to 9 daily, and that a fortnight's notice should be

given before dismissal. Also in the capital the brewers' assistants, basket makers, furriers' assistants, omnibus employees, tailors and carpenters, are either on strike or about to go out. At Bremerhaven the tailors were going to strike for a reduction of their working (Jay to 11 hours and an increase of some shillings a week in their pay, but the masters gave way at once. The men had been working from 13 to 16 hours a day. At Wurzburg, Lubeck, Konigsberg and Bunzlau the carpenters and joiners, at Sprottau the builders and at Dortmund the brewers' assistants have also joined the strike movement.

Whether this growing movement in Germany is due to the recent successful example of the tramway men in Vicuna or is the result of an understanding between the workers to effect a general strike is difficult to determine. We incline to the belief that there has been a good deal done towards organizing a general strike but that the miners' movement in Westphalia is apart from it and due largely to local influences, a rise in the price of coal, -and the Vienna example. Undoubtedly the party of action, that is to say the Anarchists, have made considerable headway in Germany since the death of Frederick. Bebel and Liebknecht have beginning to be no longer the same influence upon the masses; they are, I regarded as too moderate, too slow. So far back as the 5th of March we saw in Le Ilatin of Paris a long letter from its Berlin correspondent in which a general strike was declared to be, imminent, which would have Berlin for its center and which would result in great things. At any rate it is evident that Germany is getting ready to act.