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# GERMANY IN REVOLUTION

By L. E. MATTHAEI



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REVOLUTION  
THE FIRST PHASE**

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LOUISE E. MATTHAEI

*Author of "Studies  
in Greek Tragedy"*

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*To*  
ALBERT AND GABRIELLE  
HOWARD

## FOREWORD BY THE EDITOR

THE object of this series is twofold ; to disseminate knowledge of the facts of international relations, and to inculcate the international rather than the nationalistic way of regarding them. This latter purpose implies no distortion of facts. It is hoped that the books will be found to maintain a high standard of accuracy and fairness.

But their avowed object is not merely to record facts, but to present them in a certain light, and with a certain object. That light is Internationalism and that object the peace of the world. If the series is successful in its purpose it will contribute to what Wells has called the " international mind."

The object has been to produce the books at a price that shall not be prohibitive to people of small incomes. For the world cannot be saved by governments and governing classes. It can be saved only by the creation, among the peoples of the world, of such a public opinion as cannot be duped by misrepresentation nor misled by passion. The difficulties of that achievement can hardly be exaggerated, but ought not to daunt. And the editor ventures to hope for support for men of good will in this one attempt, among the many others, to enlighten the intelligence and direct the will.

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## INTRODUCTORY

### THE TWO REVOLUTIONS

*Germany is free.*

The People's Commissaries to the  
returning army, November, 1918.

SOME events which should be great are born dead, and some live from the moment of their birth and become more and more important. The German Revolution is an event which has become more important as time has gone on. From 1.30 p.m. on Saturday, November 9th, 1918, which was the hour at which motor-cars ran through the streets of Berlin distributing flysheets announcing that "herewith public power has passed into the hands of the people," the German nation has discussed and developed its Revolution without one moment's pause. The Revolution has been the background and the foreground of men's thoughts ; it is with the German people day and night, and is being lived and used every moment of every day. It is profoundly affecting the life of every living human person in the land ; it is making the rich man poor and the poor man rich ; it has taken some men out of prison ; it has cast others into prison ; it has made the streets run with

blood ; but again it has put rice and meat into the poor man's cooking pot ; it has said that rice must not be three shillings a pound, and meat must not be twelve shillings a pound, and it has seen to it that they were not. Such an event is not a sham.

When I first began to write this book,\* as I turned from the English press, full of the coming trial of the Kaiser in London, the discussion of whose guilt filled the major columns of every important English paper, as I turned from that nervous and passionate raking over of the past, to the German papers, entirely taken up with discussing whether the Soviet system should wholly, partly, or not at all, be adopted into the constitution, whether the coal mines should be socialised, and if so, in what degree, whether potash and electricity should also become state property, whether all classes should attend the same common school, what is the best way of giving university scholarships to the sons of the proletariat, whether bank clerks should manage their own banks and elect their own bank managers, how much money you can squeeze out of a rich man and yet persuade him to go on working, in fact as I turned to the German papers which were discussing the *Revolution*, away from the English papers which were at that time still discussing the *war*, the change of emphasis, it seemed to me, could not be more marked or more significant.

\* July, 1919:



On one side of the Rhine there was still the old world ; on the other there was already a new one.

This is not meant to imply any criticism of the English people. It is merely saying that a great event had taken place in Germany which had not taken place in England. For a revolution is a very great event indeed ; it is the greatest event which can happen to any nation. And the German nation is immensely proud of its Revolution.

It would not have been so proud had not the Revolution been long waited for. For at least seventy years, ever since the great failure of the great attempt at a political revolution for liberty made throughout Germany and Austria in 1848, the Germans had been told that they had no genius for politics. Voltaire's words were recalled which bade them " rule the clouds " and leave dominion over the earth and sea to others. Their own Chancellor, von Bülow, twitted them with their political simplicity ; the Germans, he says, are asses at politics. During the war they were told, with every accompaniment of humiliation, that their country was governed as badly as possible ; they were advised to be humble, and to be glad if they got the chance of admiring France and copying England.

It would not be true to say that the Revolution was an answer to such arguments. The Germans were not irritated into a revolution by our journalists, nor did they make it amiably, as a result of good advice. Its causes were much greater. But it is true that, when the

Revolution had been accomplished, the Germans, and especially the German Socialists, did feel that at last they had an answer to these unpleasant arguments, which they had always resented. And, as it happened, the course which the Revolution at first took allowed them to make a quite particularly effective answer. This the reader will find explained in the chapter which I call *The Bloodless Revolution*.

The German Revolution gave the German nation back its self-respect ; that was its great power. We all know the monstrous and harmful dreams of world empire in which the Germans were indulging before the war. Many nations have indulged in such dreams. Usually the result has been bad, because dreaming nations lose sight of justice and common sense. But behind much selfishness and folly and bitter cruelty there lies a germ of something good ; most imperialisms have started out to make the world " better " ; a few of them have done so. All nations, as they approach maturity, develop a sense of " mission," just as all young men, as they approach manhood, think themselves the finest fellows in the world. The Germans had before the war an exaggerated sense of mission ; for the sake of the world it is not to be desired that they should entirely lose it.

In the following chapters I give some account of certain selected aspects of the early part of the German Revolution, November, 1918, to March, 1919. It is a

mistake to think that the German Revolution was not a genuine revolution, simply because it has not developed as was expected. I cannot share the view that it has been a disappointing revolution. It has not been a very dramatic revolution. It has changed its character as it has proceeded, and this has puzzled many people. It began as a political revolution of a fairly simple type; the Emperor was dethroned, the people seized power, a National Convention was called, a constitution discussed and passed. The latter took a long time,\* and meanwhile the political life of the country seemed to be coming to a standstill. This is true; the political force of the Revolution has to some extent run out; but it hardly matters; for underneath the political, quite another revolution has begun, an economic one. This economic revolution is very gradual, but it is much more important than the political revolution. And while everyone can perfectly understand what has happened when the Hohenzollern Emperor resigns his throne, it is not everyone who at once is interested on hearing that the Berlin bank clerks have won the right to be consulted as a body when one of their number is dismissed. Yet the first happened within the space of a week and is only significant because it is a kind of seal or mark that the nineteenth century is really over; while the process implied in the other will change the face of the world and take fifty, or a hundred, years.

\* Final adoption, August 11th, 1919.

Yet if a man who wishes to know what is happening in the world around him will take the trouble to compare what I have called the two revolutions in Germany, the political and the economic, he will see that after all they were but one. The later or economic revolution grew directly out of the political Revolution; the political Revolution was bound to lead straight to the demand for the economic revolution. Again, the economic revolution is absolutely guided for many years to come by certain great principles which those who made the political Revolution announced on the very first day when they came to power: "work for all," they said; "order, and not chaos; work *for* the worker and *with* the worker, not from the worker or against him." And this, and nothing more, is the whole secret from which the European economic revolution is to spring.

In this book I do not attempt to do more than deal with the political Revolution; that is why I call it *Germany in Revolution: the First Phase*. But the principles of the economic revolution will also be found here, stated roughly, or else implied. Therefore, after I have first described how William of Hohenzollern fell, I next go on to tell the reader something of the joy of the Revolution in Germany, of that regained pride and self-respect, of that sense of mission, which is so important in what Aristotle calls "the good life" of peoples and of cities. I then show, very simply, what those who made the Revolution meant to do with it, what they set

## INTRODUCTION

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themselves to make of it. Finally I describe some of the temptations and failures of the Revolution, so that my readers may understand why the Revolution did not accomplish all, or half, or even a quarter, of what was planned.

For revolutions are planned in an ideal world ; but they come to pass in a world of human misery.

## CHAPTER I

### HOW REVOLUTION CAME

NOVEMBER 9TH, 1918

*The Hohenzollerns have abdicated : long live  
the German Republic.*

Scheidemann to the people from  
the balcony of the Reichstag on  
the afternoon of November 9th.

A year before the Revolution took place in Germany, no single person could by any conceivable means have guessed that the Revolution, suppose it was bound to come, would come in the way it did. People at that time would perhaps have been expecting one of two things to be possible, though even these would not have seemed very likely ; they would be saying to themselves that, if the Hohenzollerns were after all doomed to go down in the cataclysm of this world upheaval, they would, being Hohenzollerns, go down fighting in a blaze of glory ; or else, it was also possible to imagine that they would in the last resort, again because they were Hohenzollerns, *i.e.* Prussian patriots and descendants of a long line of Prussian patriots, make the supreme sacrifice for their country's sake ; they would suddenly and dramatically

announce to the world : " Look you, here are we ; if our rule stands in the way of a good peace for our people, think you we do not know how to lay aside our crown even for ever, and give our nation peace ? " In a kind of way people in Germany felt that the world war would have ended fittingly so ; it would have been appropriate and harmonious and noble. Other dynasties had been expropriated meanly, in the course of mere local upheavals ; the Hohenzollerns were so great and so ancient that it seemed quite fitting that there should be a world war before they could leave the stage.

But if the world war was judged appropriate to, and worthy of, the Hohenzollerns, it never once occurred to any German, until after the incredible had happened, that the Hohenzollerns would not be worthy of the world war. It never occurred to any single German that his Emperor would run away. People in England, and still more people in France, were long harassed by anxiety lest the Hohenzollerns should return ; they did not understand the spiritual effects of the Emperor's flight. If it is possible for one man to undo all that his ancestors have built up for him in the way of prestige, reputation, and real affection, certainly William II. undid, in the space of about three weeks, all that the Hohenzollern ancestors had done for him and for his house in the course of a thousand years.

The flight of the Hohenzollerns began before the Revolution actually broke out. It began with that

“retirement” on October 29th, 1918, to General Headquarters at Spa, which the Emperor undertook on the advice of the military authorities, an advice given behind the back of the responsible civil administrators. This “retirement” is almost more severely criticised by those in the best position to know than was the actual final flight to Holland; that final flight was only a consequence of the first step and inevitable when it came; but on October 29th the Hohenzollern dynasty could still have rescued itself and incidentally Germany. Things indeed were very critical; the General Staff had just terrified the civil authorities by declaring that the position on the front was desperate, and that they could hold out no longer. Events have proved them partly right and partly wrong. The position certainly was desperate, but they could probably have held out another few weeks. On these few weeks everything turned, and undoubtedly everything depended on a bold front, or even on a certain minimum of bluff. The civil authorities were prepared for a mixture of bluff and of very genuine concession to the enemy; and part of the concession was to give some signal and remarkable proof that Germany had discarded military autocracy, and was willing to come into line with the rest of Europe in adopting a democratic Government and liberal institutions. It is difficult to think of any way in which this could have been done better than by a voluntary



resignation of the Hohenzollern dynasty ; such an act would have been a most remarkable proof of good faith and sufficiently dramatic to appeal to popular emotion even in enemy countries.

Now we must remember that the high civil authorities looked on the Emperor in this way ; they thought him an impulsive and tiresome person, very easily influenced, and when influenced extraordinarily headstrong ; but they also believed that he had a genuine love of his people, a genuine capacity for sacrificing himself on their account ; consequently, everything depended on approaching him in the right way, suggesting the right things to him, and then trusting to his own good impulses and energetic nature for carrying the suggestions through. They had constant and most maddening experience of the way in which he could be " got at " by a certain military clique ; only a few days ago the highest official in the Empire, the Chancellor, (Hertling), and before him the next highest, the Foreign Secretary, (von Kühlmann), had been ousted from their posts because they had failed to please this clique ; their successors in office were therefore prepared to be wary and tenacious.

But they had not calculated that the military clique would simply remove the Emperor from them and sweep him off to safe custody in a great military Headquarters, where civil officers had no standing and no foothold. They had not calculated that the Emperor would yield to such a suggestion. It was always afterwards a

reproach against William II. that he deserted his capital and his people when they had most need of him and he of them. He was actually outside Germany, not on German soil at all,\* when the crisis came, a fact so significant as to need no comment.

But if the Emperor showed a curious weakness in fleeing from Berlin, later he showed a curious obstinacy in refusing to resign when it came to that point. Eventually the highest civil authority in the land, the Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, actually issued the statement announcing the Emperor's resignation before he knew for certain that the Emperor had resigned; he did for the house of Hohenzollern what the last of the Hohenzollerns refused to do for himself—he made one desperate attempt to rescue honour. But the facts leaked out almost at once, and the extraordinary conduct of the Prince naturally came in for no little criticism; one does not, as a matter of political practice, *forge* the resignations of great dynasties. It was very awkward for Prince Max, when a full eighteen days after he had said that the Emperor had resigned, the Emperor issued a document of resignation dated from Amerongen, November 28th. But in reading the account written by Prince Max himself, we come to see how reasonable and natural, indeed how wise and sensible, Prince Max's conduct had been.

Prince Max's account only covers two days, November

\* Spa is in Belgium.

7th to 9th, 1918. On November 7th, the Social Democrats had handed in an ultimatum demanding the Emperor's resignation. Prince Max was the very first Chancellor who had ever received a Social Democrat into his Cabinet ; he now had two, Scheidemann and Bauer, and was fully prepared to co-operate with them, or, shall we say, graciously to permit them to co-operate with him ; the last man, Hertling, had left office rather than bow to so startling an innovation. Max of Baden was more liberal, and that was why he had been chosen ; it was all part of the new *régime*. For not long before this it had been definitely decided that Germany must be more liberally governed ; it had been agreed that the war would never be won while the people were so discontented ; and the people would not be satisfied unless certain constitutional reforms were to be conceded. Prince Max had agreed to begin these reforms. But even Prince Max had many old-fashioned ideas, and he had a lingering prejudice that it was better never to do even the most necessary acts in consequence of what might seem to be a dictation from below. He therefore had one pre-occupation, and that was to persuade the Emperor to resign before it could be said that he had been forced into doing it by the Socialists.

It is indeed remarkable that the idea of resignation at all should have been so quickly accepted by the authorities at Berlin ; it is symptomatic of the lightning pace at which history was made in those hours at that spot ;

ideas which at another period of their lives the Berlin politicians would have been years in discussing, were accepted, and discarded for others still more startling, in the course of a few hours ; this is altogether characteristic of the first phase of the German Revolution and marks it as a genuine revolution. But if history went fast at Berlin, she did not go so rapidly at Spa. The distance between Berlin and Spa became not physical, but spiritual ; those at Spa still had the old Germany round them ; those at Berlin were already swallowed up in the struggle with the new, and the two ends of that much used long-distance telephone between the Imperial villa at Spa and the Chancellery at Berlin spoke two entirely different languages.

While the Chancellor was actively engaged in thinking out the right kind of resignation, the Emperor was not thinking out any resignation at all. Prince Max could not but be aware of this very awkward fact. In the course of November 8th, he despatched two very urgent and very diplomatic telegrams ; he enjoined the Emperor not to think of yielding to anything so abhorrent as a Socialist ultimatum. On the other hand, ' we cannot do without the Socialists ; if we cross them we shall tumble right into a military dictatorship ; we must hold them, by hook or by crook,' and he respectfully suggested to the All Highest Imperial personage that it would be sensible to steal their catchword from them by — announcing a voluntary resignation from

the Emperor himself ! This highly unpalatable suggestion the polite Chancellor proceeded to make less unpleasant by the following very ingenious and not wholly impossible modification. The resignation was to be a temporary one only ; a Regency should be instituted on behalf of the Crown Prince's eldest boy, a child ; a National Convention should be summoned and a general vote taken as to the national wishes. If the nation wanted the Hohenzollerns, well, then they could come back ; nor could the Entente ever complain again that the Germans were in the grip of a detested tyranny.

It was a fair offer ; whether the Prince could ever have made what the Stock Exchange calls " good delivery," I do not know. But for a half-and-half suggestion, it had certain merits ; it was easy to grasp, and dramatic. And had the Hohenzollerns taken the risk and accepted it, there is some reason to think that they would now be the greatest, the most popular, the most firmly seated holders of power in Europe.

It was perhaps fortunate for Germany that the Hohenzollerns were born a stupid race ; otherwise the German nation might have missed its chance of setting up a republic. As it was, the head of the house of Hohenzollern caused a sharp telegram to be despatched to his Chancellor stating very curtly that " His Majesty must wholly decline to enter into the proposition made by your Grand Ducal Highness, and considers it his duty to remain, as always, at his post." Possibly the

Prince may have stared a little at the last half sentence from the hand of a man who had already shown so curious a notion of how to remain "at his post."

The Berlin authorities were in despair. Late in the evening the Chancellor insisted on a personal telephone conversation with the Emperor himself, and while at his side there stood a nervous Secretary of Legation, ready, pencil in hand, to take down his words, as constituting a kind of document of state, he personally addressed himself for twenty minutes to try and explain the realities of the situation to an old, headstrong, and obstinate man. Not without finesse he tried to appeal to the Emperor's well-known dramatic instincts. The Emperor loves to pose, and it was insinuated to him that he would be a kind of martyr-king, and that by saving his people from the horror of civil war "his name," as the Prince put it, "would be blessed in history." But William of Hohenzollern, like Pharaoh of old, hardened his heart. The Berlin Government now brought up their re-inforcements; various personages of high importance were directed to telegraph privately to the Emperor, urging resignation. Ex-Minister Solf, for instance, did so, a man whose advice ought not to have been overlooked. So the late evening wore on; at midnight a Socialist deputy came to the Chancellery with so alarming a report of the state of the streets of Berlin that the Imperial villa was once more rung up and his words handed on verbatim: the workers could

scarcely any longer be restrained till the early morning, and that only "if the resignation were by then unfailingly to hand." But morning came, bringing not the much needed authorisation from Spa, but the news of the no longer avoidable General Strike in the factories of Berlin.

It is possible that the Emperor slept that night ; it is certain that neither his civil advisers at his capital, nor his military advisers at his chief Headquarters, attempted to do so. His civil advisers were, as we have seen, engaged in trying to obtain, and by wire or 'phone to transmit to Spa, a true picture of the state of the empire. His military advisers must have been trying to obtain a true picture of the state of the army. Precisely at 9.15 a.m. on Saturday morning the 9th they caused the Chancellery at Berlin to be rung up and informed that "the Chief Command has decided at once to communicate to His Majesty that in the event of a civil war the armed forces of the country would not support the Emperor."

This sudden message was the turning point of these events. It was the death-knell of the kingdom of Prussia and of the kingship. Prince Max instantly recognised its importance. It was, of course, nearly twenty-four hours too late. Nevertheless, the munition factories in which the General Strike had broken out were in the far suburbs of Berlin and it would take some time for the excitement to work through to the centre of the town.

Exactly how many hours or half-hours, minutes or half-minutes, would a General Staff require in order to administer to their All-Highest War Lord the supremely unpalatable truth that his army had deserted him? It was a race against time and against stupidity.

We are fortunate in being able to map out the events of this most fatal Saturday morning almost by the quarter of the hour. Besides Prince Max's account, we have the account of the Generals at Spa, issued with the approval of Hindenburg, and we have other individual accounts. We can balance the story at one end with the story at the other. At 9.15 a.m. the Chief Command, as I have stated, rang up Berlin. At 10 o'clock they met the Emperor in a kind of round table conference. Now, not all the Generals had been converted to take a gloomy view of the situation. Hindenburg, indeed, had been convinced the evening before by the powerful arguments of General von Groener, who throughout had the ungrateful task of maintaining the thesis of the army's unfaithfulness; it was no doubt in consequence of what he had said that the message had been despatched to the Berlin Chancellery, probably on Hindenburg's authority. But other Generals had not been present at that previous discussion. Two of them, very depressed, but still resisting, met another, General Count von der Schulenberg, when they were going up to the conference. He had come from elsewhere, and, on being told their errand, breezily exclaimed: "I should think you must all be



mad ; of course the army stands by the Emperor." Delighted to have so cheery an ally, they then took him with them to the conference, which, in spite of its extreme importance, does not seem to have been of a very formal nature. In the sequel this chance intrusion came to be of decisive influence. But the curious may remark that the satire of history was so ordaining events that at this same moment news was coming in to the Chancellery at Berlin telling how the last " loyal " troops had now gone over : the Alexander Regiment, the Naumburg Chasseurs, the Jüterbog artillery. The Chasseurs had been drafted into Berlin for the express purpose of dealing with the insurrectionists, so that their desertion was " final and decisive," as Prince Max says. Prince Max, at Berlin, must have been hearing of this desertion at the precise moment when von der Schulenberg, at Spa, was delivering his brave words about the faithfulness of the army.

The von der Schulenberg intrusion perhaps made the conference run on lines not quite those intended. The intention had been to confine proceedings to opening the Emperor's eyes. Hindenburg, whose dignified and straightforward conduct towards the Revolution has rightly earned him the devoted gratitude of his country, began the discussion by begging the Emperor to accept his resignation, " since what I have to say cannot be said by a Prussian officer to his King." However, the Emperor only replied good humouredly : " Well, well,

let's first hear what it is." The question of resignation was not as yet touched upon; Hindenburg confined himself to stating that the army simply could not be persuaded to march on the capital. At this point von der Schulenberg first made himself felt; he sketched out an alluring plan for an armistice with the enemy, which would give the troops time to recover; it was true they were now in no fit mood to march; but let them have eight or ten days' rest, time to recover and 'get rid of the lice,' and by supplementing their short rations from 'the rich supplies' of Belgium, they would then be able and willing to set themselves in motion; and with fascinating ability he indicated what was to be no civil war, but a kind of peaceful progress of the faithful army, led by its own War Lord and Emperor, come to restore rightful authority and to administer comfort to all faithful souls.

It was then that Groener, whose disagreeable role it was, as already described, to be the champion of a revolution among monarchists, got up and addressed what I suppose must have been the most unpleasant words ever addressed to a Hohenzollern:

"The troops will undoubtedly march home again in an orderly and peaceful way, led by their officers and generals; but the troops will not march under your Majesty's command, seeing that the troops no longer support your Majesty's claims."

Schulenberg was bursting out into protest when the first "demand" for the Imperial resignation suddenly rang through from Berlin. "After that," say the

Generals naïvely, "the demands came through more and more insistently, obliging us to break off our military conference." The conference then seems to have adjourned to the garden, away from that persistent telephone. There they broke up into little groups and knots; the Crown Prince joined them, and all heads were laid together to concoct some way out. Various officials were told off to the telephone to keep Prince Max quiet; and when continual telephone messages followed the conspirators—for they were now almost that—even into the garden, the simple device was tried of taking off one of the two receivers in the house, and keeping the other persistently "engaged." And while at Berlin Prince Max was desperately trying to explain that it was now a question "not of hours, but of minutes," in far distant Spa the brain of a von der Schulenberg was working out a scheme for saving, out of the wreckage of a world war, some fragments to be called a Kingdom of Prussia.

And this was von der Schulenberg's plan. The Emperor was to resign; he was to take that fatal step. But he was not to resign altogether. He was to resign as Emperor, but *not as King of Prussia*; for, as is notorious, the German Emperor was simultaneously German Emperor and also King of Prussia by long hereditary right. It is a question whether he was more powerful as Emperor or as King, and many have held that of the two offices the kingship was probably the

most powerful ; for Prussia is two thirds of Germany. Also, it is inconceivable that William II. could long have remained King of Prussia without being invited to resume his position as Emperor. Nevertheless, what was of more immediate importance was that, as King of Prussia, he retained his absolute powers over the army ; he also retained Berlin, for Berlin is the capital of Prussia as well as of the Empire. What von der Schulenberg quite obviously intended was that William II. should re-conquer the Empire, by persuasion, or intimidation, or force, in virtue of his vantage post as King of Prussia. The so-called resignation, then, was to be a sham.

He over-reached himself. Prince Max vehemently protests that the next telephone message, (von der Schulenberg despatched it personally), was worded with such careful ambiguity that it wholly misled him. Von der Schulenberg did not want Prince Max to guess that there had been any change of plan ; nor did Prince Max guess. On the contrary, he quite simply and naturally took it for granted that, when he was told something was being " formulated " and would be ready in " half-an-hour," this something was the Emperor's resignation according to his own suggestions. How could he suppose anything else, when nothing else had ever been suggested to him ? Meanwhile the streets outside his palace windows were bursting out into revolution, and revolutions do not wait for documents to be " formulated,"

no, not though it be but "half-an-hour." Prince Max, therefore, thought it impossible to delay a minute longer in circulating by telegraph throughout the Empire, and consequently throughout the world, a message stating that "the Emperor and King" had resigned, that there would be a Regency, that Ebert should be Chancellor, and that the people should have the fullest freedom to determine their own future constitution. This must have been about 12 o'clock. At 1.30 motors were flying through Berlin flinging out flysheets beginning with these words : *The Revolution is accomplished.*

The Revolution was accomplished ; it was in being ; and it was far mightier and more tremendous than anyone had supposed. Perhaps if Prince Max's plan had succeeded, if the Revolution had stopped, as it were, half way, and a Regency had been set up, the Generals would have been less shocked than they were at his unconventional conduct in announcing his Emperor's resignation before his Emperor had resigned. But Prince Max's own plan also came to nothing ; it was swept away by the windswift rush of revolution. We hear nothing more of a suggested Regency. No Emperor is required, and no Regency, for, as the first revolutionary flysheet says, very simply, "the people has seized power."

Meanwhile at Spa the process of "formulating" was at length accomplished, and some one once more hurried

to the telephone to ring up Berlin. Hardly had he begun to read the Spa document of resignation—"as Emperor, but not as King of Prussia"—when he was curtly interrupted with: "That's no use to us at all; we can do nothing whatever with that, and you had much better listen to what we have to telephone to you"; and they telephoned to some purpose the astounding news that now the Emperor was no longer Emperor or King or anything at all, and that they had also carefully provided for the resignation of the Crown Prince at the same time.

The complete annihilation of the dynasty of Hohenzollern was announced to William II. at 2.10 p.m. precisely in the afternoon. All Highest declared heatedly: "I am and remain the King of Prussia," and the rest of the day was spent in anger, in protests, and—in discussing which neutral country would be "the safest place of residence for His Majesty's person." Towards evening the Emperor retired to his special train, which was waiting in the station. But it was not supposed that he would leave yet. Decisions were made and were unmade in bewildering rapidity, but Hindenburg saw the Emperor at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, fully expecting to take leave of him later and earnestly desiring to do so. That opportunity was never given to him. Very early in the morning of Sunday, November 10th, 1918, the German Emperor and King of Prussia stole away from his faithful Generals towards Holland in a train laden with luxurious provisions and personnel to

attend on him ; so true is it that kings break faith more easily than those who serve them.

And at Berlin, at midnight, six of the once despised Socialists of Germany, the outcasts, the pariahs\* of their country, headed by a cobbler and a journalist, sat round a table in the Reichstag building, naming themselves People's Commissaries and dividing up between them the great offices of state.

(a) Account of the four Generals : *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, July 27th, 1919, No. 364. Cf. also von der Schulenberg's previous personal account : *Freiheit*, April 5th, 1919, Nos. 163, 164.

(b) Account of Prince Max of Baden in answer to (a) : *Frankfurter Zeitung*, August 9th, 1919, No. 584.

(c) Account of Undersecretary of State Wahnschaffe : *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 17th, 1919, No. 393.

\* Vaterlandslose Gesellen.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "BLOODLESS" REVOLUTION

*A tremendous, but, thanks be to God,  
a bloodless Revolution.*

Proclamation of the Württemberg  
Revolutionary Cabinet, Stuttgart,  
November 9th, 1918.

*The dying war abroad must not be re-  
lighted as civil war at home.*

Proclamation of the Hessen Revo-  
lutionary Premier, November  
11th, 1918.

IF I were in a mood to be satirical, I should be tempted to say of the Germans that they woke up one morning and found that they had had a Revolution. It is an astonishing fact that the German Revolution was a less unexpected thing to us than to the Germans themselves. We had been so continuously and pressingly urging the Germans to get rid of their "militarist" Government by some dramatic act, had so definitely made such an act a *sine quâ non* for treating with them, were, fortunately, so ignorant of the true conditions which produce revolutions, lived in such a world of romantic illusion about revolutions and democracy in general, that the German Revolution seemed to us the most natural thing in the world. England expected a German Revolution long



before it could possibly come ; when genuine revolution came at last, it had been discounted. The German Revolution would in all probability have been received with enthusiasm in England in 1915 or 1916 ; in 1918, after four years of a most monotonous and depressing war, it was received with apathy. One or two of the big English papers which were in a position to have excellent information about Germany and which knew themselves to be read by an educated and often liberal section of the upper classes, can by no means be acquitted of having deliberately and dishonestly misrepresented the German Revolution. Their effect has been very great, and will continue to be very great. The more ordinary papers, which to a large extent are really dependent on what the public wants, had no sufficient motive to thrust the German Revolution down the public throat. And had not that public been well and conscientiously trained to think that nothing that the Germans were reported to have done could be true : or if true, then it could not be important : or if both true and important, then it must surely be wicked ? Thus between all parties the German Revolution came to be looked on as a "manœuvre," than which no more ridiculous description could be made.

It was precisely because the *coup d'état* of November 9th, 1918, was so mild, so "bloodless," that it failed to impress the English imagination. Emotions utterly jaded by the horrors of the war could have responded only to something very sensational, to a Berlin running with blood,

or going up in flame of fire. But it was precisely that same "bloodlessness" which appealed so much to the Germans themselves.

The legend of the "bloodless" Revolution, although later events shattered it to fragments, was so extraordinarily important in its inception, and had so great a general effect in winning recognition, and even joyful recognition, of the revolutionary idea from all sorts and conditions of people who otherwise would never have given in their consent to such an act, that it is well worth while to spend a little time in examining it. This chapter, therefore, will be devoted to such an examination. If it seems to deal with the realm of ideas and not with the realm of facts, the reader must not blame me. To those who made the German Revolution the ideas were the decisive thing, and I shall have more than one occasion, even in this short book, to touch on that theoretical and argumentative background which is so marked a strength, and so marked a weakness, of German political life.

The knowledge that the Revolution had been carried through, and without bloodshed, had a tremendous effect on the German mind. It gave the nation a sensation of power, and seemed to be an adequate contradiction for all time of those statements of political inefficiency which had so cruelly hurt the national pride. In order to understand the full force and the full depth of these national feelings, it would be almost

necessary to retrace the whole of the national history, through the miseries of the Thirty Years' War, the shame of Jena, the failure of 1848; only thus could the full strength of the rebound—for such it was—be calculated. I wish I could convey to my readers the exact effect of the teaching of patriotic history in German schools during the last generation; it has so often been misrepresented. The upshot was, roughly, to inculcate in the whole population an ineradicable conviction that the German nation was a nation of inherently great qualities dogged by circumstance; circumstance (in the more ungenerous minds interpreted as the malignity of a human enemy) had again and again intervened to involve the country in misfortune and misery; a theory dangerously like that of a " martyr " nation was presented. Only during the last forty years had there been what might be called a success; but this success amply proved that the Germans could, if they had a fair chance, do as well as anybody. This is why the Germans laid so much stress on 1870; it was the dramatic contradiction of all their previous failures; naturally, the failures were taken to have been due to evil fate, while the one success was held to prove the true stuff of the national character. But was this really so? It was not quite certain; and every German was dogged by an unpleasant doubt as to the real capacity of himself, his leaders, and his country to do what other nations had done.

The marked characteristic, therefore, of the German mind before the war when dealing with politics was its *uncertainty*. The average German was divided between being extremely sorry for himself and his nation, being inordinately vain of himself and his nation, being simply depressed. The Socialists were not exempt from these feelings, but to them they added a particular source of alternate depression and exultation, and that was their theory of revolution. It was because the real Revolution when it came seemed to answer so many separate and individual doubts and questionings, gathering up the whole nation in one broad movement of hope and confidence, that it became such a force for unity, welding all together for some months, far more firmly than even the war had done. But inasmuch as the Socialists are our direct concern, and inasmuch as their state of mind was the most directly concerned with the thought of a revolution, we will confine ourselves to examining their theory of revolution ; by this process, but only by this process, we can measure the mental effects of the Revolution when it came.

For the last twenty years the German Socialists had been speaking of revolutions as "out of date." In reply to the argument that the power of the lower classes had grown enormously of late years, they answered that the power of governments had grown also, far outstripping any progress made by the proletariat. For this there was

a definite reason, namely the invention and growing perfection of mechanical instruments of communication and of offence. In the old days the government had the troops and the people had their own wits to help them ; gunrunning is not difficult and it is perfectly possible to accumulate secretly a certain amount of ammunition for rifles ; put up a few barricades in the streets, and, as regards the physical assets of power, the government on one side of that barrier, and the people on the other, were perhaps on a fair level of equality. But even in the old days the government as a rule had the only cavalry, and cavalry can ride down a very determined mob. This particular inequality was partially made good by the use of barricades, which occur in almost every revolution, and for that reason.

But, since those early days, the telegraph, telephone, and railway have been invented or extended, and the machine gun and artillery have been brought to great perfection. Both these assets are exclusively in the hands of the one side, the government ; for only those can use the telegraph who hold the wires and stations, and only those can use the railway who hold the permanent way ; now the government is in actual physical possession of all this at the moment of an outbreak ; the rebels, on the other hand, would first have to capture these assets. Again, it is a peculiarity of the machine gun that it can be worked by only two or three men ; in other words, two or three men are able to annihilate

fifty or sixty, simply because the machine gun is such a good piece of mechanism. And again, and finally, the machine guns are in government hands when a movement breaks out.

The situation was this : whereas originally the masses had been on a fair, or at least a possible, level of equality with the authorities simply because of their numbers, now that factor of numbers was discounted. The advancement of human ingenuity had done it. Human ingenuity, in inventing a thing like a machine gun, puts almost incalculable power into the hands of a single man, or a few men, or a small class of men. And this seemed to be increasingly true as time went on ; if a machine gun can annihilate a crowd coming up a street, a modern heavy gun can blow a small town to pieces. Consequently, argued the German Socialists, the age of mechanics *cannot* be an age of revolutions.

The German Socialists taught themselves to repeat in season and out of season that "the machine gun had killed the revolution." They showed that lack of imagination which characterises an inferior general when his enemy springs a new weapon on him. They were seized with panic, just as the soldier is seized with panic. It did not strike them that there is a point where even the power of the machine gun breaks down. The machine gun, is, after all, a physical weapon, and is subject to all the limitations which attach to a physical weapon. It can annihilate a company of men coming up a street ;

it can clear a square ; it can do more, it can protect industrial plant and mines and keep them intact. But one thing it cannot do, it cannot go to a thousand homes and seek out a thousand workers, put them down in front of machinery, and persuade them to make that machinery work. The power of a machine gun is negative, not positive. It can prevent people from doing things ; it cannot force them to do things. For the power of a physical instrument ends where it meets a very strong mental determination. Labour has already discovered the extraordinary spiritual force of a united belief, pursued unitedly. In other words, the power of the machine gun lapses where the power of the General Strike begins.

The General Strike is, in the abstract, a united spiritual determination. As such it is a very potent instrument and well able to answer the machine gun.

It is not true, of course, that all the spiritual force is on one side, and all the physical on the other. Both sides rely largely on opinion, both sides rely partly on force, latent or obvious. Perhaps the government relies more on force than on opinion, the workers more on opinion than on force. We will not discuss this question ; it is a complicated one. We will simply agree that the General Strike was, as it were, a new revelation, and was held by its discoverers to be the real answer to the machine gun. And just as a hardpressed general, receiving artillery which he believes can outshoot the

enemy guns which but a few hours before were out-shooting him, suddenly experiences a great leap of the heart and becomes like a lion where before he was but a hare, so did the Socialists, having before been hopeless and wretched, suddenly become self-assertive and boastful. The most extraordinary hopes were placed in the General Strike, especially by French Socialists of the Syndicalist (Georges Sorel) school. It was not only to annihilate all objectionable governments with the least possible trouble, it was also to regenerate and purify the world.

For a year or two the wildest theories bloomed luxuriantly; then they were put to the test. In 1910 a railway strike broke out in France which had almost the dimensions of a General Strike. It was brought to complete failure by the action of the Minister Briand, who ordered all the railwaymen to be mobilised into the army. This curious trick was successful; Briand, so to say, called out the strikers against themselves. It is, of course, easy to argue that the workers ought to have resisted mobilisation. As a matter of fact, much of the success of Briand's policy was due to the real surprise of his tactics, which the workers had not foreseen, and which they were not quick enough to resist by any counter move. It would be difficult to repeat the brilliant effect obtained by Briand in 1910, and although other French Governments have indeed since then trifled with the idea, no one has so far ventured to try it again on a great



scale, and if they did, their success would be most problematical. From the point of view of the bourgeoisie on the defensive it was a clever, but short-sighted move ; no defeats are so hard to forgive as those imposed by a trick, and the hatred engendered by this trick was intense and world wide. It distinctly embittered the relations between the lower and the middle classes.

At the time the bourgeois success seemed perhaps even more decisive than it really was. Once more it was argued that " this is not the time " ; there must be, it was said, a long process, by which the workers acquired control over industry, especially over industries connected with communication and transport, before they could venture again to measure themselves against a government ; then, but not till then, was it worth while to rebel. Meanwhile the General Strike had been tried and had failed ; the machine gun was again triumphant.

The humiliating and ignominious failure of this great European strike seemed the end of all hope to those who had staked all hope upon it. In this sense of utter depression the German Socialists shared. With their tendency to generalise and theorise, they carelessly applied the lessons of the French strike to any and every possible situation. About this time they evolved, through the mouth of one of their chief theorists, Lensch, another popular dictum, which summed up

without mercy the lesson administered : *The General Strike is a general absurdity (Generalstreik Generalunsinn)*. This was the situation when the war broke out.

The first half of the war we may neglect ; there were no developments, except in so far as the visible collection, in the hands of the governments, of vast quantities of arms, war material, and men seemed to make those governments more irresistible than ever, while the unforeseen and curious capitulation of the liberal bourgeois forces to these same governments in the sphere of constitutional liberties, by the willing passing of various Defence of the Realm acts, added to the general depression of spirits. Even to theorise of such things as General Strikes seemed, under the circumstances, ridiculous. The German Socialist has one unusual quality : he scarcely ever overestimates his own power. He did not on this occasion, and, up till the end of 1916, his estimate of the disproportionate authority of his government, and the disproportionate weakness of himself, was so correct, so frank, and so entirely undeniable as almost to disarm criticism. Then came the Russian Revolution.

The Russian Revolution was calculated to upset all the pre-conceived notions of the German comrades. Eventually the Russian Revolution gave rise to the German Revolution, but not by a process of simple imitation. We must beware of reading the situation as simply as that. The feelings of the German comrades

towards the Russian Revolution were anything but simple, especially as that Revolution progressed and showed its characteristic features. First of all, they admired the Russians for having done what they themselves had not had the courage to do, for having arisen and chased a firmly seated government out of the country. They acknowledged, as they were bound to do, that revolutions could still take place, that they were not wholly out of date. They could take place and be successful were sufficient force used to make them successful, and on the whole the German Socialists agreed that the Russian Revolution had been well worth the bloodshed involved. But as time went on, and persistent reports reached them of cruelty employed in order to keep the Revolution in being, the German comrades got more doubtful. They would probably have accepted a state of affairs for which the Bolshevists had apologised ; had the Bolshevists deplored and bewailed the necessity of using force to crush the counter-revolution and declared themselves ready to abandon it at the first opportunity, the German Socialists would have accepted this situation. But the Bolshevists did not apologise for the use of force ; they declared it an integral and necessary part of their programme. This the German comrades refused to accept.

Consequently, the usual theme of any German Socialist paper of the normal type came to be a kind of morality lesson drawn from the awful example of the

Russian Revolution ; ' this is what revolution degenerates into,' was their constant argument. This argument they persistently offered as a panacea to those younger and more ardent spirits who were inclined to express their disappointment that Germany had not managed a revolution of her own ; here was Germany, with the finest Socialist organisation in the world, and nothing to show for it, not even—and the thought was a bitter one—not even a decent franchise in Prussia.

Thus the feelings of the German Socialist towards his Russian comrade were not simple. Admiration and dislike fought together in him, and jealousy also swung his mind this way and that. Then literally overnight, in the night between November 8th and 9th, came the German upheaval, and the German comrade found that he too could make a revolution. But what a revolution ! How strikingly different from, how strikingly better than, the Russian ! The whole political power dropping into the hands of the proletariat like a ripe plum. Ebert, the cobbler, sits where Max, hereditary heir to a Grand Duchy, has sat, and Max, instead of resisting and being put against a wall and shot, most gracefully gives way ; the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, retire, renounce their rights ; on Monday a public holiday shall be held ; on Tuesday, return to work, peace, food, and a long reign of the people's power. The very feature which seemed so disappointing to the rest of the world, the absence of excitement, the soberness of it all, appealed in a peculiar

way to German pride. 'This is the way to make revolution,' said Germany to Europe, and waited to be admired; long persistent spade work for some fifty or sixty years, and then just a gentle push at the end; so painlessly and without effort the old order gives way before the new.

The joy at the accomplishment of the Revolution was very great in Germany. It was a joy in which the bourgeois classes shared for many months. In view of the changed attitude (which is quite inevitable and not in itself serious) of many of the upper classes in Germany now, it is important to establish the fact that the Revolution was actually welcomed by the large majority of the middle classes in Germany. No doubt the sins of an outworn Government, culminating in national disaster, would have sufficed to make society accept some change of the national status; they would not have succeeded in making a revolution welcome. That was the work of the "bloodless" Revolution itself. The Revolution avoided civil war. This was its greatest achievement. For a century the whole of the great masses of the upper and middle classes had lived in a suppressed dread of what might come; the sins of the past had been great; would not the oppressed, when once they came to power, take a terrible revenge? The French terror of a hundred years ago, the Commune terror of 1871, the recent Russian terror, the worst and most dreadful of all, should they not strike fear into the

stoutest heart, should they not make to tremble minds even the most guiltless in a class so sweepingly condemned as guilty? It would be the great revenge, the great judgment, the greatest judgment in history, and what avail innocence where blood flowed in streams? Was it not best, even if a desperate best, to put off the terrible moment from year to year, from month to month, nay from hour to hour, to get a few more hours of life before the great cataclysm? But the revolution came, and—behold, it was the “bloodless” Revolution.

“The greatest Revolution which the world has ever seen,” said Count Czernin, a grateful member of a surprised and distinguished aristocracy, to a distinguished and aristocratic and surprised audience at Vienna.

“Greatest,” indeed, just because “bloodless.”

Thus did the German Socialists in the end redeem their good name to the world, and claim to have surpassed by their achievement, so long prepared, so faithfully and well carried out, the glories whether of the famous Revolution of France or of the notorious Revolution of Russia.

### CHAPTER III

## THE CALL TO ORDER AND THE CALL TO WORK

*The workers do not want disorders, but a new order.*

A Schleswig-Holstein Socialist paper.

*Work is the religion of Socialism.*

Ebert.

*Then there will be no more wars ; then humanity will  
be a community of workers who are producers.*

Kurt Eisner.

NOT so very many years ago most of us who lived in the West of Europe were in a hopeful frame of mind. We thought that it was possible to discover, by means of careful thinking, the right way of governing a country. We also thought that it would not be impossible in course of time to persuade the vast majority of our fellow men to adopt this right method of government when discovered. By working very hard for a very long time it seemed likely that in the end we should be able to persuade others to act as they should act. We were, in fact, "good democrats." But there came a time of discouragement. We were disappointed. We hesitated now to say that mere persuasion would ever be enough to convince our fellow

creatures of the truth ; something more was needed. The many who would not or could not be persuaded must be forced to accept what they were too stupid or too selfish to take in otherwise. So sprang up, about twenty years ago, the belief in Direct Action, the belief that as man cannot persuade man to do what is right, he must force him.

I have already made clear in my last chapter that the German Revolution was held by those who made it to be a great triumph for the older idea of persuasion. Of course it rested upon force in the background, *i.e.* the force inherent in the united mass of a large number of people ; but that force had not been called into play to any appreciable extent ; so that the real triumph of the Revolution was undoubtedly a triumph of persuasion. This idea was symbolised in the fact that it had been the " bloodless " Revolution ; no one, or at least very few people, had been killed to bring it about. And had not every other revolution which had ever been undertaken by men meant the sacrifice of a large number of human lives, the bitter price paid by men for men ? But the German Socialists had simply insisted that the Kaiser must resign ; they had sent him their ultimatum ; he had resigned, and they had then declared that they would take over the government of the country ; the bourgeois Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, had yielded without a murmur. The Socialists were so firm, and their demands so entirely reasonable, that Emperor and



Chancellor could not but yield. And what was this firmness on the one side and this recognition on the other, what was it, after all, but the well deserved reward of patient efforts pursued for at least sixty or seventy years? For sixty or seventy years the Socialists of Germany had been exhausting themselves in persuading their fellows of the truth, and in the end their opponents had yielded to them, quietly and decorously. Twenty-four hours secured the sudden amazing fruition of more than a half a century's toil.

Such events reflected credit on both sides, both on those who had waited so patiently and on those, who, like Prince Max, had seen the wisdom of yielding. Indeed, Prince Max had contributed most materially to the success of the bloodless Revolution. Not only had he forced the Kaiser's hand and nipped in the bud the absurd idea of his return at the head of his troops to overawe Berlin and win back, as King of Prussia, what he had lost as German Emperor, but Prince Max had in addition, as his very last order, strictly forbidden the Governor of Berlin to open machine gun fire on the revolutionaries; whereupon that functionary (von Linsingen), who as a professional soldier did not understand anything at all about methods of peaceful persuasion, promptly resigned; which eventually saved the Socialists the trouble of getting rid of him. For this action of Prince Max's the Socialists were grateful. They were, in truth, grateful to the whole of the upper

classes for their temperate attitude during the first weeks of the Revolution. They despised the Emperor personally for his flight, no doubt, but, after all, that flight had saved them a world of trouble.

The German Revolution was a peculiar one. It did not, like most revolutions, at first divide and disturb the population, setting one class against another. On the contrary, it reconciled. It healed the very old breach between the Socialists and the bourgeois world, a breach which had paralysed the political life of Germany; the Socialists were no longer "pariahs"; the bourgeois were no longer "enemies." It is true that this healing process did not begin with the Revolution, but before it, before even the war started; but the Revolution completed it and made it permanent.

Having made this promising beginning, the Socialists were encouraged to go on in the same way. They did this by issuing what might be described as a Call to Order and a Call to Work. These are, so to say, the negative and positive sides of the same ideal; "work" is to be the positive fruit reaped from a world which has been set in a state of "order." Again the Socialists appealed to all classes, to the workman, the bourgeois, and the high Conservative official; and again they were, at any rate at the outset, not entirely disappointed.

The call to "keep order," to "stand by," was all the more necessary as otherwise the whole complicated rationing system of the country would have been

wrecked and hundreds of thousands must have been starved out in a few days. In order to prevent panic, every one of the innumerable Governments which sprang up in Germany, like mushrooms overnight, made a point of at once promising security of the person and protection of property. They ordered existing food officials to remain at their posts ; they threatened instant punishment to any rioter. Their decrees, orders, and appeals may be read in any German paper which was able to appear in the second week of November. What appears very prominently in these appeals is the genuine belief which those who framed them had in the power of argument ; they rely more on the appeal to good feeling than on the attempt to enforce authority. This is significant ; it shows a certain habit of looking at the world as a place where reason will be a master principle. This is very characteristic of those who made the German Revolution, as I have already pointed out in my first chapter. Indeed, some of the best and most sincere work of the German revolutionaries is embodied in argumentative findings of Commissions or preambles of laws, documents important rather by the fact that they exist as suggestions to be carried out by the next generation than because they are being carried out by this one. To return to the first few days of the Revolution, there exists a most curious document from the local Frankfurt Government to the farmers of the district, explaining, with good faith in the power of argument alone, that it

will be wiser to supply the city with food voluntarily, and not to wait until disorder and looting sets in.

The policy was successful. A few rioters were caught redhanded at one of the seaport towns and shot out of hand ; elsewhere there were practically no disturbances. Thus the principles adopted at Berlin between the Berlin revolutionaries and Prince Max of Baden were repeated all over the country. The wheels of government never stopped ; only the hands which pushed the levers were not the same.

Thus, instead of sweeping away without mercy the whole of the old apparatus of Government officials in Bavaria, the Munich Government decree says, very simply : " All existing officials to remain at their posts . . . what matters now is that the strictest order should be secured and maintained." So too does the first proclamation of the new revolutionary Government in Hessen appeal for the maintenance of order. The Württemberg Cabinet at Stuttgart promises on November 9th protection of person and property. At Kiel, on the very first outburst of the revolutionary movement, the round table conference of workers, sailors, and Government officials publishes a manifesto begging the public to obey such decrees as are issued and " to guard order and quiet." Very striking are several military decrees, issued by Soviets of soldiers near the front, and maintaining the existing army organisation in the interests of order ; thus the German Soldiers' Council at Warsaw

declares that "the Council of Soldiers hereby assumes the direction of the soldiers of the Warsaw district; under its direction the existing military authorities shall continue their functions." A joint decree of the Berlin Government, the Navy Soviet, and the Air Service Soviet enjoins that all Navy and Air Service officers shall retain their rank, that demobilisation shall take place only on their orders, that where Soldiers' Councils have been formed, they shall "rigorously" support their officers in maintaining discipline.\*

Later on, in many more important ways, those who made the Revolution were anxious to emphasise this idea that there should not be too great a break with the past. Such an idea is strong in the minds of those men who lay value on the past, on tradition. The Germans before the war were very fond of pointing to this characteristic of theirs; they called themselves "an historically minded people." The events of the Revolution partly bear this out. Unless impelled by some very violent emotion, the Germans show themselves disinclined to disturb what exists. A curious instance of this occurred later on. At Gotha, one of the principal cities of Thüringen, an active quarrel broke out in 1920 between the Independents and the rest of the parties on the Town Council on the education question. The Independents, foreseeing their defeat, tried to retire

\* Some of these Soldiers' Councils were under the influence of the officers.

bearing with them at least some spoils in the shape of a People's University Course. The others, convinced that such a course was only to be used as a school for Bolshevist doctrine, boycotted the last possible meeting at which the project could have been passed and spoilt the quorum. But the Independents assumed a legal quorum on the basis of revolutionary Standing Orders passed during a previous period, when for a short time, immediately on the outbreak of the Revolution, a Workers' Council had replaced the town authorities; on their reckoning, all power derived from that moment and that Council or Soviet. But the Berlin Government lawyers, who acted as arbitrators between the contending parties, gave a ruling very different and decidedly curious. It strictly emphasised the fact that the pre-revolutionary Standing Orders were still in force. "The idea that the Revolution swept away the old Federal Diets," we read, "is quite erroneous. In a State where the force of law is acknowledged, *legislation is not abrogated by political events.*"\*

Yet this tendency towards conservatism must not be exaggerated. The Germans are not the people to ignore their own Revolution. At an earlier period the revolutionary authorities very successfully and cogently argued against the attempt made by the Speaker of the old, pre-revolutionary Reichstag to call that Reichstag together again; they refused to admit this; in their

\* *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 10th, 1920.

eyes the Revolution had *ipso facto* abolished the validity of the national legislative body, which had now become meaningless. On other occasions, too, they readily advanced the thesis that "revolution creates its own legality." How shall we reconcile such an apparent contradiction? Those men who argued that the central Reichstag was abolished by the Revolution, also argued that the Federal, or lesser, parliaments were *not* abolished by the Revolution. I think the reconciliation can be made in this way. The Revolution was looked on as *one* creative act which altered for ever the main directions of policy, the real course of events; but it did not and could not, nor was it meant to, penetrate into the smaller details of life in a specific or upsetting way. Here the old was to stand and only gradually to be re-interpreted in the light of a new revelation. The ultimate idea behind all this is undoubtedly an attempt to combine a new outlook with stability, and it is most characteristic that the Germans should have laid about equal stress on either principle. They held the same view that George Washington held and stated in his Farewell Address:\* that only under the most extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances is revolution—or, as Washington calls it, usurpation,—that is a sudden and violent discarding of the past and a sudden and resolute adherence to something strange and new, prescribed as

\* But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.

a right course for men to take, but that, if such an act is repeated, or abused, then the end is not good government, but confusion. Revolution is a magnificent creative act, quite distinctive in its nature, as unlike a petrified conservatism on the one side as it is, on the other, unlike a ruinous anarchy.

Stability, therefore, was a kind of watchword for the Germans immediately after the Revolution ; and it was so for two reasons: ; firstly, because it was a general principle to which they had always attached much importance, and secondly, because the special circumstances of the times made it seem more essential than ever. The orders, and especially the military orders, which I described above, must have been inspired by memories of the terrible break up of the Russian front under revolutionary influences the year before. Germany could not face the thought that her army might stream back in devastating hordes, like the Russian army. On this occasion her habits of order and obedience stood her in good stead. It was really a wonderful feat at home to maintain the organisation of the food supply, abroad to bring back an army of millions from the front.

But I think it was not very long before the Germans began to look beyond the immediate present. The reader must again forgive me if I here desert the course of events in order to explain the theory of German Socialism. It is necessary to do so ; for nowhere else in



the world has there been a set of men so obviously accustomed to act by the light of a certain dogma, so accustomed to take it for granted that conduct is almost an automatic "result" from certain mental opinions. This is all in accordance with the general trend of Marxianism. The reader must grasp this if he wants to understand the way in which a body like the German Socialists set about their tasks.

Roughly, since the French Revolution and the advent of Rousseauism, there have been two philosophies of conduct in the world, by no means entirely compatible with each other. The first is the favourite philosophy of Englishmen; it refers conduct to revelation, to inspiration, to impulse, to emotion, in a word, to *liberty*. The root idea at the bottom is that if people are left to develop naturally, the result will be the best possible; all restraint is degrading and ought not to be necessary; if it is necessary, it is a symptom of something wrong. Out of this general philosophy springs a deep passion for such rallying calls as the liberty of the person, the liberty of opinion, the liberty of the press. This philosophy is clearly founded on an overwhelming belief in the merit of the individual.

The other or rival philosophy is much older; it was the philosophy of all Greek and all Roman thinkers. It does not lay stress on the individual; in its eyes the individual is a poor and incomplete thing until and unless he enters into relations with other individuals. This

philosophy is therefore strongly social, in quite a different way from that in which the first philosophy is social. It is also apt to be strongly systematic. For if and when two or more individuals enter into relations with each other, their relations *must* be to a certain extent ordered relations ; here impulse is not enough, for the characteristic of impulse is that it is different for different people. Agreement, therefore, or consent, replaces the ideal of liberty. Liberty is all very well in its way, but it is not the most important thing ; the most important thing is an agreed consent, *i.e.* *order*. Without order the world is simply not worth while.

This great classical tradition was first handed on by the Roman Church, and has since then, curiously enough, become the permanent stock-in-trade of the Marxian Socialists. But it has had a wider reception than this. In general it may be said to have been accepted by the German nation as a whole, at least since 1870. From 1870 to 1914 it was applied by the Germans to their government, their army, etc. Then came the Revolution. Was it to be discarded ? Not at all ; it received a still more profound application ; or so the revolutionaries claimed.

The revolutionaries claimed that whereas up till now the application of the principle of order had been simply superficial and skin deep, while underneath this false and pretentious system there ruled (as in all other countries) the usual chaos and welter of the disorganised capitalistic

system, now, in consequence of the Revolution, there was about to be put before the country a high conception and idea of a more true and genuine order than had ever been known before. They presented Marxianism once more for what it is, a very proud religion. Marx had always argued that capitalism meant anarchy and waste, while Socialism would mean absolute clarity, precision, and order. In the capitalistic era a thousand things were wasted daily, a thousand existences ruined through sheer mismanagement ; but in the socialistic world there should not be a spool of cotton thrown away, nor a man labouring uselessly, nor a human existence thrown to the wall. On November 5th the *Schleswig-Holstein Volksstimme* wrote—and it must have been the very first definition of the aims of the Revolution to be published in the country—“the workers and the soldiers do not want disorders, but *a new order* ; and that new order is not to be anarchy, but the Socialist Republic.” And “the task of the Socialist Republic,” said Haase to the troops from the western front returning to Berlin on December 11th through the Brandenburg Gate, “is to create *a world of ordered life* on the heaps of ruins which the war has left behind.” “Peace, freedom, and *order* will be the guiding stars which we shall follow,” said Ebert two days previously, when swearing in the Guards to fealty to the Republic at the *Rathaus* (Guildhall) of Berlin. “Socialism is *organisation*,” writes Stampfer warningly in a circular letter to the Soviets all over the

country, "and disorganisation is Socialism's worst enemy."

Thus not only was the Revolution to be bloodless ; it was also to be orderly. It was to avoid cruelty ; it was to avoid confusion. It was to be a straight and glorious path to the new age. "We are confident," said Kurt Eisner at a Festival of the Revolution for all Bavaria, held at Munich ten days after the Revolution had been proclaimed, "we are confident that we shall succeed in finding a path to a new age, without defeats, without obstacles, and without violence." And how much swifter and better the path "without obstacles" than the impeded and disputed road ! Marx himself had greatly trained his followers to think so. He himself had told them that there must be a mighty struggle, a "class war," but it would not be for ever, and beyond it he ever taught his votaries to look for crystal-clear accomplishment as the real end. He bade them welcome struggle ; but he never set up a struggle as a god, or as a thing of its nature beneficent. And in all truly Marxian writings there is this sense as of a ship sailing at the last into a calm haven, so that "the aim of the Communist organisation shall be the abolition of all class war by means of the disappearance of all class."\*

But in itself order is only a means to an end. If a machine is oiled to perfection, if every cog fits with precision into every other, it is with a view to performing

\* Leo Trotsky on the Communist Army, *Pravda*, Feb. 25th, 1919.

some process or producing some commodity ; a machine does not revolve on its own account, or for the pleasure of illustrating the laws of mechanics ; it is there in order to make or do something. So also with the Socialist State. If to make the machinery of government revolve noiselessly is the first aim of every good Socialist, it is not his last. That would be to reduce Socialism to a mere farce. Good government, or "order," as the German Socialists were calling it, had an aim beyond and outside itself.

What then is the aim of the good State ? To this difficult question men have returned many answers. The Socialist answer is, up to a point, definite : the first and immediate aim of the Socialist State is to "increase production." We have all admired the man who can make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before ; we say he is a benefactor of the human race. The Socialists desire to be such benefactors of their fellows ; only they are more apt to think in terms of machinery than of natural things. To make two washing machines instead of one, to invent plant which will fold 20,000 envelopes per unit of time instead of only 10,000, to find methods for obtaining twice as much heat as before from a ton of coal, these, in all soberness, are the aims of the Socialist State.

And before going on to consider the application of these to the German Revolution, it is proper to pause and ask why these concrete and material aims should be what

the Socialist State desires. This cannot be understood unless we remember that the idea of the Socialist State arose late in the history of mankind ; other ideas had long been in existence when Socialism first arose. Socialism is a criticism of those other ideas. As such it is not unreasonable. For many centuries, whether we take the history of Jewish, of ancient classical, or of Christian thought, the great fundamental idea has been that men's minds are their most important asset, the highest and best thing belonging to them. Without exactly denying this the Socialists have added a kind of amendment. - They have pointed out that there has been a certain one-sidedness in this attitude. Even if the mind is a more splendid thing than the body, yet it is very notably dependent on the body. They go on to point out that, while efforts have been made to secure to men all kinds of excellent mental benefits, very little trouble has been taken to secure for them that initial and basic condition of physical health and well-being, which they must have before they can enjoy those mental benefits. Men have been given freedom before they have been given good wages ; and the result has been that, without the good wages, they have been prevented from a true enjoyment of the freedom.

There are two things which are wrong. First, the warmth, good houses, food, clothing which are produced on this earth are very unfairly divided ; second, there is actually not enough being produced in the way of

warmth, good houses, food, clothing, etc. In some ways the mistake of unfair distribution is the easier to cure. But the Socialistic era, if it is properly to displace the "disorganised" and "wasteful" capitalistic, must also deal with the second error.

For it is, after all, an error. It is not necessary, say the Socialists, that everybody should work much harder than before. On the contrary, it will be quite possible to work reasonable hours and yet to produce more, as long as *everybody works*, as long as *all workers work to the best of their ability*, as long as *work is evenly apportioned or rationed*. If these three things are done, a vast quantity more of the things really needed by men can be made by men than have ever been made before; yet no man need be overworked. This was the genuine belief of the German Socialists when they began their Revolution. Consequently, we find the heads of the new Socialist Government from the very first day promising the eight-hour day, a promise which became law.

"Work is the religion of Socialism," said Ebert to the Army returning from the front. Germany made of this day, December 11th, an opportunity for gathering up the threads of the past and uniting them to the conception of a purified future. Not in shame or in humiliation was the army to be received, nor yet in that spirit of crass and brutal pride which had ruined so great a nation; but soberly and yet with a decent ceremonial, unostentatiously and yet with flowers crowning the helmets of

those to whom fortune had permitted the unspeakable felicity of a return ; a certain simplicity, a certain proud humility was to mark the Republic's first welcome home of her sons. The war had been lost, but their valour was incontestable and uncontested. The war had been lost, but they were her own sons, her "undefeated." Causes of which they were innocent had made their sacrifices of no avail.

A few days later, the Government in a further address from the People's Commissaries "To the returning Soldiers" conveyed this in a characteristic document. Here are curiously mingled statements about such concrete things as housing and insurance, and an expression of that high and supreme claim to have brought "freedom," without which no new society ever ought to ask for the allegiance of men.

The German Republic "most heartily bids her soldiers welcome home." They had gone forth from a country in which the few, in mockery of the masses, had "shared out between themselves all power and possession." But the Revolution came ; it "broke the spell" ; and so "you and we are free : Germany is free." And freedom means that those who now hold power "with the confidence of the workers" will "get you work, protection while you work, and higher wages from your work." There follow specific promises and statements about unemployment and sickness insurance, the eight-hour day, etc. Nevertheless, it is true, it is



undeniable, that those who return find "no land of plenty, but distress and deprivation." The only help comes "from work in common, from action taken together."\* "A Socialist Republic," says Ebert, "will be a commonwealth of labour."

Full of this idea, that "the duty of work confronts every citizen of the State,"† the various governments in Germany did not hesitate to conceive their immediate task as that of providing work for those who would be sure to claim it. Hence promises of relief works; hence, further, the distinct suggestions made as to the sheer necessity of rationing work, so that the supply should go round. There would not be too much work in the country; yet there would be a great outburst of the desire to work; so work must be shared out fairly all round. It was under the influence of these ideas that the eight-hour day was adopted at once and without parley. The wretched physical condition of the workers, owing to want of food, contributed, as it is obvious that empty stomachs cannot work a long day. In any case the eight-hour day was an old demand of the worker, so that the universal adoption of the eight-hour day throughout German industry was very natural. More difficult and remote seemed the institution of relief works. As a matter of fact, shortage of raw material and money prevented anything of the kind, as quickly became

\* *Vorwärts*, November 22nd, 1918.

† Manifesto (already mentioned) of the Bavarian Revolutionary Government, November 8th.

plain even to the most unintelligent. But in the very early days of the Revolution, while many Socialists were still in the stage of taking it for granted that the Entente would automatically stop the blockade, and no one had the remotest conception that it would be continued month after month, it seemed an equally natural suggestion to talk of taking in hand the many operations which had been neglected during the war. At the Conference of the German States, which was the first semi-constitutional body summoned by the united efforts of the new Governments, Ebert's opening statement on November 25th included the remark that to provide employment must be one of the most important aims of the new authorities : " the liberty which has been secured would be worthless without bread or employment." More definite, though of course never remotely within the range of being carried out, was Kurt Eisner's announcement at Munich that the first project of the new political order was to carry out the great scheme for draining the Walchen Lake. With sarcasm he asked how many powerful bourgeois governments had not deferred the necessary work again and again ; what all bourgeois governments had been too feeble to do, that the young revolutionary Government would begin, and immediately. Now there was a certain undercurrent of irony in choosing a canal-cutting scheme as a first piece of work, because it was just on such a big canal scheme that the far-famed autocratic Prussian Government with

all the prestige of Prussian organisation at its back had once suffered a most inglorious defeat ; it had wanted to cut the great north canal : the Junkers had refused. The shame of it had rung all through Germany, and ever since that day the little rhyme had been popular which says of the Prussian Junkers and the German Emperor, who is also the King of Prussia :

And the King our master is  
When he does *our* will, not his.

What the great, stable, rich, capitalistic Prussian Government could not do, that the young revolutionary Government would do easily, quickly, and with the joyful co-operation of its people.

So Eisner boastfully : and a week or two disproved him and made his words ridiculous. For another obstacle than that of want of money and material, imposed by war and by the enemy, made all such schemes seem idle talk. This obstacle the Socialist authorities recognised with horror and dismay, and for long with utter incredulity ; it was the distaste for work. The will not to work spread through the exhausted country as a plague spreads through a stricken population. In vain did the principal Socialist paper pour out leaders imploring the country to return to the joy of work ; the dislike of work was deep and wide. It was perhaps acutest about six to eight months after the Revolution, in the early summer of 1919. Everywhere it sent men to join the strikes ; everywhere, even

without strikes, the quotas of output fell lower and lower.

This phase of work-shyness, due to overwrought nerves and underfed bodies, passed. It is only bound to linger on in exact proportion to the lingering scarcity of food. But another serious difficulty has arisen, and this is the question of the socialisation of industry. The position of the leaders is that in any case the worker is working for the Socialist State, and that as soon as circumstances at all allow, the socialisation of industry shall be proceeded with ; the position of the worker is that he sees nothing so clearly in front of him as his old capitalistic employer, whose substantial form completely obscures the shadowy Socialist State behind. There is reason on both sides. And because the leaders are willing, even if timid, followers of the faith in socialisation, they are occasionally swept off their feet and committed to promises of principle which are very important landmarks in the industrial history of the continent. One of these fits of enthusiasm was that hopeful and debonair " Call to Work " during the first days of the Revolution which I have just described ; another was the promise for ever to incorporate in the constitution the principle of Works Councils ; another was the promise, again renewed, to socialise important industries " at once," wrung out of the restored Coalition Government after the Kapp *coup* by the Trades Unions at Berlin. But incomparably the most interesting has

## THE CALL TO ORDER AND WORK 71

been the Law on Socialisation, of March, 1919 (afterwards repeated in some great Articles of the new revolutionary constitution, Nos. 157, 158 and 163). This Law is not really a law at all, but a statement of principle which was meant to be a binding constitutional bulwark. It embodies very well the not unworthy conception of the Call to Work, and I cannot close this chapter better than by quoting the opening words of this sweeping document :

Every citizen shall use his mental and physical powers in such a way as the common good requires. The working power of the nation is its highest social asset. . .

#### NOTE.

AT the outbreak of the Revolution there were three Socialist parties in Germany, the Majority Socialists, headed by Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske, the Independent Socialists, headed by Haase and Kautsky, and the Spartacists or Communists, headed by Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourgh. Throughout this book I give for the most part the views of the Majority Socialists. My space being limited, I am obliged to concentrate on the party whose views alone prevailed and became effective. Further, these views are seldom stated correctly in England, without sneers and without exaggeration. For the period under discussion, and strictly with this limitation, I believe the Majority policy to have been the right policy. It was not exactly inspired, but it may be called respectable.

There was little opportunity for an inspired policy. Had circumstances been less disastrous than they were, perhaps a greater originality might have come to the front. But an unfortunate incident caused the Independents to lose caste almost as soon as the Revolution was well started, while the violence and civil war associated with the Spartacist propaganda made their claims and

wishes utter anathema to the general public. This I explain in the two next chapters.

The Majority Socialist ideas, therefore, prevailed. This book ends where the Majority Government, by striking out alternately from Berlin in various directions, had re-established the authority of the central State as against other, newer forms of human co-operation suggested or attempted. It is the close of a period.

A complete history of the German Revolution would not, however, have ended here, but would have been carried over into the second period, the end of which we may roughly place at the time of the recent Kapp *coup* ; from this again a third period begins. This more complete exposition, had there been opportunity for it, would have entailed a certain change of emphasis. The historian here is inclined to give his verdict for the opposition and to refuse it to the Government. For, in the industrial struggle which succeeds the first phase, or political struggle, the story of the German Revolution clearly becomes the story of the rejection by those in power, the Majority Socialists, of the best aspects of the revolutionary idea; the valuable criticism of democracy, known as Council government, or Sovietism, or Shop Stewardism, or Regionalism, or by whatever other name it may be called, passed over the heads of the Majority Socialists, who have thus lost an irreplaceable opportunity for dealing with the modern constitution of society and re-moulding it to suit the

clamorous and only too justifiable complaints of those who find themselves its victims ; only in so far as the Independents or Spartacists are able to force their ideas on the Majority is any progress made. In reading the following chapters the reader should bear this ultimate verdict well in mind.



## CHAPTER IV

### 'RUSSIAN MONEY'

*Gentlemen of the Independent Party may twist and wriggle as they please, the receipt of this Russian money is so painful a chapter that they will never be able to justify themselves in the eyes of the nation.*

Noske.

IN Chapters II. and III. we saw how there was built up the proud legend of the "bloodless" Revolution and of the ordered State. In Chapter V. we shall see how that legend comes to be for ever shattered by civil conflict. Between these two topics I shall now interpose what might be called an incident or episode, namely, the affair of the "Russian money." This incident had a direct bearing on the civil conflicts which follow. It helped to undermine the faith in the Revolution which at first had been so pronounced in all classes. All classes had at first supposed both that the Revolution was a purely national movement, and also a peaceful movement. They then found out that neither had it been purely national nor was it going to be peaceful. The effects of these two disillusionments taken together and following each other immediately in point of view of time were exceedingly great.

The present chapter deals with that disillusionment whereby the German nation realised that another nation had contributed to its Revolution, a nation both disliked and feared. This was a most severe blow to national pride. Up till then the Revolution had been the subject of boast ; it was the "greatest" ; it was entirely German ; German pride was involved in proving that, when at last it came to acts, Germany could do as well as any other nation.

It is an undoubted fact that the claim of the Entente nations to have "brought" Germany to revolution by inflicting on her a military defeat has entirely passed over the heads of the German nation. There are now many German nationalists who are very ready to argue that the Revolution caused the defeat ; the German army was "stabbed in the back," as they say, by those of the home population who could not do their part by putting up with the necessary privations ; the Socialists, again, heatedly deny this, and retort with some proof that the defeat would in any case have come, indeed, was already there, and was a military fact entirely independent of the attitude of the home population or of the Revolution. The Revolution, then, did or did not cause the defeat, according to one's political point of view. But neither side thinks of arguing that the defeat caused the Revolution. All parties deny that the nation, brought to a knowledge of the truth by the efforts of the enemy, repented, reformed, and in that mood repudiated

previous conditions. The legend of the war as a purificatory process for which the nation should be grateful, as a lesson of which the Revolution was merely a logical fruition, has no hold on the German nation. It would seem to them to be degrading the Revolution to too low a place in the process of history. Their view of the relations of the war and of the Revolution is quite different. They cannot agree that the Revolution should have less emotional emphasis put on it than the war; they cannot see it as any outcome or lesson or fruition from any war, however great. It appeals to them as a thing in itself, independent, grand, tremendous. They talk of it as "an event of nature," and perhaps in their more mystical moments as a God-given dispensation, a revelation; or again, they speak of it as an immense process, going back in its origins to a time when even the remote beginnings of the war had not been thought of. As for the theory that this great event is a "gift," bestowed by the more democratic nations of the West through the medium of a military defeat on the retrograde German people, I cannot remember having seen a German writer take that seriously, unless it were some isolated Independent speaker in the Prussian House, who by this argument very effectively and promptly succeeded in emptying the Hall.

The Germans would only laugh if someone were to argue that the secret propaganda initiated by us among the rank and file of the nation had seriously helped on

the Revolution. In a perfectly good-humoured way *Vorwärts* had given an amusing account of the supposed methods of the secret Northcliffe agent in Germany. The other papers, when Lord Northcliffe had been appointed Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries by our Government, gave, in small print, contemplative records of the Northcliffe career, as of a remote fact which might conceivably interest their readers. Whether the Germans were right so to despise Lord Northcliffe, I do not know ; I am only professing to give their own point of view. But that point of view changes abruptly and brutally when the national mind turns from English to Russian propaganda.

Russian propaganda, and Russian money, helped to make the German Revolution. That is a fact not to be forgiven, never to be forgotten.

“ I will not parley with the man who received money from Russia when his country was in the throes of her agony,” cries Helfferich, passionately, as he faces Dr. Cohn in that *Commission of Inquiry into the Guilt of the War*, which was set up in order to establish the sin of those who were for Helfferich and the innocence of those who were for Cohn ; “ I will not exchange question and answer with him ; no power on earth shall force me to ; ” and the public crowding into the law court applauds. This single damning sentence overthrew the whole carefully built up structure of that Commission. It was like the throwing of an explosive shell. After it had been

spoken, all was confusion, anger, protest, futility. Dr. Helfferich knew well what he was about, when he deserted his own defence in order to pass to this invective. He was confident of appealing to feelings still most bitter and most vehement, and his immediate and striking success showed that he had not miscalculated.

From the moment that the revelation was made that ten and a half million roubles reached Germany from Russia on the eve of the Revolution, public feeling was profoundly stirred. The villains were, among others, the Independent Socialists, or rather certain individuals among them; Haase and others succeeded in clearing themselves. The facts did not emerge all together; this, and also the powerful position of the Majority Socialists, who were determined that their comrades should not suffer, saved the Independents from anything worse than vindictive abuse; but it is an undoubted fact that the affair of the Russian money adversely affected the Independent position, which for many months after the Revolution made but little progress.

The facts, or alleged facts, are as follows. After the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk the Russians resumed the right to have a Representative at Berlin. Of this right they made the fullest possible, many in Berlin said far too full, a use. The brilliantly lit-up Embassy was the *rendezvous* of innumerable persons and agents and messengers, Russian or German or non-descript alien, who poured up and down the broad steps all

day and all night ; mysterious and sinister activities were concentrated and protected there ; the thing became a scandal, or so good patriots like Count Reventlow averred. In order to protect a Friendly Power, the Liberal Government of Prince Max of Baden issued a most polite Note completely exonerating the Russian Representative of any illicit activities ; " they were assured that a Friendly Power would never, etc." ; this was on November 4th, 1918. It is ironical to read how the very next day, at one of the big Berlin stations, the bag of a courier of that same Embassy, fastened with true Slavic carelessness, burst open, and what diplomatic immunity had concealed was revealed by the horrible evidence of facts to the startled gaze of the station officials — masses of Bolshevik pamphlets, printed in the German language and intended for distribution in Germany, streaming over the platform and spreading their pernicious contents everywhere. The episode was beyond concealment ; a patent breach of the terms of the Brest Treaty had been committed, and the Baden Government hastened to issue another Note on November 6th, this time all compounded of moral indignation and shocked rectitude, breaking off all diplomatic relations between Germany and the Soviet Government. The same night the Russian Representative at Berlin, Joffé, and his suite received their passports and hastily left for the frontier in a special train.

Yet it was quite obviously to the advantage of both sides to resume relations. The interchange of goods far outweighed in importance any number of diplomatic punctilios, and when with the Revolution, a pronouncedly Socialist Government came into power, it was almost a certainty that in course of time the difficulty would be got over and some return arranged. It was, if anything, unfortunate that a minority of Socialists, chiefly Independents, should have made of the return of the Russian Embassy to Berlin a Party cry; but whatever action the Majority may have contemplated taking from the side of Germany was abruptly ended by action taken from the side of Russia. Up to this point, in spite of the almost comic episode of the courier's bag, the general public were not inclined to believe that there was a great deal in the lurid rumours of Russian agents behind every tree, and the Government was in this respect no more than a bit of the general public. But one of the Russian diplomatic corps, whether again with true Slavic carelessness, or whether with a still more noticeable Slavic finesse, left behind him a packet of papers, containing twenty-four receipts for arms purchased and given to German agents, running from September 21st to October 31st, *i.e.* for the six weeks during which the Revolution was threatening; together the receipts showed the purchase of 259 mausers, 26 Brownings, 23 other pistols, and 27,000 bullets, for 105,000 marks.

The information was circulated by the Wolff bureau throughout the whole country and the effect was instantaneous. The German Revolution, then, it seemed, had been armed, had been financed, by a Russian, by a Bolshevik. What! Had Germany been the only European Power to extend the hand of welcome to the Russian Revolution, and was this the thanks! A solemn treaty openly flouted, the sacred rights of hospitality and immunity most scandalously abused! To be sure the anger was not wholly logical; how glorify the German Revolution and be so angry with those who helped to bring it about? Those who argue thus forget that national sentiments have a logic of their own, and that there are revolutions and revolutions; there are the revolutions you make yourself, which are wholly admirable: and there are the revolutions which others make for you, which are wholly detestable. Indeed, there is a deep-seated and justifiable distinction between revolutions arising from within and revolutions imposed from outside.

It took about a week for news of what had happened to get through to Russia. The Soviet Government was in an optimistic, not to say an arrogant, mood. No doubt the German Revolution seemed to them the beginning of the break up of Europe into revolutionary governments. At any rate, Joffé instantly despatched a wireless message: yes, he had handed over the money for the arms, and what is more to the Independent



Socialists ; but the figures which the Wolff message had quoted were much too low ; Russia had supplied far more than this paltry sum to aid the German explosion ; Barth, now People's Commissary, had had, not one hundred thousand marks, but several hundred thousand ; " in declaring this it is my boast," continues the self-confident communicator, " that these activities of mine, which were carried on in agreement with the Independents, now Ministers, Haase, Barth, and others, have been my personal contribution to the victory of the German Revolution." Ten days later a wireless addendum was received, again from the late Russian Ambassador to the Berlin Government ; " I will use this occasion to advise Herr Cohn, the Legal Adviser to the Russian Embassy, that the 550,000 marks and the 50,000 marks which a member of the Independent Socialist Party received from me the night before I was made to leave Berlin need not at present be paid over to the Independent Socialist Party ; the same is valid for the ten million roubles deposited in Germany over which I gave Herr Cohn rights of disposal in the interests of the German Revolution. These moneys also need not be put at the disposal of the Independent Socialist Party. . . ."

. . . . and all Germany completed the message by adding : " but may be given to the more

\* *Frankfurter Volksstimme*, December 20th.

revolutionary Spartacists, the real and true enemies of the bourgeoisie."

And so this insolent message set all Germany by the ears.

We have the answers of the accused, Haase, Barth, and Cohn. Haase succeeded in clearing himself of the real charge with some success. "He had no knowledge of the fact that the Russian Soviet Government had purchased arms in Germany; still less for the purpose for which such were destined. It is true that he had known that Barth had purchased arms to bring about an armed revolution in Germany, but only after the thing was done; he had never been consulted, and Barth had coolly confronted his colleagues at the last moment with the *fait accompli*. Even at the time he had had no suspicion but that the money for these purchases had been supplied by some wealthy German in sympathy with the movement; he had never talked to Joffé, had never talked to anybody about a contemplated purchase of arms."\* Barth's evidence virtually confirmed this; he had indeed purchased arms, but only with German money; what Haase said was true, he had done it on his own authority and had only told the others when it was too late to undo the act. As for Joffé, he had spoken to him once, but only after he had bought the arms, about a fortnight before the Revolution.

\* *Vorwärts*, December 10th, morning edition.

Much later Cohn also defended himself, but not completely. He could not deny two cardinal facts, that he had been legal Adviser to the Bolshevik Embassy, and that he had received a large sum of money from Joffé on the eve of the Revolution ; but he pleads that most of the money was meant to assist Russian prisoners in Germany in a purely philanthropic way, and a small sum only was given to help a perfectly legitimate form of Independent propaganda.\*

Such then are the facts ; they do not prove much. " Russian money " can in reality have played but a small part in bringing on the German Revolution ; one does not revolt against the most organised Power in Europe with the help of " 159 mausers, 26 Brownings, and 23 other pistols." Yet the accusation has stood and the defence is nothing. " It is a bad chapter," says Noske in the House, and he turns viciously on the ostracised Independent group ; " gentlemen of the Independent Party may twist and wriggle as they please, the receipt of this Russian money is so painful a chapter that they will never be able to justify themselves in the eyes of the nation. And here and now, in public, I ask these sentimentalists, who are always reproaching us because we do not hesitate to use force : for what purposes did you put into the hands of the German workman a pistol bought with Russian

\* Reply to Dr. Helfferich at the War Inquiry Commission, November 15th, 1919.

money? Simply in order to begin a battle against those of your own flesh and blood. Then you come to reproach us because we try to protect the population from violence; that is a degree of gross, mad hypocrisy, such as one could hardly have imagined possible.”\*

Why was the connection of the Left Wing Socialists with Russia so extraordinarily distasteful to the bulk of the nation? The rest of this chapter will be an attempt to answer that question.

In order to do so I must first of all make clear the grouping of that Left Wing itself. There were in Germany in the course of the war three parties of Socialists, the Majority Socialists, the Independent Socialists, and lastly the Spartacists, later called Communists. The Majority not only believed in the theory of national defence, but also considered that the war had been an example of national defence; the Independents believed in the theory of national defence, but did not consider that the war had been fought for the sake of such defence; the Spartacists did not even believe in the theory of national defence.

Up till the end of the war the influence known as Spartacus was negligible; it was not the Spartacists, or their Russian friends, who broke up Germany; Germany broke up through much more tremendous causes than that. But when Germany had broken up, then, indeed, the Spartacists became of immediate

\* *Frankfurter Zeitung*, February 27th, 1919.

importance. This was partly because they had absolutely definite ideas of what they wanted, while no one else had any definite ideas at all. Nevertheless, even at the end of the war the country was still strongly national in feeling, and in a country of strong nationalism, even at its moment of deepest degradation, the Spartacists were, though German in blood, alien in spirit. The Majority Socialists were only representing universal opinion when they so vehemently repudiated the anti-nationalism of the Spartacists. Perhaps because the country was doing so badly, it became a touchstone of honesty of motive to acknowledge a certain modicum of nationalism, not to desert the "fatherland" in the hour of need. There is a certain element of generosity here which powerfully appealed to all that was good in the country; patriotism at bay is always respectable. But the Spartacists made mock of that fierce and illogical faith, because they had already replaced it with another. This was their justification. Now where the Independents came to shipwreck was in this: that neither did they adhere to the old faith nor to the new. They decried nationalism; their tribute of respect to it was of that doctrinaire kind which can be peculiarly irritating to overwrought nerves; but, as they quite honestly said, they did not believe in the *clichés* of the Spartacists either. They were therefore the chosen victims of abuse, and, as they also sat in the political assemblies, which the Spartacists refused to do,

they were consistently selected as an example and a warning.

It is impossible to deny but that on this question of the relations with Russia the Independents and Spartacists were totally, irrevocably, and tragically at variance with their fellow-countrymen. Nothing has contributed more to bitterness of feeling than this initial misunderstanding. The Germans thought that they had made their own Revolution; but when they had done so, they found the results of their action being annexed and earmarked and stolen by a set of people whom they thought traitors for the sake of an idea which was abhorrent to them. The bulk of the nation wanted a political revolution ending in a republican form of government; they did not want a communist state of society. They laid a phenomenal stress on "order"; this I have already explained; now the Moscow *régime* seemed to them the very negation of order. A most unfortunate impression of selfishness was given to the Independent and Spartacist motives, inasmuch as they were annexing, for their own peculiar purposes of which the nation did not approve, a movement which not they, but the nation acting unitedly and as a whole had made for national ends. The idea towards which the Revolution was now to be turned was an alien one; and all joy went out of the Revolution.

National legends are never so fiercely defended as when the first tiny doubts begin to creep into the public

mind. The German nation wished and ardently desired to think of itself as acting with dramatic unity, slow indeed to wrath, but mighty when aroused, as determined as generous. It is not difficult to understand how sordid, in such a mood, seemed to them that unfortunate bundle of receipts. Incidentally, we must also allow something for the pressure at that time we ourselves were exercising in the same direction. We had delimited the world into Bolshevist and anti-Bolshevist, and had decreed outlawry and curses against all who would not join in the crusade to put down the Bolshevist plague. But the Germans wanted to be admitted to the League of Nations, not to be yet further excluded; it was suicidal to be convicted of having trafficked with Bolshevism.

I have deliberately given the less important reasons for the national anger first. Trafficking with Bolshevist Russia destroyed a national legend which was in a fair way to be built up; it was obviously counter to self-interest. But there was something else. This something else was quite simply: fear, *i.e.* fear of Russia. "Whosoever after me shall govern Prussia," wrote Frederick the Great, in making the first alliance between his own country and the Russians, "will have sedulously to cultivate the friendship of these barbarians."\* In these words are embodied all the deep prejudice,

\* *Quiconque après moi gouvernera la Prusse, se trouvera dans la nécessité de cultiver soigneusement l'amitié de ces barbares, (1763).*

dislike, suspicion, contempt, and fear with which the German has regarded the Russian. Above all things, fear; for to cultivate sedulous friendship is necessary for no other reason but that otherwise the German imagines himself at the mercy of "these barbarians."

It is difficult, without seeming to be guilty of an exaggeration, to explain the full force of this "Russian fear" in Germany. We Westerners talk so glibly of Europe and European civilisation and do not realise the deep line of cleavage which ran, before the war, right through the centre of the continent. That line was deep just because it was compounded of three divisions which chanced to run concurrently with each other; there was the division between two Churches, the Eastern and the Western forms of Christianity, the division between two cultures, the agricultural and the industrial, with their profound modifications of society, and there was the difference between two races, the Slav and the Germanic. These three distinctions often coincided and most markedly divided Eastern Europe from Western. It was not at all unnatural that the nations which lay along the frontier or danger line should have been the most conscious of this state of affairs; they felt themselves to be in an exposed position. The Germans honestly thought themselves called upon to defend "Westernism" from "Eastern barbarism"; in Hungary, which, curiously enough, although in origin Eastern, is never tired of boasting that



it is an "island" of civilisation in a sea of barbarism, this legend of being the champion of Europe rose to fantastic heights of ill-conceived vanity and boastfulness. Germany is less conceited and less warlike than Hungary; there the feeling was often one of panic. Bismarck alone was held to have been capable of dealing with the Russians; with the passing of his influence the "Russian terror" came to be shared equally by all classes of society. It was one of those popular emotions independent of the often very artificial course of formal politics. It could be much better studied in the third-rate German novel, or better still, in the third-class railway carriage, than in political speeches and polite literature.

Such was the situation when the war opened. Its effect on the attitude of the German Socialists has been noted with astonishment by those not conversant with this "Russian fear"; they were amazed to see the German Socialists hold this fear sufficient excuse to vote the war credits; but there is no doubt that they so voted almost entirely for that reason. Russia in the East was vastly more real to them than France in the West. They admitted that Germany was invading France; but then Russia was invading Germany; they declared that of these two undoubted facts the second far outweighed the first. For while the German invasion of France was wrong and tragic, the Russian invasion of Germany was wrong and disastrous; in the one case a country was

threatened, in the other a civilisation. Nor could they understand, nor can they understand to-day, how the Englishman could stab "Europe" in the back by allying himself with the barbarian "Cossack."

Hard on these overwhelming emotions there followed the terrible invasion of East Prussia by the Russian army. This was accompanied by Russian atrocities which—in the opinion of the ordinary German—made any allegations of ill-conduct by German soldiers in Belgium seem mere child's play. To heated imaginations it seemed as though the evil days of the Mongol and Turkish invasions were once more at hand and that Eastern hordes were again devastating the culture of the West with fire and sword. Nevertheless, after untold miseries had been wreaked on the luckless population, the invasion was stemmed by that amazing battle of Tannenberg which established once for all the reputation of the German military staff.

There is a huge revulsion of feeling. The diplomatic incompetence of her statesmen might embroil Germany in war: the genius of her generals would nevertheless save her. We now know that battle to have been won, not by the genius of the German, but by the inconceivable stupidity of the Russian, generals. On this stupidity Ludendorff gambled and won; if to gamble and win against great odds is genius, then certainly Ludendorff had it. But at the time none of this was known. All that appeared was that by valour and extreme strategic

skill the Russian "hordes" had been utterly destroyed by a small and disciplined army pledged to shed its last drop of blood in defence of its home soil. Indeed, in its moral effects, the battle of Tannenberg may be quite fitly compared with the ancient battle of Marathon. Later research has shown in each case that the great battle was not so very wonderful after all; but later research has never been able to destroy the ultimate effects of a revulsion of feeling which at the time was like a revelation; Marathon proved that the Persian Empire, and Tannenberg that the Russian, were but clumsy colossi after all.

From Tannenberg we may trace a straight line to Brest Litovsk. Tannenberg showed that Russia was not invincible; Brest Litovsk showed her helpless; and "the Russian peril is over for ever," cried the man in the street.

Was it so, indeed? Or did Germany very soon begin to realise that a country beaten militarily may revenge itself in spiritual ways? The wretched Russian moujik fled; deserted by the moujik the Russian negotiator had perforce to give way; but the Russian pamphlet had come to stay.

The Russian pamphlet came; it was universal and all pervading; we have seen it bursting forth from the Embassy bags. Russian propaganda was in Germany conducted by the best propagandist on whom the Bolsheviks could lay hand, Karl Radek, "this insignificant

little man with the brow and eyes of an intellectual and the brutal, mobile mouth of a demagogue." But the danger did not lie in the mouth or in the eyes of a Radek, but in the audience to whom he spoke. The condition of the German worker was wretched, (in the next chapter we shall see the full effects of this), and the Bolsheviki promised him a new heaven and a new earth.

Bolshevik propaganda was in itself not deadly ; it was ruthless and bitter, but so are many faiths. But it was dangerous because it flooded in just at a moment when the old military administration slackened suddenly and completely. The public was seized with nothing less than a panic ; it was the revenge for Brest Litovsk, bitter, deadly, subtle ; it was the old, old fight of Russian against German, of East against West, of savagery against " culture " ; it was historic, fated, inevitable, worse than ever. And all society coalesced and forgot their quarrels to fight Bolshevism, not Bolshevism as we fought it from England, with selected volunteers on the remote Murman coast, but Bolshevism here and now, in the streets of Berlin, and every man to the pumps.

This is indeed a strange situation ; revolution only lives by denying revolution.

It was the tragedy of Germany that her sons could not agree together as to how much of revolution they desired. A violent conflict of desires leads to a violent conflict of acts. On the one side " democracy " was the cry, on the other it was " sovietism." As a matter of

fact, as so often happens, the spiritual ideas, which gave rise to the quarrel, became rapidly of less account than the quarrel itself ; the conflict of ideas is almost buried under the violence of conflicting acts. Perhaps this would not have been so, had not each side in its terror and despair allied itself to doubtful allies ; the Spartacists, by appealing to the streets, inevitably opened their doors to crime and common misdemeanour, while the democrats, by falling back on the trained officer, found to their dismay that they had surrendered to the old militarism. I do not wish to balance the errors committed. I will ask the reader to refer back to the *Note* at the beginning of this chapter on that point. If the following chapter seems to omit any description of the surrender to militarism, that is because such surrender really came a good deal later, and could not reasonably be included in my period. In general, I have described the struggle itself rather than discussed the theories of society which it was supposed to decide. For, whatever may be the future course of those theories, and however important the form in which they may eventually revive, for the remaining short period under discussion the cardinal and outstanding thing is not really a spiritual conflict, but the sheer, unadulterated fact of civil war.

## CHAPTER V

### SPARTACUS

*The storm of the Revolution swept them over into a world beyond their power to grasp.*

Theodor Wolff.

*All Germany asks my blood.*

Seidl, before being condemned to death.

IN the present chapter we have the history of a civil war without nobility, without dignity, and without grandeur, a peculiar civil war. If the ordinary man in Germany were asked to describe it, I think he would say frankly that it was neither dramatic nor heroic, that it could not bear comparison with other great civil wars in that respect; but, he would say, it was above all *necessary*; necessary, not because he wanted it, but necessary "if we wished in any way at all to continue to exist; and that is its great historic justification, and that is why I," he would add, "will always maintain that Noske is a great man, or was a great man for a time at any rate, or at least did great things; or if he did not do things great in themselves, he did one great thing, he saved Germany; he restored law and order; law and order is a fact which it may please other nations to esteem lightly, but which

we in Germany, having once had to do without, could tell those other nations is about the only thing in the world which one cannot do without."

The first serious disturbances brought about by factions dissatisfied with the results of the Revolution occurred on December 6th, exactly a month after the Revolution came about. But the dissatisfaction out of which these disturbances arose was not caused simply by the Revolution. Long before the Revolution the Socialists had quarrelled about the war, and had divided into two entirely distinct parties, known as Majority Socialists and Independents. As the war went on a third small party began to be formed, secretly and desperately, mostly composed of men who spent their lives in and out of prison for political offences. This party lived by what the Germans call subterranean methods, that is, they had no headquarters, kept no books, never attempted any formal meetings, but devoted themselves exclusively to distributing pamphlets and flysheets and to personal "grubbing underground";\* they lived a hunted life.

It might have been thought that with the end of the war some of the causes of quarrel between the Socialists would have disappeared. As the war was over, there would no longer be any dispute whether to support

\* *Wuhlarbeit* ; the metaphor is that of the mole grubbing underground.

it or not. It is possible that had not the third party of irreconcilables existed, the Majority and Independents might have come to a permanent reconciliation. They did in fact do so for a short time ; from November 9th till nearly the end of December the revolutionary Government was composed of three Majority and three Independent People's Commissaries. The breach first came after the "shooting affray" of December 6th ; the Independents blamed the Majority for what had happened on that day. When events were repeated on December 23rd, they threw up their seats in the Government, signifying, that if it were a choice between the Majority and their victims, they preferred to side with the latter, that is, with Spartacus.

Of this third party we may say that the most brilliant thing they ever did was to give themselves a name. Spartacus was the nom-de-plume used for signing a series of remarkable flysheets which appeared halfway through the war. Not that these flysheets were remarkable in the sense that they displayed great originality of ideas or great force of writing ; they were only remarkable in this one point—that in spite of great crudeness of thought and poor level of craftsmanship, they did what few political pamphlets ever do, they somehow or other exactly expressed the desires and wishes floating in the minds of large masses of people who were quite unable to write or speak for themselves. Spartacus did not waste time in arguing about the rights and wrongs of



voting war-credits ; Parliament seemed very far away to those who read Spartacus. But when Spartacus said, violently and crudely, and, above all, over and over again : "Down with the war!", the conscript who read the flysheet furtively by the miserable candle-light of his dug-out, instantly responded, heart and mind and spirit. Spartacus indeed spoke for the oppressed, just as the original Spartacus had once spoken for the oppressed. Spartacus, the real Spartacus, was a slave of the great Roman Empire, who in 73 B.C. headed a revolt of all the slaves in Italy, and kept Italy, the civilised centre of the world at that time, disturbed and unsafe for years on end. History has always agreed that there was something not unheroic in this figure of a slave Spartacus, not because he was the leader of any great new movement, but simply because he revolted so desperately against desperate conditions.

All that was miserable and wretched, all that was violent, crude, and disorderly, all that was criminal, and, we may add, all who had become criminal, ground in the remorseless mill-wheels of society, gathered round Spartacus. It does not often happen that the miserable and wretched congregate together and become what is usually looked on as a political party ; but occasionally, when events are very abnormal, it may so happen. Things had been utterly abnormal in Germany for many months past ; the food conditions alone made life most extraordinary. Then, instead of having isolated

misery, perishing singly, we get concentrated misery, obvious and rampant. But concentrated misery automatically becomes a threat to society, to "order."

The existence of the Spartacus party was a kind of wild satire on the programme of "order" and "work" launched by the Majority Socialists. The Spartacus party claimed, of course, to have a programme of its own. This programme was the Russian Bolshevik programme. But it is a mistake to look on the Spartacus party as a true political party with a true political programme. They adopted certain party cries from the Russians, no doubt with perfect sincerity; but the extraordinarily automatic way in which they adopt everything that comes to them from Russia without examination tells its own tale. Their best leader, Liebknecht, was a man of no real originality.

The Spartacists were no party; they did not even represent a whole class, in the way that the Russian Bolsheviks represent a large and homogeneous mass of town workers; they represented simply one thing—the submerged tenth, the frayed edges of human society. Or rather, they represented a most unusual and extraordinary coalition of the submerged tenth with certain other elements. I have called Liebknecht a man of no originality. But Liebknecht was a highly educated man and Rosa Luxembourg an even more highly educated woman, mistress of many languages and of the whole theory of economics and sociology. To these isolated

theorists, leading a tiny band of devoted and wholly uninfluential followers, there came suddenly a most unexpected body of adherents out of the lower ranks of society. It was not the intrinsic power of the Liebknecht ideas which attracted the masses ; it was the abnormal condition of society which, like a pot boiling over, threw up to the top all its scum and froth. Had Liebknecht and Luxembourg not been there, this scum and froth would have been spewed forth and disappeared. It was the educated nucleus of leaders who gathered round them the streets of Berlin and supplied concentration, will power, some kind of a programme, and, we may add, some undeniable disinterestedness.

The Spartacus group rose to immediate importance as soon as the starving masses found out that the end of the war did not mean plenty of good food for all. Something must be attributed to Russian agitation ; something also to the riffraff which is bound to return with a returning army. Yet the demobilisation of the huge German army, was, on the whole, carried out with great speed and hardly any disturbance, and this amazing feat was itself partly due to the fact that everybody was in good humour. That soon passed ; then the hungry people very naturally were tempted to turn most to those who promised them most. " It is all very well," wrote *Vorwärts* rather bitterly, " for Liebknecht to say : I lead you to glory and prosperity ; but we owe the people honesty, and no mad promises."

In accounting for the events of December 6th and of later tragic days in the German Revolution, it is impossible and will always be impossible, even though the men who were chiefly responsible for all that was done are many of them still alive, to say who first began the spilling of blood. It is certain that Spartacus, at any rate, was fully armed ; all the evidence agrees that the Spartacists from the outset disposed of such things as armoured motor-cars in considerable numbers. It is necessary that the English reader should understand that Spartacus is anything but a harmless street crowd. There was nothing accidental about Spartacus. Spartacus was a determined faction, not an accidental concourse of street idlers. Only three weeks after the opening of the Revolution Spartacus, in a widely circulated and most violently worded pamphlet, had declared Ebert and Scheidemann only fit for hanging at the nearest street lamp-post. Yet the first outbreak had a curious accidental origin and passed away arbitrarily and quickly. The more radical elements had their strongholds in the Executive Committee of the Berlin Soviets Congress. Two young aristocrats, who afterwards escaped, were foolish enough to get a few soldiers together and arrest the Committee for a few hours. In the conflict to rescue them Spartacus and Government came into collision and eight victims fell, (December 6th).

In an official apology which was at once issued five out of the six People's Commissaries dissociated themselves

entirely from having had the least intention of shedding blood, indeed from any responsibility whatever for orders given without their knowledge or consent. The sixth Commissary, Barth, who was a kind of liaison officer with the Spartacists, was supposed to have dissociated himself for his part by his silence from the Government apology. Led by Liebknecht, the crowd streamed up to the Chancellor's Palace to hear what he had to say. At first he refused to speak, and said he had a cold and was hoarse. Then he appeared in a lighted window, smoking a cigarette, and addressed himself to Lieb-knecht as follows :

" I should just like once only to meet Liebknecht in one of the biggest of the Berlin halls, let us say the Circus Busch, and tell him what I have to tell him, and I engage not a workman would be left on his side. The reason why I sit in the Government . . . is just this, that in the Circus Busch, on the 10th of November, it was not Scheidemann, but Karl Liebknecht, who pressed me, saying, ' it must be done, unless the Revolution is to be endangered.' "

This rather interesting piece of evidence shows that even the Spartacists had not at first thought of exercising sabotage against the Revolution. But an extraordinarily rapid development of events is one of the features of a Revolution. The Majority Socialists did not grasp this ; they were therefore both taken unawares later on, and also most furiously angry at what they considered the change of front and treachery of those who had promised them their support. They clearly had no idea that the events of December 6th might easily be

repeated; they contented themselves with giving the victims a public funeral and hoped that nothing of the kind would occur again.

Yet signs of a like kind were not lacking elsewhere in Germany. Everywhere there were disturbances, and on December 7th, the day after the affair at Berlin, a much more extraordinary affair took place at Munich. In the night of the 7th an armed band of 300 or 400 persons forced their way into the house of the Minister for the Interior of the Bavarian Government, Auer,\* and, with pistols literally held at his head, made him sign a resignation from office. This was much less obviously accidental and more sinister than what had happened at Berlin. Yet this isolated attempt was not followed up, and next day the Eisner Government simply declared the resignation null and void.

Next follows the confused outburst of December 23rd and 24th at Berlin. It is impossible to get even approximately to the bottom of this episode. The established facts are that the Commandant of the city of Berlin, Wels, was taken prisoner by some marine regiments, and in imminent danger of his life; further, that someone, whether General Lequis on his own responsibility, or by order of the Government, gave the order to open fire on the Royal stables, which the unruly sailors were holding, after only a ten minutes' ultimatum. This

\* This is that same Auer whom the Entente Governments demanded in February, 1920, as a "war criminal"; as a subordinate officer at the front he had obeyed orders to dismantle some machinery.

time no less than seventy victims fell, but after some inquiry, the Executive Committee of the Soviets, which in a general way was supposed to supervise the acts of the Commissaries, passed a ruling to the effect that the Government had been justified in their use of force, and that such force could not have been avoided. Again it was hoped that the affair would not be repeated and that things would blow over. But the situation was not improved by the resignation of the three Commissaries belonging to the Independent Party, directly in consequence of the orders given on December 24th.

It was not, I think, until Christmas was past that the Government realised what Spartacus meant and what Spartacus stood for. The accounts written at the time are so confused that we cannot properly find out what happened. But a year later, on the anniversary of these events, the newspapers of various complexions published articles, mostly written by the chief actors themselves, describing what had happened and defending their own courses. Some of these accounts are of great interest. One is a kind of Questionnaire or Open Letter addressed to Noske,\* in which among other things it is made an accusation against him, that he positively forced himself and his troops from Kiel on the Berlin Government for armed action against the Spartacists and Independents. This may very likely be true, and agrees with other

\* *Die Freiheit*, December 24th, 1919, morning edition.

evidence which shows the Government taken unprepared.

There is no reasonable doubt that on this, the third occasion, the great struggle of January 5th to 14th, 1919, the Spartacists and Independents were the aggressors, and the Government and Majority Socialists acted in self-defence. Ledebour, the chief Independent leader, has declared with entire frankness that January 5th was an attempt to upset the Government by a *coup d'état* and to replace it by a "revolutionary" administration; it was to be the "second" or "true" Revolution. As I write I have before me a facsimile of the typewritten document in which Liebknecht, Scholze, and Ledebour declare the Government to be deposed and to be replaced by a Revolutionary Committee; the document is dated January 6th. This document was presented to the officer in charge of the War Office building, who refused it on the ground that the signatures were only typewritten. It was then taken back to the Royal Stables and signed. Further than that the new Revolutionary Government never got; it remains in history a Government of three signatures and a typewritten document.

The Majority Socialists nevertheless say that they cannot imagine how on this occasion Berlin failed to fall into the hands of their rivals. The attempt began on a Sunday, January 5th, and Sunday of course is a dangerous day in a country which is socially at unrest



and trained to look on Sunday as demonstration day. The blood already shed had irritated the masses. The afternoon was misty and enormous demonstrations collected before the Police Presidency. Now the Police President was a certain Eichhorn, who at this point, or before, took on himself to supply the crowd with arms; Eichhorn was in sympathy with the Spartacists. The crowd streamed on and seized on what corresponds to our Fleet Street and Trafalgar Square. The great newspaper offices, the *Vorwärts* building, the big corner house of the Mosse building, were theirs without resistance; Theodor Wolff, chief Editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, coming to that same Mosse building, found the dozen soldiers allotted to protect it amiably letting the Spartacists in; they were all, he says, not angry or violent, but just "mad for Liebknecht."

Meanwhile, the Independent leaders were holding a hurried meeting to decide whether to restrain or to encourage the action of the crowd. By eighty votes to six they determined to join in and cause the fall of the Government. But they were never really unanimous, and almost immediately we find some of their leading men attempting to negotiate with the Government and to bring an agreement together. These men, of whom the chief was Kautsky, reckoned without their host. For it was not for the Independents to determine the life and death of the Government; judgment on that had already been passed by the Spartacists, for the first time

in their history openly assembled in a public congress and not working behind closed doors. At this congress, which took place during the last days of December, Radek, the Russian revolutionary, who was supposed to be in hiding or to have fled to Russia, suddenly turned up in a most dramatic way ; there can be no doubt that plans were laid, and with some skill, during the assembling of that congress ; later on, on the first day of the riots, Radek is pictured as motoring up and down the *Unter den Linden* boulevard estimating, as an expert in revolutions, the strength of the gathering crowds.

They were enormous. And Liebknecht could have had Berlin, says Theodor Wolff, had he not stopped to make quite so many speeches from the tops of cars.

The state of the city of Berlin was an extraordinary one. All men were looking in her direction and waited for the storm to burst ; and still some restraining hand, some last remnant of the once famed " citizens' peace," there held back even the most desperate. The Government, indeed, was without arms ; what troops it had had were gone over to the other side. But a vast crowd of the faithful, numbered by " tens of thousands," gathered to interpose their bodies between the Reichstag building and destruction. This " living wall " faced other equally vast crowds led by Liebknecht. It was as though the people had in truth gathered themselves together in the flesh. They wandered aimlessly for no certain goal, or stood, waiting for no certain

purpose, the people, whose name every statesman in turn had taken in vain in the course of the war, the living matter out of which revolutions shape themselves and grow. At the side of such elemental forces individuals seem of no account. Liebknecht was swallowed up in the masses of those whom he had evoked ; Radek, most fiery of agitators, is not heard of again ; Scheidemann and Ebert can but stand on the balcony facing the sacrificial wall of their defenders, and, with the sweat pouring down their bodies, speak words of little meaning, " to encourage them."\*

In those days two regiments were formed, literally out of the streets, to defend the " bloodless " Revolution against its own rebels and violators. They called themselves *Reichstag* and *Liebe*. They had no arms ; the deserting sailors had taken all there were to Spartacus. But by a trick they broke into a Spartacus depot, and so took back their own again. Even so the Reichstag building might have been taken and the Government scattered to the ends of the earth ; it was not done, one might almost say, " by a miracle." Very desultory fighting began on Sunday, died away on Monday morning ; on Monday at 5 in the afternoon a rush was made at the Reichstag, but somehow beaten off. But the railway stations, the Post Office, could not be saved, and the Brandenburger Tor fell to the rebels ; half Berlin was theirs.

\* Theodor Wolff's description.

Noske relates that his troops entered Berlin on the following Saturday; but small detachments probably came in during Tuesday and Wednesday. On Thursday evening the Government had got the railway stations back and trains were leaving the city. On Thursday, the Spartacists proposed the resignation of the Government and the appointment of a new government of Independents and Spartacists; but the offer was now meaningless, as they were no longer the dictators, but the losing side. As a matter of fact, the worst fighting was between Thursday and Sunday, after the real struggle had been virtually decided, for the Spartacists displayed, in a losing game, that courage and determination or almost ferocity, which they had so strangely omitted to show when Berlin could have been theirs. Desperation often gives men phenomenal courage, and the Spartacists did not surrender the newspaper buildings and Royal stables until howitzers and heavy guns had been brought up and a regular bombardment had been carried on. Certain charges are brought against the Scheidemann-Ebert Government, that in the end they refused to listen to the voice of mercy; but they are not very well sustained, and it is impossible to say whether they are true. On the 13th all was over. The great struggle, or, as those against whom it was made called it, "the blasphemous attempt,"\* to initiate the second or

\* *Das frevelhafte Verbrechen*; manifesto issued by the Government. *Frankfurter Volksstimme*, January 15th.

“ true ” Revolution had altogether failed at a most terrible cost.

The Government had won. On January 19th it was able to hold the much needed general election for the National Convention, to wreck which the Spartacists had hurried on their preparations. This election, although not ending in an absolute Socialist majority, gave so large a relative majority that both formally and in every other way it immensely strengthened the Majority Socialist position ; indeed, it may be said to be the true basis on which the Government subsequently rested. But whatever moral prestige the Government earned by their sustained efforts to keep law and order in a country which seemed to be breaking to pieces under their hands, was most seriously discounted by the murder of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg on the night of January 16th.

I will not describe this murder in its details. Rosa Luxembourg was lynched by the mob while being conveyed from one place of detention to another, and Liebknecht was shot by his own guard. Perhaps he was attempting to escape ; but this is not proved. The Government was, of course, responsible for the safety of those whom it had chosen to arrest. But it did not intentionally give inadequate protection ; the whole thing was a surprise attack and accident seems to have played a large part ; no one was probably more embarrassed by these miserable murders than the Government. It is horrible to think that two people of the character

of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourgh should have been murdered in this atrocious way. But apart from their tragedy, these two murders were essentially a continuation of what had been happening. A series of violent murders of political personages now takes place. The most terrible were those of Kurt Eisner at Munich, on February 21st, when an attempt was made literally to shoot down half the Munich Council of Ministers in the presence of the Munich Chamber, and the horrible lynching of the Saxon War Minister, Neuring, on April 12th.

Neuring was literally hacked and battered to death and then thrown into the Elbe, while the brutal crowd watched his struggles or pushed him off the bank. The Spartacists vehemently denied that they were responsible. It is just to say that they certainly did not instigate this act. Indeed, they never at any time admitted an intention of using political murder ; they professed to be no terrorists. Their aim was straightforward rebellion. At the same time there is a very broad and important distinction between their views of violence and the views held by the Majority Socialists. While the Majority Socialists do not disavow the use of force *where unavoidable*, they consistently look on it as a *pis aller*, only to be used in the last resort, and they prefer to exhaust every other means before having recourse to it ; their theory on this point is perfectly lucid, and their practice, on the whole, struggles to be consistent with their theory.

The Spartacist view was entirely different ; it was, in fact, the Bolshevik view. They did not consider violence as a *pis aller*, but as a legitimate act. Theoretically, they positively advocated the use of force, and their practice, also, was consistent with their theory. Holding that only by force could the " true " revolution be initiated, and that therefore it was criminal to hesitate to use such force, they took the final step and deliberately used force for this precise purpose, namely, in order to obtain political power. Nor did they take their first failure as any proof that their argument was false. They frankly deduced from it, not that they had been wrong in using force, but that they had been wrong in not using enough force. More force, not less, was now their aim. Granted their theory, their deductions are perfectly correct. In March there was a second Spartacist rebellion of an even more terrible character than the one which had taken place in January. I do not propose to describe this second rebellion, as in many ways it merely repeats the first.\*

What I am now about to describe is the effect of the Spartacist example on people who were not Spartacists, although it was impossible to prevent them from sheltering themselves under the Spartacist wing. If we look on the whole internal course of the war and the

\* It contained one very important new feature—the demand for economic revolution. I have not found any English account more detailed than the one to which I myself contributed in *The International Review* for May, 1919.

Revolution and also the aftermath of the Revolution as one uninterrupted sweeping movement, then what is significant is that whatever party arises to claim a position as the most radical of all parties is very soon borne down and overwhelmed by another, which claims to be yet more extreme, more radical, more "true." The January rebellion was a most serious attempt by the extreme Left to capture the machine of state ; it failed, and inevitably there arose behind this last of parties another last party ; there arose behind the Spartacists those who were more Spartacist than the Spartacists. For about four months there gathered together, as it were crawling out of the hidden holes and corners of society, the degenerate, the robber, the thief, the weak-minded idealist, the fantastically deluded fanatic. For four months, now in South Germany, now in North, they induced scenes of terror and of blood, such as no living man had ever thought he would be called upon to survey. No wonder that men were seized with panic and thought that the days of society were numbered. Their minds contemplated the awful thought that all ordered life must come to an end, and that Europe must revert amid convulsions to barbarism, to ignorance, to darkness, and to lust. And amid a most strange and disheartening indifference on the part of those beyond the immediate zone of danger, they faced, for themselves, immediate individual death, and, for their fellows, immediate corporate nothingness.



Such thoughts are terrible thoughts and make men desperate and revengeful when the moment comes for summing up and judgment. After many weeks of horror, culminating not at Berlin, but in South Germany, in the siege of Munich by the Noske troops and their re-entry into that terrorised city, such a moment came for Germany too, when she sat down to count her victims and execute punishment. In the tremendous *Geiselmordprozess*, which, viewed with neglect or indifference by the rest of the continent, shook the emotions of this one great European country from end to end, Germany reviewed the past and re-lived over again a time which seemed to most of those who had suffered more terrible than any moment of the war itself. This must not be forgotten. The civil war in Germany was in its immediate and visible effects far more terrible and atrocious for the mass of the people than even the preceding miseries of the great war.

The *Geiselmordprozess*, or trial of seventeen rebels accused of the brutal butchery of about a dozen civil "hostages" taken from the population of Munich, opened on September 1st, 1919, before the Chief Court of that city. After the murder of Eisner Munich went through a series of convulsions of governments and finally was dominated at the end of April by a semi-insane rabble of terrorists. During the last days of the month, when the Berlin troops were closing round the doomed city, this rabble arrested a collection

of apparently harmless aristocrats, including a Prince of Thurn and Taxis, a Baron von Teuchert, a high bureaucratic official, four Munich artists, a Countess von Westarp, and one or two others. These people seem to have carried on a perfectly futile little society for propagating "patriotic" principles, and one or two of them were said to have tried to tear down some revolutionary posters. The evidence proved that not their errors, but their rank, was their undoing, for "a Prince" as one of the arrestors exclaimed, "is a diamond in our hands, and we want the most genteel." Their treatment after arrest was described at length in the course of the trial. They were all thrust together into a low cellar measuring only 5 yds. by 5 yds., and 7 feet high, where the walls dripped with moisture; they lay on the stones, and with difficulty a separate room was obtained for the Countess. Their only candle was snatched away from them and they were told that bread and water was "good enough for such canaille as you until what time you are shot." An extraordinary picture was elicited by the rigid questioning of accusing counsel as to the state of affairs meanwhile among the captors themselves. Robbery, theft, drink, violation of women, imposture, immorality, and every kind of disorderly conduct and confusion reigned. But the talk was all of "shooting, shooting, shooting dead." And in the end, infuriated by a rumour that a price had been set on their own heads by the besieging army, the so-called Government did

take its wretched victims out into the courtyard, with brutality and insults, and in an inconsequent and haphazard way shot them down, anyhow and anywhere. Their bodies were for a time left lying and were viewed with curiosity by one of the women of the establishment carrying some dinner across to the perpetrators.

The speech of the counsel for the prosecution neither required, nor did it contain, any argument ; it was an unbroken appeal to indignation and prejudice, and it had a sure and immediate effect. The defence was perhaps the most terrible feature of this terrible trial. Every one of the accused tried in vain to save his own life by betraying his companions, and painful and desperate scenes took place in court when witnesses pointed each other out as the real perpetrators of the guilty act. One only, a man called Seidl, who was admittedly chiefly concerned in whatever slight orders had been given for the shootings, stared at the ceiling in a kind of dream, when, on the eleventh day of the trial, while a pin could be heard to drop, the widow of one of his victims heaped up the evidence against him. When his own turn came to appeal to the judge, he made an unexpectedly vigorous and most passionate defence. He declared he was no murderer, but he gloried in having been guilty of high treason to so-called society. " If you shoot me now, you are doing exactly what we did to those others ; we shot them as scapegoats for the sins of society, and you shoot us

as scapegoats for the sins of those who will have none of your society. I know well that all Germany asks my blood." When, on September 18th, he and five others were condemned to death, and seven more sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude, Seidl is reported as receiving his sentence with the remark: "Here is the same comedy as we played on our side. Neither here nor there could a man find any justice."

In a way this murderer, thief, and embezzler was in the right, and those who condemned him to death were in the wrong. There was no "justice" in society—as he knew society. His case lay not against one Prince of Thurn and Taxis, or a Countess Westarp, not even against "all Germany," but rather against the whole constituted social order all the world over. In the course of the trial counsel did not fail to point out the amazing record of the accused persons. Seven were illegitimately born, two were living in adultery, several had been condemned for theft; one was living by his wits as matrimonial agent and thief; one was an habitual drunkard; "but I only took to drink because my wife was on the streets"; only four had been of age when the war broke out; one had been condemned as quite mad during the war, another as feeble-minded; one was a religious maniac; one suffered from venereal diseases; one was so poor that he had never had a watch, and had stolen a watch off one of the dead bodies, by which act he was condemned. If for a moment we put aside our

disgust, we can see that dispassionately considered, all these defects have a common factor—they all spring out of a diseased condition of the social order. The seventeen miserable victims, who without heroism or courage tried at the last moment to save themselves at each other's expense, were the derelicts, the wreckage which society manufactures out of some human existences. They were the typical waste which society throws aside in its onward course.

We are perhaps in danger of stepping into rather deep waters. Any honest English reader will remind me that a simple history of the German Revolution need not end in a moral disquisition about the vices of the modern social order. And yet that is precisely where it ought to end; the German Revolution was formally the product of Socialism, and Socialism is formally nothing but a most terrible—and a most true—bill of accusation against the modern social order. But my answer shall be more straightforward even than that. There is no such thing as a simple history of the German Revolution, or of any other Revolution. This is because the German Revolution was not simple, nor has any other Revolution ever been simple. There have been, indeed, purely political *coups d'état* known to history which conceivably might be called simple. Revolutions are not of this nature. They are greater and profounder.

There was a certain excuse at the outset of the German Revolution for believing in its simple political character.

But even then the inane theory that the Revolution was a "manufactured product" ought to have been strangled by the commonsense of Europe as it arose; since then the whole course of the German Revolution has flung this absurdity back in the faces of those who invented it. The outstanding mark of the German Revolution has been the way it has broadened and deepened as time has gone on. I am well aware of the common verdict, held very strongly in Germany itself, which says that the revolutionary impulse has died away and left only an ebb-tide, and to a large extent I agree, as any person of common honesty must. The *élan*, the glory, the joy of revolution very quickly faded for the German nation; only for a brief moment did the flush of revolution light up their sky; then they looked in at each other's faces again in the cold, grey pallour of that dreary dawn which succeeds the nightmare of a war. But in another way the Revolution as it was on November 9th, 1918, was a poor and trivial affair compared with what it had *become* on November 9th, 1919. The present sluggish drift of waters on the surface conceals a vast gathering momentum of forces below. This momentum is not political, but economic. It will not, except accidentally, end in such specific political upheavals as those of January and March, 1919. To be sure, there may be more of such upheavals; there might be a monarchist restoration. It is proper to be prepared for all these eventualities, for they are all quite possible.

The recent attempt at Berlin, known as the Kapp *coup*, may possibly be repeated. But the real history of the Revolution, which is the real history of Germany, is not in these. It is in the economic change which is re-shaping Germany from end to end, the fringe only of which has as yet been entered on the statute-book in laws even as fundamental as the new Works Councils law. No one having the most superficial knowledge of the condition of the continent at the present day can doubt but what there has begun an immense process which must end in the re-statement of the nature of society. Of this process the German Revolution has now become a foremost part.

But I have not attempted to take the reader into this complex of facts. I have confined myself to giving a sketch of the first phase only of the German Revolution. But even during that first phase we can trace a process which has led us in a broadening course from the apex of society to its base. We began with the acts of the German Emperor on November 9th, 1918; we end with the acts of the most obscure haunters of the most obscure purlieus of Munich. Revolutions, say the historians, always contain tragedies. Let us agree that the flight to Amerongen was no tragedy. But perhaps the other end of the scale has the true tragic element, sordid though it was. Revolutions are, in their essence, a revolt of the human spirit against the unendurable. In almost every revolution there comes a phase when that

revolt reaches fanatical and ghastly heights. It then stands for a symbol of the misery of the human race. Those whom the dead-weight of the social mechanism has kept submerged, then, and then only, are able to emerge; it is their brief moment of power, and they use it as only the miserable and oppressed can use such hours.

I have written that revolutions are in their essence a revolt of the human spirit against the unendurable. But what the human spirit had felt to be unendurable was, in truth, nothing but the bondage it had, in folly and neglect, imposed on itself and on its powers. Revolutions re-assert the spirit of man. They are acts of power. They are awful renewals and re-baptisms of the mind of man.



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