

CHAPTER X

FROM REVOLUTION TO REFORM

I SHALL consider the German and Belgian experience in much detail, because it offers us the best possible criticism upon the socialist movement as a whole. It represents it in its later and riper stages. I deliberately substitute this experience for speculative discussion, confident that this actual history of failure and success throws far more light upon the issues than volumes of subtle theorizing. We do not know what the socialistic principle can do, or what it can not do. It has now made two extraordinary records; one political, the other political and economic. It is to these records I now refer the reader. They furnish lessons of such obvious significance that there would be little hope for any people who refused to heed them.

So far as political duties alone can steady men, the German social democrats have been at last forced to take step with the great army of those who do the ordinary work of carrying on the empire. Within my own personal experience with some of the leaders of this party, the change of attitude on very vital points has been so radical, that one hesitates to state it except in their own words. Socialists are extremely sensitive about these changes of opinion within their own ranks, and I shall not therefore trust to notes taken during three years' residence in that country and during four visits at more recent periods.

Even if it somewhat overload the text, the most authoritative proofs should be given. These changes have been brought about by the bearing of specific responsibilities. In Germany these are almost exclusively political. Bamberger, who with the eye of an enemy watched the growth of social democracy in Parliament, told me that what had interested him most was to see the effect of parliamentary life upon the outward behavior, the manners and dress, of these representatives of the labor classes. "Even those who are most persistent in marking themselves off by external peculiarities, gradually get subdued by their surroundings, so that in dress and bearing strangers are bothered to know where the socialists sit."

It is of much more weight that this subduing process does not affect the outside only, but thought and opinion as well. Let us take one by one the leading revolutionary principles which had the sacredness of a religion to the older German socialist.

(a) After their parliamentary life began, men who guided the opinion of the party held, as Bellamy came to believe, that the social revolution was to happen at a date so near, that one was safe in stating it as twenty-five years at the utmost. The great struggle was just ahead and was to come abruptly to an end. The words of their leader, Bebel, were: "For it is the last social struggle. The nineteenth century will hardly be at an end before this struggle shall be practically ended."¹ He even held that the entire

¹"Die Frau," p. 352. (Denn es ist der letzte sociale Kampf. Das 19. Jahrhundert wird schwerlich zu Ende gehen, ohne dass dieser Kampf so gut wie entschieden ist.)

plan of the new society should be worked out beforehand to the last detail.

The Protokoll of the party, as late as that at Erfurt, contains the sentence, "I am convinced that the fulfilment of our hopes is so near that there are few in this hall that will not live to see the day."

(*b*) It was held and taught that this triumph of the social democracy could not come peaceably, but only through violence and bloodshed. In 1874, as the strength of the party began to show itself, Liebknecht was its chief and most instructed popularizer. He writes in his "Volkstaat" these words, "Those who wish a new society must work directly for the destruction of the old one." "It is solely a question of force — eine Machtfrage — which is not to be fought out politically, but on the battlefield," — die in keinem Parlament, die nur auf der Strasse, auf dem Schlachtfeld zu lösen ist. — His "Zu Schutz und Trutz" is also filled with kindred expressions.

At the Congress of 1883 the words are, "A change in our industrial system through peaceable means is unthinkable." At St. Gallen, in 1887, it is laid down that one who teaches that the social democratic ideal can be reached by constitutional and parliamentary means is a humbug — "er sei ein Betrüger."

These are not garbled citations but the deliberate opinions of the intellectual leaders of the party. The proceedings at the Congress of Wyden bear the same stamp of violent purpose. Dietzgen's "Religion der Socialdemokratie" is filled with it. The period, he says, in which he wrote was quiet, but only because forces were gathering for a catastrophe, — "weil sie Kraft sammelt zu einer grossen Katastrophe." In

1875 Marx described the transition between the capitalistic and the final communistic society. Between these two, he says, comes "die revolutionäre Dictatur des Proletariats." In 1891 his life-long friend and ablest colleague explained this sentence thus: "You wish, gentlemen, to know what this dictatorship of the proletariat means? Look, then, at the Paris Commune!"

(c) The struggle was sharply defined — the poor against the rich. It was to be the war of the proletariat against the well-to-do. In their one scientific journal it is written down, in 1891,¹ that no people as a whole is to bring in the new era. The whole burden of the fight falls to the workman, "eine bestimmte Klasse, nämlich das Proletariat innerhalb aller civilisirten Völker."

(d) As capitalism advances, wages lessen, and the masses sink into deeper want and misery — in Marx's words, "wächst die Masse des Elends, des Drucks der Knechtschaft, der Entartung, der Ausbeutung."

(e) The teaching of the great autocrat, Marx, that industries would fall as by nature into fewer and fewer hands, was accepted so implicitly, that when, a few years since, the first doubt was raised concerning this teaching, as applied to the peasant farmers, it was met by a storm of resentment. When Marx said that the accumulation of riches at one pole was at the same time the accumulation of wretchedness, slavery, ignorance, brutalization, and moral degradation at the other pole,² he included the farming class. The keenest and most faithful summarizer of Marx in England,

¹ "Die Neue Zeit," 1891-1892, Heft 9.

² "Das Kapital," p. 611.

Dr. Aveling, says the farmer is to be extinguished because the revolution is even more intense in agriculture than among factories. In Germany, Bebel popularizes this opinion, and Kautsky taught that the hopelessness of the farmer was inherent in the capitalistic development of society.¹

(f) Nor can one omit the question of religion from this list. Twenty-five years ago the tone against religion was that of an acrid dogmatic atheism. A single passage from Liebnecht's paper ("Volkstaat") in 1875 stands fairly for opinions that may be quoted from twenty authoritative sources: "It is our duty as socialists to root out the faith in God with all our zeal, nor is any one worthy the name who does not consecrate himself to the spread of atheism."

This is not merely Engels's word, "Mit Gott sind wir einfach fertig"; it is the "Zwangs-Atheismus" of that period. In his "Christenthum und Socialismus" Bebel says of the Christian religion, that it stands over against socialism as fire and water. Dietzgen claimed in his "Streifzüge" that being other than man was not possible. The Stuttgart leader Schall was applauded when, in 1871, he said, "We open war upon God because He is the greatest evil in the world."

I do not give this array of opinions to find fault with them. I give them solely to show that the ablest social democrats have changed their attitude. Some of these opinions have been cast out altogether, and are now freely spoken of as an exhibition of intellectual rawness that shows itself in the beginnings of a new movement. Other points, like the last one

¹ See Protokoll, 1895.

regarding religion, have not been discarded, but so entirely modified as scarcely to be recognized.

What has occurred that so vital a change should have taken place? The general answer is that the strenuous experience of twenty years of political agitation has given—what is freely admitted—a larger outlook.

Let us begin with the last point (*f*), on religion. As early as 1889, it had become clear to many of the shrewdest in the party that religion had a much deeper hold upon large classes, especially in the farming district, than these jaunty critics in the seventies ever dreamed. They learned that religion was a larger fact than what they saw embodied in any church, catholic or protestant. They learned that even if it were a superstition, generations must pass before its victims could be disillusionized. This had become so manifest that the Protokoll of the party at Halle declares that religion must be left to the private judgment of the individual. This is a long step from Liebknecht's positive duty of the socialists to root out religion and (*mit allem Eifer*) to spread atheism. It is easy, moreover, to account historically for the hilarity with which, at that time, men like Liebknecht, Bebel, Stern, and Dietzgen mocked the religious sentiment. The "intellectuals" of social democracy were caught by the prevailing scientific current of the time. About 1870 a crude materialism was at its height. Skilful popularizers like Büchner were read with eager zest by those whose joy it was to discredit the faiths of the ruling classes. "Wissenschaft" was a word to conjure with. Liebknecht writes, "Our party is a scientific party." Before

1885, it was a dull mind that could not see that this kind of materialism was repudiated by all the first-rate scientific minds in Europe.¹ In 1884 I heard a university professor of philosophy, in strongest sympathy with the social democrats, say, "It is a great pity that the leaders of the party do not see that they are discrediting their own cause by repeating what every instructed person knows to be nonsense." Many of their leaders now recognize this. Malon, before his death, wrote pathetic appeals to the party in Europe to "spiritualize the movement," at least "to bring it up to the level of the reigning science."

In his final work, "Le Socialisme Intégral," he pronounces the economic materialism of Marx wholly untrue to the facts of life.²

In all that was said at the Congress in Halle (1891) about the relation of the party to religion, the effects of this great change are clear. Even if policy alone dictated the altered tone, the proof is just as convincing that the party guides have learned their lesson. When a member says, especially of the country districts, "We get on best when we leave this subject (religion) entirely alone,"³ and finds his words approved, it is evident that religion is recognized as a force with which social democrats have to work. The Marxian Woltman has recently written a book upon historical materialism in which he teaches that religion is an abiding fact in the life of

¹ A brilliant account of this change may be found in Lange's "History of Materialism."

² See also Gustave Rouanet, "Revue Socialiste," 15 décembre 1887.

³ Auf dem Lande kommen wir mit der Religion am besten fort, wenn wir sie ganz aus dem Spiel lassen. — Protokoll zu Halle, p. 190.

the race. Socialism in his view has no more sacred task than to add deeper spiritual purpose to all its aims.¹ This is the key to the change in every point we are considering. At first the arch sin is compromise with existing society. Its God, its government, its family, its cherished forms of property, are to be broken in pieces. It is treachery to every sacred principle to recognize legal and parliamentary methods, since these involve some sort of working partnership with capitalistic society. Yet that which at first was a perfidy, has slowly become a virtue, even if one of necessity. Step by step the inflexible antagonisms have yielded to the same influences that have disciplined the race from its beginnings.

The point (*e*) illustrates this better still. The Marxian abstraction, that the big fish of industry are gradually destroying the little ones, has also been "found out," *i.e.* the infallibility of the generalization, applied to all industry, is now known to have limitations undreamed of by the master. As early as the International Congress of 1868, through Marx's influence, it was laid down that land was to be made common property. This was repeated until the International was scattered by the incessant bickering of its members. In 1870 the German party at its Congress at Stuttgart accepted this principle of the International because "economic development made it a necessity to convert land into common property." This was to be worked collectively by labor associations. The Congress at Gotha, in 1875, holds firmly to this plank of its platform. Nearly twenty years were still to pass before any one raises the question whether the great

¹ L. Woltman, "Der Historische Materialismus."

farming was as a fact generally swallowing up small proprietors. As late as 1895 a very frequent and impressive illustration, which one often heard from the speakers, was the resistless march of the colossal farm in the United States. It was assumed that this added further proof of the infallibility of Marx's insight. Before the dispute upon this point arose, a purely tactical issue appeared, like that which showed itself at Halle in regard to religion.

The South German socialist, Von Vollmar, knew well the life and the economic condition of the small farmer. He first saw that whether or not the great farming was to replace the small, nothing was surer than that the owner of few acres would straightway pronounce every man an enemy and a blockhead who proposed to take away this ownership and merge it in a collective proprietorship. Would it not therefore be better to recognize this fact and adjust the party policy to it? So universally was this reprobated, that three years passed before the slightest real impression was made on the party action. In 1894, Von Vollmar was able to make his challenge felt. He first showed it to be the worst of tactics to outrage the traditional land hunger of the peasant. In this same year, he challenged the evidence that the little farmer was generally being despoiled by the great one. At this date it was possible to get news from America. From letters and agricultural reports it was learned that the "big farm illustration" was premature. There was too little good evidence to show that the economic fatalities were strengthening the thesis of the prophet. The testimony was that for large portions of this industry, the future was possibly for smaller rather than

for larger farming. I remember the surprise of a socialist scholar and writer who told me, with something like consternation, that he had received trustworthy information that the "big farm" was upon the whole a failure, that the tide seemed to be setting in many districts in the direction of more scientific methods on small areas.

This news was very disturbing to men who had committed themselves with irrevocable emphasis to a proposition so open to doubt. An independent investigation of their own in Germany confirmed the case against them. For years their speakers had been telling the peasants that their future was hopeless. The campaigners had used big words before these agricultural hearers. "Evolution" and "science" were always on their lips. It was thus very chilling to hear from this same science that, as it came to be applied to farming, a large part of the cultivators were to find new hope and security in few acres rather than in many. Few social democrats were so obtuse as not to see that, at least for this section of the farming class, it was the last folly to ask that their holdings pass into a common possession. There have been ten years of very bitter contention over this agrarian issue. The social democrats have had to pay the penalty which every political party that fights with infallible abstractions must pay. The abstraction in this instance was at best a poor sort of half truth. When this was discovered, the dilemma of the social democrats was serious. Their political future made it impossible to drop the farming class, but on what basis could the propaganda now be carried on? They could propose certain improvements in the

peasant's lot, — lightened taxation, easier and safer credit, and the like ; but to do this, the social democrats must commit the deadly sin of coöperating with agencies already in hand by government and bourgeois associations. This compromise with existing society had upon all hands been pronounced the one disloyalty against their principles that was never to be pardoned. If one wished to raise a riot in a socialist gathering, one had only to suggest some modification of doctrines that would enable the party to coöperate with any recognized state or social policy. Twenty years' experience with the farmer, and the inquiries which this agitation has involved have compelled a change of tactics that bears this party still further from revolution toward the ordinary methods of an advanced party politics. It is a crisis in the history of the movement, because the fall of one infallible abstraction raises quick doubts about others. When it was once felt that Marx's thesis was more than doubtful as regards agriculture, the bolder minds began to ask if it was true of other industries. The development of social politics under the government (of which workingmen's insurance is a type) has produced a body of statistics about wages and conditions which the social democrats know they can trust. Many questions can now be tested for which there was neither proof nor disproof twenty-five years ago. From these and kindred sources of information, socialists now see that the assertion that "the big business is growing bigger and the small business smaller," is not true, except with qualifications that are very vital.

As middle-class incomes are increasing, so also

many types of middle-class industries were never in a stronger and healthier state than at the present time in Germany. The proof of this, which the scholarly Bernstein has forced his German comrades to face, marks all the change there is between the revolutionary method of the "class struggle" and the humbler method of social reform in which all men of good will may unite. This change marks an end of the man with a formula; it means a victory for practical political opportunism in its best sense. A single line from Bernstein's book reads as if Mr. Giffen or Edward Atkinson had written it, "The number of the possessing classes grows absolutely and relatively."¹

No sentence more revolutionary than this could have been written by a socialist pen. Nothing more revolutionary could happen than that its significance and its consequences should have patient hearing at the last Congress. It means no less than a reversal of political procedure. Liebknecht, in 1893, says, "Compromise gives up every principle for which we stand." Four years later he admits that compromise has become a necessity of party action. This Nestor of the party said at Hamburg, "If I can gain an advantage from another party by compromise, I will seize it."

Bebel also yields, and accepts what in 1893 he had hotly condemned—a working alliance with parliamentary forces.

¹The whole sentence is so epigrammatic that it should be given in full: "Der schlechtere Weg mehr, d. h. absolut *wachsend* wachst; die Thätigkeit und die Zahl der davon abhängig, dass die Zahl der sie sich in der That 'schlafen legen.'" y

peasant's lot, — lightened taxation, easier and safer credit, and the like ; but to do this, the social democrats must commit the deadly sin of coöperating with agencies already in hand by government and bourgeois associations. This compromise with existing society had upon all hands been pronounced the one disloyalty against their principles that was never to be pardoned. If one wished to raise a riot in a socialist gathering, one had only to suggest some modification of doctrines that would enable the party to coöperate with any recognized state or social policy. Twenty years' experience with the farmer, and the inquiries which this agitation has involved have compelled a change of tactics that bears this party still further from revolution toward the ordinary methods of an advanced party politics. It is a crisis in the history of the movement, because the fall of one infallible abstraction raises quick doubts about others. When it was once felt that Marx's thesis was more than doubtful as regards agriculture, the bolder minds began to ask if it was true of other industries. The development of social politics under the government (of which workingmen's insurance is a type) has produced a body of statistics about wages and conditions which the social democrats know they can trust. Many questions can now be tested for which there was neither proof nor disproof twenty-five years ago. From these and kindred sources of information, socialists now see that the assertion that "the big business is growing bigger and the small business smaller," is not true, except with qualifications that are very vital.

As middle-class incomes are increasing, so also

many types of middle-class industries were never in a stronger and healthier state than at the present time in Germany. The proof of this, which the scholarly Bernstein has forced his German comrades to face, marks all the change there is between the revolutionary method of the "class struggle" and the humbler method of social reform in which all men of good will may unite. This change marks an end of the man with a formula; it means a victory for practical political opportunism in its best sense. A single line from Bernstein's book reads as if Mr. Giffen or Edward Atkinson had written it, "The number of the possessing classes grows absolutely and relatively."¹

No sentence more revolutionary than this could have been written by a socialist pen. Nothing more revolutionary could happen than that its significance and its consequences should have patient hearing at the last Congress. It means no less than a reversal of political procedure. Liebknecht, in 1893, says, "Compromise gives up every principle for which we stand." Four years later he admits that compromise has become a necessity of party action. This Nestor of the party said at Hamburg, "If I can gain an advantage from another party by compromise, I will seize it."

Bebel also yields, and accepts what in 1893 he had hotly condemned—a working alliance with parliamentary forces.

¹The whole sentence is so epoch-making in the history of socialism that it should be given in full: "Nicht mehr oder minder, sondern schlechtweg mehr, d. h. absolut *und* relativ wächst die Zahl der Besitzenden. Wäre die Thätigkeit und die Aussichten der Sozialdemokratie davon abhängig, dass die Zahl der Besitzenden zurückgeht, dann könnte sie sich in der That 'schlafen legen.'"

(d) That the wages of labor, as Lassalle held, must remain under capitalism on the line of bare subsistence, — auf den nothwendigsten Lebensunterhalt, — is likewise acknowledged to be a mistake. It was first held to be a “law of nature,” then qualified, and finally in the form first stated frankly given up.

(c) That the great struggle was to be one of clearly defined classes — “proletariat against dividend-receiver” — has been fundamental with socialists since the Revolution of 1848. It was the alarm note with which Marx and Engels opened their long campaign. Upon none of the six points just now in view have the social democrats insisted with more untiring importunity than upon the fact that the wage-earning class was separated in all its interests, as by a gulf, from its foe the capitalistic class. From the first bugle note of the International, “proletarians of all countries unite!” down to the obscure programmes printed at this day in American cities, the call is to organize “on class lines.” For no object have the German leaders striven harder, than to deepen this sense of antagonism among the workingmen. Liebknecht, to the end, clung to his policy of class strife. One of his last appeals was that the “class fight” be maintained, “the sharper the struggle the better for our party.”

Yet when the veteran of the party spoke these words at Hamburg in 1897, his friends knew that the lash fell upon a dead horse. From the day when the party turned its back on the absolutism of the Marx programme, and entered on the way of legal and parliamentary processes, the magic of the Klassenkampf was gone. As long as it was said, “We

will work with no political party, — zu verwerfen ist jeder Pakt mit einer andern Partei, — we will fight the state's attempt to win us by its workingmen's insurance or by any other palliative, so long as there life and meaning in the shibboleth of class antagonism. It is now resolved to go to the polls with any party that can give them temporary help. They must give and take. It must in the same spirit welcome every "palliative," even if it mark but an inch toward their distant goal. All this is now being done by the social democrats in Germany with a heartiness that marks the greatest change in the practice and theory of the movement.

It is to be observed that these lessons have been learned through the experience gathered in political agitation of thirty years. Until the fall of Bismarck, the government did all in its power to tighten the hold of the social democrats upon every revolutionary conception they held. As long as the iron hand of the chancellor was felt in drastic laws that made socialist opinion criminal, the counter policy was one of "Macht und Gewalt." The first important utterance that I have seen from any socialist, in favor of conciliatory and parliamentary measures, was after these laws were revoked and the present emperor had admitted that the social question was of momentous consequence and should have every attention that the government could give it.

A dozen years ago, I heard the bitterest denunciation of the state labor insurance, by socialists who now defend it in public speeches. "It is not enough," they urge, "but all there is of it is good." Steps in factory legislation that were once jeered at are now

approved. Whether for the Reichstag, Landtag, or the common council of the city, socialists now cooperate, not alone in elections, but in the general policy of social and industrial improvement.

Last year in the province of Brandenburg, socialist municipal representatives met for deliberation. It perplexes one to find a proper term of comparison between the present discussion and those that filled the air at such gatherings ten years ago. The questions are now about the introduction of direct employment by the city, of extending the franchise, of a better tenement-house bill, of the hours of labor, of extending municipal control over the street cars, etc. When party tactics are chiefly directed to agitation of this kind, the Klassenkampf in its former sense, if not quite dead, is no longer alive.

To have struck at its roots this vicious growth of the class fight is the chief moral triumph in the changes here noted. As these sectional hatreds are overcome, the ground is first reached on which the longed-for social reorganization can begin. The conditions that shall make such reorganization possible can spring neither from hate nor suspicion. They can come only from a completer sense of a common and not a divided social destiny.

If we look once more at socialism in which the ideals of business and of politics really unite, we shall have the final illustration of the collectivist theory at work with results more remarkable still.

The German and Belgian experience offers society its chance of wise and generous cooperation.