

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW

VOL. VIII

DECEMBER, 1907

NO. 6

The Social Democratic Party-School In Berlin.

THE PARTY-SCHOOL in Berlin which was established last year by the committee of the Social Democratic party, did not spring up by chance; on the contrary, it is a quite necessary product of the conditions, into which, through its developments, the German party has come. In the beginning, when the labor movement was still small, and when it was comprehended only by a few chosen enthusiastic persons, the study of the scientific principles of socialism was eagerly pursued by them. They had time for it, and it was necessary for them, if they would win for the cause the mass of their comrades who either pinned their faith to bourgeois parties, or were indifferent; the bourgeois teaching had to be refuted, and the indifferent workmen aroused by pointing out the necessary tendencies in the development of capitalism, and the goal of the working class. In order to do this they must themselves be thoroughly grounded in the scientific principles of socialism; and, as we have said, they found time for this effort, all the more readily as the discussions added something to the pleasure of sociability, and to the entertainment of the tavern. In this way a strong nucleus of educated comrades was created, who were able to grasp clearly the tactics of the party; to trace out new paths for the international movement, and to carry through victoriously, under the laws for German socialists, the fight with the Bismarckian government.

Since then, however, circumstances have changed. After the decline of the laws against socialists, when the labor movement could develop freely and openly, it grew with giant strides. The unions, especially, could better bestir themselves. Their

growth was so enormous, particularly after the crisis of 1896 when good times set in, that Mehring, in his history of socialism, called the ninth year the *Jahrzehnt* of the unions. Co-operative societies were founded also, and grew with great rapidity. Everywhere was going on the ceaseless work of organization, — not only the chosen ones but the great mass of the workers were brought in; everywhere were founded socialist newspapers which constantly increased the numbers of their subscribers.

This development, which is still in full swing, soon brought its dark side which began to work an ever unceasing injury to the movement. The work of organization absorbed all the energy — no time was left for study. For the inexorable demands of practical work must weaken the passion for knowledge. The small industries clamored for new powers, the more aggressive workmen demanded the full measure; and every young man who showed some eagerness and capacity was immediately set to work, and henceforth found no time for theoretical study. It happened further that the bourgeois parties ceased to fight with theories, principles and arguments. Abuse, personal attacks, misrepresentation of facts took their place. Therefore in order to wage war with the bourgeois, theoretical knowledge was not necessary, but rather polemic agility and knowledge of facts; at least the need of fundamental knowledge was little felt in such a contest.

It is easy to see, therefore, why those words of Engels, in which he exalted the German workingman's ability to use and understand theories, are no longer true, no longer hold good. There was no time for theories,—practical work absorbed all their strength. But little by little it began to be apparent that even for practical work, this state of things was dangerous. We make use of the theories of socialism not alone to argue with the bourgeois parties, but also in order to correctly determine our own tactics. We must clearly understand the nature of capitalism not simply to incite the workingmen to fight against it, but also to find out for ourselves the best *method* of fighting it. Wherever this knowledge is lacking, tactics will be governed by established tradition or by superficial empirics. Only the present, the immediate, will be taken into account, appearances will deceive, and deep-lying cohesiveness will be lost sight of.

In the theoretical strife within the party carried on by those who call themselves Revisionists, the theoretical defects of the movement have found an unsightly expression. When Bernstein came forward with a criticism on Marxism and the old program, and demanded a revision of the former tactics,—advocating social reform as genuine socialistic tactics, instead of the "revolutionary phrases" formerly laid stress upon,—this

theoretical confusion was recognized only by certain spokesmen. It lasted for many years before the great mass of the working people understood the untenableness of Bernstein's views; and then it was not because of their theoretical grasp of the matter, but through practical experience which did not agree with Bernstein's conclusions. These contentions have strongly demonstrated the need for a theoretical clearing up of the subject.

This need appeared still more pressing when to the German party was set the task of considering new methods of tactical warfare. The breaking out of the Russian Revolution pushed the masses into the foreground as instruments of war. Traditional methods, traditional catch-words, would no longer serve; theoretical discussions were necessary, and the interest in theory therefore grew stronger. The Russian Revolution also brought to light that the franchise was no longer the all-important thing, and the social democratic societies became conscious of a higher mission than that of extending the franchise. The instruction of members and the grounding them in socialistic studies, was attempted. The newspapers which increased their subscriptions enormously demanded the same object. The lack of theoretical knowledge in the agitators and journalists then became more and more apparent. The situation was a contradictory one. Those who demanded redress, themselves stood in its way. The Party-School has been one means of escape from this contradiction.

The purpose of the Party-school as its origin shows, is not to give a kind of university training in socialistic principles, but only to educate party members as far as it can be done, in the theory of socialism, so that thereafter they may be able to work independently in any party position. Accordingly, some 30 comrades have been selected to reside for a half year in Berlin, their support, and the support of their families at home to be paid for out of the funds. These are all workingmen, actively prominent in their own localities, some of them holding salaried positions in the party. After finishing the course, they may offer themselves for the post of editor or agitator. They are given places as the need arises, and in the meantime they shift for themselves.

As a matter of course, these men placed all at once in a position to study, to cultivate their intellectual side, use their opportunity to the utmost. In order that they may not study without plan, they follow daily courses given by different teachers. In the first year the principal direction of the school fell upon the head of comrade Hilferding, who gave the courses in political economy and in the history of economics, and upon Pannekoek, who taught the history of materialism and social theories. A few weeks before the beginning of the second term, the Prus-

sian police did what they could to injure this Socialist educational institution. Both these comrades, who are foreigners, were threatened with banishment if they continued their teaching. But their places were filled by Comrade Rosa Luxemburg and Comrade Cunow; so the plan to cripple the work of the school came to nothing. The well known historian, Mehring, gives a course in the history of politics; there are courses in communal politics and in trade unionism, and a systematic training in public speaking and in journalism. Not only the theoretical but also the practical training which an agitator or a journalist may need in Germany, is considered. To the regular courses five hours are devoted daily. The remaining time is given to independent study and to a personal inspection of all branches of the Berlin labor movement. The present prospect is that a good quality of intellectual work may be looked for from the Party-School.

Can the school attain its end? It may seem difficult to train in half a year those men who have simply passed through the elementary school, to train them sufficiently in such deep scientific theories. Still, it must not be forgotten that they have passed through the school of life, and therefore the theory of that life is easily taken up by them. Then it is possible that socialist workingmen well acquainted with the practical side of life and with the labor movement, should have a good understanding of the fundamental ideas of socialistic theory. The first half year of the school has shown this. A foundation for the further study of classical and current literature has been laid; but farther study is of course necessary. It is clearly understood in the German party that not enough can be done through this Institute alone. Everywhere committees are springing up, mostly from unions and party branches, whose object is to provide lectures, courses and lessons for the workingmen. Interest in theory, in the theoretical question is awaking everywhere; libraries are being founded and lecturers provided. In this way the German working class is preparing itself for the hard battle of the future; and the hardest task it will have to accomplish, is to be well armed.

A. P.