

Prussia in Revolt.

Being Chapter I in the History of a Political Revolution.

BY DR. ANTON PANNEKOEK.

TEN COSSACKS ARRESTING ONE "RIOTER".
From the Literary Digest.

political struggle now going on in Germany is the heart of the whole European situation. Since the revolution tumbled Russia from her predominance, Germany is not only the strongest military power on the continent but the greatest force in the European action. And it is in Germany, likewise, that the socialist-labor movement is strongest. Here the forces of revolution and reaction stand facing each other armed to the teeth; here will take place the first fateful battles of the revolution.

I. Landed Nobility and Bourgeoisie.

What distinguishes Germany from America and Western Europe is control by titled land-holders, the lack of civil liberty and free institutions, and the cowardliness of the middle class. The bourgeoisie endures without protest the humiliating tyranny of the police. It goes without saying that one moment of determination on the part of this class would smash the whole regime of police and land-holders. But this is the last thing it desires. Police and land-holders are a

barrier against the rising tide of the proletariat. In form the land-holders enjoy unrestricted mastery over Prussia, and through Prussia over Germany. They occupy all the important positions in the government, the army and the courts. In form they constitute the ruling class. But in fact they are in the service of the bourgeoisie. They are like mercenary soldiers kept in pay to fight a foreign foe. The foe, of course, is the working-class.

The present German Empire was founded at the command of rising industry. Before 1871 some three dozen paltry states, each with its own laws, taxes and trade regulations, rendered capitalist expansion increasingly difficult. Capitalism demanded a new state, and a new state sprang into being. The Prussian land-holders, despite their business thrift, had only with difficulty been able to maintain themselves. Now they had such an opportunity as has been offered to few other holders of hereditary privilege. With infinite skill they managed to keep the government in their hands and so make themselves necessary to the rising bourgeoisie. All that was necessary was to serve the purposes of the rising class as well as any government could. This it has done consistently and energetically: it has persecuted the socialists and done its best to prevent the organization of labor.

II. Economic and Political Development.

The founding of the German Empire in 1871 determined the further development of the nation. It was a strange creation, this empire; constitutionally nothing but a pitiful patchwork. The tiny states did not disappear; they remained, each with its own sovereign and its own laws. But over them was the empire. This was not arranged without design. By means of this device it was possible to serve the purposes of capitalism and still keep many important phases of political and social life in a medieval state of backwardness. The functions of government were divided: schools, police, local administration, etc., went on in the old way under the separate little states. But whatever had to be modernized for the sake of capitalist development was turned over to the empire. This included foreign relations, army, navy, tariff regulations, post-office, transportation and coinage of money. Naturally the constitution of the empire was drawn up on modern lines. As parliament it was given a legislative body, elected by universal male suffrage. No doubt, Bismarck, in granting this suffrage right, had in mind the possibility of playing off the mass of the people against the bourgeoisie.

But whatever may have been the motive for granting it, the

imperial suffrage has been of immense value. In a capitalist state universal suffrage gives the only chance of securing representation for conflicting class interests. Every class, every group, can lawfully enter parliament and bring pressure to bear in proportion to its influence with the masses of the people. Thus discontent finds a voice: every change in the structure of society is immediately recorded in the law-giving body. And since the proletariat is now the rising class, it is not strange that universal male suffrage has been more useful to it than to any other class.

To the proletariat the imperial suffrage has been a mighty weapon in its battle for emancipation. It has given them the consciousness of power and inspired them to organization. Parliamentary power was the more necessary in Germany because the German bourgeois class has bequeathed to the rising proletariat no tradition of revolutionary courage. Here the working-class must needs begin modestly, feel its way, and gradually gather courage for the conflict. At times, under the Anti-Socialist law, the ballot was the only proletarian weapon, and with it the law was finally defeated and Bismarck, its author, brought to his fall. With these events began a new chapter in German history. Externally, Germany turns more and more to world politics and the development of its colonies; internally, the law-making power must continually give way before the growing power of the Social Democracy, while the bourgeois parties combine more and more closely in a reactionary coalition. Both of these facts result from the tremendous development of great industry within the boundaries of the German empire.

From 1882 to 1907 the agrarian population of Germany sank from 42.5% to 28.6%. During that period the number engaged in commerce and industry increased from 45.5% to 56.2%. The number of persons employed by small industrial concerns actually decreased between 1882 and 1907, while the number of those in the employ of large concerns leaped from 1,554,131 to 4,937,927.

A steady growth of the Social Democracy has been the result of this tremendous economic development. Beginning at a couple of hundred thousand, the socialist vote increased in 1890 to more than a million, in 1903 to more than three millions, and in 1907, under unfavorable conditions, to three and a quarter millions. This means that one third of the ballots cast are for socialism.

Another result of this economic development has been the unparalleled growth of the German labor unions. After the political struggle had destroyed the Anti-Socialist law, labor was at liberty to organize openly. At first the crisis of the early 90's prevented rapid

development and, moreover, there was a sharp internal division in regard to the form of organization. But since 1895, when industrial conditions became favorable, the growth of the movement has been tremendous. From 1891 to 1907 the number organized in the free unions (*Gewerkschaften*) increased from 277,659 to 1,865,506, and the total income grew from less than \$300,000 to \$13,000,000.

In part this development has been the result of favorable industrial conditions, but in part, also, of energetic struggles and excellent internal organization. Although formally independent of the Social-Democratic party, the unions are filled with the socialist fighting spirit. This is shown by the fact that of the \$36,000,000 expended during the past eighteen years \$16,000,000 went to the support of strikes. Forced on by industrial development the craft organizations of the early days have more and more joined themselves into great industrial unions. Thus the metal workers, the brewery workers, the wood-workers and the building trades are now industrially organized. It may be said with truth that the craft spirit has entirely died out of them. Through unceasing struggle they have noticeably improved the condition of the workers; they have become a power with which the capitalists must reckon. In fact they have often dictated the terms of labor contracts. The capitalists, of course, have met the organizations of labor with larger and larger employers' associations. Every strike is answered with a greater lock-out. So the conflict has become constantly more bitter.

Naturally there were not lacking in the German union movement, the bourgeois and conservative tendencies which still control the old-fashioned English and American trade unions. The concessions forced from the capitalists gave rise to the notion that there would be no limit to conquests of this sort. Hence it was thought that the union movement alone was sufficient to make the position of the worker tolerable even under capitalism. From this sprang naturally the opinion that the unions would be able gradually to wrest from the capitalists their control within the factory and so usher in an industrial democracy without a political revolution. The most distinguished leaders of the German labor movement became revisionistic. When the Marxian theorists pointed out the limitations of the union movement, they were attacked as the enemies of unionism. In addition to all this it came about that in the 90's most of the groups in the Social Democracy underestimated the importance of the union movement. Only a few Marxians, like Kautsky, opposed this tendency. All this united to bring about a misunderstanding between the socialist and labor movements. This misunderstanding reached its most open ex-

pression when, in 1905, the congresses of the two movements adopted contradictory resolutions on the subject of the general strike. An echo of it can be found in the defense of Samuel Gompers by various union leaders on the occasion of his recent visit to Europe.

But this Revisionist tendency was too strikingly at variance with the facts of German industrial life to endure long. The government persecuted the labor unions as vigorously as it did the political party. For the great trust magnates of the metal and coal industries further development of the unions meant defeat, revolution. By means of the black-list they drove the most active unionists from town to town; by the importation of hordes of Poles they sought to force down wages; and lately they have invented a compulsory system of labor exchanges which robs the laborer of all freedom of movement. The master-builders have the impudence to demand recognition of their labor exchange in the wages contracts. These contracts, which were formerly regarded as a means of maintaining the peace, are more and more a bone of contention. The courts are, of course, on the side of capital. The rates fixed by the contracts are now regarded merely as maximum rates, while if the men fail to live up to their part of the agreement, the employer has the privilege of raiding the union treasury.

In addition, the law-making power is brought directly into play against the working-class. The "finance reform" of last summer laid one and a quarter millions of dollars of taxation on the shoulders of the masses and let the rich go free. These taxes and the rise of prices in the world market have reduced to nothing the advantage won by the unions in the matter of wage-scales. The new police code contains provisions which will render the upward struggle of labor infinitely more difficult. The new insurance law is designed to take from the workers the administration of their own funds for sick benefits. Political reaction is gathering force: it threatens the worker at every point. Everywhere it creates increasing bitterness. Gradually the old, peaceful Revisionist spirit is disappearing from the unions, and the bond which unites them with Social Democracy gains strength with each new development. And it is constantly becoming clearer what a tremendous power these labor organizations wield in the struggle for the political state now entered on by the German working-class.

III. The Struggle for Suffrage Reform.

The Russian revolution created the conditions for a revolutionary movement in Germany. So long as the Czar stood on the eastern

frontier as a mighty power, he was ready at any moment to help suppress a revolution in Germany, as his predecessor suppressed one in Hungary in 1844. But the Japanese war and the revolution destroyed the military power of Russia. The Russian proletariat, moreover, has taught the German people the use of a new weapon, the general strike. The awakening of various Asiatic peoples and especially the revolutions in Turkey and Persia have upset international relations and roused the international proletariat. All the external conditions call to a revolution.

And within the structure of German society the economic foundations of a revolutionary movement have long been preparing. Germany is now an entirely different land from what it was thirty years ago. The gulf between political forms and the economic structure has slowly but surely grown wider. The resulting social strain has been given a revolutionary turn by various occurrences of the last few years. A conflict for a division of political power representing the actual strength of the different classes has become inevitable. And the first object to form the center of this struggle turns out to be the Prussian electoral system.

The analysis of German political development, given above, makes it clear that this electoral system should form the object of the first revolutionary efforts of the German proletariat. Universal suffrage for Prussia was the demand with which German socialism began. That was under the leadership of Lassalle in 1863. When universal male suffrage was granted to the empire, the proletariat neglected the Prussian Landtag for a while; it had another field in which it could develop unhindered. But now that it has developed into a great power, it returns to its former demand. For, in proportion as it gains influence in the empire, it feels itself more and more restricted and hindered by a legislature in which it has no representation. The decisions of the Reichstag can be made of no effect by the Bundesrat. And the Bundesrat is controlled by the Prussian government. The Prussian is, in reality, the only German government. When the working-class makes a demand in the Reichstag, the ministers refer it to the individual states. That means Prussia. For example, after the great disaster in Radbod mine, the miners demanded an imperial law for their protection. The matter was left to Prussia and it is easy to guess what sort of a law was devised by a Landtag, elected under the three-class system. Instead of a protection for miners, it was made a protection for mine-owners.

Under these conditions the labor movement encounters at every point the administrations of the separate states. Instead of being

checked by an imperial anti-socialist law, it is constantly embarrassed by police regulations. And the police is not German, but Prussian or Saxon. The education of the working-class is opposed with all the apparatus of the school laws. As the motive power of a great educational movement which seeks to lead the enslaved masses on to civilization, to art, to science, to unhampered development, the labor movement feels that the heavy hand of the most shameful of reactions has become un-endurable. So all the hate, all the scorn of the working-class is poured out on the Prussian system of government. They feel that it is a disgrace to an enlightened, progressive people. And political insight is teaching the workers that the Prussian parliament is the wall that stands across the path of every advance. Every energy must be called into play to secure universal suffrage for the elections to this body.

The Prussian three-class electoral system was foisted upon the country in 1850. Its chief provisions are as follows: in each electoral district the voters are divided into three classes according to the amount of their taxes; the first class is made up of the wealthiest, enough of them to pay the first third of the taxes (sometimes one or two millionaires will suffice); the second is made up of the moderately wealthy, who pay the second third of the taxes; and the third is made up of all the other adult males, who together pay the last third. Each class chooses an elector, and the three electors from each district choose the representative of that district. Under these conditions the mass of the people, who, of course, are crowded together in the third class, can always be voted down by a comparatively small number voting in the other two classes. Moreover, the elections are held publicly and each elector indicates his choice by word of mouth. This makes the support of a socialist dangerous to anyone economically dependent. On this account the Social-Democracy refused for a long time to participate in the Prussian elections. Not until the movement became strong enough so that great numbers of working-men could publicly vote for socialists without fear of being disciplined did it ask for recognition at the Prussian polls. It is true that in the last election the Social-Democrats captured a number of seats. But this happened because of a curious feature of this electoral system. The electoral districts are small; and a comical result of this fact is that, while a minister of state living in a wealthy district may be forced to vote in the third class of his district, his coachman may have the privilege of voting in the second class of his. Naturally in some poor sections the better situated proletarians and small business men make up the second class. And it is because of this circumstance that seven Social-Democrats could be elected to the Landtag.

In 1907 the Social-Democrats decided in their annual congress to make an energetic campaign for universal suffrage. On Jan. 12, 1908, mass-meetings and street demonstrations in the interest of suffrage reform took place in all the larger cities. The working-class swarmed out in great numbers. In spite of the fact that the Police Commissioner of Berlin had forbidden street demonstrations, it was with the greatest difficulty that he kept the demonstrators from the immediate neighborhood of the royal palace. "The Conquest of the Streets" was the headline which appeared the following day in *Vorwaerts*. In truth the police had found themselves entirely unable to cow into submission the army of working-men and women. From that moment a new sense of power inspired the masses; they had found a new right, a new weapon. And when, some months later, this new spirit of the masses forced a small group of Social-Democrats into the Landtag, the Prussian government finally announced that it would modernize its electoral system.

But unfortunately the attack was not continued with the same energy. The executive committee of the party itself was startled by the magnitude of the demonstration of January 12th and hardly dared repeat it for fear of collisions with the police. There was no definite plan of campaign. The general strike was mentioned now and then and among the workers and the notion of trying it was constantly getting a stronger hold. But the General Commission of the unions was opposed. It held that the prevailing industrial crisis made it inadvisable just then. It was unsafe to give the employers an excuse for a lockout that might exhaust the union treasuries. Here we had a case to show how a revolutionary political movement may be temporarily hindered by the carefully calculated workaday methods of the labor movement.

The next party congress failed to call the masses into line for new attacks, the movement lost momentum, and the reactionary forces gained courage. But, as usual, the reaction over-reached itself and so roused the people more than ever. Feeling sure of its power, the government last summer loaded a tremendous burden of indirect taxes upon the shoulders of the people. The popular opposition to this measure was everywhere evident. Every new election that was held gave the Social-Democrats increased majorities. In an election to the Saxon parliament the socialists polled a clean majority of the popular vote.

The new suffrage bill introduced into the Landtag in January last is but another proof of the feeling of security which actuates the reactionary government. It was a satire on reform. In all essentials it left the structure of the old system intact. The three-class system

and the indirect election were to remain and only the choice of the electors was to be kept secret. In the rural districts, where the landlords control, a free election will be impossible as long as the second electors are forced to vote openly.

As soon as this patchwork was made public the suffrage reform movement flamed up again. Heated demonstrations took place in all the cities of Prussia. On the 13th of February 200,000 people marched through the streets of Berlin. Almost everywhere the police had the good sense to stand aside and give the people the right-of-way, but in some cities they fell upon demonstrators and innocent by-standers with

MARCH OF THE TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND.

From Current Literature.

terrible effect. Sunday after Sunday the demonstrations continued. In Berlin the working-class recently turned the whole police department into a huge joke by holding a great demonstration in the Tiergarten while police and soldiers were looking for one in Treptow Park.

Such occurrences have brought over to the support of the suffrage movement various groups of the bourgeoisie. And in various places spontaneous strikes broke out. But all this had no effect on the course of legislation. The clericals and landed proprietors (Junker) forced the "reform" measure through the lower house with all speed, and whether it is accepted by the upper house and the government is a matter of little importance. In any case the electoral system of Prussia will remain practically unchanged.

But one thing has been changed; and that thing is the spirit of the people. The continued struggles and demonstrations have brought thousands upon thousands into the movement; they have redoubled

the fighting spirit of the people; they have given to the masses a feeling of power, have shown them that their organization is mightier than the brutal weapons of the government. From now on every new eruption of discontent will be more tremendous than the last.

These events indicate the beginning of the German revolution. It is true that it is but a small and uncertain beginning, and it has opposed to it a mighty military power. But it has behind it a wonderfully disciplined proletarian force. This force moves slowly just at present, for its methods are adapted to former conditions, are designed solely for elections and wage-conflicts. It is difficult to alter the purposes and methods of such a mighty organization. The new beginning must be made slowly, carefully. A revolutionary struggle must be centrally controlled, but the executive committee of the Social-Democratic party is not suited to leadership in a revolution. Herein lies the difficulty: revolutions, in the nature of the case, cannot be pre-arranged according to the decision of an organization, but, on the other hand, they must be brought about by organizations, and by organizations highly developed and well disciplined. Such an organization can be developed but slowly, especially in Germany. "Even German thunder," wrote Heine, "is German; it comes rolling up but slowly, once arrived, however, it does its work with relentless thoroughness."

Yes, with thoroughness, for it has a greater purpose than to clear the heavy atmosphere of Germany. The German proletariat is just now the champion of the working-class of the world. Its fight and its triumph will awaken an echo in the farthest quarters of the world. Nowhere do exploiters and exploited stand face to face so determined, so powerful, so well-armed. Here will be fought the first decisive battle in the world war between capital and labor. If the proletariat wins here, a new impulse will be given to the revolution in all lands. It is on this account the movement which is slowly getting under way in Germany is of the highest importance to all mankind.

(Translated by Wm. E. Bohn.)