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EDITORIAL

## THE GERMAN ELECTIONS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE returns of the Reichstag elections, held on the 16th instant, are sufficiently complete to enable an estimate in rough. Rough as the estimate may be, it is accurate enough for all practical purposes, and of many-sided interest. In forming the estimate several facts must be kept in mind.

In the first place, there are in Germany fully ten political parties. There is no real shading off between these parties, such as there is in this country, or even in France, where parties are more numerous than here, and where they can be graded from the extreme Right (monarchic-clerical) to the extreme Left (revolutionary Socialist). In Germany there is an “extreme Right,” in so far as there is a feudo-imperial party, and an “extreme Left,” in so far as there is a party led by Socialists whose ideal is the Socialist Republic. But in between these, there are no shadings, properly speaking: there are parties of various nationalities—“Danes,” “Poles,” “Alsations”—dominated essentially by nativistic reminiscences, prejudices, antipathies and aspirations; and there are others with politico-economic bases, but so cut up and warped that they do not shade off above and below from a more conservative into a more radical basis, but rather dove-tail in a sort of Gerrymander style in all imaginable directions. Thus the political parties’ appearance in Germany presents rather the strung-up aspect of the tail of a Chinese kite than that of a connected chain of political evolution. The circumstance caused Engels to observe—and he was penetrating enough to observe it with sorrow—that there was not in Germany any radical bourgeois party, hence radical bourgeoisism—what in this country and France has “Free Trade,” “anti-Militarism,” “anti-Clericalism,” “anti-Expansion,” “Tax Reform” generally, etc., etc., for its manifestations and rallying cries—flowed into the Socialist party, there named “Social Democratic,” and its current turned awry.

The second point to be considered is the economic turn of affairs in Germany. One thread, taken from the tangled web, will illumine the physiognomy of things there. The phenomenal development taken in Germany by the cultivation of the sugar beet for the exportation of sugar, withdrew vast acres from the cultivation of grains and from cattle raising. The sequence, together with the sequences to the sequence, was this:—a scarcity of domestic bread-stuffs and meats; increased importations; Agrarian (landlord farmer) demand for high, even exclusive tariffs to the end, not only of profiting by the high scarcity prices, but also of being saved from drowning in a deluge of imported foreign farm products; finally a conflict between the manufacturing and such agricultural interests. The upshot—strange as it would seem in this twentieth century—was such as the predominating feudal character of the nation foreshadowed. The Agrarian idea won out by a large majority in the Reichstag, and the new tariff was enacted,—a tariff justly named “famine tariff.” Shortly after this law the term of the Reichstag expired; and the electoral campaign started in for the new Reichstag.

From these two bases it is obvious:

1° That the large majority of the parties had interests directly opposed to the new tariff; but could not express them;

2° The only logical party of opposition was the Social Democratic;

The result—the Social Democratic gains of about fifteen seats and an increased poll of about 400,000, after a generation of parliamentary work and opportunities—must fall far below the expectations of the German Socialist leaders, whatever their printed, cautiously expressed expectations were, who in the heat of the fight must be excused for over-sanguineness; and it falls farther still below the expectations of the bourgeois world, radical and free trade or otherwise, outside of Germany, in America and England especially, who expected to see the tariff reversed at the polls. To the careful watcher of events and weigher of facts there is no disappointment. There is gladness only that progress was at all made. And in what lies the progress? It is in the answer to this question that lies the lesson of the campaign.

Elsewhere in this issue will be found the manifesto of the Social Democratic delegation in the Reichstag, issued on the day of its expiration, and published on

May 1 in the party's organ, the Berlin *Vorwaerts*.<sup>1</sup> The campaign opened therewith. The only additional fact needed to be mentioned in this connection is that the Social Democratic campaign was carried to the tune of "Bread, Usury and Dear Meat!"

"Bread and Dear Meat"—even with the "Usury" thrown in—makes ideal gunpowder, but it is only gunpowder. For all that, a revolutionary movement may swing upward with its aid. But "gunpowder" alone does not indicate the movement's immediate direction. Its direction is ascertained by the solid shot that the gunpowder carries. The nature of the "shot" that the "gunpowder" carried in this instance is betrayed by the manifesto. The "shot" is not Socialist, it is Radical Bourgeois. It is essentially such a manifesto as the radical bourgeois of any country, America included, may issue, and at times have issued. The few phrases about "class rule" and the like that it contains have none but declamatory significance.

Conditions determine cases. The revolutionary Socialist movement has not yet, can not yet have its day in Germany. Whatever the aspirations may be of especially enlightened individuals, they are overpowered by exigencies. The Social Democratic party of Germany, Socialist in the abstract aspirations of its leaders, is compelled to turn its attention to bourgeois issues. Nor should the inestimable value of its work in that direction be underrated, or measured by the seeming smallness of its achievements. It has a stony road to travel in the final overthrow of feudalism,—how stony, may be judged from this campaign;—why and in what way stony, the background of the campaign, as herein described, indicates.

That such a party in such a country does make progress; that it alone progresses;—that is cause for congratulation. Feudo-capitalism is a monstrosity. It must be overthrown before the march can be entered upon against Capitalism proper. That is the task of the present Social Democracy of Germany.

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<sup>1</sup> [See page 4, below.]

# MANIFESTO

## Of the German Social Democratic Party to the German Voters

Berlin *Vorwaerts*, May 1, 1903

Voters: With to-day's session, the Reichstag, elected June, 1898, has come to a close.

In returning our mandate to the voters, we believe with a clear conscience to be able to leave them to pass judgment upon our record.

When, in the spring of 1898, we published our call for the election, we promised to battle against injustice, oppression and exploitation of all shapes, and to promote progress in all ways. We have honestly kept our word.

We have done what we could to remove injustice, to pillory violence, to prevent exploitation, to fight oppression and to promote progress.

If but too often we fail to reach what we aim to reach the cause lay in the small number of our delegation, which faced a large majority of adversaries.

Sad to say, the last five years have brought but little in matters of progress that we believed we should support, and but too much in the matter of burdens laid upon the people and oppression.

The old navy bill of 1898 was followed by another and more oppressing one in 1900, demanding much larger outlays. It was approved by an everwilling majority under the leadership of the Centrum and by infringing the rights of the Reichstag. The year 1899 saw the passing of the five-year military bill, with an increase of the army of over 19,000 men and corresponding increased expenses.

During the long session of 1901–3 the battle began on the new tariff which was adopted on the night of December 13–14, 1902, with a two-third majority, after this majority, led by its president, trampled justice and law under foot and resorted to the most illegal means to overpower the minority.

This new tariff is in our eyes a product of unlawfulness and of barbarism. It is illegal on account of the manner in which it was brought about; it is barbarous on account of the duties which it imposes, especially on the necessaries of life, thereby

plundering and robbing the large majority of the nation for the benefit of a privileged few.

By reason of this new tariff all treaties of commerce for German industry and of farm products needed by the large majority are excluded.

As the decided upholders of a policy of commercial treaties, that facilitate as much as possible the interchange of goods and means of civilization with all the nations of the earth, we are now compelled to oppose decidedly all treaties of commerce that are concluded upon the basis of the new tariff, and that injure our commercial relations with foreign nations and the living of the large mass of the people.

Voters, it is for you to decide at this election whether you will continue to sanction a policy of plundering and robbing the masses in the interests of the privileged classes.

But this is not the only question; a number of others will come up during the next five years.

Despite the enormous armament of the nation on land and on the water, kept up during the last decades—a policy in which Germany leads and overtrumps all other nations; and although the army and navy equipments and the expenditures connected therewith swallow up more than 1,000 million marks a year, there are still more armaments, with corresponding expenditures, in sight.

The five-year military law expires in 1904. A new and large military bill is ready to follow. Also has a new Navy bill been announced.

Thus Germany is the first nation responsible for the evil of there being no end to the armaments, and that the nations of the world are racing for supremacy in this respect—a policy under which the people cannot choose but break down.

It is years since France reached the end of its tether in point of men, and her taxes and debts rise immeasurably, similar to Russia, which in the East has overloaded its stomach and needs time to digest. To this is added her increasing financial difficulties, the misery of the peasants, the fermentation from within shortly must make it impossible for her to start a great war.

Moreover the prospect of a financial and social catastrophe, which would be the inevitable consequence of a European war, prevents all the great states from

throwing the torch into the powder magazine lest they provoke their own downfall.

This, notwithstanding, the German Empire is ever pushing and driving toward new armaments.

Voters, this must be put an end to!

It is for you now to utter many million strong "Enough!" and to fling the answer into the face of our ruling classes.

Together with the army and military expenses, the expenses rise for the colonies, whose development is a sorrowful one and who cost as much as they bring in. But the other needs of the Empire rise also from year to year, although they are held back with might and main as a result of the low state of the imperial treasury. As a consequence, the necessary raising of the pensions for military invalids fell through for want of funds. The existing ebb in the treasury of the Empire set in, although the burden of indebtedness that weighs upon the country has risen to 3,000 million marks, with 100 million marks interest a year since 1888, the year in which the present Emperor commenced his reign. While the income from duties and indirect taxes has increased from 235 million marks in 1878 to 900 million marks.

Aye, it is ascertained that even the increased incomes expected from the new tariff, and which will run up to more than 200 million marks, will not suffice to cover the deficit of the next year.

A considerable increase of the tax on beer and tobacco and also a tax for military defence, the latter of which is especially popular in the Centrum circles, will be introduced if a majority similar to the previous one re-enters the Reichstag.

The same classe{s} and parties that steadily boast of their patriotism and who charge us with having no country, refuse emphatically to draw upon the large incomes and for the support of the Army and Navy; at the same time they consider it patriotic and just shamefully to load down the poor classes with tariffs, indirect taxes, and other such favors of all sorts.

Voters, the day when the property classes in the Empire will be compelled to defray the Army and Navy expenditure by taxes on their incomes and fortunes there will be no more such appropriations. Their patriotism then suffers shipwreck, and the superfluousness of these armaments will then be in evidence.

In the separate states of the Empire the financial stress is the same; they no longer know which way to turn. The most pressing requirements of civilization are left to pine, but for an armament funds are promptly raised, as though millions were dirt.

Voters, if such conditions do not finally snap the thread of your patience, you must not wonder if instead of being whipped with switches you are next whipped with scorpions.

And how is it with our internal concerns? The most pressing reforms in the administration of law, the most necessary social reforms, the extension of old age pensions for workingmen, thoroughgoing measures of public sanitation, are all met with the answer, "That costs too much money."

The press, trades organizations, public mass meetings, associations of workingmen, the personal freedom of the male and female citizens are all treated as though Germany stood not on one of the highest, but on one of the lowest stages of civilization.

There is but one thing to be done:

To fight and fight against all those who are responsible for this unhallowed state of things, until they are overcome. Above all, it is the duty of the working class, who suffer heaviest under these evils, to support the Social Democracy with all their power in its struggles against the enormous injustice that the state and society perpetrate every day.

The women, also, especially the working women, who are deprived of political activity in the exercise of their rights as human beings, have every reason to come out for the candidates of the Social Democracy, so as to help solve the questions whose solution will depend upon the pending elections.

If they cannot vote they can always agitate. They must oppose openly and in behalf of their most sacred interests the agitation of all sort that is conducted against them even though {despite?} the abuse of the pulpit and the confessional.

The Social Democracy battles to the end that the state and society cease to be class institutions, through which the ruling minority keep the majority in subjection, dominates, oppresses and plunders them.

Voters, to the ballot box!

Election day should be a day of judgment; it should be a day to settle accounts with those who hoodwink and rob you; it should be a day of victory from which a new and more beautiful future shall take its date.

Consider that by decree of a reactionary Reichstag's majority you are called upon every five years to the ballot box. How seldom does such a day fall to your lot. Make use of it. Make use of it in such manner that you can all say with a clear conscience, "We have all done our duty."

Voters, your adversaries are running about headless, looking for a campaign cry. We have ours. Let your rallying cry be:

"Down with Militarism and Navyism in its present form, which sucks up the substance of the people. Let there be good understanding among nations! Let there be peace among them!

Down with a harmful policy of tariff and commerce which injures millions of people in their living!

Down with a policy of taxation which oppresses the poor and favors the rich!

Down with reaction in internal matters; with governmental arbitrariness; with privileged; with police oppression; with insecurity of rights.

On to the battle for progress in all directions, for knowledge and enlightenment, for freedom and emancipation from all oppression, that the class state, class rule and class legislation have put upon the shoulders of the hard working working class.

Our aim is the establishment of the Socialist state and social order, founded upon collective property in the means of production and of the duty of all to work; the establishment of political and social conditions in which truth, justice, equality and the welfare of all shall be the standard of all action.

Voters, whoever among you shares our views let him vote on June 16 for the candidates of the Social Democracy.

Berlin, April 30, 1903.

[Here follow the names of the Social Democratic delegates to the Reichstag.]

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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