

EDITORIAL

SHIFTING SCENES IN GERMANY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

GOMPERS'S visit to Germany has had for one of its consequences a bitter polemic between Kautsky and the Berlin *Correspondenzblatt*, the central organ of the Trades Unions of Germany. The disputants have flung severe charges at each other. The *Correspondenzblatt* charges Kautsky with a desire to injure the Trades Union movement; Kautsky retorts in kind; and the end is not yet.

The polemic does not turn around the point of fact. If it did it would be of little interest outside of Germany. The interest, the great interest that lies in the polemic lies in this, that it is the consequence of the economic ground changing under the feet of the disputants; that it reveals the fact of they themselves not yet being aware of the change; and that, as the change goes on, they themselves have been shifting their positions towards their goal, or their goal seems to be changing its position towards them. Superficially observed one might conclude a rupture between the political and economic wings of the Movement in Germany. In point of fact the polemic brings to the surface views that denote closer touch between the two wings—closer because better and more correctly understanding each other.

Thirty years ago the class-conscious German Unionist, that is, the German Unionist who threw his political activities into the Social Democratic scale, looked at his Union as a necessary aid, 'tis true, to the Social Democracy, but only temporarily so. After Socialism was introduced no Union was to be needed any longer. Thirty years ago the militant Social Democrat who was not a wage earner, looked at the Trades Union as a temporary shift, much as the parallels that an army throws up as it advances towards a hostile fortification. The party was essential: it alone was to survive.

This mutual conception of and by the political and the economic wing was the reflex of a twofold state of things—one, the semi-feudal character of German

institutions which demand parliamentarism for their final removal; the other the immature state of capitalist development. While the former has continued to be, resisting even the bourgeois efforts put forth on the recent occasion of the embroglio that the Kaiser got into with Great Britain to establish a “responsible cabinet,” the latter has undergone radical improvement.

The long steps taken by Germany during these last thirty years in capitalist production could not choose, German conditions being considered, but aid mightily in the development of the Unions; the development of the Unions, German conditions again considered, could not choose but cause the Unions to begin “to feel their oats,” that is to say, to begin to descry on the horizon of the future vague outlines of their fuller mission, and to cause them, like the adolescent human being, to experience the vague sensations that are the premonitions of the adult functions. Finally, seeing that, due to German conditions, the political Movement had leaped clean ahead of the economic, and thereby kept the economic Movement substantially free from the debauchery that, with us in America, lowered its tone, its fibre and its mentality, in Germany the political Movement could not but whiff the breath of healthily growing Unionism.

The consequences of this all around development can be none other than a material modification—

First, in the conception of Unionism with regard to itself;

Second, in the conception of Unionism with regard to the Social Democratic party;

Thirdly, in the conception of the Social Democratic party with regard to Unionism; and

Fourthly, in the conception of the Social Democratic party with regard to itself.

As to the first, the German Unionist, from one time holding his Union as a temporary affair, no longer to be required after the establishment of Socialism, must now, however unclear his mind may still remain concerning the evolutionary fact that the Reichstag of the future must consist, not as now of territorial, i.e., of political delegates, but of delegates of the Unions of all the useful occupations of the land—however unclear he may still be on this head, has a “presentiment” of the fact, and already realizes that his Union is something of vastly more importance

than a ladder to be kicked over after being used.

As to the second, the German Unionist, from one time holding the party as the all essential and the lasting formation, must now have inklings, however unformulated, that, however important and necessary the party is, ITS usefulness is transitory, ITSELF is the formation that final victory discards.

As to the third, the militant Social Democrat who is not a wage earner, from once having looked upon the Union as merely a temporary makeshift, is bound to appreciate the Union ever more, and ever more perceive vaster revolutionary areas as embraced within its scope.

As to the fourth, whether the militant Social Democrat who is not a wage earner at all realizes, to-day, the fact or not, the day is bound to come when, from having looked upon the Union as a transient and upon the political party as the permanent formation in the Revolutionary Movement, he will reverse the order, recognizing the transitoriness of the political, the permanence of the economic organization.

Of course, the third and fourth modifications of opinion are of slower process. With them, to the habit of thought, a pardonable personal pride, or “esprit de corps,” is added, that tends to retard the abandonment of a false position. Nevertheless, that a modification of thought is in process, even in these quarters, there can be no doubt. Already on a previous occasion the *Daily People* pointed to the encouraging circumstance that Kautsky, who, seventeen years ago, at the Zurich International Congress, rejected the general strike idea with the neatly contrived sentence: “When the general strike is needed it is not practicable; when it will be practicable it will not be needed,” now, in the *Neue Zeit* of last August 27, referred enthusiastically to the “glorious general strike” of the Swedish Unions, and in the last September 3rd issue of the same publication recognizes that the parliamentarians are condemned to increasing failure and prospectlessness if not backed by a strong and militant economic movement.

Of course, while these modifications of thought are in progress there will be the conflicts that ever accompany readjustment. Such is the nature of the polemic now going on between Kautsky and the *Correspondenzblatt*. For the reasons above stated both Kautsky is wronged by his Unionist opponents, when they accuse him of

meaning harm to the Unionism, and they are wronged by him by the severity of his answers. Neither quite realizes that the shifting of the ground under him is causing himself to shift. In the fact that this shifting of scenes is taking place in the German Movement lies the interest, internationally, in the heated polemics that Gompers's visit to Germany involuntarily provoked between Unionism and a leading figure in the Socialist political movement of the Empire.

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Uploaded March 2011

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