

Bebel and Hervé: German Party Leader As A Jingo

The "revolutionary" Bebel has again been distinguishing himself as a patriot, both in the Reichstag and in the Press. In the Reichstag he repudiated Liebknecht's book on anti-militarism, and to a French journalist he made an attack on the anti-militarist propaganda of Hervé.

The *Times* of 31st April reported that:--

"M. Jules Hedeman, of the *Matin* has seen Herr Bebel, the German Socialist leader, in Berlin, and obtained from him the following statement in writing upon Mr Hervé's anti-militarist propaganda in France:--

"The ideas and anti-militarist propaganda of Hervé are impossible in German Social-Democracy. German Social-Democracy is the avowed adversary of the present military system, but it considers that a military organisation is necessary in the States now existing so long as all the civilised nations shall not have established conventions and institutions which would once for all render war impossible. So long as the danger exists and wars are possible, every nation should possess a military organisation sufficient for resisting an aggressive war, and defending its own territory against the invasion of the enemy. If German Social-Democracy supports every local initiative with the object of avoiding war and assuring peace—for example, the organisation of international tribunals of arbitration for the settlement of conflicts between different States—it nevertheless considers a military organisation indispensable so long as the danger of war exists. It is for this reason that German Social-Democracy has inscribed in its programme—first, education which will render all citizens fit for military service; secondly, the substitution of militias for permanent armies.

"Consequently, if a member of the German Socialist Party propagates ideas and claims analogous to those that Hervé defends, one would be justified in asking, in virtue of the programme of the Socialist Party, does this member still belong to that party? The party could not admit a propaganda which goes directly counter to its programme, which seriously damages the party, and of which the aims are in existing circumstances unattainable, because they are contrary to the interests of our own country."

Bluntly put, the above means that Bebel regards it as the duty of members of the German Socialist Party to sacrifice themselves in defence of their exploiters' property should the latter be coveted by the exploiters of any other country. In other words it says that the working class of Germany should be prepared to slaughter workers of any other country should their respective masters quarrel over the division of the wealth that has been stolen from the working class!

Every Socialist must know that the problem of militarism—like that of unemployment—is inseparable from capitalism, and while Hervé undoubtedly errs in concentrating his energies upon anti-militarist propaganda since militarism is but an effect of capitalist exploitation, yet our sympathies are heartily with him as against Bebel's patriotic clap-trap.

In his address to comrades of the Socialist Party, Hervé said:--

"All Socialists call themselves internationalists, and this, to every Socialist, means to be in favour of the international union of the workers.

"But there are two very different ways of understanding this international union; there is the patriotic way, and the anti-patriotic way.

"The patriotic internationalists say: 'Present day countries, such as history has made them, are moral entities whose existence is useful to human progress. However imperfect they may be, however inhuman even they may be for proletarians, the latter have in each country the duty of defending them when attacked. We are internationalists, but if the country in which we chanced to be born is attacked we will defend it to the death'.

"This in plain language means simply; 'Workers of the world unite; but if your rulers order you to massacre your comrades, do so!'

"This singular internationalism, a few months ago just missed producing what it threatened.

"If war had broken out over Morocco between France and Germany, the two proletariats, French and German, would have protested through the voices of their parliamentary tenors; resolutions proclaiming eloquently the fraternity of the two peoples would have been exchanged; and, then, fraternally, the French and German working classes would have gone to massacre each other in order to find out with which of the two capitalist classes Morocco would remain."

Hervé also says in explaining his own attitude:--

"The workers are disinherited and illtreated in every existing country.

"All nations are equal, or nearly so, in this respect, particularly now that the capitalist regime renders more and more uniform the material, intellectual, and political conditions of life for the labouring class in all countries; and now that the introduction of the capitalist system in Russia will compel even Tsarism to accord to the Russian workers the essentials of political liberty.

"No country at the present day, is so superior to the others that the workers of that country should get themselves killed in its defence.

"In case of mobilisation, no matter who is the apparent aggressor (it is, indeed, never exactly known, when war breaks out, who is the legal aggressor), the proletariats of the belligerent countries should reply to the order to mobilise by insurrection against their own rulers, in an attempt, each, in his own country, to establish Socialist Society.

"Rather insurrection than war!"

Certainly no one country's exploiters are so superior to the rest that the workers should sacrifice themselves in defending them; but it is equally certain that if the proletarians were to rise in armed revolt against their rulers immediately on the outbreak of war, while the master class controlled the armed forces of the nation, and while the workers were yet unable and unready to assume control of Society, they would be courting a shambles that would make war peace by contrast.

And when the working class is able and ready to assume control of the political and industrial forces of the country, it is its bounden duty to do so, whether its masters are

at war or not, for the lives of millions of workers under capitalist rule perpetuate horrors that are worse than any war.

Since, therefore, Hervé's statement implies that the workers even though they are not in a position to successfully emancipate themselves should nevertheless sacrifice themselves in a fruitless and bloody attempt to do so on the outbreak of war, it is necessary to dissent from that position of his declaration.

Militarism is an inevitable effect of capitalist domination and the struggle for markets and profit, and so long as the workers are ruled by a master class, so long will their masters use them as cannon fodder. The only solution of the question of militarism from the proletarian point of view is the abolition of capitalist exploitation. It is then our duty to concentrate our efforts upon Socialism, upon the triumph of those who labour. The revolutionary Socialist is the truest peace advocate.

The particularly anti-militarist propaganda of Hervé has undeniably an educational value, and to that extent it is to be welcomed; it is also an inevitable reaction against the jingoism of men like Bebel. We have so-called Socialist advocates of militarism in this country, and indeed, though it appears a harsh saying to many would believe their parties and their leaders to be Socialist, it is true that The Socialist Party is the only party of which it can be said that it advocates undiluted Socialism.

All the various problems that affect the working class hinge upon the ownership of the means of life, and yet outside of our ranks practically the whole of the workers' energies are being directed against effects rather than to the removal of the cause of the trouble. The origin of poverty, war and slavery lies in class ownership of the means whereby the people live. The straightest road is the shortest road, and the only way to get rid of the evil of militarism is to get rid of capitalism.

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