

The Political System of Social-Democracy.

Memorial presented to the International Socialist Bureau and the Interparliamentary Commission.

The increasing development and influence of the socialist movement, brings more and more into evidence an existing gap, which, if not filled up in the course of a few years, will prejudice the unity and the strength of this movement and may stand in the way of further progress.

Already we may witness symptoms pointing in this unfortunate direction.

The action of the social-democrats in Parliament, the usefulness and necessity of which has never been doubted by me, has nevertheless given rise everywhere in the masses to a real disappointment, because of its lack of positive results on behalf of the working class. As long as the party is only represented in Parliament by a small minority, this disappointment affects the middle-class, the unwillingness or impotence of whom, to comply with the desires of the laborers, is clearly proved. But as soon as the socialist minority increases or the mass of outsiders who stand behind this minority grows more important so as to represent a considerable fraction of the nation, the unsuccessfulness of the proceedings of Parliament is used as an argument against the socialist movements itself. And when socialist ministers, with the coöperation of their party or without the same, share the responsibility for the political system of the "bourgeoisie", the party is still further held responsible for the errors and faults of the said system. It matters but little with what kind of government we have to deal.

The German system of semi-absolutism has no worse influence than the democratic parliamentary one of the French Republic. We might even ask whether the first, with its greater stability and perseverance, has not met with greater success than the latter, where the constantly varying alignment of the parties, as well as the sensibility of the machinery of the state to constant modifications of the governing powers, greatly interfere with the legislative proceedings. It is no mere accident that amongst the French labourers indifference and even disgust with parliamentary politics are very strong and that among the German workmen antiparliamentarism is continually increasing during the last years.

Everywhere, that socialism has passed through the stage of pure and simple propaganda and of common opposition, and where it has to face the necessity of making use of the political system of the middle-class, in order to further its own direct wants, the insufficiency of the said system will become more evident and will be revenged on the social-democracy itself, if the latter should not, in using it, take up a critical position toward the system and disown every responsibility for the same.

I expect to hear the objection that the scarcity of results I have pointed out, is not to be imputed to the political but rather to the economical system and the political supremacy of the middle-class. But those two elements cannot be separated. Each economical system has its own political regime. It is evident that under the sway of capitalism, which submits the mass to a heavy daily labour in order to earn their living, we cannot imagine any other system than that of representation. Parliament, the historic manifestation of the rising economic power of the middle-class and recognised as such by the sovereigns themselves, was the essential organ of the system. It can easily be proved that, in its practical results and development, it is unable to outlive capitalism; its faults will even be seen more clearly, in proportion as in the period of transition in which we live, social interests and arrangements become of more importance to legislators. In various countries the rights of Parliament towards the Crown and the government may differ, but they all have one thing in common, viz. that laws are framed and the system is discussed by ministerial bureaux and that Parliament has nothing but a correcting and completing influence on law. As long as there are in Parliament only two important parties, representing political thought and political life of the nation, our objection has no very serious character. Each of these parties will alternately hold the reins of government and each will alternately be at the head of the ministerial bureaux.

But if the middle-class is going to divide itself and the laborers are becoming a separate party, we are face to face with quite another case. The original condition for the Parliamentary system falls away. The temporary governments become, owing to antagonism in Parliament and by the lack of a sufficient majority, either powerless or almighty. Powerless inasmuch as they are prevented by the divergence of political opinions, from carrying out a well-framed system. Almighty because the lack of a conscious and unanimous opposition gives them an opportunity for realising certain schemes.

The division of the middle-class is one of the principal reasons of the modification in the nature of the parliamentary system and it causes a continuous change in the alignment of

fractions, with the result that, in democratic countries, government and legislation are not to be relied upon, and become ever more the prey of the politician. In less democratic countries this offers an opportunity for the Crown, to unite several groups of the opposition into one coalition, favorable to the government, a step that becomes more frequent as the fear of socialism eclipses the different groups of the middle-class. It is but natural, that a change in the character of the middle-class causes a similar modification in its chief political institution.

But the institution itself, as part of the middle-class organisation, to which it is peremptorily attached, can no longer satisfy the needs of modern legislation. It is based upon a fiction, that the whole nation is represented by Parliament, but even with manhood suffrage this is not the case; only part of the nation is represented and we must not forget that this always remains mere *representation*. Intellect, knowledge of business, practical experience of groups and organisations, all those categories are only represented by accident, which nobody is able to foresee. The choice of persons is more decided by political considerations than according to personal value. All questions concerning government are continually treated and decided by the same persons, which causes a vast amount of superficiality and red tape and consequent deterioration of the laws that are passed. This is especially evident where legislation loses its administrative and periodical nature, and enters more into the domain of social conditions.

The logical and historic complement of parliament is a middle class ministerial bureaucracy. If up to the present the social-democrats have been compelled to confine their influence to the state, and if they have been the strongest force for the extension of state intervention, this does not signify that by those means they could found their system. On the contrary, their theory teaches us that the victory of the proletariat attacks the very foundation of the state, which afterwards may be "stored away in a museum of antiquities." And the foremost theorists who have discussed the future régime of social-democracy, have concluded that its greatest duty should be to systematically convert the existing state into an organization leaving free course to trade-unions.

If this idea is not given greater emphases in the practical propaganda within the existing régime, this can be explained by the fact that even its partial realization is only possible within the limits of socialism itself. Suppose for example the nationalization of railways, mines, etc. In contrast with the system according to which the government should take the railways *in their own hands*, and manage them the same way private business is managed, through ministerial bureaux, proceeding

from the top to the bottom, the socialists would be compelled to recommend working by those who are interested in the concern, under the control and on behalf of the whole nation. But there is a lack of any organization for this purpose so that, if it were possible to convert the several unions of laborers or others, who have an interest in the concern, into one organization, there would be no link between this organization and the central organization of the nation, whilst there are no rules by which the proper degree of public authority and autonomy could be transferred to the organization, which would be necessary to any effective operation.

The official control and the limitation of the rights and duties of laborers under the régime of capitalism are more to be feared than to be desired by the laborers. Germany, France and England have sufficiently proved this fact. It seems that the most favorable condition for the trade-unions is the absolute liberty of proceedings. This makes it impossible to compel the adhesion of all the laborers to one and the same organization. The working class cannot permit their rights to be determined by a party they are fighting. The full development of the task of trade-unions is only possible under a social-democratic system.

We believe we have said enough to point out, why the socialists, even if they make use of the bourgeois political system to further their strife and their purpose, must more and more recognize its insufficiency in proportion as they become stronger and as they lay more emphasis upon the positive results of their work. Until now this critical point of view has revealed itself either insufficiently or in a wrong way.

In its attitude toward anarchism and anti-parliamentarism, the movement of the laboring-class has been insufficient in that it has too often emphasized exclusively the uncontested necessity and advantage of parliamentary action, whilst neglecting the proletarian standpoint and its present problems. Perhaps in theoretical publications this has been done occasionally in an excellent way, but in practical strife, while propagating the cause, this has been too much neglected. No wonder, where the program of the social-democrats opposes no system of its own to that of the bourgeoisie, and where it demands nothing but a more logical application of the parliamentary system of the "bourgeoisie."

These critics have also neglected to consider the historic necessity and the urgency of not only using the system as the theatre of action but as well for the sake of its direct results.

All these movements, which have called attention to the vices of parliamentarism, from the German "Independents" to the "syndicalists" have displayed these same defects. But what must doom their criticism to ineffectiveness is that either they have no proletarian system of their own to contrast with the system they

condemn, or that, moved by vague notions about the function of the labor-unions, they wish to see the same act a part, which could only be reasonable under a régime of the proletariat and even then only after due preparation and development.

In both cases however this lack of a political system of their own, is injurious to the unity of the Party and the strength of the propaganda. If we contemplate the social-democracy of every country, we find everywhere two different views about the suitable tactics. One of those considers the parliamentary method of ever increasing importance, and wishes to carry it through even to the extent of affiliation with middle-class democracy, while the other seeks to get rid of the consequences of the system, without altogether condemning it, and is accordingly forced into a purely oppositional position to the party; and by national and international verdicts, seeks to put a stop to the "parliamentarisation" of the movement, and to find fresh weapons, which shall put the mass outside of Parliament into action against the whole bourgeoisie.

However important this struggle may be, the question arises whether its importance is not exaggerated. Let us first acknowledge, that not every struggle which causes much noise in literature, is of equal importance in practical life. Without denying the exceptions in which this strife has affected serious interests, it may be said that, both in France and Germany, the party's representatives are accustomed, even when following different tactics, to unite in all matters of vital interest. And it may be stated as well, that many questions, which attract much attention at the moment of their origin, only concern political expediency, caused by the party's tradition and are of importance only for the sake of propaganda. Furthermore every deviation from the really imperatively prescribed line of proletarian action shows its results within a short time, by rousing the inevitable reaction and by providing the laboring class with the real experience, without which it will be impossible to find the right way. The struggle of the proletariat contains in itself the chief conditions, under which it must and can be fought. Whosoever accepts this combat honestly and frankly, whosoever remains animated by its true spirit, will hear the voice of a conscience when making use of certain methods, a conscience which no doubt will end by showing him the path of duty. The middle-class itself, justly understanding that the progress of the social-democrats means a menace to their own position, show more and more their character as capitalists and even on their left wing we see them together with a small number of democrats, who have accepted democracy for emergency's sake, attempt a revival of the capitalist reaction

even among the most democratic elements, as soon as the proletariat manifests its revolutionary character.

Within these limits we will most probably soon witness the phenomenon, that in different countries and at various moments one or the other method, often the one after the other, will be brought into practice. Both fractions, if they are wise, will try to correct and not to kill each other.

Meanwhile this struggle amongst the members of the Party themselves suffers from the want of a proper socialistic political system. The actual program for which they struggle, in its political part, is essentially the fulfilment of the system of the middle-class. Adult suffrage for both sexes is its first and last word. Extension of governmental intervention on every domain is a continual desire. In their political program the social-democrats are only the logical conclusion of the democracy of the middle-class; as it contains no points except those which are to be realized by Parliament. Really, those who reproach the revisionists and the reformists with their exaggerated expectations concerning the democracy of the middle-class, might do well by asking themselves whether the fault does not lie in their own program.

A government, seriously desiring to do something in the way of meeting our wants, raises *ipso facto* the hostile feeling of middle-class reaction and *must* be supported by us; we may frame as revolutionary a program as we wish, but finally we are compelled to content ourselves with the half or the fourth part of reforms, exactly as the parliamentary outcome may give us. Parliamentarism has its own rules, to which every party, making use of this institution, must conform. Therefore it is bad policy to confine the tactics and the character of the party to the limits of the question, what must be the attitude towards the political system of the middle-class. Within the limits of this system every social-democratic action must needs be unprincipled and opportunist. The real struggle concerning politics must remain on the outside. It may only be asked, what system the social-democrats intend to substitute for that of the middle-class. And as the more radical fraction of the party has no answer to this question, it tries to find its principles where they do not exist. Not until the party has formed an exact idea of the political organization that is to be established, will it be possible to decide the direction in which its positive task has to be achieved. Its views about trade-unions, about the rights and duties of officials, etc., cannot remain free from the influence of the above mentioned question. Towards the middle-class there will be a fixed standard which may be of the greatest use in answering the question in how far it will be possible temporarily to co-operate with one or more

of these groups, in special circumstances. And besides many misconceptions about the importance of state and Parliament *will disappear for the social-democracy*, when the question has been settled, misconceptions which are found not only within the limits of our party but as well amongst outsiders and which can only be got rid of in this way.

If we have demonstrated above the necessity of elaborating a political system for the social-democracy, chiefly for its value to the party itself, this question has also a larger scope. The fear of middle-class utopianism has until now withheld our best thinkers from exerting themselves in this line. When Kautsky ventured a very modest step in this direction, he only wished to give a scientific completeness to his work. Works like those of Menger and Deslinière could only emphasize the opinion that every effort to give birth at the present time to the political system of the social-democracy, would suffer from the sterility of middle-class utopianism.

This however is not the case. It all depends on the method. If we follow the course, indicated by Menger and seek for the ideas or moral principles of the social-democracy, and if we make a juridical application of these, we remain within the limits of the utopian point of view. But if we appeal to history and consider which social organisation we are facing and what part of the same can be transferred to the regime of the proletariat, if we examine the growth and constitution of these social organs, if we deduct therefrom the general rules, the result can be very real and without suffering from more fancy, than we witness in every scientific work.

Furthermore at what distance do we suppose the victory of the proletariat over the middle-class to be, if the time has not yet come to state to the world by what means the social-democrats intend to make their victory correspond to their ideals? The Socialists have already admitted the impossibility of establishing the complete socialistic state by any artificial method.

At this moment this party has in some countries millions of partisans, and when everywhere the masses are organising themselves more and more against the existing economical and political system, is it too much to ask the party to do something more than walk about in the dress of the middle-class, patched up with red, and if we want it to show itself in its own garb, and to possess a scheme of political organisation of its own, subject to discussion?

By what means are the social-democrats to convert the middle-class into their own society? This question must be answered by the political system. We take for granted the economical and industrial action towards socialism. We ask however,

what political superstructure could be solid and elastic enough, so to correspond and to enforce every fresh growth.

When the middle-class fought their own fight, they were able to answer this question. The instructions of the Third Class' representatives contained the political system of this group. Parliament had been existing for some centuries and, by generalising its character, elaborating its principles, and applying the same, the middle-class have given to themselves and to the world what they wanted.

The proletariat has no more need to mount in the air, to elaborate their political system, than the middle-class had. They develop their own organization due to their rising political power, enforced and developed by the struggle, in the same way that we have seen that the middle class developed their parliamentarism. But it will prove much more difficult to generalize this organisation and to endow it with public authority, to adjust it to the social and political unity, than it was for the political institutions of the middle-class to be developed.

The base for this political system can be no other than an organisation on the base of a community of economic interests, among which the labor-unions occupy the first place. This organisation must needs dispose of a certain public authority, with compelling force over minorities. Above this organisation there must be the organ, expressing the entire interest and desire of the people.

As the prototype of this system we may quote an organization, already known for centuries in the middle-class system of Holland viz. the "waterschap" (polder-system). The land-owners in a certain part of the country have one common interest, to protect themselves against the sea and to assure the gauge. This work requires dikes, sluices, ditches, bridges, mills, etc. The minority might by refusing to give their consent, hinder the common establishment, the defrayment and the achievement of these works. But the State has given the right, to the willing majority, under certain conditions concerning the general interest, to compel the minority to join the majority, in order to create the above mentioned works as a public duty. The State delegates a part of its powers to the corporation; in so far as concerns the punishment, police and taxes, necessary to secure the performance of this public function,—the "waterschap" is substituted for the State. And by doing so, there has been made a tie between the special organisation and the general one.

I quote this instance to show that the method, by which the State regularly delegates its power, to maintain a more harmonic unity, is not based merely upon fiction. We witness the same fact in the inner constitution of the several organisations;

the experience acquired by British and German labor-unions provides sufficient material on this point.

I believe I have said enough to prove my point. I should like to call the attention of the International Socialist Bureau and of the Interparliamentary Commission to the necessity and the opportunity for starting the study which needs must precede the framing of a political system. This task is too heavy to be achieved by one single person but if it is desired to entrust one person with this work, he ought to get the co-operation and advice of many. The work in itself must have a collective character. The best thing would be if some prominent members of the party were appointed to take part in this work; amongst them a reporter might be chosen to frame a general report concerning the results of the committee's proceedings. I think it would be possible to bring the results of this work before the next international congress, by publishing the same in due time.

I expect much from this work for the growth, the unity and the consciousness of the party and for the practical results, to be obtained by the social-democracy of all countries.

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