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THE ROLE OF RUSSIA IN GERMAN SOCIALIST POLICY, 1914-18

German Socialism drifted towards the whirlpool in 1914 in a vessel straining with contradictions. In internal matters the SPD paid lip service to Marxist doctrine but was, in its day to day operations, profoundly revisionist. It had long since effected a compromise with the Bismarckian state. In foreign affairs the party was pacifist but had no plan to preserve the peace. It cherished the international solidarity of the proletariat but would not use force to preserve it. It deplored the militarism of German foreign policy but did not see that the state, to which Socialists no less than Conservatives were deeply attached, could not be defended with pacifist gestures. Its ideology hobbled its patriotism, while its investments, other material interests and radiant political prospects made it a party of "irresolute Marxists."¹ The SPD was the Hamlet of international socialism.

A Franco-German war alone might conceivably have resolved these contradictions in a revolutionary fashion. A Russo-German war could only resolve them in a Teutonic, nationalist manner. As it turned out, the Russian question was destined to be the great hinge upon which German Socialist policy turned forevermore. Because of Russia the SPD chose German unity rather than social revolution, the European states system rather than a continental workers' empire, *Freiheit* and western individualism to Communist autocracy and the shadow existence of a satellite. In a word, German Socialist decisions on the Russian problem during World War I and the armistice period were to hold Germany, the hub of old Europe, in the Atlantic cultural community.

The chief goal of pre-war SPD foreign policy, if one concedes the existence of a Socialist foreign policy to begin with, was restoration

¹ The phrase is that of John Plamenatz in: *German Marxism and Russian Communism* (London, 1954), p. 184.

of western unity. This alone would enable the European proletariat to advance hand in hand towards a global democratic social order. The chief obstacle was the double alliance system. As between the Franco-Russian and the Austro-German combinations, the SPD regarded the former as potentially more dangerous to peace.¹ It felt that the Austro-German alliance was basically defensive, designed to maintain the status quo which rested upon the German peace of Frankfurt. By contrast with the conservative Central alliance, the Franco-Russian alignment seemed unnatural and provocative. It was preoccupied with conspiracies for the violent upset of the balance of power. Its expansionist aims, which were chiefly continental, could not be achieved save by general war.²

Since for socialists war was the consequence of contradictions in the capitalist system aggravated by imperialism, the SPD thought it silly to join the controversy over territorial and colonial ambitions. It focused its attention solely upon preserving peace. It should not surprise, therefore, that at the time of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand the German Socialists urged termination of the Austro-German alliance with the aim of abolishing the dangerous cleavage in Europe.³ Nor was the party particularly troubled by the probability that the severance of the alliance with the Dual Monarchy would leave Germany isolated and surrounded by enemies.⁴ Though we may be shocked at such diplomatic ingenuousness, we must acknowledge that a powerful attachment for western unity motivated this curious attitude.

Until July 29, 1914, the attitude of the SPD was neither at variance with that of a majority of the people nor even with that of the government. It is unfair to assume as does the East German Professor Jürgen Kuczynski,⁵ that the leaders of the SPD were intentionally deceived by a government that wished general war. Bethmann and William II strove manfully at their Sisyphean task of repairing the dikes to hold back the flood, and, although this is not the place to document the honor of the German government, it may be said there was no fundamental opposition, secret or otherwise, between the peace aims of the SPD and government. Only ignorance brought a fleeting aberration at the very end of July, for when it came to inter-

¹ Vorstand der SPD, *Zur Frage der Verantwortung am Weltkriege* (Berlin, n.d.), p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³ C. Schön, "Der Vorwärts" und die Kriegserklärung (Berlin, 1929), p. 16.

⁴ *Verantwortung am Kriege*, p. 4.

⁵ *Der Ausbruch des ersten Weltkrieges und die Deutsche Sozialdemokratie: Chronik und Analyse* [Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Schriften des Instituts für Geschichte, Reihe I: Allgemeine und deutsche Geschichte, Band 4] (Berlin, 1957), pp. 19, 37, 38, 44, 67.

national affairs the SPD knew the first lines of everything and the second of nothing.

Daily between the 24th and 29th all Socialist newspapers inveighed against the "criminally audacious policy" of Austria-Hungary.¹ The party press, disregarding Austria's vital stake, agreed that the Hapsburg monarchy was guilty of the foulest crime in seeking to provoke a war simply over an insignificant internal affair.² The German government must make the "warmongers in Vienna" clearly understand that Germany would not lift a finger in support of them.³ The strongest pressure must be applied to Austria to get her to retract or modify the ultimatum.⁴ How could this attitude of the strongest mass party in Germany not have influenced Bethmann in his two admonitory telegrams to Tschirschky on the 30th?⁵

It was believed by the SPD that both chancellor and kaiser wanted peace. The *Vorwärts* even publicly recognized William II as an "upstanding friend of international peace."⁶ Almost the entire blame was put upon the Dual Monarchy, the German government being held responsible only in the degree that it did not exhaust every means to restrain its ally. This contributory negligence was the only real ground for Socialist criticism of official policy in the last days of the crisis.⁷

In the face of mounting popular enthusiasm for war and of parades in the streets, it became dangerous for Socialists to hawk their anti-war propaganda or speak in public. Still the party leadership persisted in its censure of Austria in the face of declining party newspaper sales, the trampling of the *Münchener Post* in the mud by chauvinists, attacks by the bourgeois press, threats to party leaders' lives (Eisner at the Munich Kindlkeller on the 27th), and desertions of party members.⁸ Social Democratic protest assemblies continued to be held until

¹ Hartwig Koch, *Die Hamburger sozialistische Presse im Weltkrieg* (Elmshorn, 1929), pp. 27-34; H. Laufenberg and F. Wolffheim, *Kommunismus gegen Spartakismus* (Hamburg, 1920), p. 7; Luxemburg, *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1916), pp. 13-4. Liebknecht, *Klassenkampf gegen den Krieg* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 4-5.

² See *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, July 24; *Dresdner Volkszeitung*, July 24; *Vorwärts*, July 25; *Münchener Post*, July 25; *Magdeburger Volksstimme*, July 25; *Frankfurter Volksstimme*, July 28; *Hamburger Echo*, July 28; and Koch, p. 28.

³ Ernst Drahn and Susanne Leonhard, *Unterirdische Literatur im revolutionären Deutschland während des Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1920), p. 9.

⁴ *Verantwortung am Weltkriege*, p. 7.

⁵ Q.v. *Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch* (Berlin, 1919), Vol. I, p. 125 and *passim*.

⁶ July 30, 1914.

⁷ Cf. Karl Kautsky, *Wie der Weltkrieg entstand* (Berlin, 1919), p. 90. Kautsky was of a notoriously different opinion.

⁸ See Felix Fechenbach, *Der Revolutionär Kurt Eisner* (Berlin, 1929), p. 11.

prohibited. In Hamburg nineteen meetings were held between the 24th and 29th,¹ while a number convened in Berlin on the 28th to arrange for a mammoth protest to be staged on Sunday, August 2.² But the going got tougher with every hour as tension mounted. On Thursday afternoon the public was excited to fever pitch when it was falsely reported by the *Berlin Lokalanzeiger* that mobilization had been ordered.³ Before the dam burst, however, Rudolf Hilferding and other party leaders toyed unrealistically with sending the masses to the barricades instead of the trenches: "To the mobilization of the powers there can be only one answer: permanent mobilization of the people!"⁴

This was idle fustian, for the SPD was, from the standpoints of *Weltanschauung* and circumstances, incapable of a stroke against the state. The German Socialist attitude was not, as Arthur Rosenberg wrongly averred, such as typified a pre-revolutionary period,⁵ but a pre-democratic period. Under the impact of the practical concerns of rank and file and trade unions, party leaders had turned their backs sheepishly on doctrinaire Marxism at the SPD conventions of Chemnitz (1912) and Jena (1913) and had set out on a road that knew no turning, a road that led to collaborationism and a social, democratic state.⁶ Party attacks upon the class composition of the Wilhelmine state did not imply the rejection of the class state *per se* nor rejection of the idea of defense of the country.

Unfortunately the central executive committee (CEC) of the SPD had never dispelled the public confusion by renouncing the canons of revolutionary socialism. The rank and file, who almost certainly would have approved substitution of a credo of nationalism, reformism, and revisionism for the Erfurt Program (1891), were in 1914 only dimly aware of the fundamental premises of party action. As in a chiaroscuro painting, doctrinaire policy features were thrust forth in the bright light of publicity while revisionist operations were shrouded in shade.

Whether a revolutionary resurrection would have come had Germany found herself only at war in the west or if the general strike at St. Petersburg in July had had the support of a *united* Russian Social Democracy and had paralyzed mobilization, are academic questions. Either contingency must have caused the SPD the gravest embarrass-

¹ Hamburger Echo, July 30, 1914.

² Vorwärts, July 29, 1914.

³ Julian Borchard, Vor und nach dem 4. August (Berlin, 1915), p. 8.

⁴ Vorwärts, July 29.

⁵ Birth of the German Republic (London, 1931), p. 58.

⁶ See my "Triumph of Nationalism in the German Socialist Party on the Eve of the First World War," Journal of Modern History (hereafter cited as "JMH"), XXIV, No. 1 (March, 1952), 15-41.

ment. The latter might have made the SPD militantly anti-government. But apart from “might have beens,” an incontrovertible fact is that Russian mobilization was the pivot on which the SPD swiftly executed its ideological turning movement. The party swang from opposition *to* to support *of* the state. Russian mobilization first led SPD leaders to search their consciences and weed out withered political concepts.

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude from this that the SPD welcomed war against Russia as a “*gefundenes Fressen*.” For such a wish there was still too much vacillation in the party, too much honest uncertainty respecting contradictions between theory and *praxis*. Evidence is, moreover, lacking that the CEC deliberately sought so crass a pretext to consolidate pariah party with nation. Had the opposite been true, then indeed Socialist leaders would have been guilty of treason to the proletariat.¹ As it was, Russian mobilization coming at a time (6 : 00 P.M., July 30) when Bethmann at Russia’s request was still earnestly mediating in Vienna, was viewed by virtually the entire working class as an unprovoked attack.² It caused the ponderously turning SPD to move swiftly to the new position and a

¹ Kuczynski, pp. 83-4, 77. Kuczynski is the latest advocate of the myth of German Social Democratic treason, no more tenable than his “lie of a Russian attack” or the thesis of G. Barraclough (*Origins of Modern Germany* [Oxford, 1947], pp. 435-6) that the German government “ran the risk of a great European war” so as to give a set-back to Socialism.

² F. Herbach, *Die Strömungen des Marxismus in Deutschland während des Weltkrieges und die Grenzen zwischen seinen einzelnen Richtungen nach Ideologie und Praxis* (Berlin, 1933), p. 8; Adalbert Wahl, *Deutsche Geschichte von der Reichsgründung bis zum Ausbruch des Weltkrieges, 1871-1914*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1936), IV, 766-7; E. Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil* (London, 1945), pp. 24-5. Although the Russian question was the great hub around which SPD war policy turned, anti-English sentiments in the party were strong. For a number of years before the war a group of Socialist imperialists on the SPD Right (Wally Zepler, Max Schippel, Max Maurenbrecher, Wolfgang Heine, Eduard David, Max Cohen, Ludwig Quessel, Heinrich Peus, etc.) linked with the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* had rung the changes upon British monopoly over world markets and colonies. The Socialist imperialists pictured England as a “have” and Germany simply as a “have not” nation. Translated into Marxist terminology, Britain was an arch-capitalist, Germany, a proletarian. After the English declaration of war, this artfully fostered mass resentment degenerated to bitter hatred. Then the contrapuntal course to the SPD’s Russian melody became quite naturally the revolution against plutocratic Britain. The alternative, it was argued by the Lenschs, Winnigs, and Max Cohens, was the ruin of not only the German working class but European proletarian democracy. (See articles by G. Hildebrand, Quessel, Leuthner, Quessel in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, XVIII-2 (1912), pp. 661-75; *ibid.*, pp. 707-15; XVIII-3, pp. 1119-24; *ibid.*, pp. 1491-6; XIX-2 (1913), pp. 715, 718 respectively; and Carl Severing, *Sozialdemokratie und Völkerhass* [Vol. XI of *Kriegsprobleme der Arbeiterklasse*, Berlin, 1915], pp. 8-10; Lensch, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und der Weltkrieg* [Berlin, 1915]; Lensch, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie in ihrer grossen Krisis* [Hamburg, 1916], pp. 6, 18; and Eduard David, *Sozialdemokratie und Vaterlandsverteidigung* [Bielefeld, 1915], pp. 25-6).

corresponding ideology. Russian mobilization thus made straight the path of "government socialism" in Germany. Contrariwise, the SPD did not invent "the lie of a Russian attack"; to say so is to stand the facts upon their heads, as Professor Kuczynski has.

The jolt of Russian mobilization upset prognostications by the unenlightened that at the forthcoming session of the Reichstag SPD delegation on August 3 war credits would be rejected. Certain recent writers, notably A. Joseph Berlau,¹ taking their cue from C. Grünberg and Karl Kautsky, have argued that because for a decade past the party had repeatedly affirmed its commitment to maximum legal opposition to war, it was uncertain what the delegation would do on August 3. This view does but exiguous justice to the import of decisions taken at Chemnitz and Jena and ignores the fact that Social Democrats in their overwhelming majority were convinced of the pacific intent of the German government and of the malice of Russia. The whole evolution of the Socialist movement since the days of Gotha disposed to certainty, given the belief of a Russian attack.² Charles Andler was correct when he wrote a generation ago: "Il était sûr d'avance que le parti socialiste allemand n'opposerait aucune résistance effective à la mobilisation de 1914 dès l'instant que la Russie serait mêlée à cette guerre."³

The Russian action outtrumped Socialist pacifism. The German worker, heir to a mystic dread dating back to 1761, feared lest a Russian offensive preface a Slavic occupation of eastern Germany or lead to a Franco-Russian partition of Europe à la Tilsit.⁴ The Socialist rank and file did not wait for their leaders, and the trade unions placed themselves unreservedly at the disposal of the government.⁵ Even more than in Russia, the working class locked hands tightly with the "ruling classes" in an *Einheitsfront*. This being the case, it is legitimate to ask whether it is possible for a party leadership, professing to be democratic, to betray the masses by *complying* with their demands. Whereas from the outset Lenin and the Bolsheviki protested against

¹ The German Social Democratic Party, 1914-21 (Columbia University Studies in History Economics, and Public Law, No. 557; N.Y., 1949), pp. 67-8; also Ossip K. Flechtheim, Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik (Offenbach a.M., 1948), p. 11.

² Hans Herzfeld, Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und die Auflösung der nationalen Einheitsfront im Weltkrieg (Leipzig, 1928), p. 8; Heinrich Ströbel, Die deutsche Revolution (Berlin, 1922), pp. 10-11. Cf. Milorad Drachkovitch, Les socialismes français et allemand et le problème de la guerre, 1870-1914 (Geneva, 1953), p. 286.

³ La décomposition politique du socialisme allemand, 1914-19 (Paris, 1919), p. 47.

⁴ Herzfeld, pp. 7-8.

⁵ John L. Snell, Socialist Unions and Socialist Patriotism in Germany, 1914-18, in: American Historical Review, LIX (1953), p. 67; Konrad Hänisch, Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie in und nach dem Weltkrieg (Berlin, 1919), pp. 22-3.

the war, refused to approve war credits (the Duma session of August 8), and set their course straight for overthrow of the government, the SPD sought to identify itself with majority sentiments and interests. The one type of thinking led to the ultimate dictatorship of party politburo over the people; the other to rule of the people and by the people. Thus early the road of socialism forked: one branch towards communist autocracy; the other towards social democracy. It was the genius of the former to exalt the end above the means, and the humanity of the latter to concentrate not so much on "*what* is to be done" as upon *how* it should be done (Bernstein: "The end is nothing; the movement everything!").

The prolix objections of the tiny internationalist minority in the SPD were beaten down by the majority. It was pointed out that the general strike could only be effective in countries with strong socialist labor movements, that Russia was not one of these, and that consequently general strike in Germany would be tantamount to alliance between the working class and its natural foe, tsarist despotism.¹ Bebel, W. Liebknecht, and Engels were regimented to prove that "victory by the Russians over Germany means the oppression of German Socialism,"² but these arguments are well known to the reader. It was also cogently urged that the SPD, with a following of a third of the German nation, was the heart and soul of the western socialist movement. While in Germany there were more than a million dues-paying party members, in England there were only 38,000 socialists, and in France barely 80,000.³ Ergo, if the German proletariat were enslaved, it would be a mortal blow to Europe's social democracy. Even were Upper Silesia to fall to the Russians, this would cripple the western proletariat. If the party did not join the *Burgfrieden*, it would divorce itself from proletariat and country.⁴ It would not only be without a fatherland but without a class to lead! The *coup de grâce* was put to the last objections of the minority by the admonition that Germany dared not wait until Russia's vast manpower should descend from its Eurasian shield and overrun Germany's feeble eastern de-

¹ Kautsky, *Die Sozialdemokratie im Kriege*, in: *Die Neue Zeit* (hereafter cited as "NZ"), XXXIII-1 (1914), p. 7; Kuczynski, of the Humboldt University of Berlin, concedes that, in any case, circumstances did not favor a general strike in Germany in 1914 (*Op. cit.*, p. 142).

² Quotation from Paul Lensch, *Am Ausgang der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1919), p. 30.

³ Hermann Heidegger, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und der nationale Staat, 1870-1920* (Göttinger Bausteine zur Geschichtswissenschaft, Vol. XXV, Göttingen, 1956), p. 80.

⁴ Koch, pp. 36-7.

fenses.¹ The war was thus *volkstümlich*. The SPD CEC summarized the situation:

“The total Russian mobilization tore the veil off for the German public. From this moment on, the masses were as hypnotized by the Russian menace. Everything that had been heard of tsarism and its armed hordes caused every German to contemplate the consequences of a Russian break-through onto German soil and of a Russian victory. In this atmosphere of panic the entire German nation became a pliant tool in the hands of the political and military leadership of the country.”²

The War Ministry might confidently assure the OHL that “the SPD has the resolute intent so to conduct itself as would befit every German under the present circumstances.”³ Nevertheless, utmost care had to be given to drafting the declaration of war against Russia, because of its capital importance to the SPD and the loyalty of the workers. “Otherwise,” said Bethmann, “I shall not have Social Democratic support.”⁴

In the defeat of Hugo Haase’s proposal to reject war credits (Reichstag SPD caucus meeting, August 3) by the huge majority of 78 to 14, Heidegger is disposed to assign an unnecessarily decisive role to Kautsky.⁵ Actually David’s speech was more influential.⁶ His argument that the SPD could not, if only out of considerations of organizational survival, stand aloof from the crusade to liberate the non-Russian subjects of the tsar as well as to free the Russian masses, carried the day.⁷ The main aim of the war for the SPD was thus destruction of tsarist despotism and the liberation of enslaved Poles, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, White Russians, Moldavians, and the political emancipation of the Russian people themselves. More profoundly, however, it was defense of western and especially German civilization against corruption by primitive Russia.

¹ P. Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1928), I, p. 353; Wilhelm Blos, *Von der Monarchie zum Volksstaat* (Stuttgart, 1922), I, pp. 8-9.

² *Verantwortung am Kriege*, p. 8.

³ *Ursachen des deutschen Zusammenbruches im Jahre 1918*, (Berlin, 1928) II, p. 74. See also correspondence between the chancellor and the right Socialist Dr. A. Südekum of July 29 and 30, from the *Deutsches Zentralarchiv Potsdam, Reichskanzlei*, reproduced in Kuczynski, pp. 77-80, confirming SPD reliability.

⁴ Prinz von Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1931), II, pp. 307-9.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 74. — The most recent discussion of Kautsky’s position is that by Erich Matthias, in *Marxismusstudien*, Vol. 2 (Tübingen, 1957).

⁶ P. Frölich, *Zehn Jahre Krieg und Bürgerkrieg*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1924), I, pp. 68-9.

⁷ The dissenting declaration is given in Eugen Prager, *Geschichte der unabhängigen sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands* (Berlin, 1921), pp. 30-1.

When Haase read the momentous statement of the SPD, with which he disagreed, in the Reichstag on August 4, it was found to contain no reservation which would have obliged the SPD to combat the war in case it become one of conquest. But how could one distinguish between detachment of territory for liberation and detachment for conquest? Entire emphasis was placed on Russian aggression:

“The victory of Russian despotism, sullied with the blood of the best of its own people, would jeopardize much if not all for our countrymen and their future freedom. It is our duty to repel this menace and safeguard the culture and independence of our country.”¹

With the exception of the leftist *Vorwärts* and ultra newspapers as the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, Stuttgart *Schwäbische Tagwacht*, and *Die Gleichheit*, the entire Socialist press endorsed the anti-Russian apologia of the SPD Reichstag delegation.² Territorial defense, freedom, and culture were the main refrains.³ So imperative was the popular mandate that even Liebknecht had bowed to the party on August 4, allegedly out of party discipline,⁴ but actually because “only someone who was stark raving mad – no responsible-thinking comrade – could have cast the only vote against” approval of the war credits.⁵

When Scheidemann a few weeks later stated the German case to American workers, he was delineating the argument that had from the outset been that of the SPD:

“No one in Germany wanted the war. This is not controverted by the fact that Germany declared war against Russia and also finally against France. If Germany, which was accurately informed about the preparations of its neighbors, had hesitated a little longer, Russia would have been ready with the mobilization that she had been carrying on secretly for some time and would have inundated... German soil in the east.... Then woe to us!.. On Russia rests the main guilt for the present war....

We in Germany had the duty to protect ourselves against tsarism, the duty to fulfil of protecting the land where social democracy

¹ Verhandlungen des Reichstags: Stenographische Berichte (hereafter cited as “V.R.”), CCCVI (Aug. 4, 1914), p. 9.

² Koch, p. 54; Haenisch, p. 25; C. Grünberg, *Die Internationale und der Weltkrieg* (Leipzig, 1916), Part I, pp. 303-4.

³ See especially editorials in the *Hallesche Volksblatt*, August 5; *Hamburger Echo*, August 6 and 7; and *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkszeitung*, August 7.

⁴ Liebknecht, *Klassenkampf gegen den Krieg* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 14-9.

⁵ This is Kuczynski's phrase (! - Op. cit., p. 164).

is best developed from the threat of enslavement to Russia... A Germany in bondage to the tsars would thrust back not only the Socialist movement in the Reich but in all the world by decades.”¹

When the SPD joined the *Burgfrieden* it, in effect, took out shares in the national corporation. It formally proclaimed its vested interest in the Bismarckian state and capitalist society. Nothing in this decision was incompatible with the party's sociological character, for anyone who carefully examined the composition, wealth, level of education, and position of the party in the economic community could not deny that the practical future of the SPD lay *in*, rather than upon the ruins of, the state.² Prospects of an early inheritance of the Bismarckian bequest seemed so bright that most party leaders, who, after all were decent, honorable, and industrious persons, concluded that an ideology of demolition would only ruin the chances of inheritance. “How can the working class win influence in the state without a revolution?” said Dr. Paul Lensch, former Left Wing Socialist and future editor of the bourgeois *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. “This can only happen in the degree that the state is democratized; only as a reform party can the SPD achieve its goals.”³ From the foregoing prognosis, which became party creed after Russia's mobilization, derived virtually every major line of action of the SPD Majority during the war. This is only another way of saying that the will of the rank and file was throughout the war, as at the beginning, the determinant of SPD executive policy.

A paranoiac hatred of tsarist Russia led to a policy of ambiguities respecting war aims.⁴ Obviously no measure that might bring about the destruction of that oriental despotism could be entirely bad! While the so-called “government Socialists,” who controlled the party apparatus, never came out for a war of conquest, it is nonetheless true that they did not always and from the beginning of the war champion

¹ New Yorker Volkszeitung, Aug. 21, 1914.

² Harry J. Marks, *The sources of Reformism in the Social Democratic Party of Germany, 1890-1914*, in: *JMH*, XI (1939), pp. 357-61.

See also Siegfried Marck, *Sozialdemokratie*, in: *Die geistige Struktur der politischen Parteien Europas* (Berlin, 1931) and Theodor Buddeberg, *Das soziologische Problem der Sozialdemokratie*, in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, XLIX (1922) for sociological aspects of SPD organization.

³ *Am Ausgang der S.D.*, p. 33. Lensch was one of “the fourteen” who had voted against support of war credits at the caucus meeting of Aug. 3.

⁴ *Prager*, p. 51; cf. Herzfeld, p. 15. For the evolution of Germany's western war aims until 1916 see Hans Gatzke, *Germany's Drive to the West* (Baltimore, 1950), p. 67 and passim.

a peace of understandings without annexations.¹ Horrendous tales occurrent to the war in the east begot vengeful thoughts. From the statements of SPD leaders in the first year of hostilities it appears that the party would at most have objected only mildly if the government had decided upon detaching extensive territories from a defeated Russia.² Long before November 5, 1916, the SPD had announced that separation of Poland from Russia was a legitimate war aim.³ Incensed at the alleged "great betrayal" and subscribing to Luxemburg's famous dictum that the SPD was become "a stinking corpse," Lenin wasted no time in reading the SPD (Nov. 14, 1914) out of the international revolutionary movement.⁴

Oftentime articles in the party press made it abundantly clear that victorious peace in the east would not violate Socialist war aims, provided it were reasonable. Plausible "revolutionary" interpretations of victory were given by Scheidemann in his New Year's speech at Solingen in 1915;⁵ in David's speech at Bielefeld on March 6, 1915;⁶ in Ernst Heilmann's article in the *Chemnitzer Volksstimme* on July 2, 1915;⁷ and by August Winnig in an article of 1915.⁸ Haenisch, Winnig, David, Cunow, Max Cohen, and Scheidemann, not to mention Carl Legien and the trade union functionaries, were all guilty of imprudent utterances respecting war aims in the east, which they would have given much to retract after Versailles.⁹

Throughout 1915 overthrow of tsarism remained the main war aim of the Socialist majority. While it would be unjust to say that the Socialists wanted an outright military victory in the west, where all but a few hoped that before a decision could be forced on the battlefields a conciliatory peace would end the war,¹⁰ SPD policy towards Russia was a horse of a different color. In 1915 it was still absolute. It aimed at total destruction of tsarist tyranny, arch-foe of liberty, and at

¹ W. Dittmann, Die Wahrheit über die Friedenspolitik der Regierungssocialisten, in: Leipziger Volkszeitung, June 15, 1917.

² Herzfeld, p. 15.

³ Ibid.; Cf. ed. in Vorwärts, Nov. 6, 1916.

⁴ See "Der Krieg und die russische S.D.," in: Ausgewählte Werke (Berlin, 1951), I, 739.

⁵ In: Bergische Arbeiterstimme, Jan. 2, 1915.

⁶ In: David, S. D. und Vaterlandsverteidigung (Bielefeld, 1915), pp. 25-6.

⁷ Similarly see Lensch, SPD in ihrer grossen Krisis (Hamburg, 1916), p. 14; Haenisch, Wo steht der Hauptfeind? (Berlin, 1915), p. 10; Haenisch, SPD im Weltkrieg, pp. 125-6; M. Cohen, Das Volk und der Krieg (Berlin, 1916), p. 4.

⁸ In: Die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung und der Krieg (Annalen für soziale Politik und Gesetzgebung, IV [Berlin, 1915], Part I, p. 139).

⁹ Wilhelm Dittmann, Wie Alles Kam: Deutschlands Weg seit 1914 (unpublished MS in possession of Dittmann family), p. 56.

¹⁰ Dittmann MS, p. 48.

emancipation (detachment) of subject peoples from the Russian Empire – by another name, *victory*. Such a victory would not materially have differed from the conquest sought by the OHL in that sector. The first and sixth points in the CEC's contemporary assessment of war guilt must be construed as endorsing victory in the east:

- “1. Victory of a coalition of which Russia is a member would be more dangerous for the peace of Europe than a German victory.
6. The struggle against tsarist tyranny coincides with the interests of the proletariat.”¹

Once the river of German blood began to flow, the SPD had no intention of restoring the *status quo ante bellum* in Russia. Significantly, Kautsky's formula of August 3, 1914, which would have made it impossible for the Socialists to connive in a war of conquest,² was not included in Haase's Reichstag declaration on the 4th.³ In any case, Kautsky himself soon rang the changes on the Russian peril when on August 28, 1914, he wrote in *Die Neue Zeit*: “Once again we are ranged against the ancient, evil foe of liberty in Europe, tsarism.”⁴ Could one compromise with the devil? Blind to the implications of the war against democratic France,⁵ Socialist leaders identified the German cause with “historical progress,” social and economic democracy, and the international proletariat. For them Germany represented the revolutionary, Russia the reactionary, principle.⁶

The later widely celebrated “Scheidemann Peace” did not in 1915 contradict the aim of peace *with victory* in the east.⁷ The Scheidemann Peace was at first only for the west; the mailed fist, for the east. This attitude is typified in the following statements of Parvus (the Russian Dr. Alexander Helphand) in *Die Glocke*:

“The German workers... know that the democratic development

¹ Verantwortung am Kriege, p. 9.

² Text in Sozialisten und Krieg (Prague, 1937), p. 459. Liebknecht insisted Kautsky's proposal was turned down by the majority (Klassenkampf, p. 15), but this was denied by Dittmann (MS, pp. 46-7) and Herzfeld (Op. cit., p. 9).

³ According to Kautsky, the deletion was requested by Bethmann who was concerned over English neutrality (Sozialisten und Krieg, p. 460); cf. Scheidemann, Memoiren, I, 300.

⁴ “Die Sozialdemokratie im Kriege,” N.Z., XXXIII-I (1914), p. 7.

⁵ For Socialist policy towards France see Kautsky, Sozialisten und Krieg, p. 459; Carl Severing, Sozialdemokratie und Völkerhass (Vol. XI of “Kriegsprobleme der Arbeiterklasse”; Berlin, 1915), pp. 8-10; F. Stampfer, Die Sozialdemokratie und Kriegskredite (Berlin, 1915) p. 12; Gatzke, pp. 73-4.

⁶ Lensch, S.D. in Krisis, pp. 14-5.

⁷ Cf. Koch, p. 95.

of Europe will not be assured so long as tsarism retains power in the great Russian realm... If it is an historic imperative that Russia be chastised and the throne of the tsars toppled, then the German workers will be the executioner of this verdict handed down by history.”¹

“What would all our propaganda for general peace and the International avail us, if the war should end with the triumph of Russian tsarism?”²

“In the interest of the proletariat it is important not only to conduct a sufficiently strong opposition to tsarism but to shatter its military power as decisively as possible and to destroy the state centralization created by tsarism.”³

From the spring of 1915 to the imperial proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland on November 5, 1916, the German government used the various Socialist factions in the Reich to further its own eastern objectives. During this period the German government pursued a double-faced policy towards Russia. On the one hand Jagow and Zimmermann in the Foreign Office encouraged negotiations between various conservative Russian and German aristocrats looking towards a separate peace with the existing tsarist regime. On the other, they encouraged the German Socialists in their various extremist and revolutionary policies towards Russia.⁴ Dr. Helphand (Parvus) was a most important three-way intermediary in this connection. He kept Jagow well-informed of the identity of Russian revolutionary and German Socialist war aims regarding Russia with those harbored by the German government.⁵ All alike would have welcomed the overthrow of tsarism through a major revolution, which would also bring the dissolution of the Russian Empire. It is evident that the Russophobia of the German Socialists was grist to the mill of the Kaiser.

What occasioned the first ebb in the anti-Russian tide in German Socialism? Military defeat. Nothing fails like failure in a great enterprise, and world war is the greatest enterprise. Already with the battle of the Marne party leaders on the Socialist Left and in the Center had

¹ *Der Freiheit eine Gasse*, III (Oct., 1915), p. 118.

² *Meine Stellungnahme zum Krieg*, *ibid.*, p. 156.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴ Z.A.B. Zeman, ed., *Germany and the Revolution in Russia, 1915-18: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry* (London, 1958), pp. 23-4.

⁵ See documents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 (Jan. 9, 1915-Dec. 26, 1915) in *ibid.*, pp. 1-6; 8-10. Parvus received an earnest payment of one million roubles for transmission to Petrograd to the revolutionary Socialists with the purpose of organizing the Russian revolution (State Secretary to the Minister in Copenhagen, tg. 952, Dec. 26, 1915, in: *ibid.*, p. 10).

come to share Heinrich Ströbel's bleak prophecy that "the war cannot end with a German victory; at best it can end in a draw."¹ But the party majority clung to its grand design of smashing tsarism, and it used every Russian offensive as ammunition against the minority.² The effects of the entrance of Italy into the war and black rumors of appalling losses in the great land drive at Verdun, however, mitigated the SPD's Russian policy.

Under the impact of such jolts and those to come within a few months along the Somme, the *furor teutonicus* of Majority Socialist policy towards Russia began to abate. It abated because one could no longer be certain whether the Russian Empire would, after all, collapse first. The Majority Socialists found it one fine day "unrealistic" to speak of a peace of justice (conquest) in the east. Now the watchword was restoration of the status quo ante (read "inviolability of the German Empire"). This did not, of course, rule out minor boundary adjustments in the east. As Scheidemann said in the Reichstag on April 6, 1916, "a man would have to be a simpleton to think that, after a European conflagration in which millions... have been slain, not a single boundary stone... will be moved." Towards England and France he adopted a different tone, for the west was the real stage for the implementation of the "Scheidemann Peace": "The whole war in the west, the war among Germany, France, and England is sheer madness, an incommensurate crime against humanity."³

No such geographical ambiguity regarding war aims confused the policy of the wartime SPD Center (Haase, Dittmann, Kautsky, Bernstein et al.) *Almost* from the beginning of the war its course had clearly been towards a "peace of understanding." In Haase's first Reichstag address after formation of the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, he ripped the Majority's ambivalent policy towards Russia, especially flaying the government's designs on Poland and the Baltic states.

"If you were to ask not only the civilians but the soldiers whether they want to continue fighting in the prospect of perhaps conquering a strip of soil in the east,... I know that ninety percent and more would favor calling a halt and making peace!"⁴

¹ Speech of November, 1914, at a Berlin meeting, reported in Ströbel, *Die Kriegsschuld der Rechtssozialisten* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 35-7. But the Kaiser had made the same funeral prediction on July 30 (*Marginalia to tg. from Pourtales to Jagow, July 30, 1914*. In: *Deutsche Dokumenten zum Kriegsausbruch*, I, pp. 132-3).

² As in the March, 1915 offensive on the Austrian front. See Prager, p. 58; Herzfeld, p. 27.

³ V.R., CCCVII, pp. 895-6.

⁴ *Ibid.* (April 6, 1916), p. 889.

These shining words were applauded not only by the Center-Socialists but by many comrades to the left of Center ("*Gruppe Internationale*" – Luxemburg, Zetkin, Mehring, Duncker; the "*Gruppe Arbeiterpolitik*" or Bremen Ultras – Knief, Frölich; and by Julian Borchardt's *Lichtstrahlen* clique). But they were an evil portent for Germany. The separatist action of the Minority SPD-SA (Bernstein, Haase, Dittmann, Ledebour, Herzfeld, O. Cohn, Geyer, Kunert, etc.) on March 24, 1916,¹ and Haase's speech of April 6 constituted a milestone along the road not towards establishment of democracy in Germany but, away beyond, towards the ultimate ruin of the democratic idea in 1931-3. It was the harbinger of events that were to dig an impassable moat between the left and right of the German working class. It heralded a generation of intra-class strife, which for bitterness surpassed the classic hatred of proletariat for bourgeoisie, and led SPD and KPD, especially the latter, to dissipate the last hours of liberty under the republic in the billingsgate of recriminations.

Until the autumn of 1916 the Majority Socialists had reason to fear the growing influence of the annexationists over the government but would not believe that Bethmann was dominated by them.² Scheidemann, who next to Heine was the most embattled Majority champion during these months, repeatedly penned articles affirming the desire of the SPD for *one* war aim: the just and speedy end of the conflict.³ But here the efforts of some to prepare for an abandonment of the party's original Russian policy were energetically countered by the German government's informer, Parvus, who was uncompromisingly opposed to the proposals of certain Social Democratic circles to accord an indulgent peace to prostrate Russia.⁴ Far more important in the new hardening of the Majority Socialists' Russian policy than Dr. Helphand's articles was the attitude of the French and British Socialists. Their aversion to the revival of international co-operation of working class parties to end the war on a conciliatory basis and their steadfast refusal until 1917 to sit at a conference table with Germany's "government Socialists" undermined the friends of a Scheidemann peace also in the east.⁵ Similarly the Majority Socialists' approval of the Imperial Manifesto establishing a truncated Kingdom of Poland (Nov. 5, 1916) rendered impossible any hope of a separate negotiated

¹ See Prager, p. 94.

² Scheidemann, *Die deutsche S.D. und der Krieg: eine Rede gehalten in einer Breslauer Volksversammlung am 20. Juni, 1916* (Breslau, 1916), p. 15.

³ R. Berger, *Die SPD im dritten Kriegsjahr* (M.-Gladbach, 1917), p. 52.

⁴ See tg., Brockdorff-Rantzau (Copenhagen) to Zimmermann, Aug. 14, 1915; in: Zeman, p. 4.

⁵ Heidegger, p. 141.

peace with the tsarist government.¹ After the Polish manifesto the only feasible Socialist policy was revolution in and division of Russia. Socialist hearts were unalterably hardened towards the Allied governments when the German chancellor's peace note of December 12, 1916, was rejected (Dec. 30).² This the Majority Socialists charged to the malevolent intent of the Entente governments to cripple or destroy Germany. Ebert was right! Henceforth the war for Germany was defensive,³ and there could be no more talk about the Majority Socialists illegally carrying on peace action, as there had been briefly in the summer of 1916 on the heels of the news of the collapse of the Verdun offensive.⁴

The Russian March Revolution compelled a reconsideration of the Majority Socialist position. In a speech of March 29, 1917, in the Reichstag Gustav Noske admitted that a prime war aim of the SPD had been achieved: destruction of tsarist despotism. His demand that the German government leave nothing undone to arrange an honorable, lasting peace with the new Russia was the first trumpet wind of a change in the Majority Socialist line.⁵ The new Majority policy was conditioned by two considerations: failure radically to alter SPD policy towards Russia now would entail wholesale desertions of members to the USPD; and a new German offensive against the crumbling Russian army would likely wreck hopes of peace and give the war the very character the Opposition said it had.⁶ The SPD CEC publicly proclaimed its agreement with the resolution of the Petrograd Soviet "to prepare the way for a general peace without annexations and indemnities on the basis of free national development for all peoples."⁷ When Tereshchenko, who had succeeded Miliukov at the Russian Foreign Office on May 18, invited the German Socialists to an international congress to be held in Stockholm at once, almost all Socialist groups in Germany applauded,⁸ for all could at least agree on the desirability, from the workers' standpoint, of peace in the east.

¹ Zeman, p. 23.

² Herzfeld, p. 45.

³ See Scheidemann's speech, V.R., CCCIX (Feb. 22, 1917), p. 2483.

⁴ Protokoll der Sitzung des Parteausschusses von Aug. 18, 1916 (Berlin, 1916), p. 23.

⁵ Reported in Vorwärts, March 30, 1917.

⁶ SPD leaders feared that the OHL wanted to force Russia to her knees, then turn and launch a *Friedenssturm* in the west to achieve a *Machtfrieden*. "This suspicion," said the editors of Vorwärts (May 16, 1917), "is at present the greatest hindrance to an end of the war."

⁷ Ursachen des d. Zusammenbruches, Sec. 2, VII, Part 2, p. 332.

⁸ Scheidemann, Memoiren, II, p. 11. See also Max Cohen, Zum internationalen Sozialistenkongress in Stockholm, in: Sozialistische Monatshefte, IX (1917), pp. 455-9; and Heinrich Peus, Die Aufgabe des Stockholmer Kongresses, *ibid.*, pp. 563-8.

Inversely to the high water spirit of conciliation on the eve of the Stockholm Congress, SPD anti-Russian sentiments were at neap tide. The concurrent pull of government (nationalist) and Socialist (internationalist) aims towards a conciliatory general peace was at its most powerful in June, 1917. Prior to their departure for Stockholm, Socialist Majority leaders heard from Bethmann that quite apart from his ostensible rejection of Scheidemann's peace program in the Reichstag,¹ he privately cherished war aims that did not sharply diverge from theirs.²

Sad to say, since the Allies boycotted the Congress, the stones cast into Swedish waters did not even cause a ripple on the surface of hostilities.³ The sensible peace proposals contained in the Stockholm Manifesto, reflecting SPD Majority views, were ignominiously ignored, possibly because of reactionary changes that took place in the German government on July 14.⁴ Socialist approval of war credits was thereafter construed by the Allies as endorsement of the Ludendorff dictatorship. The western democracies, heedless of the sincere peace sentiments that animated a large part of the German nation, preferred to fight on *à outrance*.⁵

To understand the Majority Socialists' position on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, we must watch them drink the cup of humiliation. The Allies appraised the Reichstag Peace Resolution of July 19, 1917, upon which the SPD, if not the USPD, had pinned such great hopes,⁶ as worthless.⁷ The Entente press hailed it only as the forerunner of German surrender.⁸ Similarly the Allies cold-shouldered the Stockholm Manifesto.⁹ Bitterly disappointed on two counts, the SPD thenceforth

¹ Q.v., V.R., CCCX (May 15, 1917), pp. 3390-8.

² B.-H., *Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1921), II, p. 212.

³ Q. v. Merle Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), pp. 144-5; Olga Gankin and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War* (Stanford, 1940), pp. 597-8; Frölich, I, p. 189.

⁴ The Socialists had joined the *fronde* against Bethmann because they could not forgive his public rejection of their peace program (*Ursachen des d. Zusammenbruches*, Sec. 2, VII, Part 2, p. 379; VIII, pp. 79-80. Otto Braun, *Von Weimar zu Hitler* (N.Y., 1940), pp. 35-6; F. Stampfer, *Die vierzehn Jahre der ersten d. Republik* (Karlsbad, 1936), p. 28.

⁵ D. L. George, *War Memoirs* (London, 133-6), III, p. 1115; also Wilson's note to the Russian government. Lansing to Tereshchenko, May 22, 1917. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the U.S., 1917: Russia* (Wash., D.C., 1940), I, Suppl. 2, pp. 71-3.

⁶ Dittmann MS, p. 68; M. Erzberger, *Erlebnisse im Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1920), p. 167. Text of resolution in V.R., CCCX, p. 3573.

⁷ E.g., see views of British ministers, in *Great Britain*, 5 *Parliamentary Debates: Commons* (July 26, 1917), pp. 1479-1589.

⁸ Bernstein, *Die deutsche Revolution* (Berlin, 1921), p. 12.

⁹ Cf. Heidegger, pp. 142-3.

clove instinctively to the Fatherland. At the SPD's Würzburg convention from October 14-20, 1917, Gustav Hoch's resolution calling for opposition to the war was rejected 257-26.¹ Instead the Majority Socialists adopted (265-14) Löbe's endorsing the Reichstag and Stockholm resolutions and the party's usual approval of war credits.² The SPD further demonstrated it had no intention of undermining the authority of the German government, by repelling Helphand's suggestions for convening an international socialist conference at Stockholm to frame an irrefragable peace with Russia.³

Even more than the SPD, the USPD during 1917 worked for general armistice, rather than separate peace with Russia. Before Russia was isolated from the west by the Bolshevik Revolution, the USPD indulged the belief that general peace could be achieved through co-operation between Russian and Allied socialists.⁴ They had been opposed to a Russo-German peace on the grounds that such efforts would drive Russia closer to the Allies and strengthen reactionary tendencies in that country. After the revolution the USPD relinquished the idea of intercession but still hoped for general peace through concerted pressure by the European proletariat. The USPD thought that the Allied working class could be encouraged by example of open diplomacy and by lenient terms to Russia. There is no corroboration for the charge that the Minority Socialists desired to postpone peace in the east because an armistice would interfere with the development of a revolutionary situation in Germany.⁵

Prospects of terminating the war through a general conciliatory peace revived as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution and the publication of the secret treaties. The latter exploded the myth of sole Austro-German war guilt, a thesis which the USPD, with absolute faith, had hammered into the German working class.⁶ The SPD awaited triumphantly for the French Socialists to make a move towards a peace of understanding. It did not seem possible that Prince Czernin's conciliatory peace offer of December 25,⁷ his Christmas gift to the world, could be turned down by the Allies.⁸

¹ Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitagess der SPD abgehalten in Würzburg, 1917 (Berlin, 1917), pp. 216-7; also pp. 339-51. Cf. David's speech in *ibid.*, pp. 316-9.
² *Ibid.*, pp. 217-8.

³ Zeman, p. 73.

⁴ See Ledebour's speech in V.R., CCCX (Oct. 10, 1917), pp. 3838-56.

⁵ An accusation made by Ludendorff (*Op. cit.*, pp. 438, 443) and repeated more recently by Helmut Tiedemann, *Sowjetrussland und die Revolutionierung Deutschlands, 1917-19*. (Vol. CCXCVI of *Historische Studien* [Berlin, 1936], p. 118).

⁶ *Vorwärts*, Nov. 27, 28, 1917.

⁷ Text in *Die Friedensverhandlungen in Brest-Litovsk und der Friede mit Russland* (Leipzig, 1918), pp. 23-5.

⁸ See *ed. in Vorwärts*, Dec. 28, 1917.

But when it was and Czernin retracted it in favor of an alternate formidable set of demands on the 28th, the Majority Socialists were too smart to allow sand to be thrown into their eyes. "Not English intrigue, but the shocking contrast between the declarations of December 25 and 28 has provoked the breakdown of... negotiations at Brest-Litovsk," they cried.¹ The brief wedding between Socialist nationalist and internationalist principles had come to grief on the rocks of realities.

When General Ludendorff revealed the full scope of his alternate hand (he had, of course, always regretted the Reichstag Peace Resolution),² German Socialists of every hue were forced to choose between revolutionary opposition (i.e., the "permanent revolution") and fidelity (i.e., national socialism) to the state. The Spartacists had already chosen. The dicephalous USPD, lashed on by the example of the Spartacists, now followed them reluctantly down the road to subversion, although a powerful minority tormented with misgivings lived to rue the day.

The Majority Socialists had thus far avoided endorsing a separate peace with Russia. This would only have aborted the general, democratic peace which the SPD hoped would be the main contribution of the Bolshevik Revolution.³ Only the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* group (M. Cohen, David, Cunow, Quessel, Leinert, Winnig, and Kolb), who viewed the Russian problem mainly from the slant of territorial security,⁴ called for a separate peace with Russia.⁵ But even though SPD leadership was seething at having been duped by the Hertling ministry, whose connections with the annexationist Fatherland Party, Pan-German League, and Defense Association were showing, the Majority Socialists did not break with the government.⁶ Rather the leadership expostulated and equivocated. It tried to sit out the rest of the war on the fence, a feat which, though amusing, fooled no one aware of the force of western sentiments in the party. Refusal of the Entente to negotiate, indifference of the Allied proletariat, food shortage, security reasons, suspicion that Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk was seeking to apply the torch of social revolution to central Europe,

¹ Vorwärts, Jan. 6, 1918.

² Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen, 1914-1918* (Berlin, 1919), p. 365.

³ Heidegger, p. 156.

⁴ Q.v., Ströbel, *Die Kriegsschuld der Rechtssozialisten*, p. 42; Friedrich Schinkel, *Preussischer Sozialismus* (Breslau, 1934), p. 202.

⁵ Heidegger, p. 156; cf. Scheidemann, *Der Zusammenbruch* (Berlin, 1921), p. 155.

⁶ See Scheidemann's speech of Jan. 24, 1918, before the Main Committee of the Reichstag, in: Schulthess' *Europäischer Geschichtskalender* (Munich, 1918), Part I, pp. 26-8.

were all powerful deterrents to abandoning the government.¹ Such considerations argued in favor of a “trailer” policy. The SPD followed in the wake of the government in that it did not oppose a separate Tilsit peace with Russia.

The fact is that obedience to legal authority still took priority in both SPD and USPD over any independent Russian policy. In the Majority Socialist sector the anti-Russian barrage recommenced. True the Spartacists and Independents did not join the attack, preferring for tactical reasons to ridicule Majority Socialist gullibility and rip the government for having surrendered to the militarists.² But the real proof of priority in the USPD came when that party co-operated with the SPD in January to draw the fangs of the great munitions strike,³ which had been staged chiefly in support of the Bolshevik peace formula.

By early February the entire nation was gravitating towards what appeared to be the only opportunity for peace in the east: the terms of the OHL. As early as late February the SPD began to waver in its campaign against a peace of conquest,⁴ for it saw that it was losing the sympathy of the nation. Proof of the Allies’ unwillingness to negotiate overrode all Socialist casuistry. Also a phrenetic revulsion against Bolshevik Russia was rising in Germany. Obviously the question whether the SPD would stand by the Fatherland or follow the Bolshevik pied piper was decided, as was the question of the party’s stand on August 4, 1914, by the masses themselves.

David announced the SPD’s new line toward Russia on February 20, 1918,⁵ the date the party endorsed the peace treaty with the Ukraine. The new line was one of conditional surrender to the military. It was vindicated by the argument that “our first duty is to bring about peace,” but it caused sharp cleavage in the SPD.⁶ The right-majority, led by David, Ebert, Quessel, M. Cohen, urged acceptance of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.⁷ Apart from the usual arguments was the

¹ See the Report for the Under Secretary of State from Herr Nasse, Dec. 26, 1917 in Zeman, pp. 110-2.

² See F. Mehring’s *Vom Militärstaat*, in: *Kriegsartikel* (Berlin, 1917), p. 77; also G. Ledebour’s speech before the Main Committee on Jan. 24, in Schulthess (1918), Part I, p. 39; and Haase in *ibid.*, p. 46.

³ Cf. Flechtheim, p. 25; Richard Müller, *Der Bürgerkrieg in Deutschland*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1925), I, pp. 101-18; Cf. Scheidemann’s speech in V.R., CCCXI (Feb. 26, 1918), pp. 4162-71.

⁴ See editorials in *Vorwärts*, Feb. 19, 20, 1918.

⁵ Speech in V.R., CCCXI, pp. 4007-13.

⁶ Scheidemann, *Zusammenbruch*, p. 154.

⁷ Scheidemann, *Memoiren*, II, p. 151.

provocative news that Trotsky was turning negotiations at Brest-Litovsk into a farce, demonstrating that the Bolsheviki "did not want to buy peace, but to foment revolution in Germany."¹ A minority, captained by Scheidemann and Hoch, opposed acceptance.² "We fight in the defense of our native land, not for the destruction of Russia."³ The USPD termed the treaty the worst imaginable, "the consequences of which will have to be borne by our children's children."⁴

The vote of approval of new war credits, given by the SPD Reichstag delegation on March 18,⁵ adumbrated how that on the treaty would go.

In the Reichstag debate over Brest-Litovsk David admitted that the treaty was a "*Diktat*," that the civil authorities had capitulated to the military, and that the Entente would now know what to expect if the Germans won.⁶ Still there was no more doubt that the SPD would *not* reject. On March 22, abstention having been agreed upon in caucus, Scheidemann communicated to the Reichstag a party decision with which he strongly disagreed:

"This policy of force in the east is contrary to the interests of the German Empire, which require lasting, pacific relations and friendship between the German and Russian peoples.... But as the treaty has practically ended the war in the east, we shall not oppose it.... We shall abstain from voting."⁷

The USPD rejected the treaty. Haase asserted that the military had once again won an absolute victory: "Who sows the wind must reap the whirlwind!"⁸

The SPD had committed a serious blunder. Rejection would have cost but little. The war in the east would have ended soon anyway. Rejection would have proved the SPD's allegiance to the Reichstag Peace Resolution and could not have failed to have enhanced the party's prestige value abroad. At home it would have led to a united

¹ Winnig in *Die Glocke*, April 6, 1918. Cf. Tiedemann, p. 118; Max von Hoffmann, *War Diaries and Other Papers* (London, 1929), II, p. 211; Trotsky, *My life* (N.Y., 1930), p. 390 and his *Über Lenin* (Berlin, n.d.), p. 85.

² Scheidemann, *Memoiren*, II, p. 151.

³ See Scheidemann's speech in V.R., CCCXI (Feb. 26, 1918), pp. 4162-71.

⁴ Haase's speech in *ibid.* (Feb. 27, 1918), pp. 4208-16.

⁵ Schulthess (1918), Part I, 127; for details see Max Quarck, *Von der Friedensresolution bis zur Revolution* (Berlin, 1919), p. 44.

⁶ V.R. CCCXI (March 18, 1918), pp. 4431-41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, CCCXI, p. 4356.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4540-4; p. 4522-6.

workers' front against the war aims of the OHL, an opposition that even the *Vabanquespieler* Ludendorff could not have ignored. It would thus have forestalled a new exodus of party members to the USPD and averted the later schism in the German proletariat, a schism that was ever afterwards to make a new *Burgfrieden* impossible. The balance sheet is so lopsided that it must be concluded that behind the weak apologies of the abstentionists lurked the old unmentionable Russophobia in new guise.

If the immediate tactic was wrong, the instinct that prompted it was right. For after November 1917 it was, in a larger sense, no longer Germany that was on the offensive against Russia, but Russian Communism against the citadel of German-Christian-Roman civilization. Before the Red Army in 1918-'19 the German Socialists were no more disposed to open the gates of Troy than to the Tsarist in 1914.

The Bolshevik Revolution, a caricature of the Marxian dream, mainly determined German Socialist policy during the next great phase of the history of the Social Democrats. It consolidated western, parliamentary tendencies in German socialism. The new legal approach to social democracy was rationalized with the Marxian dictum: "no people can skip natural phases of development."¹ For the party the future course was clear. It lay first through a liberal capitalist regime to a welfare state. The method adapted to this goal was not the tactic of insurrection but the "democratic proletarian" form of battle.

Among the new apostles of the legal road to power none was more vociferous than the great theorist, Kautsky, whose revolutionary vulcanism was a thing of the past. He republished the following:

"In the degree that democratic institutions are effective in a given country, the so-called peaceful method of the class struggle, which limits itself to non-military means, to parliamentarism, strikes, newspaper agitation, demonstrations and similar means of pressure, enjoys the greater prospect of success. For these reasons I expect that the social revolution of the proletariat will assume quite another form from that of the bourgeoisie, that... the proletarian revolution will be fought out everywhere, wherever democracy has taken root, with peaceful economic, parliamentary, and moral weapons, and not through violence."²

¹ Kautsky, *Die Diktatur des Proletariats* (Vienna, 1919), p. 60.

² *Weg zur Macht* (1909), reprinted in his *Demokratie oder Diktatur* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 26-7.