

# MAY DAY IN GERMANY

(Special Correspondence.)

Berlin, May 2, 1911.

May day in a large European city, what a prospect for an American revolutionist who for years has been fed on stories of working class deeds of prowess performed on this day of all days in the year. Although somewhat biased and sophisticated I'll confess that I awaited the approach of this day with more than ordinary interest. When it finally arrived I got up early in the morning and hurried out into the streets in order to take a look at the limping capitalism, lamed by the desertion of thousands of its most necessary slaves on this festive day of labor. But what a disappointment, everything seemed as usual; the trolley cars were running with matter of fact regularity, the young, boy street sweepers were dodging about among the ordinary volume of traffic, etc. Everything wore its ordinary aspect, whereas I had expected to find the city's life metamorphosed from its usual humdrum aspect into a day of celebration, the streets full of soldiers, etc. Another idol destroyed.

The May Day celebration in Berlin is a thing hated by those who should do the most to uphold and develop it; namely, the Socialist labor leaders. At best they only suffer it to exist because they cannot suddenly abolish it without running the risk of incurring disastrous consequences to themselves inflicted by aroused and incensed workers to whom May Day is yet full of meaning. They hate it because it is a constant menace to the success of their social peace schemes; to their tying the working class hands and feet with contracts; to the perpetuation of the political lie that the working class on the economic field is powerless before the modern capitalistic organization, that it must win its emancipation on the political field. These political leaders know that the May Day celebration may any year provoke an industrial war which would scatter their beloved contracts and political organization to the four winds, which would give the working class an inkling of the vast power it possesses on the economic field and introduce the dreaded idea of the general strike and direct action tactics into Germany.

They freely admit that the idea of the general strike and that of the conquest of the political powers are incompatible. The workers can have but one or the other as their ultimate goal. The furthering of the political action idea demands as far as possible economic peace between employers and workers. If there must be war between them it must be limited to as small compass as possible. All tendencies of vast masses of workers to strike together, especially along lines of general strikes must be repressed else the workers will get an inkling of their economic power and neglect the political action. The May Day semi-general strike celebration thus forms a very great danger to the political action  
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movement and receives but scant courtesy from its leaders, who are likewise the leaders of the unions.

For years these men have singlehandedly "knifed" the May Day celebration, until now it is only a skeleton of its former self. This they have done by "throwing cold water" on the celebration, making it difficult for the locked out workers to get strike benefits (the employers usually out-employ those who take May Day off) and causing certain categories of "indispensable" workers, etc. They are now nursing a position to have May Day celebrated on the first Sunday in May. It wouldn't be surprising if this plan were shortly inflicted on the international movement. Thus to kill two birds with one stone; the sacred contract would remain clear of danger and all fear of a general strike or lockout with the dangerous consequences to the political movement would be averted.

The form of the celebration here is very characteristic of the efforts of these leaders to keep the workers from acting in concert or developing any enthusiasm. Each union holds its own celebration. No general demonstration, as at Paris, for instance, is attempted. The socialists are too law and order to break the anti-demonstration laws. At least that is what they say, though the real reason is that they fear to bring about trouble that might lead to a general strike. I attended the largest of these meetings, that of the "Woodworker Union." It was well attended, possibly 15,000 workers were present.

The affair was of the ordinary German type, lots of beer, good singing by the male choir, police on platform, a "vote 'em out" talk, etc.

While we were thus celebrating with due decorum, the French workers were having a real celebration. In Paris the police Emperor Lepine forbade the proposed demonstration, but the lawless syndicalists held it in spite of him. In the resulting collisions between the police and soldiers and workers, there were over a hundred wounded. "Vorwärts" the central organ of the S. D. party gave the Paris demonstration about 20 lines of its valuable space. Some bourgeois papers gave it a full column. Such suppression of working class news is only one of the hundreds of means of keeping the German workers from getting the solidarity idea into their minds. Besides anything that smacks of syndicalism is strictly taboo by the S. D. leaders.

Yours for real working class solidarity,

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