

Crisis of German Social Democracy

By M. N. ROY.

The German social democratic leaders created the theory of coalition, as against the Marxian view that the road to Socialism lies through the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state and dictatorship of the proletariat. They thoroughly negated the Marxian conception of the state as the organ of class dictatorship. They, led by Kautsky, maintained that the characteristic feature of the last stages of the class struggle is not armed conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, ending in the suppression of the former by the latter, but a period of coalition governments, during which period the political power would gradually and peacefully pass over from the bourgeoisie to the working class through the operation of parliamentary democracy.

Correctness of Marxian Theory.

Even before the Russian Revolution, Lenin theoretically combated and exposed the counter-revolutionary nature of the Kautskyan conception of the state. The Russian Revolution and the general unmasking of democracy after the war proved the correctness of the Marxian theory of the state. Nevertheless, the social democratic leaders still held the masses bound by the spell of parliamentary democracy, and promised to guide them to Socialism through coalition.

Germany is the home of the social democracy theory of coalition, and it is in Germany that the theory has been put to test only to be exposed for what it really is—counter-revolutionary. Coalition with the bourgeoisie has been practiced by the social democratic leaders in many countries, in different forms. Even in the opening years of the present century a Millerand in France and a John Burns in Britain sat in capitalist cabinets.

Coalition a General Policy.

But it was not till parliamentary democracy completely broke down as result of the world war, that coalition with the bourgeoisie became the general social democratic policy. Even then, there was a common form of coalition. For example, in Britain it takes a very different form which should be separately treated. In Germany, however, the coalition has been and is being practised in the classical form, so to say. And the policy of coalition has not brought the working class nearer to Socialism; but it has at last landed the German socialist democratic party in a severe crisis, the result of which will be the liberation of the masses from the influence of reformism. And the crisis in the German social democratic party represents the crisis of social democracy as a whole throughout the world.

Latest Coalition Cabinet.

After the general election on May 20, a coalition government was formed with a social democratic "head of the government" frankly accepted the dictation of the bourgeoisie at least on three occasions whenever vital issues of class interests were involved.

Firstly, under the pressure of the big bourgeoisie (to have the party representing the heavy in-

dustry enter the coalition) the social democratic ministers were freed from all responsibility to their party; secondly, the social democratic ministers supported the construction of the new German navy cynically violating their principal election pledge; and thirdly, they co-operated with the industrial magnates in the latter's attack upon the metal workers of the Ruhr.

In all these three cases, together with many more of comparatively minor importance, the erroneousness of the social democratic conception of the state was exposed. It became clear that, under parliamentary democracy, the state remains an organ of bourgeois dictatorship, notwithstanding the participation of a working class party in the administration of its affairs.

Betray Workers.

It also became clear that social democratic ministers of a parliamentary democratic state cannot in the least promote or defend the interests of the working class (even if they sincerely want to do so); on the contrary, they can but aid the bourgeoisie to stabilize their power. Coalition is not the way to Socialism; it is a weapon of the fight against Socialism.

The eyes of the social democratic workers, not only in Germany, but throughout the world, who honestly believed power by exploiting the possibilities of parliamentary democracy, should be opened by the experience gained in Germany during the last six months.

Ruhr Sell-Out

Let alone the vital question of political power. Even the immediate economic interests of the working class cannot be guaranteed under a coalition government. When, three months ago, the rank and file of the party demanded that the social democratic ministers should withdraw from the coalition government, were they obliged to approve of the construction of battleships, the ministers replied that it would be impractical to do so, for by the control of the state-apparatus it was possible to make valuable economic and social acquisitions for the working class. Presently, about a quarter of a million metal workers were locked out in the Ruhr. The employers demonstratively refused to abide by the verdict of the social democratic minister of Labor about a small increase of wages in keeping with the cost of living.

The coalition was in a crisis which was overcome by the readiness of the social democratic ministers to act as the administrators of the capitalist state, against the workers, in support of the employers. As long as the bourgeoisie own and control the means of production in a given country, the state is the organ of their power, and must do their bidding. As the minister of this state, the social democrat must take his orders from the bourgeoisie and thus betray the workers. And the bourgeoisie cannot be deprived of their ownership and control of the means of production so long as they remain in possession of the state-power.

Open Counter-Revolution

The super-class theory of state, and the policy of coalition, however,

are not error on the part of the social democratic leaders. If these were honestly mistaken, experience would have taught them before long, for they are not stupid. They purposely elaborated the theory and formulated the policy with the object of diverting the proletariat from the path of revolution.

As conscious and consistent counter-revolutionaries, the social democratic leaders do not hesitate, when necessary, as in Germany today, to act openly in defence of the capitalist state. And when they finally are obliged to do so, the eyes of their followers are opened. The revolt of these against the treacherous leaders indicates the crisis of social democracy. Failing to deceive the masses by reformist illusions, the social democratic leaders join hands with the bourgeoisie in stemming the rising tide of revolution by wielding the state-power as members of coalition governments.

The action of the German social democratic leaders during the last six months clearly shows that their policy of coalition is dictated exclusively by the desire to hinder the revolution. One even need not be a Marxist to have this appreciation of the social democratic leaders. The bourgeoisie also find in the social democratic leaders enemies of revolution. For example, dealing with the resolution of the social democratic minister of the interior, Severing, to use summary power for liquidating the struggle in the Ruhr on the terms of the employers, the famous German liberal journalist, George Bernhard wrote: "a reasonable exercise of the state-power always aids evolution, which hinders revolution."

Swing to Left

Let us chronicle the facts characterizing the application of the policy of coalition. The last general elections held in May returned the social democrats as the single largest group in the Reichstag as well as in the Prussian Landtag. The balance of power inside the national, Prussian and several other state parliaments distinctly inclined to the reverse. The nationalist predominance was replaced by a swing to the left.

Out of the 25 millions (in round numbers) votes cast in the Reichstag election, 12.5 millions were given to the two working class (social democratic and Communist) parties. The remainder was distributed among the six leading bourgeois parties. While all the bourgeois parties without exception lost, the votes polled by the social democratic and Communist Parties were nearly 2 million more than in the previous election in 1924. The German nationalist party (monarchist, representing mainly reactionary landed interests) lost 30 seats.

The people's party (predominantly monarchist, representing heavy industry) lost 12 seats. The centre party (catholic, representing industry) lost 7 seats. The democratic party (republican, representing liberal intelligentsia and the urban petty bourgeoisie) lost 7 seats. The fascists were practically swept off the board. On the other hand, the social democratic party gained 49 seats more; and the Communist Party 10.

To Be Continued