

The Prospects of the Communist Party of Germany and the Question of Bolshevisation

Interview with Herzog, Member of the G.C.P.

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First Question (Herzog). Do you think that political and economic conditions in the democratic-capitalist republic of Germany are such that the working class will have to wage a struggle for power in the more or less immediate future?

Answer (Stalin). It would be difficult to give a strictly definite answer to this question if it were a matter of dates and not of trends. That the present situation, as regards both international and internal conditions, differs substantially from that in 1923 needs no proof. That, however, does not preclude the possibility of the situation changing abruptly in favour of a revolution in the immediate future as a result of possible important changes in the external situation. The instability of the international situation is a guarantee that this assumption may become very probable.

Second question. Considering the present economic situation and the present relation of forces, shall we need a longer preparatory period in which to win over the majority of the proletariat (the task which Lenin set the Communist Parties of all countries as an extremely important condition for the conquest of political power)?

Answer. As regards the economic situation, I am able to judge the matter only in the light of the general data that I have at my disposal. I think that the Dawes Plan ¹ has already produced some results, which have led to a relative stabilisation of the situation. The influx of American capital into German industry, the stabilisation of the currency, the improvement that has taken place in a number of highly important branches of German industry—which by no means signifies a radical recovery of Germany's economy—and lastly, some improvement in the material conditions of the working class—all this was bound to strengthen the position of the bourgeoisie in Germany to some extent. That is, so to speak, the "positive" side of the Dawes Plan.

But the Dawes Plan also has "negative" sides, which are bound inevitably to make themselves felt at some definite period and to demolish the "positive" results of this plan. Undoubtedly, the Dawes Plan imposes a double yoke upon the German proletariat, the yoke of home and the yoke of foreign capital. The contradiction between the expansion of German industry and the shrinking of the foreign markets for this industry, the discrepancy between the hypertrophied demands of the Entente and the maximum ability of German national economy to meet these demands—all this inevitably worsens the conditions of the proletariat, the small peasants, office employees and the intelligentsia, and is bound to lead to an upheaval, to a direct struggle for the conquest of power by the proletariat.

That circumstance must not, however, be regarded as the only favourable condition for a German revolution. In order that this revolution may be victorious, it is also necessary that the Communist Party should represent the majority of the working class, that it should become the decisive force in the working class. Social-Democracy must be exposed and routed, it must be reduced to an insignificant minority in the working class. Without that, it is useless even to think of the dictatorship of the proletariat. If the workers are to achieve victory, they must be inspired by a single will, they must be led by a single party, which enjoys the indubitable confidence of the majority of the working class. If there are two competing parties of equal strength within the working class, a lasting victory is impossible even under favourable external circumstances. Lenin was the first to lay special emphasis on this in the period before the October Revolution as a most essential condition for the victory of the proletariat.

It could be considered that the situation most favourable for a revolution would be one in which an internal crisis in Germany and the decisive growth of the Communist Party's forces coincided with grave complications in the camp of Germany's external enemies.

I think that the absence of this latter circumstance in the revolutionary period of 1923 was by no means the least important unfavourable factor.

Third question. You said that the C.P.G. must have the majority of the workers behind it. Too little attention has been paid to this aim hitherto. What, in your opinion, must be done to convert the C.P.G. into such an energetic party, with a progressively increasing recruiting power?

Answer. Some comrades think that strengthening the Party and Bolshevising it mean expelling all dissenters from it. That is wrong, of course. Social-Democracy can be exposed and reduced to an insignificant minority in the working class only in the course of the day-to-day struggle for the concrete needs of the working class. The Social-Democrats must be pilloried not on the basis of planetary questions, but on the basis of the day-to-day struggle of the working class for improving its material and political conditions; in this, questions concerning wages, hours, housing conditions, insurance, taxation, unemployment, high cost of living, and so forth, must play a most important if not the decisive role. To hit the Social-Democrats day after day on the basis of these questions, exposing their treachery—such is the task.

But that task would not be fully carried out if those everyday practical questions were not linked up with the fundamental questions of Germany's international and internal situation, and if, in all its work, the Party failed to deal with all those everyday questions from the standpoint of revolution and the conquest of power by the proletariat.

But such a policy can be conducted only by a party which is headed by cadres of leaders sufficiently experienced to be able to take advantage of every single blunder of Social-Democracy in order to strengthen the Party, and possessing sufficient theoretical training not to lose sight of the prospects of revolutionary development because of partial successes.

It is this, chiefly, that explains why the question of the leading cadres of the Communist Parties in general, including those of the Communist Party of Germany, is one of the vital questions of Bolshevisation.

To achieve Bolshevisation it is necessary to bring about at least certain fundamental conditions, without which no Bolshevisation of the Communist Parties will be possible.

1) The Party must regard itself not as an appendage of the parliamentary electoral machinery, as the Social-Democratic Party in fact does, and not as a gratuitous supplement to the trade unions, as certain Anarcho-Syndicalist elements sometimes claim it should be, but as the *highest* form of class association of the proletariat, the function of which is to *lead* all the other forms of proletarian organisations, from the trade unions to the Party's group in parliament.

2) The Party, and especially its leading elements, must thoroughly master the revolutionary theory of Marxism, which is inseparably connected with revolutionary practice.

- 3) The Party must draw up slogans and directives not on the basis of stock formulas and historical analogies, but as the result of a careful analysis of the concrete internal and international conditions of the revolutionary movement, and it must, without fail, take into account the experience of revolutions in all countries.
- 4) The Party must test the correctness of these slogans and directives in the crucible of the revolutionary struggle of the masses.
- 5) The entire work of the Party, particularly if Social-Democratic traditions have not yet been eradicated in it, must be reorganised on new, revolutionary lines, so that every step, every action, taken by the Party should naturally serve to revolutionise the masses, to train and educate the broad masses of the working class in the revolutionary spirit.
- 6) In its work the Party must be able to combine the strictest adherence to principle (not to be confused with sectarianism!) with the maximum of ties and contacts with the masses (not to be confused with khvostism!); without this, the Party will be unable not only to teach the masses but also to learn from them, it will be unable not only to lead the masses and raise them to its own level but also to heed their voice and anticipate their urgent needs.
- 7) In its work the Party must be able to combine an uncompromising revolutionary spirit (not to be confused with revolutionary adventurism!) with the maximum of flexibility and manoeuvring ability (not to be confused with opportunism!); without this, the Party will be unable to master all the forms of struggle and organisation, will be unable to link the daily interests of the proletariat with the fundamental interests of the proletarian revolution, and to combine in its work the legal with the illegal struggle.
- 8) The Party must not cover up its mistakes, it must not fear criticism; it must improve and educate its cadres by learning from its own mistakes.
- 9) The Party must be able to recruit for its main leading group the best elements of the advanced fighters who are sufficiently devoted to the cause to be genuine spokesmen of the aspirations of the revolutionary proletariat, and who are sufficiently experienced to become real leaders of the proletarian revolution, capable of applying the tactics and strategy of Leninism.
- 10) The Party must systematically improve the social composition of its organisations and rid itself of corrupting opportunist elements with a view to achieving the utmost solidarity.
- 11) The Party must achieve iron proletarian discipline based on ideological solidarity, clarity concerning the aims of the movement, unity of practical action and an understanding of the Party's tasks by the mass of the Party membership.
- 12) The Party must systematically verify the execution of its decisions and directives; without this, these decisions and directives are in danger of becoming empty promises, which can only rob the Party of the confidence of the broad proletarian masses.

In the absence of these and similar conditions, Bol-shevism is just an empty sound.

Fourth question. You said that, in addition to the negative sides of the Dawes Plan, the second condition for the conquest of power by the C.P.G. is a situation in which the Social-Democratic Party stands fully exposed before the masses, and when it is no longer an important force in the working class. In view of actual circumstances, we are a long way from that. That is obviously the effect of the shortcomings and weaknesses of the Party's present methods of work. How can these be removed? What is your opinion of the results of the December 1924 elections, in which the Social-Democratic Party — an utterly corrupt and rotten party—far from losing votes, actually gained about two million votes?

Answer. That is not due to shortcomings in the work of the Communist Party of Germany. It is primarily due to the fact that the American loans and the influx of American capital, plus the stabilisation of the currency, which

have somewhat improved the situation, have created the illusion that the internal and external contradictions connected with Germany's situation can be completely eliminated. It was on this illusion that German Social-Democracy rode into the present Reichstag as if on a white horse. Wels is now preening himself on his election victory; evidently he does not realise that he is claiming another's victory as his own. It was not the victory of German Social-Democracy, but of the Morgan group. Wels has been and remains merely one of Morgan's agents.

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Notes

1. The Dawes Plan was the name given to the scheme for the payment of reparations by Germany drawn up by an international committee of experts under the chairmanship of the American financier, General Dawes, and endorsed at the London Conference of Allied States on August 16, 1924 (concerning the Dawes Plan see this volume, pp. 277-79).

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