

THE LIVING AGE

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THE DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

MANY points about the making of the German revolution are left obscure by the accounts hitherto published in this country. It is, however, possible to reconstruct its history from the official and other documents which have been published from time to time in the German press. This we propose to do, and as the documents are themselves of great historical interest and importance, we shall quote them in full.

The first act or prelude in the revolution was the naval mutiny at Kiel on November 5. It spread to Bavaria on November 7, and broke out in the capital of the Empire on November 9. It is probable that Saturday, November 9, was deliberately chosen beforehand to recall the Russian revolution of the previous year. It is still uncertain to what extent the revolution was prepared and concerted; it was, however, certainly not wholly spontaneous. The only statement which we have is one by the Majority Party to the effect that their leaders were for several weeks in close consultation with the factory workers — a significant fact when it is remembered that the revolution was actually accomplished through a general strike of factory workers. The truth seems to be that the Majority

Party (and probably many of the leading Minority or Independent Socialists) were, even as late as November 6, opposed to any revolutionary action, but as the military situation became more desperate, they attempted to compromise by insisting upon such drastic steps as the abdication of the Kaiser. On November 4 and 6, the Majority paper *Vorwärts* was urgently appealing to the workers and warning them against agitators, flysheets, Bolshevism, and 'Russian conditions,' or, in one word, revolution. Then, suddenly, the Socialist papers began to demand the Kaiser's abdication. Even on the morning of Friday, November 8, the Socialist Ministers, Ebert and Scheidemann, seem to have thought it possible that the revolution might be staved off by the Kaiser's resignation, and they issued the following ultimatum to Prince Max's Government:

*Announcement of an Ultimatum to the
Bourgeois Government Issued by
the Socialist Majority Party, Ex-
piring at Mid-day on Friday, No-
vember 8, Demanding the Kaiser's
Abdication.*

Peace is assured — in a few hours the armistice will have begun. Only let there now be no thoughtless acts, such as would

cause the bloodshed which has ended at the front to reappear again at home. The Social Democratic Party is exerting all its power to get your demands fulfilled as quickly as may be!

Therefore, the Executive of the Social Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Parliamentary Party have put the following final demands to the Imperial Chancellor:

- (1) Permission to hold the meetings forbidden to-day.
- (2) Instructions for extreme caution to police and military.
- (3) Abdication of the Kaiser and Crown Prince by Friday mid-day.
- (4) Strengthening of the Social Democratic element in the Government.
- (5) Conversion of the Prussian Ministry to conform to the programme of the Majority Parties of the Reichstag.

If no satisfactory answer is given by Friday mid-day, then the Social Democrats will resign from the Government.

Expect further news from us in the course of Friday afternoon.

THE EXECUTIVES OF THE SOCIAL
DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND OF THE
SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMEN-
TARY PARTY.

This ultimatum was to expire on Friday mid-day; as a matter of fact, the time was extended until Friday midnight. But in the interval events moved with great rapidity; and when, in the 'early hour' of Saturday morning, the Kaiser at last consented to retire into Holland, it was no longer merely a question of the resignation of Socialist Ministers but of revolution. On Saturday morning many workers struck work spontaneously, and at 1 P.M. the following flysheet, calling a general strike, was issued from the offices of *Vorwärts*:

Notice, Calling the General Strike, Published in an Extra Edition of Vorwärts, at 1 O'Clock on Saturday, November 9.

GENERAL STRIKE.

The Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin has decided to call the General Strike. All factories are to stop. The necessary feeding of the population will continue. A

large part of the garrison has put itself at the disposal of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in units armed with machine guns and rifles. The movement is to be led jointly by the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the Independent Party of Germany. Workers and soldiers! See to it that quiet and order are maintained! Long live the Socialist Republic!

THE WORKERS AND SOLDIERS'
COUNCIL.

A few hours were sufficient for accomplishing 'the bloodless revolution,' and in the afternoon motor cars dashed through Berlin with the following notice announcing the success of the revolution:

Flysheet Issued in Berlin on the Afternoon of Saturday, November 9, Announcing the Success of the Revolution.

WORKERS, SOLDIERS, FELLOW CITIZENS!
The Free State has come!
Emperor and Crown Prince have abdicated!

Fritz Ebert, the Chairman of the Social Democratic Party, has become Imperial Chancellor and is forming in the Empire and in Prussia a new government of men who have the confidence of the working population in town and country, of the workers, and of the soldiers. Herewith public power has passed into the hands of the people. A National Assembly to settle the Constitution will meet as quickly as possible.

Workers, soldiers, citizens! The victory of the people has been won; it must not be dishonored by thoughtlessness. Economic life and transport must be maintained at all costs, so that the people's government may be secured under all circumstances.

Obeys all the recommendations of the people's government and its representatives. It is acting in the closest union with the workers and soldiers.

Long live the German People's Republic!

THE EXECUTIVE OF THE SOCIAL
DEMOCRACY OF GERMANY.
THE WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS'
COUNCIL.

Then Scheidemann appeared on the balcony of the Reichstag and addressed the crowd in the following speech:

Scheidemann's Speech to the People from the Balcony of the Reichstag on the Afternoon of November 9.

WORKERS AND SOLDIERS! The German people have won all along the line. What is old and corrupt has yielded. Militarism has yielded. The Hohenzollerns have abdicated. Long live the German Republic! Ebert has been proclaimed Imperial Chancellor. Comrade Ebert is thereby commissioned to form a new government. All Social Democratic groups will belong to this government. Now our task is not to let this glorious victory, this complete victory of the German people be besmirched. Therefore, I beg you to see to it that there is no disturbance to the public safety. We must be able to be proud of this day forever. Nothing must happen which might later be thrown in our teeth.

Quiet, order, and security, these are what we need now. The General commanding in the marches and the War Minister Scheuch, will each receive an adviser. Deputy Göhre will sign all statements of the War Minister as well as Scheuch. It is, therefore, your duty now to respect all statements signed by Ebert, Scheuch, and Göhre. See to it that the new German Republic which we are setting up is not interfered with by anything. Long live the German Republic!

Prince Max handed over the Chancellorship to the Socialist Ebert, and announced the abdication of the Kaiser. But the Kaiser himself waited for nineteen days in Holland before signing his formal Act of Abdication.

Act of Abdication, Signed by the Emperor William II at Amerongen in Holland on November 28, 1918.

I hereby renounce forever the rights to the Crown of Prussia and the rights to the German Imperial Crown therewith bound up. At the same time I release all officials of the German Empire and of Prussia, as also all officers, non-commissioned officers, and rank and file of the navy, the Prussian army, and the troops of the Federal contingents, of their oath of loyalty, which they took to me as their Emperor, King, and Commander-in-Chief. I expect of them that until the German Empire is ordered anew they will help those men who hold the actual power in Germany to protect the German people against the threatening

dangers of anarchy, famine, and foreign domination.

Given by our own hand and under our own seal,

At Amerongen, November 28, 1918.

WILLIAM.

The new Government immediately announced its accession to power in a flysheet, and its policy in a decree, but its programme could not be declared until its composition had finally been agreed upon. Saturday afternoon and evening were occupied by negotiations between the Majority and Minority Socialists, and the demands of the Minority and the answer of the Majority are shown in the statement issued by the latter at 8.30 P.M. Agreement as to the conditions of a Coalition Government were at last reached. It was to consist of three Majority Socialists, Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg, and three Minority Socialists, Haase, Dittmann, and Barth. This Cabinet of Six — they call themselves indifferently *The People's Commissioners*, or *The Imperial Government (Reichsregierung)*, i.e., Central Government for the whole Empire — issued its programme on November 12:

Flysheet Issued on November 9 by Ebert to Inform the Public That He Had Taken Over the Chancellorship.

The previous Imperial Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, has, with the consent of the various Secretaries of State, handed over to me the conduct of the Imperial Chancellor's business. I am in process of forming the new Government by agreement with the parties, and will shortly inform the public of the result. The new Government will be a People's Government. Its aim must be to give the German people peace as soon as possible, to secure for it the liberty which it has won. Fellow citizens! I beg you all for your support in the difficult work which awaits us. You know how heavily the war threatens the people's food supply, the first prerequisite of political life.

The political revolution must not disturb the feeding of the population. It must remain the first duty of all in town and in

country not to hinder but to further the production of food and its transport into the towns. Want of food supplies means plunder and robbery, with misery for all. The poorest would suffer most, the industrial workers would be hit the most hardy. Whoever interferes with the supplies of food or other objects of necessity, or with the means of transport necessary to their distribution commits the heaviest sin against the community.

Fellow citizens! I beg you all most earnestly: Leave the streets. See that peace and order are maintained.

(Signed) EBERT,
Imperial Chancellor.

Decree Issued by the New Revolutionary Government on the Evening of November 9.

COMRADES!

This day has completed the freeing of the people. The Emperor has abdicated, his eldest son has renounced the throne. The Social Democratic Party has taken over the Government, and has offered entry into the Government to the Independent Social Democratic Party on the basis of complete equality. The new Government will arrange for an election of a Constituent National Assembly, in which all citizens of either sex who are over 20 years of age will take part with absolutely equal rights. After that it will resign its powers into the hands of the new representatives of the people.

Until then its duties are:

To conclude an armistice and to conduct peace negotiations; to assure the feeding of the population.

To secure for the men in the army the quickest possible orderly return to their families and to wage-earning work.

For this the democratic administration must begin at once to work smoothly. Only by means of faultless working can the worst disasters be avoided. Let each man, therefore, realize his responsibility to the whole. Human life is sacred. Property is to be protected against illegal interference. Whoever dishonors this glorious movement by vulgar crimes is an enemy of the people and must be treated as such. But whoever co-operates with honest self-sacrifice in our work, on which the whole future depends, may say of himself that at the greatest moment of the world's history he joined in to save the people.

We face enormous tasks. Laboring men

and women, in town and country, men in the soldier's uniform and men in the workman's blouse, help, all of you!

EBERT, SCHEIDEMANN, LÄNDSBERG.

Answer of the Majority Socialist Party to the Demands of the Independent Socialists Concerning the Basis on Which They Should Both Agree to Form One Government, Issued 8.30 P.M. on November 9.

TO THE EXECUTIVE OF THE INDEPENDENT SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

Guided by the sincere wish to achieve union, we must make clear to you our attitude to your demands. You demand:

(1) *That Germany is to become a Socialist Republic.* Answer: This demand is the goal of our own policy; nevertheless, it is for the people and the Constituent National Assembly to decide.

(2) *In this Republic the whole executive, legislative, and judicial power is to be exclusively in the hands of the chosen men of the total laboring population and the soldiers.* Answer: If this demand means the dictatorship of a part, a class, without the majority behind it, then we must reject the demand, because it would run counter to our democratic principles.

(3) *Exclusion from the Government of bourgeois members.* Answer: This demand we must reject, because to accede to it would seriously endanger the feeding of the people, if not make it impossible.

(4) *The participation of the Independent shall only be valid for three days, as temporary measure, in order to create a Government capable of concluding the armistice.* Answer: We hold that a coöperation of the Social Democratic groups is necessary at least until the meeting of the Constituent Assembly.

(5) *The Departmental Ministers shall count only as technical assistants to the Cabinet, which alone shall take decisions.* Answer: We agree to this demand.

(6) *Equal powers to the joint Presidents of the Cabinet.* Answer: We are for the equal powers of all members of the Cabinet; nevertheless, the Constituent Assembly will have to decide on this.

It is to be hoped from the good sense of the Independent Social Democratic Party that it will achieve a union with the Social Democratic Party.

The Executive of the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

(Signatures.)

Programme of the New Revolutionary Government, Announced by the Berlin Cabinet of Six.

TO THE GERMAN PEOPLE!

The Government which the Revolution has produced, whose political convictions are purely Socialist, is undertaking the task of realizing the Socialist programme. They now make the following announcements, which will have the force of law:

- (1) The state of siege is abolished.
- (2) The right of association and meeting is subject to no limitations, not even for officials and State workers.
- (3) The censorship ceases to exist. The censorship of plays is abolished.
- (4) Expression of opinion, whether by word of mouth or in writing, is free.
- (5) Freedom of religious practice is guaranteed. No one shall be compelled to perform any religious act.
- (6) An amnesty is granted for all political punishments. Trials now proceeding for such crimes are quashed.
- (7) The Law of (compulsory) National Auxiliary Service is abolished with the exception of the provisions referring to the settlement of disputes.
- (8) The Domestic Services Decrees become null and void; also the Exceptional Laws against rural workers.
- (9) The laws protecting Labor, which were abandoned at the beginning of the war, are herewith restored. Further orders of a social-political nature will be published shortly. On January 1, 1919, at latest, the Eight-Hour Day will come into force. The Government will do all that is possible to secure sufficient opportunities of work. An Order *re* the support of unemployed is ready. It divides the burden between the Empire (Federal), State, and Municipality. In the sphere of sickness insurance the insurance obligation will be increased beyond the present limit of 2,500 Marks (£125). The housing difficulty will be dealt with by the building of houses. Efforts will be made to secure regular feeding of the people. The Government will maintain ordered production, will protect property against private interference, as well as the freedom and security of individuals. All elections to public bodies are immediately to be carried out according to the equal, secret, direct, and universal franchise on the basis of proportional representation for all male and female persons of not less than 20 years of age; this franchise

also holds for the Constituent Assembly, concerning which more detailed orders will follow.

Berlin, November 12, 1918.

EBERT, HAASE, SCHEIDEMANN,
LANDSBERG, DITTMANN, BARTH.

The appeal to abstain from disorder so as not to imperil the food supply, which appears in these early documents, is repeated in a vast number of statements issued by every kind of authority all over the country. It shows that from the first moment of the revolution the new Government were as urgent with their own people on this subject as Doctor Solf has been with the Allies. In a second appeal, issued by Ebert on the first day of the revolution, the statement is made that it is proposed to retain the bourgeois administrative services in order to avoid confusion and breakdown of supply. This is typical of innumerable other statements issued in other parts of the country.

The question of public order was naturally bound up with that of maintaining discipline in the army. The lesson of the Russian revolution is shown by the new Government's determination to maintain discipline and the command of officer over private. At the same time, the old military system could not be retained, and the Government defined the relations which were to exist between officers and men in a very interesting telegram to the High Command. The attitude of the Army Command in not challenging the revolution made the Government's path easier in this delicate and difficult matter. Hindenburg's announcement that he would coöperate with the Berlin Government has appeared in our press; statements, for which we have no space here, show that the local military authorities followed suit:

Telegram of the People's Government in Berlin to the High Command, Defining the Relations of Soldiers to Officers and Regulating Military Discipline; Issued by the Wolff Bureau on November 12.

The People's Government is inspired by the wish to see each of our soldiers return to his home as quickly as possible after his unspeakable sufferings and unheard-of deprivations. But this goal can only be reached if the demobilization is carried out according to an orderly plan. If single troops stream back at their own pleasure, they place themselves, their comrades, and their homes in the greatest danger. The consequences would necessarily be chaos, famine, and want. The People's Government expects of you the strictest self-discipline in order to avoid immeasurable calamity. We desire the High Command to inform the army in the field of this declaration of the People's Government, and to issue the following orders:

(1) The relations between officer and rank and file are to be built up on mutual confidence. Prerequisites to this are willing submission of the ranks to the officer, and comradely treatment by the officer of the ranks.

(2) The officer's superiority in rank remains. Unqualified obedience in service is of prime importance for the success of the return home to Germany. Military discipline and army order must therefore be maintained under all circumstances.

(3) The Soldiers' Councils have an advisory voice in maintaining confidence between officer and rank and file in questions of food, leave, the infliction of disciplinary punishments. Their highest duty is to try to prevent disorder and mutiny.

(4) The same food for officers, officials, and rank and file.

(5) The same bonuses to be added to the pay, and the same allowances for service in the field for officers and rank and file.

(6) Arms are to be used against members of our own people only in case of self-defense and to prevent robberies.

(Signed) EBERT, HAASE, SCHEIDEMANN, LANDSBERG, BARTH.

The last document contains the statement that the Soldiers' Councils are to have 'an advisory voice.' This

brings us to the obscure subject of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils at their relation to the Government. The Councils are of two kinds: (1) the Soldiers' Councils, formed at the front and in garrison towns and including officers, and (2) Workers' and Soldiers' Councils formed of civilians among those soldiers who had returned home. The first give a strong support to the new Government, and demand, with that Government, that a Constituent Assembly shall be summoned as soon as possible, and shall determine the future Constitution before any elaborate 'socialization of industry' is attempted. It is said by some that the attitude of the Soldiers' Councils influenced by the presence of officers in them, but it is probable that the returning soldier supports the Berlin and other Governments because what he dreads is disorganization and unemployment. The Government obtains their support by promising employment and the rationing of work through an eight-hour day. This appears clearly in the following document:

The Imperial Cabinet to the Returning Soldier.

TO THE RETURNING SOLDIERS!

COMRADES! The German Republic heartily bids you welcome home! You were forth for a country, in which you had to say, in which a handful of men in authority had shared out between themselves power and possession. You were but allowed to be silent and to fight, while hundreds of thousands had to be silent and die before your eyes.

To-day you return to your own country in which no one in future has anything to say or to decide except the people itself which is now receiving you once more as members. The revolution has broken the spell: You and we are free, Germany is free. Our Socialist Republic is to enter the League of Nations as the freest of all. And you are not only to find all the political rights of which hitherto you have been deprived; your country is also

become your possession and your inheritance in an economic way, in that no one shall any more, with our consent, exploit you and enslave you.

The Imperial Government, which has been created and is being supported by the confidence of your comrades and of the workers, will get you work, protection while you work, and higher wages from your work. The eight-hour day, insurance for unemployment, creation of employment, development of sickness insurance, the solution of the housing question, socialization of those industries which are ready for it: everything is in process, is already partly law!

Come and be welcomed as the men who are to carry on the new Republic and its future. It is true you will find scarcity among us in foodstuffs, in all economic materials; there is distress and deprivation in the country. We can only get help from work in common, from action taken together. Only a Germany which has a Government secured and anchored in the workers and soldiers can get from our previous opponents what you have fought

The International Review

for and longed for during four years — peace!

Council of the People's Commissaries,
EBERT, HAASE, SCHEIDEMANN,
DITTMANN, LANDSBERG, BARTH.

It is feared in some quarters in Germany that with the demobilization of the army the true Soldiers' Councils will cease to exist and all power will come into the hands of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, where the Extremists of the Spartacus group exercise such power as they have. At the time of writing there has just been fighting in Berlin which seems to have left Ebert and the Majority Socialists still more firmly established in power. Conditions vary from place to place. In Berlin, from the outset, there has been some attempt to imitate the Russian Bolshevik theory, but for this men like Ebert, Scheidemann, Haase, Bernstein, and Kautsky have no sympathy.

WAS LUDENDORFF TO BLAME?

IN 1916 Hindenburg declared to an Austrian journalist that no one on earth could separate him from Ludendorff. This statement he made *à propos* the attempts made by the former Government to do so, and also by members of certain circles, who are now busily engaged in trying to prove that Ludendorff is responsible for Germany's misfortunes, whereas the blame is to be found in quite another direction. These people are those who from the very beginning of the war regarded it simply as an opportunity for political power, and to whom a German victory meant an insuperable obstacle to the attainment of their aims. Ludendorff and Hindenburg have now been separated, we do not know precisely how or why; but one thing is certain, however, that Kaiser Wilhelm was induced to withdraw his confidence from General Ludendorff. When the latter realized this he tendered his resignation. It is merely a legend that Ludendorff fell because he refused to recognize the changed condition of affairs. On the contrary, he approved, and even urged, a change. It is also a legend — to use no stronger expression — that General Ludendorff at the last moment suddenly put before the former Government the demand that they should conclude an armistice within 24 hours. As a matter of fact, as far back as the middle of last August, Ludendorff told the Foreign Secretary that steps ought to be taken, primarily through Holland, to make arrangements to negotiate an armistice. This he did after the German defeat of August 8. That defeat caused a gap which could not be made good either by numbers or by splendid

moral. What course the German diplomats at that time really pursued is a matter of conjecture. We have no real data on which to form any unprejudiced opinion on the events of the middle of August, or the relations between Hindenburg and Ludendorff. The following, however, appears probable: When, during August, Hindenburg, in agreement with Ludendorff, approached the Government, and later on demanded of the latter an account of how matters stood diplomatically, neither of the generals had the slightest intention or idea of an armistice, which, of course, would mean the annihilation of the German Empire. The version that Ludendorff had demanded an armistice within 24 hours is certainly not correct. It is more probable that Ludendorff pressed for an armistice at the end of a time previously arranged by the Government itself. The General, moreover, at the time considered the situation extremely critical. A few days later his opinion was that the situation had changed for the better, and, as a matter of fact, he was correct in that view. He accordingly did all in his power to avert the impending political upheaval, but his efforts were in vain. His enemies had him in their power, the moment had arrived when they could overthrow the man they hated, and whose energy and courage they feared from a political standpoint. Doubtless, he would prove an insuperable obstacle to the carrying out of their revolutionary plans to the conclusion of a peace at any price. We may call to mind the state of public opinion at the time. If we could only have an armistice and could persuade our enemies of the