

**GERMAN SOCIAL
DEMOCRACY
DURING THE WAR**

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German Social Democracy During the War by Edwyn Bevan

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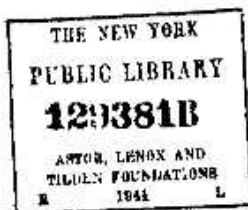
GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY DURING THE WAR

BY
EDWYN BEVAN



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PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to put together in a consecutive narrative the principal events which make up the history of the German Social Democrat Party from the outbreak of the Great War till the elevation of Count Hertling to the Imperial Chancellorship at the beginning of November 1917. Of course any account of German Social Democracy written in England at this period must be—to use a delightful phrase of the late Professor T. K. Cheyne's—"strongly marked with provisionality." This account is based upon the printed utterances—in papers, pamphlets, and books—of those who have themselves taken part in the events narrated: to that extent it is already possible to have first-hand data. Further, since the war literature produced by the opposing Social Democrat groups consists largely of mutual criticism and polemic, it is often possible to check one mode of representation by another. For a finally satisfactory account to be given, it will no doubt be necessary, not only that first-hand data should be available with regard to the separate facts, but that the person who constructs out of those facts a living whole should himself have been inside the movement and, grasping the inner forces at work, the interplay of personal influences, should select and order the facts in such a way as to exhibit their organic significance. That an English

131394

writer in the fourth year of the war cannot do. Yet the outlines are already established, and one may hope that if such an account as the present one would need a great deal of supplementing in the light of fuller knowledge, it would not need much correction. It seems of great importance that we in England should gain without delay such clearness as is now possible on the part played by Social Democracy during these fateful years in Germany.

A great deal of the material from which the account is derived is still dispersed in newspapers and periodicals (as will be seen by the footnotes), but a few books may be mentioned which have already put some of the material together. For the earlier part of the war we have the account written by a German Social Democrat of the extreme Nationalist wing, Konrad Haenisch, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie in und nach dem Weltkriege* (Berlin, 1916), and a book by Dr. Richard Berger (Catholic "Centrum" Party), *Fraktionsspaltung und Parteikrisis* (München in Gladbach, 1916), referred to as "Berger" in the footnotes—which, although ill-constructed and wooden, is useful in so far as it puts together a certain number of documents. On the other side one may call special attention to Eduard Bernstein's article "Der Riss in der Sozialdemokratie" in *Die Zukunft* of April 21, 1917. One may also mention *La Faillite de l'Internationale*, by Alexandre Zévaès (Paris, 1917), a book written apparently with a strong anti-Socialist bent, and *The Socialist Party in the Reichstag*, by P. G. La Chesnais (Fisher Unwin, 1915). I regret that I did not see, in time to make use of them, Berger's second volume, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie im dritten Kriegsjahr* (1917), or *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie während des Weltkrieges*, a little book, published posthumously,

PREFACE

vii

by the able Minority writer Gustav Eckstein, who died untimely in 1916, a comparatively young man.

* * * * *

A word must be added on the developments which have taken place since November 1917, since, apart from them, a false conclusion might be drawn from the story broken off at that point. My book traces the continuous growth of the anti-war Minority in numbers and influence during thirty-nine months of war. It is important, therefore, to realize that in the subsequent months this process has been suddenly reversed, and it is difficult to say for how much the Minority counts to-day. The explanation seems to be given in the extract with which this book concludes. The Minority grew, not because the German masses cared for "self-determination of nationalities" or "no annexations," or any other ideal principle, but because the bereavements and material discomforts of the war made them want peace above everything else, and the policy of the Minority leaders seemed to promise them peace most speedily. Since November they have been given a peace on the East, a peace of ruthless conquest, a peace which the Pan-Germans acclaim as their own, and the effect has been to draw the masses to the side of the Government. As to the conduct of the Majority leaders in face of the Russian peace, a great deal of sarcasm has been expended upon it. And it must be admitted that they present anything but a heroic figure in the eyes of history. It is a cruel position to have to swallow all your professed principles with the world looking on, to be reduced simply to shrugging the shoulders and saying: "Not, of course, a peace which we approve, but still a peace; and if one nation is going to trample