

The Soviet Idea in Germany

(Extracts from an Article in the "New Republic," August 6, by H. N. Brailsford.)

The Left had its own clear and decided idea of the function and future of the Councils. It intended that they should remain a class organization in the broad meaning of that word. Every genuine worker, including the salaried employer and the professional man, should have a vote for them, but no employer, no rentier, none who lived by the toil of others. I heard a debate on the draft of a new formal constitution in the Berlin Soviet during May. Some of the marginal cases were rather curious. The Left was quite ready, for example, to enfranchise doctors in ordinary practice, but it wanted to exclude doctors who make a living by keeping sanatoria in which they "exploit" the labor of junior doctors and nurses. The Right wished to include even the employer if he were himself active as manager and organizer; but in the Berlin Soviet, as it is today, the Left is dominant. The real driving forces of the movement, the extreme "Independents" like Daumig and Richard Muller, and of course the Communists, regarded Parliamentary institutions as obsolescent. They meant sooner or later to make Germany a "Rate-Republic;" in other words, to suppress the rival institutions and to make the Rate (Councils) the sole legislative and executive authorities. Any compromise they regarded as purely transitional.

For the moment the idea of compromise has won. The one permanent result of the March general strike was that the government promised to give the Workers' Councils a definite place in the German constitution. As yet, the scheme agreed upon between the Scheidemann cabinet and a delegation from the Berlin Soviet (in which at that time the "Majority" Socialists were leading) exists only in outline. It is a promise that the constitution shall recognize, or set up (1) Works' Committees representing all workers and employers in every factory, mine, etc. (2) Industrial Councils in every trade of the "Whitley" type to regulate the general conditions of production representing both employers and workers; (3) Chambers of work, representing employers, the professions and the workers of all trades in definite territorial districts; and (4) A Chamber of Work for the whole German realm, with a right of suggestion and consultation on all industrial and social-political legislation.

There is in this German compromise between the old forms of democracy with their basis in territorial representation and the new form with its basis in industry, a close parallel to the solution propounded even before the war, by our British Guild Socialists. The Germans have, however, reached their compromise mechanically. They find the state and the old form of democracy in existence, and they make terms with it but trouble themselves very little to assign it a suitable function. The Guild Socialist on the other hand does not merely tolerate or accept the "democratic" parliament; he regards it as the necessary representation of citizens regarded as consumers. His structure is no mere compromise; it is a recognition of the fact that the same person will act and vote somewhat differently, according as he is organized as consumer or producer. The German "Councils" movement, on the other hand, is thinking only of the worker as producer.

This interesting phase of social evolution in Germany was interrupted for a moment by the crisis over the terms of peace. The next few months will show whether it can be directed into the channels of a constitutional development. For my part, I am inclined to think that the class cleavage, sharpened intolerably by the miseries of war and the blockade, is too acute to admit of such compromises as the government or even Herr Kaliski propose. The Independents and the Communists scoff at the idea of any Chamber of Work in which the employing class has equal representation with the workers.

They are fanatically attached to the Council idea, not merely because it is a more supple and natural form of representation than the old territorial basis, but above all because it represents the worker to the exclusion of the capitalist. The Councils enter as no conventional "democratic" body can, into the worker's daily life. They give to every employee security against unjust dismissal. In them he acts with comrades in close association and to use them as a basis for political action also, is an inevitable development. The compromise is not yet accepted, and the power of the Left is growing. The tactical value of the Workers' Council for the Left is, firstly, that it brings together all the workers, no longer sundered in crafts and divided in trade unions, as a single class with a solid interest against capital as a whole, and secondly, that it can wield the weapon of the political strike. At bottom, it is, I believe, the acuteness of this class cleavage in Germany which explains the decay of Parliament. Parliament is neither a Workers' nor an Employers' Council, but a confused attempt to reflect the unity of a nation, where, in fact, unity no longer exists.

The compromise might, I think, stand a chance of success, if at the start some of the chief industries were already nationalized. If, for example the mines and the big metal concerns were represented among the employers on the Council not by profit-making companies but by the democratic state as owner then the two halves of the Chamber of Work would no longer reflect an unbridgible class cleavage. Under these conditions the Chamber of Work would tend to be a body specially charged with the duty of preparing the progressive socialization of industry and graduating the stages of public control over production. Evolution in the present condition of Germany can hope to cope with revolution only if it moves rapidly and visibly. The pace since November has been too slow primarily because the makers of the republic failed to realize that democracy is no longer for any living society an end in itself.

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LABOR'S ACTIVITIES.

(From the "Dial," July 26.)

As labor in Europe and elsewhere resorts to industrial action to effect political ends, it seems as though the world might discover, in the years ahead, where and how, in the interest of a progressive civilization, political action can be put to use. While political government has served as a tool for the accomplishment of ends which are distinctly finite, it has figured traditionally among common people as a sacrosanct institution. They have been permitted in the most advanced communities to approach the institution at regular, stated, or convenient intervals with a paper offering which they might drop on the altar. This act of the common people constituted a state of affairs called democracy. Having just waged a war for the continuation of this happy state, we are naturally shocked to find that the common people of Europe propose to regard the political machinery at the knocked down valuation to which it has been reduced. There are methods of handling this machinery more realistic than the ballot, and some of these methods are open to the common as well as the uncommon man. All may play the game of hold-up in one way or another. The workers have been loth to use their power, but they have discovered as a result of the war that if their participation in the affairs of common life is to be more than a myth they must accept the terms which others have set up. The game is crude, but the crudity did not become apparent until it threatened to become common. As a matter of fact as labor succeeds in opening up the game for common use and advertising the crudities of political methods there will be a chance, for the first time in the history of political government, to discover how far political machinery can serve political, that is common, interests.

SIBERIA.

(From the "Dial," July 26.)

Weeks pass and the case of Kolchak V. the Soviets drags on interminably. John A. Embry, sometime United States consul at Omsk, reports wholesale killing in the region where the White Terror and the Red overlap—killing for which the Bolsheviki are responsible, Mr. Embry says (New York Times, July 1.) Upon being questioned, the witness states that he now represents a firm of exporters and importers with headquarters at the capital of the Kolchak Government! Comes then one Joshua Rosett sent into Siberia by the Committee on Public Information, a branch of our government not yet suspected of pro-Bolshevist tendencies. This witness testifies that Kolchak broke up the Zemstvo government in Siberia, suppressed free speech and free press, and "exiled or murdered every member of the Russian Constituent Assembly upon whom he could lay his hands," (New Republic, July 9;) the Admiral's method of dealing individually with the members of the Assembly will appear very ingenious when it is remembered that the majority of these persons are now of the Bolshevik persuasion. In a confidential dispatch from the Far East, Arthur Bullard, another representative of Mr. Creel's Committee, says that "allied support of Kolchak's experiment in reaction is a feature regrettable," (The Nation, July 19.) Thus the volume of testimony grows; spectators come and go, wondering casually what the final outcome will be, blind to the fact that those who sit in high places have already given a verdict and that the executions are in progress. Russia asks for bread and receives—whiffs of grapeshot. Typhus and cholera are raging, but medical supplies are denied and material of this sort shipped by the Danish Red Cross is turned back by the Allied forces. The formalities of a trial are superfluous when starvation and the plague are already guiding the hand of "justice" to the throat of the Russian people.

CAPITALISM AND TEACHERS' PAY.

(From the "Christian Science Monitor.")

The other day, outside the class room, in a friendly conversation touching on salaries and prices, a professor in one of the leading American universities was heard to say, "Well, they haven't raised my pay any during the war. My income is just what it was before." And in spite of a half jocular manner, he was thereby stating a fact that is of serious importance to the people of the United States. Notwithstanding the numerous increases common in so-called wage-earning classes, notwithstanding the general understanding of the fact that the cost of living has gone up 60 to 70 per cent. since 1914, the educators of the country have been, to a large extent, left with their incomes just about where they were when the war began.

In this same period, Capitalism has had its innings. United States Treasury Department figures showing the percentage of net income to capital stock for the year 1917, as compared with the same for the year 1916, give some measure of the increase accruing to many lines of capital during the war. One can hardly believe that in some cases it was as high as 33,000 per cent. Yet that is the fact concerning steel. Similarly, the net increase in the return on money invested in the coal industry in the first year of the United States in the war was over 6900 per cent.; in theaters and motion picture shows, 1437 per cent.; in groceries, 2032 per cent.; in warehousing, 4431 per cent.; in clothing and drygoods, 5293 per cent. Doubtless the money of teachers and university professors contributed to all these increases, yet the incomes of such people remained, in many cases, absolutely on a pre-war basis.