

Eduard Bernstein

**Patriotism,
Militarism and
Social-Democracy**

(July 1907)

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As a result of some recent speeches in the Reichstag, part of the Socialist press is again occupying itself a great deal with the question of patriotism and militarism. The declaration, given in the Reichstag, that against a foreign enemy who frivolously drew Germany into war, or sought to seize German territory, the Social-Democrats, as well as others, would be ready to fight, is alluded to as an awkward compromise with the way that foreign policy is at present managed and the repudiation by the Socialist fraction in the Reichstag of the responsibility for comrade Karl Liebknecht's anti-militarist pamphlet has been blamed as unjustifiable, as siding against the necessary sharp opposition to militarism. It is said to be an offence against

the international obligations of Social-Democracy. Especially the first-mentioned declaration is considered as calculated to increase the difficulty for Socialists of other lands to fight against their militarist opponents. As it is easy for a sly diplomacy to represent itself as the provoked party, this action actually gives the Governments a free hand to all sorts of warlike intrigues, thereby increasing the menace to peace.

It will be useful to take up our stand, in these columns also, towards these questions, the importance of which nobody can doubt. First of all, it must be pointed out that it is not the first time that questionable declarations have been given in the Reichstag. It is extremely unjust, if not worse, to pick out, as has been done in one quarter, the speech of the deputy Noske as containing greater concessions to militarism and nationalism than are to be found in the speeches of other representatives of the party in the Reichstag. Neither concerning militarism in general, nor in the question of home defence in particular, did Noske express any opinion that had not already been expressed by the first leaders of the party in a very decided manner. But the fact of these declarations not being new does not on that account place them beyond all criticism, and especially not beyond any re-examination. They were, indeed, formerly not quite unquestioned. Already in a resolution presented by the Berlin branch of the party to the Wyden Congress in 1880, to pass a vote of want of confidence in the Reichstag fraction, one of the reasons given for it was "Bebel's appeal to the patriotism of the members of the party", and his *expectation* that they too would certainly "drive the *enemies* out of the country." It is true that this resolution, which was unanimously rejected, originated with

the supporters of Hasselmann, who tried to form a new group, splitting the party. But all the same the resolution found the support of comrades in Berlin who would have nothing to do with that attempt, and were only expressing their honest opinion.

It must also be admitted that at a time when Social-Democrats were subjected to an exceptional law which placed them under a ban, and which was enforced with the most uncompromising severity, it needed a very strong overruling of the first natural feeling to be able to reach the point of view on the war question which Bebel had expressed during the session of 1879-1880 in the Reichstag. Patriotism is, in modern States, not an inborn feeling as was the feeling of solidarity of the members of a tribe at an earlier stage of development. It is true that at all periods a certain feeling of belonging together has developed itself among troops – whether they consist of hirelings or even of soldiers who are forced to field service – which gives them moral unity and gives rise to many examples of self sacrificing solidarity. But this feeling of solidarity is esprit de corps and not patriotism. Quite as little is the desire to protect hearth and home, town or district, against any intruder, to be compared to the patriotism which is expected in the modern States or empires. As these States have not developed organically, by means of natural growth, out of a tribe, but have been brought about by, or at least with the help of, force, sale, marriage, etc., as they had during many generations or even centuries, very little of the unity of an evolved organism, but only developed some of this later and very gradually, under the influence of economic changes, therefore, also among the mass of the people there could, for a long time, be no question of a national State-sentiment, which forms such a

considerable element in modern patriotism. What is to-day, retrospectively, taken for it, was in reality, apart from ebullitions of local-patriotism, for the most part only that esprit de corps of serfs, or a reflected feeling resembling this in its nature. Up till a time which does not lie very far behind us the great mass of the governed people knew nothing of a State-national patriotism, or, at any rate, only through the medium of a thin upper strata of privileged classes, whose patriotism was often such as could easily be dissolved. Examples of this are to be found in the history of all countries, but in none in more abundance than in that of Germany.

Even in the eighteenth century Germany's great dramatic poet Schiller felt this so strongly that in *The Maid of Orleans* he assigns the words:—

Unworthy is the nation who doth not
Joyfully stake its all for its honour

to Count Dunois, that is to a warrior who belonged to the high nobility, and on the other hand puts in the mouth of the peasant Thibaut the words :—

Let us in calm obedience wait
Who war shall give us now to be our king,
For what is battle's fortune but God's judgment?
And he shall be our Lord who doth receive
The holy oiling and the crown at Reims.

That was the logic of an epoch in which whole countries were sold or given away as marriage dowries, and where the great mass of the people was without any voice in politics. And, indeed, the German people at the end of the eighteenth century knew as yet only an ethnological, but no State-

national feeling, and, therefore, also no political-national patriotism. This did not come until the time of the reaction against the Napoleonic rule, when it seized wide circles of the population, and long continued to exist as basis of a political ideal compared to which the national State which was realised in 1870 to 1871 showed up very unfavourably. And if the man who allowed himself to be honoured as the creator of this national State could, already in the seventh year of its existence, place a considerable portion of the German people under the ban of an exceptional law, it proves to what extent he himself regarded this creation as a mechanical one, and not as a form which embraced the united organism of the whole German people. It was, therefore, no unnatural phenomenon, if, among the outlawed party, that feeling arose which, in the Old Testament, the representatives of the ten tribes rebelling against Rehoboam clothe in the words: "What portion have we in David ? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse ; every man to your tents, O Israel."

And yet Bebel was right and those who attacked him were in the wrong.

The fact of the modern national States or empires not having originated organically does not prevent their being organs of that great entity which we call civilised humanity, and which is much too extensive to be included in any single State. And, indeed, these organs are at present necessary and of great importance for human development. On this point Socialists can scarcely differ now. And it is not even to be regretted, from the Socialist point of view, that they are not characterised purely by their common descent. The purely ethnological national principle is reactionary in its results.

Whatever else one may think about the race-problem, it is certain that the thought of a national division of mankind according to race is anything rather than a human ideal. The national quality is developing on the contrary more and more into a sociological function. But understood as such it is a *progressive* principle, and in this sense Socialism *can* and *must* be national. This is no contradiction of the cosmopolitan consciousness, but only its necessary completion. The world-citizenship, this glorious attainment of civilisation, would, if the relationship to national tasks and rational duties were missing, become a flabby characterless parasitism. Even when we sing “Ubi bene, ibi patria,” [1] we still acknowledge a “patria,” and, therefore, in accordance with the motto, “No rights without duties”; also duties towards her.

Now, one of the first duties towards a community is to stand up for its independence and inviolability. If this duty is not to be founded simply upon external force, it requires in return certain rights, the most elemental of which is Universal Suffrage. Where this does not exist in modern society, no true national feeling can develop or continue among the people, especially among the working class. Without universal [2] suffrage, the Social-Democracy in Germany would, as the workers’ party, take up quite a different stand towards the State to that which, in fact and by general agreement, it does at present. When, in the year 1874, Julius Motteler, in a speech on the military budget, let fall the words “We are not opponents of the Empire” [3] as a national whole, uniting the different parts, but “opponents of the Empire in so far as it represents certain institutions which oppress us,” he was attacked sharply in an organ of the “Eisenacher” fraction of the Social-Democracy, the

Dresden *Volksbote*, for even this qualified acknowledgment of the Empire, and was excused by the official organ of the party, the *Volksstaat*, in very much the same way that Noske is being excused by some of our papers to-day, when they write about his having made a mere oratorical slip.

The way the *Volksstaat* defended Motteler against misinterpretation of his speech was, in fact, equivalent to disapproval of the above words. To-day, on the contrary, the Social-Democracy is, and that unanimously, the most decided Imperial [4] party that Germany knows. No other party is so keen to make over more and more legislative authority to the Empire, and to widen its competence, as the Social-Democracy. Compared with it, even that once most energetic representative of the Imperial idea, the National-Liberal party, is particularistic. And if the Social-Democracy, as opposition party, now as ever refuses to vote for the complete budget, still it goes much further in the way of voting certain portions of it than in those days.

How has this happened? Well, this development gives an interesting example of Ignaz Auer's phrase, "Such a thing one does not *say*, such a thing one does not *decide*, such a thing one *does*." It has not been decided, it has not been proclaimed, but under the pressure of facts, in consequence of universal suffrage, it has moved step by step of itself. And because the Social-Democracy puts ever more forcible demands to the empire, because it helps to build legislation, to heighten its attainments, to increase the number of its officials, it is only logical if our representatives also declare their readiness to defend in case of need its independence and integrity against foreign force.

Austria shows the same picture. The Austrian Social-Democrats were at one time enemies of the empire to a much greater degree than their German comrades. In Germany the enmity towards the empire was for the most part only enmity towards the Government and some of the State imperial institutions. But in Austria it was a longing to get away from Austria altogether, out of the confusion of that patch-work State. This had changed even at the time of the former suffrage reform. The strength of the Social-Democracy to oppose a counter-weight to the centrifugal tendencies in the Hapsburg Empire, to neutralise them, became apparent. The **Arbeiterzeitung** was read in the Hoffburg, bourgeois Radicals scoffed at the party as "imperial Austrian Social-Democracy," and indeed in the **Arbeiterzeitung** the State-strengthening power of the working classes in Austria was strongly emphasised. This was still more the case in the struggle for the latest suffrage-reform which has now brought in universal suffrage, the first fruit of which has been a splendid victory for Social-Democracy and a crushing defeat for the anti-Austrian Pan-Germans. And it strikes one as rather strange when K. Kautsky writes in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of May 6 that the bourgeoisie, for fear of the revolution, allows "such antediluvian States as Austria and Turkey" to continue. If it be a historic crime to keep up Austria as a State, then the Austrian Social-Democracy has been guilty for years, and in a high degree, of this crime. But one can look at the thing in a different way.

In all countries where the working class has become influential it develops a new patriotism of its own. This patriotism cannot be that which seeks the ruling of nationalities by other nationalities, it can only be that of the

equal democratic right of the nationalities. In so far as its realisation succeeds the so-called racial or, as I prefer to call it, ethnological nationalism – the tendency to erect new national States on the basis of language and descent – loses weight as against the sociological national idea. We have seen it in several old States of Western Europe, and see it again to-day in Eastern Europe. But it is a phenomenon which we need not regret. For it promises to solve a series of problems which are ever becoming more threatening, not by altering the boundaries on the map of Europe, which under present circumstances could only be accomplished by means of bloody wars, but by altering the constitutions of those States which have become historical. It enables the working class to combine with its patriotism the most effectual peace policy that the world has ever known.

Are not these last remarks a contradiction of Bebel's and Noske's declarations ? Not in the least. The opinion that the latter might increase the danger of war, rests on an erroneous idea of the weight of those factors which to-day play a part in the war question. One is apt to forget what an important factor in the calculations of the Cabinets, and especially of the military parties, is formed by the disposition of the populations with whom, in case of war, they would have to deal. The idea that in the country in question there exists a powerful party which is only waiting for war in order to make difficulties for its own Government, to set on foot a military strike and such-like, this idea may become the greatest menace to peace, by being a spur to adventurous politicians to work towards a war with that country. Our late comrade William Liebknecht, as well as the present writer, and other comrades, made their own observations on this point during the years of the anti-

Socialist law, and became convinced of the necessity to destroy any illusions of the military politicians abroad regarding a possible furthering of their aims on the part of the Social-Democracy. To open the eyes of the foreign countries should be the first concern of an effectual peace policy. But the home Government knows very well that the declaration that the Social-Democrats would, in case of need, give their lives for the independence of Germany against a foreign power, is by no means a free pass for them to take war easily. No syllable in the speeches of Bebel or Noske points towards the Social-Democracy departing an inch from the duty of watching sharply over the home Government's foreign policy.

The anti-militaristic propaganda is quite another matter. It is just this that may, as is to be seen from the above, easily increase instead of diminishing the danger that it wishes to do away with. It is true, not every kind of anti-militarist propaganda is to be dispensed with. Militarism is a very ambiguous idea. If it means being ruled by the military or the formation of an army separated from the rest of the people by a specially dependant position, then the Social-Democracy has opposed it as long as it has existed and will continue to oppose it. It will oppose it and all that hangs together with it, as, for instance, those military institutions which date from feudal times, and the reflection of these institutions and their spirit in the public life of the nation. [5] But if it means training the people to the use of arms and keeping the nation in the position for efficient self-defence, which, of course, includes the capability, in case of need, not only to drive the enemy out of the country, but to *keep* him out, then these are things whose necessity the Social-Democracy never questions, which, indeed, it advocates. A

position which does not hamper the Social-Democracy in the fulfilment of international duties, but on the contrary, now, when the mutual dependence of the nations on every plane of social life is already to such a great degree a reality, and is developing to an ever greater extent-when an ever tightening net of economic relations of all kinds is being spread over the civilised world, and jurisprudence, science, art, social-policy are ever becoming more international-puts it in a position to be able to fulfil the international duties of a workers' party and a peace party with all the more energy. The more decidedly we determine to keep off trouble from our own country the more powerfully shall we be able to stand up also for the rights of others.

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In the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.

Notes

1. "Where it goes well with me, there is my country."
2. Why does Bernstein say "universal," when he means "manhood"?
3. "Reich" (empire) – here used in contradistinction to the governments of the various German States.
4. As in note 3 above.
5. According to Karl Liebknecht I said in the Paris *La Vie Socialiste* of June 5, 1905, that the present-day military institutions are "only an inheritance from the more or less feudal monarchy." I no longer have the journal, but think it impossible that I can have expressed myself in this way. As far as I remember I did indeed speak of military institutions which are only an inheritance, etc., but certainly did not assert that all military institutions are nothing but such an inheritance.