

EDITORIAL

THE GERMAN ELECTIONS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE is great glee in the American and British capitalist press over what it pleases them to call “the Socialist defeat” in Germany. One paper, the *London Telegraph*, even goes so far as to say “Herr Bebel and his followers have gone down in a Socialist Sedan.” For one thing, the completer returns, giving the figures of the poll, indicate no defeat; for another thing, even if, indeed, there was on last 25th of January a “Socialist Sedan” in Germany, the elements now crowing loudest will be eventually the gloomiest—just because of the “Sedan.”

What is it that has happened?

As far as the figures indicate, the 3,000,000 poll of the German Social Democracy has been preserved; it has even been considerably increased. In face of this, the now undoubted fact that the Party lost a round score of seats furnishes matter for speculation, and the reflection by no means portends good to the “triumphant” Kaiser.

The loss of seats, despite a considerable gain in votes, denotes two things: first, that what has been called the largest party in Germany, the “non-voting Party,” is being drawn into the vortex of German political life—an ominous event for reaction; secondly, that there has been a re-alignment of party forces—no less an ominous symptom for conservatism. Inadmissible would be the theory that every voter who took part in this year’s, but abstained at previous elections, was an anti-Socialist. Inadmissible also would be the theory that the Social Democracy preserved all its previous voters. The locations in which the seats were lost, and the elements that were returned in such places at the top of the polls, indicate that the purely manufacturing and mercantile strata of the population have come forward. They must have taken votes away (who knows how many!) from, but they must also have yielded large numbers to the Party. Thus a re-alignment of forces must have taken place. A party of revolution can only gain by such process. The process purifies it of

elements that are alien; the process invigorates it by the more deliberate forces that join it. However necessarily radical-bourgeois the German Social Democracy is, it is a party, the sole party of revolution in the Empire. Seats in the Reichstag amount to nothing: veterans in the field amount to everything.

Silliest of all is the “Sedan” cry. It is worse than silly. The slight note of truth that there may be in the cry is ominous—to those who raise it. In a way, in a remote rhetorical way, there was a “Sedan” for the German Social Democracy. It is unquestionable that the large increase of votes and seats at the election of 1903 raised visions of a parliamentary state of things in which the Party was to be the dominant factor in the Reichstag. Wherever these visions existed there was a “Sedan,” and HAPPILY SO. The Sedan, administered to France over the back of Napoleon III, did more than to overthrow that rotten throne. By a strange dispensation of Providence, democratic institutions—a necessary step towards Socialism—were reared in France by the identical German gunpowder of “divine right” that knocked down the French Imperial throne at Sedan. Conservatism has its mission in the scheme of social evolution. It seems to furnish Sedans to Progress, while it is itself that it furnishes the Sedans to. It has so happened at the late German election. In the *Daily People* of January 2d, *Weekly* 12th, the forecast of the then pending elections was correctly planted upon the facts furnished by the carefully considered work of Dr. Robert Michels on the German Social Democracy. “Who can count their numbers,” observed the talented essayist, “the numbers of those who call themselves Social Democrats but are no Socialists?” The “Sedan” of this year, and whatever future “Sedans” may still be necessary, in order to drive these non-Socialists out of the Social Democracy, and to rectify the Party’s agitational work so as to attract and drill Socialists only—those “Sedans” will be the dearest victories that German Imperial Conservatism can purchase—those “Sedans” will prove to be just so many steps, hewn in the living rock of the Movement; so many steps, up which the Revolution will climb to victory, and down which it will force Reaction to descend into defeat.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2009

slpns@slp.org