

CHAPTER VIII: THE BEGINNING OF MY POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Towards the end of November, I returned to Munich. I went to the depot of my regiment, which was now in, the hands of the Soldiers' Councils.

As the whole business was repulsive to me, I decided to leave as soon as I possibly could. With my faithful war-comrade, Schmiedt Ernst, I went to Traunstein and remained there until the camp was broken up.

In March 1919, we were back again in Munich. The situation there could not last as it was. It tended irresistibly to a further extension of the Revolution.

Eisner's death served only to hasten this development and finally led to the dictatorship of the Councils, or, to put it more correctly, to a Jewish hegemony, which turned out to be transitory, but which was the original aim of those who had contrived the Revolution.

At that juncture innumerable plans took shape in my mind. I spent whole days pondering on the problem of what could be done, but unfortunately every project had to give way before the hard fact that I was quite unknown and therefore did not have even, the first qualifications necessary for effective action. Later on I shall explain the reasons why I could not decide to join any of the parties then in existence.

As the new Revolution began to run its course, my activities drew down upon me the ill-will of the Central Council. In the early morning of April 27th, 1919, I was to have been arrested, but the three fellows who came to arrest me did not have the courage to face my rifle and withdrew empty-handed.

A few days after the liberation of Munich I was ordered to appear before the Inquiry Commission which had been set up by the 2nd Infantry Regiment for the purpose of investigating revolutionary activities. That was my first incursion into the more or less political field.

A few weeks later I received orders to attend a course of lectures which were being given to members of the Army. This course was meant to propagate certain fundamental principles on which the soldier could base his political ideas.

For me the advantage of this organisation was that it gave me a chance of meeting fellow-soldiers who were of the same way of thinking and with whom I could discuss the actual situation.

We were all more or less firmly convinced that Germany could not be saved from imminent disaster by those who had participated in the November crime—that is to say, by the Centre and the Social Democrats, and also that the so-called Bourgeois-National group could not make good the damage that had been done, even if their intentions were of the best.

Certain conditions necessary for the successful undertaking of such a task were not fulfilled. The years that followed have justified the opinions which we held at that time.

In our small circle we discussed the project of forming a new party. The leading ideas which we then proposed were the same as those which were carried into effect afterwards, when the German Labour Party was founded.

The name of the new movement which was to be founded should be such that, of itself, it would appeal to the masses of the people, for all our efforts would turn out vain and useless if this condition were lacking. That was the reason why we chose the name ‘Social Revolutionary Party,’ particularly because the social principles of our new organisation were indeed revolutionary.

There was also a more fundamental reason. The attention which I had given to economic problems during my earlier years was more or less confined to considerations arising directly out of the social problem.

Subsequently my outlook broadened as I came to study the German policy of alliance. This policy was very largely the result of an erroneous valuation of the economic situation, together with a confused notion as to the basis on which the future subsistence of the German people could be guaranteed.

All these ideas were based on the principle that capital is exclusively the product of labour and that, just like labour, it was subject to all the factors which can hinder or promote human activity.

Hence, from the national standpoint, the significance of capital depended on the greatness, freedom and power of the State, that is to say, of the nation, and it is this dependence alone which leads capital to promote the interests of

the State and the nation, from an instinct of self-preservation and for the sake of its own development.

Consequently, the dependence of capital upon the independent and Free State would force it to defend the nation's freedom, might, strength, etc.

According to such principles the duty of the State towards capital would be comparatively simple and clear. Its only object would be to make sure that capital remained subservient to the State and did not allocate to itself the right to dominate national interests.

Thus the State could confine its activities within the two following limits: on the one side, to assure a vital and independent system of national economy and, on the other, to safeguard the social rights of the workers. Previously, I did not recognise with adequate clearness the difference between that capital which is purely the product of creative labour, and the existence and nature of capital which is exclusively the result of financial speculation.

Here I needed a stimulus to set my mind thinking in this direction, but that had hitherto been lacking. The requisite stimulus now came from one of the men who delivered lectures in the course I have already mentioned. This was Gottfried Feder.

For the first time in my life, I heard a discussion which dealt with the principles of stock-exchange capital and capital which was used for loan activities. After hearing the first lecture delivered by Feder, the idea immediately came into my head that I had now found a way to establish one of the most essential prerequisites for the founding of a new party.

To my mind, Feder's merit consisted in the ruthless and trenchant way in which he described the speculative and political economic character of the capital used in stock exchange and loan transactions, laying bare the fact that this capital is always dependent on the payment of interest.

In fundamental questions his statements were so full of common sense that even those who criticised him did not deny that at first his ideas were sound, but they doubted whether it were possible to put these ideas into practice. To me, this seemed the strongest point in Feder's teaching, though others considered it a weak point.

It is not the business of him who lays down a theoretical programme to explain the various ways in which something can be put into practice. His task

is to deal with the problem as such; and he has, therefore, to look to the end rather than the means.

The important question is whether an idea is fundamentally right or not. The question as to whether it may or may not be difficult to carry it out in practice is quite another matter.

When a man, whose task it is to lay down the principles of a programme or policy, begins to busy himself with the question as to whether it is expedient and practical, instead of confining himself to a statement of the absolute truth, his work will cease to be a guiding star to those who are looking, for light and guidance, and will become merely a recipe for everyday life.

The man who lays down the programme of a movement must consider only the goal. It is for the political leader to point out the way in which that goal may be reached. The thought of the former will, therefore, be determined by those truths that are everlasting, whereas the activity of the latter must always be guided by taking practical account of the circumstances in which those truths have to be carried into effect.

The greatness of the one will depend on the absolute truth of his idea considered in the abstract; whereas that of the other will depend on whether or not he correctly judges the given realities and how they may be utilised under the guidance of the truths established by the former.

The test of greatness as applied to a political leader is the success of his plans and his enterprises, which means his ability to reach the goal for which he sets out; whereas the final goal set up by the political philosopher can never be reached, for human thought may grasp truths and visualise ends which it sees with crystal clarity, though such ends can ever be completely attained, because human nature is weak and imperfect.

The more an idea is correct in the abstract, and, the more comprehensive it therefore is, the smaller is the possibility of putting it into practice, at least as far as this depends on human beings.

The significance of a political philosopher does not depend on the practical success of the plans he lays down, but rather on their absolute truth and the influence they exert on the progress of mankind.

If it were otherwise, the founders of religions could not be considered as the greatest men who have ever lived, because their moral aims will never be

completely or even approximately carried out in practice.

Even that religion which is called the religion of brotherly love is actually no more than a faint reflex of the will of its sublime Founder, but its significance lies in the orientation which it endeavoured to give to human civilisation and human virtue and morals.

This very wide difference between the functions of a political philosopher and a practical political leader is the reason why the qualifications necessary for both functions are scarcely ever found combined in the same person.

This applies especially to the so-called successful politician of the lesser kind, whose activity is indeed hardly more than that of practising the art of accomplishing the possible, as Bismarck modestly defined the art of politics in general.

If such a politician resolutely avoids great ideas, his success will be all the easier to attain; it will be attained more expeditiously, and will frequently be more tangible. By reason of this very fact, however, such success is doomed to futility and sometimes does not even, survive the death of its author.

Generally speaking, the work of such politicians is without significance for the following generation, because their temporary success was based on the expediency of avoiding all really great decisive problems and ideas which would hold good for future generations likewise.

To pursue ideals which will still be of value and significance for the future is generally not a very profitable undertaking and he who follows such a course is only very rarely understood by the masses of the people, who find the price of beer and milk a more persuasive index of political values than far-sighted plans for the future, the realisation of which can only take place later on and the advantages of which can be reaped only by posterity.

Because of a certain vanity, which is always one of the blood relations of unintelligence, the general run of politicians will always eschew those schemes for the future which are really difficult to put into practice; and they will avoid them in order that they may not lose the immediate favour of the mob.

The importance and the success of such politicians belong exclusively to the present and will be of no consequence for the future, but that does not

worry small-minded people who are quite content with momentary results.

The position of the constructive political philosopher is quite different. The importance of his work must always be fudged from the standpoint of the future; and he is frequently described by the word *Weltfremder*, or dreamer.

While the ability of the politician consists in mastering the art of the possible, the founder of a political system belongs to those who are said to please the gods only because they wish for and demand the impossible. They will always have to renounce contemporary fame, but if their ideas be immortal, posterity will acclaim them.

Within long spans of human progress it may occasionally happen that the practical politician and political philosopher are one. The more intimate this union is, the greater will be the obstacles which the activity of the politician will have to encounter.

Such a man does not labour for the purpose of satisfying demands that are obvious to every Philistine, but he reaches out towards ends which can be understood only by the few. His life is torn asunder by hatred and love. The protest of his contemporaries, who do not understand the man, is in conflict with the recognition of posterity, for whom he also works.

The greater the work which a man does for the future, the less will he be appreciated by his contemporaries. His struggle will accordingly be the more severe, and his success the rarer. When, in the course of centuries, such a man appears and is blessed with success, then, towards the end of his days, he may have a faint prevision of his future fame.

Such great men are only the Marathon runners of history; the laurels of contemporary fame are only for the brow of the dying hero.

The great protagonists are those who fight for their ideas and ideals despite the fact that they receive no recognition at the hands of their contemporaries. They are the men whose memories will be enshrined in the hearts of future generations.

It seems then as if each individual felt it his duty to make retrospective atonement for the wrong which great men have suffered at the hands of their contemporaries. Their lives and their work are then studied with touching and grateful admiration.

Especially in dark days of distress, such men have the power of healing broken hearts and of raising the despairing spirit of a people. To this group belong not only the genuinely great statesmen but all the great reformers as well. Besides Frederick the Great we have men such as Martin Luther and Richard Wagner.

When I heard Gottfried Feder's first lecture on 'The Abolition of the Thralldom of Interest,' I understood immediately that here was a truth of transcendental importance for the future of the German people.

The absolute separation of stock-exchange capital from the economic life of the nation would make it possible to oppose the process of internationalisation in German business, without at the same time attacking capital as such, for to do this would jeopardise the foundations of our national independence.

I clearly saw what was developing in Germany and I realised then that the stiffest fight we would have to wage would not be against an alien enemy, but against international capital. In Feder's speech I found an effective slogan for our coming struggle.

Here again, later events proved how correct was the impression we then had. The fools among our bourgeois politicians no longer mock at us on this score, for even those politicians now see if they would speak the truth that international stock-exchange capital was not only the chief instigating factor in bringing about the war, but that, now the war is over, it serves to turn the peace into a hell.

The struggle against international finance capital and loan capital has become one of the most important points in the programme on which the German nation has based its fight for economic freedom and independence.

Regarding the objections raised by so-called practical people, the following answer must suffice. All apprehension concerning the fearful economic consequences that would follow the abolition of the thralldom that results from interest-capital are ill-timed, for, in the first place, the economic principles hitherto followed have proved fatal to the interests of the German people.

The attitude adopted when the question of preserving our national existence arose, vividly recalls similar advice once given by experts—the

Bavarian Medical College, for example—on the question of introducing railroads.

The fears expressed by that august body of experts were not realised. Those who travelled in the coaches of the new ‘Steam-horse’ did not suffer from vertigo. Those who looked on did not become ill and the hoardings which were to have been erected to conceal the new invention, were never put up.

Only the blinkers which obscure the vision of the would-be ‘experts’ have remained, and this will always be so.

In the second place, the following must be borne in mind. Any idea may be a source of danger if it is looked upon as an end in itself, when in reality it is only the means to an end. For me, and for all genuine National Socialists, there is only one slogan: People and Fatherland.

What we have to fight for is the necessary security for the existence and increase of our race and people, the subsistence of our children and the maintenance of our racial stock unmixed, the freedom and independence of the Fatherland, so that our people may be enabled to fulfil the mission assigned to it by the Creator.

All ideas and ideals, all teaching and all knowledge, must serve these ends. It is from this standpoint that everything must be examined and turned to practical use, or else discarded.

Thus, a theory can never become a mere dead dogma, since everything must serve the purpose of guaranteeing our existence.

The conclusions arrived at by Gottfried Feder determined me to make a fundamental study of a question with which I had hitherto not been very familiar.

I began to study again and thus it was that I first came to understand perfectly what was the substance and purpose of the life-work of the Jew, Karl Marx.

His *Capital* became intelligible to me for the first time, and in the light of it I now clearly understood the fight of the Social Democrats against national economics, a fight which was to prepare the ground for the hegemony of a real international and stock-exchange capital.

In another direction also, this course of lectures had important consequences for me. One day I put my name down as wishing to take part in the discussion. Another of the participants thought that he would break a lance for the Jews and entered into a lengthy defence of them.

This aroused my opposition. An overwhelming number of those who attended the lecture course supported my views. The consequence of it all was that, a few days later, I was assigned to a regiment then stationed in Munich and given a position there as 'instruction officer.'

At that time the spirit of discipline was rather weak among the troops which were still suffering from the after-effects of the period when the Soldiers' Councils were in control. Only gradually and carefully could a new spirit of military discipline and obedience be introduced in place of 'voluntary obedience,' a term which had been used to express the ideal of military discipline under Kurt Eisner's higgledy-piggledy regime.

The soldiers had to be taught to think and feel in a national and patriotic way. In these two directions lay my future line of action.

I took up my work with the greatest zeal and devotion. Here I was presented with an opportunity of speaking before quite a large audience. I was now able to confirm what I had hitherto merely felt, namely, that I had a talent for public speaking.

My voice had become so much better that I could be well understood, at least in all parts of the small hall where the soldiers assembled. No task could have been more pleasing to me than this one; for now, before being demobilised, I was in a position to render useful service to an institution which had become infinitely dear to my heart, namely, the Army.

I am able to state that my talks were successful. During the course of my lectures I have led back hundreds and even thousands of my fellow-countrymen to their people and their Fatherland. I 'nationalised' those troops and by so doing I helped to restore general discipline.

Here again I made the acquaintance of several comrades whose line of thought was similar to my own and who later became members of the first group out of which the new movement developed.

