

## **The Rise of Hitler: A Warning to the Workers**

The rise of Hitler to power in Germany is an event which the workers of all countries should study with care. It is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a world-wide overflowing of discontent. It is not a coincidence that the three years since the oncoming of the crisis late in 1929 have witnessed the abrupt and sometimes violent overthrow of governments in different parts of the capitalist world. "National" Governments in the United Kingdom and many of the British Dominions; the advent of De Valera in the Irish Free State; the colossal defeat of "Prosperity" Hoover in the USA; repeated cabinet crises in France; political revolutions and counter-revolutions in South America; the Republic in Spain; political crises in Scandinavia; expulsions of leaders and reversals of policy in Russia; no country has escaped the economic consequences of a capitalist world which is seriously out of joint.

Each country has witnessed the consequent political stresses and strains of new discontents, and new slogans, which had generally brought about new political groupings and new figure-heads. The universal insurgency expresses itself in different ways according to the traditions, experience and constitutions of the various countries. A century ago such economic crises brought to a head deep underlying social conflicts and produced the revolutions of '30 and '48, with their violent overthrow of kings and absolutist constitutions. Nowadays the more advanced countries have developed systems which permit easier adjustment to new pressures, avoiding the disturbance and expenses of the appeal to violence. Countries which have not travelled so far along the road of capitalist democratic government still resort to the old method of the bomb, the rifle, and the machine gun, the mass demonstration, the barricade, and the organisation of insurrection in the armed forces.

In a broad way the cause and the effect are the same everywhere. Everywhere capitalist private ownership reigns. Everywhere the rulers must serve the interests of the capitalist class, but everywhere it is an over-riding condition of social life that rulers cannot ignore the active discontent of the mass of the population. The discontent, even the open rebellion, of individuals and minorities can be bludgeoned into acquiescence, but when great masses of the population are driven by intolerable conditions into organising for common action then the rulers must sooner or later provide a safety valve; placate the movement or find means of dividing it; turn it into new directions or harness it directly to the capitalist state. In no other way can capitalism maintain itself.

Long before the war the British ruling class learned how to incorporate radical politicians and labour leaders in the parties of capitalism. The German capitalists in 1918 jettisoned the Kaiser for a similar end. Fifty per cent of the German voters had registered their disillusionment and war-weariness by voting for the reform programme of the Social Democratic Party. German capitalism thereupon "digested" the SDP and watched it stabilise German capitalism in the troubled post-war years. The military and civil associates of the Imperial Kaiser humbled themselves to the "upstart" labour leaders because they had to have someone who could control the workers and keep them loyal to the fundamentals of capitalism. So for fourteen years the Social Democrats, either in coalitions or in "friendly opposition", worked out their policy of bargaining for reforms as price of their support. The outcome was inevitable. They have shared the fate that has always overtaken "Labour" politicians

and parties when they accept responsibility for the administration of capitalism. Discontent with the effects of capitalism cannot for ever be stifled by Labour promises of better times or apologetic assurances that things might be worse. The membership and influence of the German SDP declined year by year until it had shrunk to a third of its former size. Part of the loss was picked up by the Communist Party, but in the meantime a new group had arisen, led by Hitler. At the election on March 5<sup>th</sup> he received 17,266,000 votes (43.9 per cent) and his allies, the Nationalists, received 3,132,000 (8 per cent), giving him a clear majority. The Social Democrats received 7,176,000 (18.3 per cent) and the Communists 4,845,000 (12.1 percent).

In one important respect Hitler's Nazis are just like the Social Democrats and the Communists; they are all parties of discontent. Hitler promises work for the workless; secure government jobs in the police, the Army or the Civil service for 100,000 of his members; higher prices for agricultural products to help the peasants; and protection for the small investor and little shopkeeper squeezed by the big stores and the banks.

Immediately on taking office Hitler imposed fresh taxes on the big departmental stores and chain stores with the professed object of helping the small shopkeepers. He promised also to find posts for out-of-work professional men (doctors, lawyers and others), and it is because a relatively large number of bankers, proprietors of big stores and the more successful professional men are Jews that the party has taken on a violently anti-Jewish character. Every Jewish doctor driven out of practice, every Jewish lawyer barred from the courts, every Jewish schoolmaster and civil servant dismissed, makes another vacancy for one of his members. He was supplied with funds by German heavy industry, by armament manufacturers both in Germany and in France, and by American and other business men and financiers who had investments in Germany for which they needed protection. With the help of these funds Hitler's party has known how to rally all kinds of discontent into a great movement representing half the electorate of Germany. Therefore Hitler has had to be "digested" as fourteen years ago were the Social Democrats. The stately and imperious Hindenburg and the aristocratic Von Papen, representing the military caste and big landowner, have had to receive on terms of equality the Austrian house-painter Adolf Hitler. Dr Hugenberg and the Nationalist Party, representing big industrial capitalists, have had to enter into coalition with him. Hitler will now have to administer capitalism. He will have to curb the demands of his followers, disappoint them, and ultimately lose many of them to new political adventurers, whereupon the capitalists and landlords who now use him will scrap him and use his successor.

The great lesson to be learned from the decline of the Social Democrats is the sterility of the policy of reforms and of reform parties. The day on which a reform party reaches power is the day on which the evil effects of capitalism begin to sap and undermine the strength of the party, turning the members' blind loyalty first into bewilderment and then into dissatisfaction, causing them to drift into new parties.

The depths of mental bankruptcy of the reformists are shown by the comment of the Fabian *New Statesman* (London, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1933). After explaining that Hitler scored because he appealed, with banners and uniforms and parades, to the electorate's love of glamour, the German correspondent of the *New Statesman* says that the Social Democrats should have done the same, and should have given more prominence to pageantry and less prominence to social reforms. In other words, the

workers are to be enticed, not even by the old plan of "bread and circuses", but by circuses without the bread! This is what forty years of Fabian reformism has brought to the working-class movement!

The second lesson is one which has been entirely missed by the Labour Press in Great Britain, that is the evidence given by the Hitler episode of the overwhelming importance of controlling the political machinery. Six months ago, although the largest party in Germany, Hitler was not in control of the German Parliament and the machinery of government. He was ridiculed and derided by the members of the Government, and insulted by President Hindenburg. His party officials were hauled into court on charges of treason, and thrown into prison. Others were forced to flee the country. His newspapers were suppressed, his offices were raided by the police, his troops were forbidden to parade or wear uniforms in the street. When they attempted defiance they were driven off just like the Communists.

Now, having become possessed of the political machine and confirmed in power by the electors, he is able to turn the tables on his former opponents. He has removed the Governments of all the States of Germany. Former Cabinet Ministers have been arrested, beaten and made to suffer many indignities. Newspapers have been suppressed and their offices raided—from Conservative Catholic newspapers at one end of the scale to Social Democratic and Communist newspapers at the other. The Communists, in spite of their 5,000,000 voters and their year-long boasting of their belief in "mass action" and military revolt, have been cowed into complete submission without offering any real resistance whatever. Events are proving to them what they refused to learn. The organised political majority which controls the political machinery of the modern State is in a position to dominate, and can enforce submission on minorities. There is no road to Socialism except through the control of the machinery of government by a politically organised majority of Socialists.

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