

ON THE HISTORY OF OPPOSITION IN DENMARK'S SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

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A new edition of the famous Danish historian Hans-Norbet Lahme's work *Die Revolutionären. Gerson Trier, Trier, Nicolaj L. Petersen und die Revolutionäre Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei (RSAP), Dänemarks Beschreibung und Ausblick, Exkurse, Briefe (1889-1918)*¹ was published online in 2019 and made available open access to all interested readers.

The author has a long tradition of researching the history of the Danish labour movement and publishing documents on the issue: his work *Sozialdemokratie Und Landarbeiter in Danemark, 1871-1900*² is well-known; and he has published numerous articles in various journals, including the *International Review of Social History* (Amsterdam), on the history of left-wing movements during the emergence and formation of Danish social democracy.

The main theme of the book and the author's task is to investigate the history of the revolutionary opposition within the Danish Social Democratic Party during the specified period. In the first part, Lahme details the events that preceded the organisation of the party, founded in 1871 as a section of the International Workers' Association (IAA) and headed by Louis Pio (1841-1894). Lahme examines its objectives and ideological principles, its cooperation with amateur workers' organisations, including trade unions, and concluded that the ideological and political circumstances were favourable for the formation and strengthening of the left, the Social Democratic Party, which from 1878 became known as the Social Democratic Union. In 1882-1910, the party was headed by Peter Christian Knudsen (1848-1910), one of the main opponents of the future revolutionary internal party opposition.

Lahme suggests that under Knudsen's leadership, the Social Democratic Organisation had taken the principles of German social democracy as a basis for its activities, with its desire to develop a network of local associations, create a party press, cooperate with trade unions and representatives in parliament, as well as to develop links with workers' organisations in other countries. In the 1880s, Social Democracy actively cooperated with the Liberal-Conservative Peasant Party ("Venstre"), which represented a significant part of the Danish agricultural population.

All these circumstances allowed the author to conclude that the nature of the Social Democratic Union in the 1880s was reformist, as its leaders saw no need for revolutionary changes in the country and sought to achieve their goals by gradually transforming social order from bourgeois to socialist. At the same time, the importance of the scientific theory of socialism and its assimilation was not denied. Therefore, much attention in the Lahme's work is paid to the relationship of Danish socialists with K. Marx and F. Engels, first as a section of the IAA then to bolster the Marxist views among party members. This was facilitated by the personal acquaintance of Engels with G. Trier (1851-1918) and N. L. Petersen (1854- circa 1916), both who had worked in London since 1885. For the book series "Socialistisk Bibliotek" (Socialist Library) published in Copenhagen, Trier translated Engels' work "Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staates" into Danish. The translation was reviewed by Engels, who contributed some supplementary text,³ and was published in the seventh volume of the series in 1888. It should be noted that the first volume of "Socialistisk Bibliotek" published a Danish translation of the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1885), determining the direction of further publications, in the fourth and fifth volumes of Marx's *Das Kapital* (1886 and 1887).

However, as Lahme stresses, the assimilation of these views remained rather "academic" and had little impact on the practice of Danish social democrats.

The other side of the party's life is the emergence of numerous intra-party groups that disagree with its policies, particularly cooperation with trade unions and the Peasant Party. There was even an attempt to split up and create another, independent party, which, however, did not bring real results, but gave rise to right-wing and left-wing groups within the party itself. The cooperation of the Social Democrats with the Peasant Party, remained the main grounds for criticism, which became a stumbling block among Social Democrats, subsequently leading to the emergence of a revolutionary opposition.

The author investigates the reasons for the emergence of this opposition and the reasons for the harsh treatment of it by the party leadership. He notes the controversy at the Party Congress in 1876, and the failed attempts of the ultra-left to break away and found a new, more radical party in 1877. For example, he considers in depth Danish politician Harald Brix's activities in 1881, when he harshly criticised the Party leadership for abandoning socialist ideas and collaborating with the Peasant Party, especially in the newspaper "Herolden", which he founded, calling for the most radical actions against the policies of the Social Democrats. Lahme also mentions an episode with Baroness Lilienkrantz, a journalist and women's rights activist who, while making leftist critiques of the social democrats, collaborated in the newspaper "Den nye Socialist", which was published partly by right-wing financiers, leading to a scandal in 1884. The author notes that the debate over the policies of the leadership of the Social Democratic Party primarily revolved around the trend towards collaboration

¹ In English: Revolutionaries. Gerson Trier, Nikolai L. Petersen and the Revolutionary Socialist Labour Party (RSAP) of Denmark: History and Perspective, Excursions, Letters (1889-1918).

² Lahme H.-N. Sozialdemokratie und Landarbeiter in Dänemark (1871–1900). Odense, 1982

³ Engels F. Note til den danske læser. – Marx K., Engels F. Gesamtausgabe (MEGA²) Vol. I/29, p. 119-20.

with other parties, and this caused disgruntlement among the party's most radical members.

In narrating the biographies of his protagonists, Trier and Petersen, Lahme emphasises that both of them, despite their different fates and reasons for their participation in the labour movement, came to it not from the socialist movement in their homeland, but through an interest in the labour movement in Europe, with which they were well acquainted, most likely adjoining the Marxist circles and organisations. Petersen and Trier returned to Denmark separately, but both in the first half of 1888. Lahme stresses that, firstly, before their return, their contacts with Danish social democrats were irregular, and secondly, they brought with them the idea that the Marxist worldview should be integrated into the activities of the party. These ideas were probably born out of communication with Engels, who approved this line of thinking.

Lahme highlights the fact that Petersen and Trier's views were not close related to those of the Danish Social Democrats and only found support among the opposition – a notion that the author gives substantial attention. A large section is devoted to the emergence and development of an inner-party opposition, the aim of which was to change the policy of reformism. This was achieved by the revolutionaries, i.e. supporters of reform within the party, by educating party members from Marxist positions through the publication of texts by Mars and Engels in the party newspaper "Arbejderen" (Worker) and by igniting debate about various issues, such as the Danish party's participation in the 1889 Paris Congress of Socialists. In particular, it were these discussions and Petersen's speech at the Congress itself that criticised the policies of the leadership of Danish social democracy, which served as the decisive watershed moment within the party.

Confrontation between reformists and revolutionaries within the party after the Paris Congress led to a split and expulsion of the last Social Democrats from party ranks. Lahme notes that this event was seen by many as a struggle against freedom of opinion and expression and provoked negative reactions from foreign parties, including the German Social Democracy Party and sister Scandinavian parties. In this regard, the author quotes Engels' letter to Trier of 18 December 1889, in which he carefully examines the situation, condemns the position of Danish reformists, but at the same time urges them not to refuse cooperation with parties that hold different views. However, Lahme draws the reader's attention to the fact that the letter has been preserved only as a draft and it is unknown whether Trier had read it.

A significant part of Lahme's work is devoted to the aftermath of all these events, including those expelled from the Danish Social Democratic Party and the founding of the "Revolutionary Socialist Party" (RSAP), its programme and activities. In the corresponding chapter, the author details both the political struggle around the emergence of a new party among the Danish Social Democrats and Engels' position, as well as his attitude towards split or unification, when he called for a real assessment of the current social situation in the country and the party.

Published on January 27, 1890 as a program of the revolutionary party proclaimed four days earlier, the "Party Manifesto", was imbued with Marxist ideas, but did not contain an analysis of the specific Danish conditions, where the rural population still dominated and the industrial

proletariat has not yet developed.

In assessing the initial period of RSAP's activities, Lahme discusses the small number of its members (approximately 300) and its not entirely successful attempts to collaborate with other social organisations (e.g. trade unions), as well as its commitment to political and theoretical views rather than German social democracy.

The subsequent parts of the book are dedicated to the desire of RSAP to gain influence both within Denmark and throughout Scandinavia. It saw as its objective as uniting the working movement under its slogans and in direct confrontation with Social Democrats. This was particularly evident at the Scandinavian congresses of the working parties of Denmark, Norway and Sweden from 1890-1892, and Lahme admits that the initially increased influence of the RSAP had almost vanished by 1892. This was reflected, for example, in the Social Democrats' victory at the congress in Malmö when their resolution was adopted, demanding the lifting of restrictions on the organisational rights of agricultural workers.

In discussing the future of RSAP, Lahme stresses that the main actor in its activities was Petersen, whose arrest in 1891 and stay in prison until December 1892 led, in particular, to a gradual curtailment of activities and weakening of the influence of both RSAP itself and the newspaper "Arbejderen", headed by Petersen. The author analyses the reasons for the decline of the revolutionaries' activity – the left-wing, Marxist alternative to reformist social democracy – and considers the dogmatic nature of Marxist views reflected in the party's program, which did not take into account the specific conditions of Denmark and the need to cooperate with other parties as a governing principle. He also mentions the paucity of revolutionary parties as well as the party's weak presence in other labour organisations, such as the trade union movement. Equally important is the party's high dependence on the personality of its leaders, as the arrest of just one of them would practically halt its entire operation.

Trier and Petersen found the continuation of their activities in the organisation of workers' education in the form of a "New Workers' School" and "People's University", the latter inspired by "Open University". Lahme allocates considerable attention to this stage of their work, including the introduction of workers to Marxist theory, and details the nature and characteristics of the educational institutions themselves.

Further research concerns the restoration of Trier and Petersen to the Social Democratic Party (Social Democratic Union) in 1901 and their final years. Trier held a high position in the party, was a member of its presidium, but due to disagreement with his opponents, voluntarily left the party for good in 1916. Petersen continued to be a propagandist of Marx and Engels' ideas, was appointed editor of the periodical "Socialisten", and gave public lectures. In 1905 he moved to Hamburg, soon made an attempt at suicide there, but was saved, after which all traces of his history were lost.

In conclusion, Lahme acknowledges the weakness and small size of the revolutionary party and the inability of its representatives, especially Trier and Petersen, to meet the challenges they had set for themselves in the early 1890s. He states that, despite their efforts, they were unable to ensure the spread of Marxist views and the related ideas of revolutionaries about the transformation of society. At the

same time, the reformist policy of the Social Democratic Union headed by P. Knudsen and the party's cooperation with the Venstre Party and major trade unions laid the foundations for the successful development of the country not only at the end of the 19th century, but also throughout almost the entire 20th century. It should be noted that the author himself tries to analyse objectively the reasons for this state of affairs and speaks positively about the protagonists of his research.

The book is based on previously known sources, primarily the correspondence of Trier and Petersen, and new materials. In the final part of the work, the surviving correspondence of Trier and Petersen with Engels for the years 1885-1893, as well as correspondence with other persons (some in excerpts) is fully published, comprising 39 letters in total. Of interest is the author's preface, in which he details the principles of his publication in the original languages and, importantly, provides a translation of the relevant document from Danish into German, providing commentary where necessary.

Lahme's other major resources include numerous archival documents, including the archive of the Danish

Social Democracy, as well as the press and other publications.

On the whole, the study presents not only a historical picture of the early days of the Social Democratic Party in Denmark, not as well-known as the history of German social democracy. H.-N. Lahme analyses in detail the principles and characteristics of Danish social democrats and, most importantly, the reasons for the emergence and struggle against radical internal party opposition. The book expands the understanding of the Danish labour movement and its place in the wider European labour movement.

References

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