

The Social Democratic Movement: Its Electoral Rise and Legal Repression (1871–1890)

Abstract

The reports of British diplomats stationed in the capitals of Germany's federal states provide a unique perspective on the Social Democratic movement under Otto von Bismarck, its electoral fortunes, and attempts to repress it. In this case, reports from Dresden, the capital of the Kingdom of Saxony—Imperial Germany's third-largest federal state, with over 3.5 million inhabitants by 1890—chronicle the SPD's remarkable growth in a highly industrialized, urbanized region of the Reich. These British envoys were given wide latitude to explore and report upon the circumscribed worlds of political activity in the federal territory to which they were accredited. They had regular, confidential conversations with state ministers whom they came to know well; they gathered statistics on individual constituency races and judged them against press reportage and local gossip; and yet they were able to align local peculiarities with national and international developments—in this case, the German and European labor movements. Relevant here is a remark made long ago by the Stanford historian James J. Sheehan: “a great deal of the political activity that goes on at the national level is designed to simplify issues, to clarify alignments, to reduce politics to a set of binary choices. [...] But [...] in the worlds of local politics, choices are frequently more fluid, alliances more uncertain, combinations more complex.”

The first few reports (from 1871) were authored by the British envoy Joseph Hume Burnley (1821–1904), who reported from Dresden from 1867 to 1873. His successor was George Strachey (1828–1912), whose duties in Dresden stretched from 1874 to 1897. Readers who proceed chronologically through Strachey's insightful dispatches from Saxony's capital will see that during the 1880s he gradually became convinced that state repression of Social Democrats, like the attempt of parties further to the right to mobilize voters against them, were hopeless causes. Strachey was not an uncritical admirer of Social Democratic politicians, still less of socialist doctrine, but he had more than judging grudging respect for August Bebel (1840–1913) and Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826–1900). “Very few Saxons,” Strachey reported on October 26, 1881, “are politically educated enough to see that if a Bebel exists he ought to be in Parliament.” Strachey's sarcasm was directed in other directions: against Bismarck, or National Liberal and Conservative politicians and editors, or government ministers, or judges and spies and police who, he felt, were as cynical as they were misguided in their attempt to stamp out political heterodoxy through repression.

Source

Joseph Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No. 10, Dresden (January 31, 1871)

Social Democracy, although existing here as every-where, is too firmly kept under by the Government for it ever to become dangerous as long as Police and Military combine to be what they are, very uncompromising when repressive measures have to be carried out. The start attempted by the Brunswick Democrats^[1] found a certain echo in Saxony and a meeting on the subject was proposed at Zwickau but an immediate stop was put to it by the Government and nothing more was heard of the meeting or the Democrats.

The arrest of the two Saxon Deputies to the Berlin Diet, Messrs Bebel and Liebknecht social Democrats in politics, a short time ago at Leipzig for treasonable proceedings,^[2] is a stern proof that a German Government knows how to put down what may become a disturbing element unless firmly taken in hand

and as the German workman enjoys a greater amount of well being & many more opportunities of rationally passing his time at places of amusement to which both rich and poor may resort in the greatest good fellowship and harmony, I do not think the labouring classes have much to complain of.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/153; reprinted in Markus Mößlang and Helen Whatmore, eds., *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, vol. 1, 1871–1883, pp. 271–72.

J[oseph]. Hume Burnley to Earl Granville, No 57, Dresden (November 6, 1871)

[T]here has been no new phase in the Chemnitz strike. The operatives have up to the present behaved in an orderly way and in some cases responded to the call of the owners to resume work under a strict guarantee that they will not allow them to be molested by the dissentients. In one factory about 3/5 of the Hands have returned and in one or two others the Half. At the same time [...] the law will be vigorously applied should it be found necessary to quell any thing like disturbance or intimidation, and a first step has been taken in the direction by the Town Council of Chemnitz warning the workman that according to § 153 of the “Gewerbeordnung” or Trade Law such illegal acts will be subjected to a punishment of 3 months imprisonment, if not to a higher penalty in conformity with the criminal code of Germany. [...]

The principal organ of the Social Democratic Party here is the “Volksbote” edited by a certain Dr. Walster and written in the usual rabid style of such prints where as much odium as possible is thrown upon the manufacturer, who is generally held up as a tyrant from whom no good can be expected.

Such prints do an immense amount of harm and tend to accustom the workmen to [a] chain of ideas which are in the main unjust. [...]

In this way a vast social revolution is gradually gaining ground which must end in lamentable conflicts, unless the lower orders are emancipated from the leading strings of their present rulers and taught to listen to the advice of others better qualified by position and education to teach them.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/153; reprinted in Mößlang and Whatmore, eds., *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, vol. 1, 1871–1883, pp. 274–75.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No 2, Dresden (January 17, 1874)

Twenty of the twenty four [*sic*, for twenty-three] Saxon elections for the Parliament of the Reich have been concluded. The result is [...] [that] the Social-Democrats muster in surprising force, sending to Berlin no less than 6 members, instead of their previous contingent of [August] Bebel, and the dubious [Reinhold] Schrap. Saxony, therefore, seems to have elected twice the Social-Democrats as all the rest of the Reich: Saxony and Prussia being the only German states where adherents of this party have been chosen.

The preponderance of Social Democracy here is both real and electoral. According to a usual estimate, about two thirds of the working population, industrial or agricultural, are Socialists. Such strength becomes irresistible in districts where the villages, as well as the towns, are seats of manufacturing industry. However[,] the Social Democrats owe almost less to their absolute and distributive force, than to their electioneering energy and skill. A National-Liberal journal ascribes the unpalatable advance of Social-Democracy to ‘A Jesuit Intrigue’! but I gather that this hated faction has made proper use of the classical English methods of electioneering, while the Liberals have neglected the essential tactics, candidates and committees alike trusting more to their wishes than to their energies.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/158.

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No 6, Dresden (March 21, 1874)

The Kingdom which possesses the chief seat of continental learning,^[3] and claims, with the neighbouring Thuringian states, to be the historical centre of German civilization, might have been expected to make some sign of disapproval of the Imperial Press Law.^[4] [...]

I suspect that a large majority of the upper and middle class electors of Dresden would not be sorry to see the Bill restored to its' original Draconian shape.^[5] [...] Against the Socialists extreme bitterness prevails because of their late display of electoral strength, of strikes, rising wages, and the concomitant increase of prices so sharply felt in this capital now. [...] [N]o one with a tolerable knowledge of Germans, individually, and through their chief manifestations and controversies in the various branches of culture, can be unaware of their extreme personal susceptibilities, and infirmity of temper, of their impatience, of ridicule, sarcasm, and contradiction. So constituted, they easily sympathize with systems which punish energetic criticisms of public men and measures, and make minorities mute.

Source: The National Archives, London, FO 68/158; reprinted in Mößlang and Whatmore, eds., *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, vol. 1, 1871–1883, pp. 280–82.

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No 42, Dresden (December 3, 1874)

The Kingdom of Saxony is, as you are aware, the chief stronghold of German Social-Democracy. At the general election ten months ago [January 1874] about half of the entire poll fell to that party [...]. The meaning of these figures as indications of the growth of the Social-Democratic power was explained in my correspondence of the time. On the present occasion I propose to describe the position of the Saxon proletarian class as regards freedom of the press, and the rights of public meeting, and association.

1. [...] The politicians and journals of the respectable 'Fractions' [caucuses] maintain a considerable silence about Social-Democracy. This arises, partly from the indisposition of the Germans peculiarities of the nature of the German mind, which is content to remain uninformed about minorities until the moment comes for trying to thrash them; partly, from the difficulty of ascertaining the facts and merits of trials which from the inferior degree of culpability involved are excluded from the category of Jury cases, and so conducted chiefly by secret procedure. So that when a meeting is dispersed by the Police, or an Editor sent to jail for a year, mention of the incident is seldom made except by the Social-Democratic organs. [...]

2. Liberty of the Press.

[...] I presume that no Saxon Social-Democrat can sit down to write a political paragraph or article without feeling that he has already put one foot in prison. The liberty of effective newspaper discussion of public persons and things is not enjoyed by the Saxon demos. It is positive that the Social Democrats are subjected to a differential severity of treatment, although justice might seem to suggest that the style of a former journeyman turner like [August] Bebel, a book binder like [Johann] Most, a cobbler like [Julius] Vahlteich (lately Editor of the Chemnitz Fr. Presse) might seem to be entitled to a wider margin of energy and vituperation than that prescribed for Professors of good birth like [Heinrich von] Sybel and [Heinrich] von Treitschke.

3. Freedom of Speech.

Arrest for utterances at public meetings do not often occur, for prosecution is vigorously applied. At every meeting or lecture which can be qualified as public, police agents attend, by whom, if a speaker attempts to discuss matters not named in the programme necessarily submitted beforehand by the police, or a single remark is made which the agents disapprove, the Chairman is at once required to interfere. Should he be slow with the call to order the agents threaten him with consequences: should he

persist in his refusal they disperse the meeting. [...]

The workmen's meetings are constantly broken up by the police. [...] Not long ago, a speaker who had been describing the present degrees of German liberty in a style which the police agent had disapproved, went on to say – "and I cannot tell, for instance, whether when I wake tomorrow the Police will not be at my bedside to apprehend me." At this the Chairman was required to order the speaker to sit down, and on his refusing the police dissolved the meeting: under such circumstances the orator would probably be arrested in addition. Irreligious observations are ~~always generally~~ always checked. According to a recent decision of a Berlin court the persons of the Deity and the Kaiser are sacred from discussion. Of almost equal sanctity are the military institutions of the Empire. A certain [Ignaz] Auer maintained in a speech that the system of one-year army Volunteers granted a class privilege, a fact which no sane person would deny, although only ~~a Social Democrat would~~ Auer and his friends would find fault with so fair sensible an institution. [...] Auer was punished with ten days imprisonment. [...]

What was said as to gagging speakers in the middle of dangerous sentences applies only to the partizans of the inferior class. ~~But like the Duke of Alba German justice can distinguish between small reptiles and great fishes.~~^[6] Leaders, especially members of the Reichstag, like Bebel, [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, or Most, are allowed as much rope as they will take. For instance Most (member for Chemnitz) was allowed to talk himself into prison for 19 months. [...] The sentence declares that Most's arguments in favor of the legal basis of the Paris commune might be permissible in the Versailles Assembly, or before a learned audience, or at a meeting of the Commune's enemies, but that spoken before presumed sympathizers with that institution they acquired a criminal character. [...]

4. The position of the Social Democrats as regards The Right of Association may be described in a few lines. Every society whose activity embraces political, religious, social, or educational, objects, must submit a full account of its' aim, organization, governing body &c to the Police, who can prohibit or dissolve such society as they think fit. No association may combine or correspond with parent, filial, or similar bodies elsewhere by committees, deputations, or letters. A Social-Democratic Union in Dresden may not be in communication with a like society in Meissen, or Leipsig [*sic*], or with the Central Committee of Five. [...]

6. This, My Lord, is the position of the Social-Democrats of Saxony. There has been no special inroad on them, as lately in Prussia and Bavaria: the picture drawn is of a normal state of things, which prevails not only in the Kingdom, but throughout the Empire, wherever Social Democracy has a visible, concentrated life. [...] Prosecutions and condemnations run, mechanically in their traditional groove. There is no need for that ministerial pressure on Public Prosecutors and Judges [...]. The natural alacrity of a highly conservative class, which itself looks on the *demos* as a wild and intractable beast, and knows that the dominant ~~classes~~ majority approves and demands a Draconian asperity of coercion, may be trusted to make the best use of laws tendentiously devised, and of the resources of constructive and spurious interpretation.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 215/34 (draft), FO 68/158 (final).

George Strachey to Earl of Derby, No 5, Dresden (January 27, 1877)

Following the example set at Berlin, Dresden has returned a Social Democrat. The unprecedentedly large proportion of $\frac{3}{4}$ ^{ths} of the constituency voted, with the result, [August] Bebel 10,830, [Karl] Mayhoff (Nat. Lib.) 9,930. [...]

As far as is known, Bebel's is the solitary Social-Democratic victory in the second series of [runoff] elections. If so, their original strength of 6 will only have been augmented by 1. [...] The moral triumph is greater than the numerical. No more complete victory could have met the successor of [Ferdinand]

Lassalle [i.e., Bebel], than his return in the second capital of Germany, which, though it includes a manufacturing element, is, on the whole, a Residenzstadt of the old type, whose population has an unusually large admixture of persons in independent and affluent circumstances.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/161.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No 14, Dresden (May 16, 1878)

The news of the attempt on the Emperor's life were received here with suitable demonstrations of the respect and regard entertained for His Majesty by all but extreme Socialists or Particularist partizans.^[7] Incidents of this lamentable kind must be expected to recur, while the German way of dealing with obnoxious minorities remains what it is. About 3½ years ago I shewed in a comprehensive report, based on my own observations, how it was that although the Social-Democrats enjoyed full political rights, no active members of the party could escape the permanent certainties of prosecution and punishment for press misdemeanors and defamation. [...] The infirmities of the national temper make the Germans very intolerant of criticism, so that there is a constant flow of prosecution initiated by sensitive officials, or by the representatives of public bodies, institutions, professions, and departments, (the Army, Clergy, Police, &c &c) which may have been impugned in their corporate character and actions. [...]

The attempt of [Max] Hödel in Berlin has suggested to some of the National-Liberal organs the reiteration of their old hints on the propriety of a legislative crusade against the Socialist propaganda, which, they argue, has no claim to the tolerance proper for the "Legitimate Parties". Responsible politicians will no doubt resist the insertion of the thin end of the wedge of reaction, but the recent augmentations of Social-Democratic strength, indicated, e.g. by [August] Bebel's return to the Reichstag for Dresden, and the surprising elections in Berlin,^[8] to say nothing of the gradual intrusion of the party into communal offices, have so alarmed the public, that the adoption of some system of Six-Acts^[9] would not, in my opinion, be generally disapproved. Severe repression would without doubt attain some of its' objects, whereas [...] the most venomous class enmities and political passions are stored and kept alive.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/162; reprinted in Mößlang and Whatmore, eds., *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, vol. 1, 1871–1883, pp. 336–38.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No 44, Dresden (November 10, 1881)

The [Saxon] Landtag, which meets in biennial session, is now sitting.

The first political business brought before the 2nd Chamber was an interpellation by the three Social-Democratic members [August] Bebel, [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, and [Ludwig Emil] Putrich, respecting the motives which induced the Government to apply the 'lesser' state of siege to Leipzig in June last.

Bebel argued, – that if the Government had believed that public order and safety were menaced, they would not have been satisfied with the removal of the persons incriminated, but would have exercised the full power available under the German law against Social-Democracy, besides prosecuting the alleged offenders for breach of the Saxon law against corresponding-Societies. The assumed secret meetings of his party had never taken place: there had been no communication with Russian Nihilists: and the collections of money were for the benefit of partizans expelled from the Empire. [...] All these proceedings had nothing to do with fears for order and safety, which no one was threatening. Their real origin must be sought in the anxiety of the Saxon Government to influence the elections by getting rid of a number of obnoxious persons supposed to be engaged in the Social-Democratic propaganda. [...]

Herr [Hermann] von Nostitz [-Wallwitz], as Minister of the Interior, [...] proceeded to shew [...] that the programme of the Party was the subversion of monarchy, of individual property, and of religion, and the organization of communism, and atheism. Such was their activity, that in Saxony the newspapers

suppressed under the law of 1878 had been largely replaced by pamphlets and fly-sheets; while in lieu of the prohibited Societies there had been founded a number of Clubs with names indicating harmless social purposes but, in reality, devoted to the political objects of the party, including the appointment of committees and delegates, and the arrangement of an elaborate electoral organization with a regular chain of subordinated agitators and authorities.

The acknowledged ideals of Social-Democracy being what they were, the state of things described, argued the Minister, constituted a danger, eventual, no doubt, but none the less real, to public order, on which Society could not afford to look with folded hands. [...]

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/165.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No 5, Dresden (January 17, 1884)

The presentation of a parliamentary petition, respecting an alleged illegal prohibition of a meeting by the municipality of a Saxon town [Großenhain], has given rise to an animated debate in the Landtag [...].

After an opening speech from [August] Bebel on the formal aspects of the question, Herr [Otto] von Ehrenstein,^[10] for the Government, discussed at large the attitude of Social-Democracy towards Society and the State. The Socialist ideal, he said, had two central points – the suppression of private life, and the suppression of professional employment. In the world of Social-Democracy no one was to have any particular calling, or any separate, private, existence. Human activity was to be limited to the equal production and distribution of the necessities of life. The earth was to be divided into districts, and to each individual of the human race his portion of work, and his portion of enjoyment, were to be assigned by local committees. These fundamental notions had been clearly developed in a book by Bebel, published in Zurich, called “Woman in the present, past, and future”. This work went further: mankind were to have no money, and were not to eat in their own houses. Bebel had written: “as the new society has no wares, it has no money”: also – “in the society of the future the entire preparation of victuals will be a social arrangement: the private kitchen is abolished.” This programme is to be attained by “the expropriation of the expropriators”, that is, by a comprehensive spoliation, and a general redistribution of property. [...]

Some effect may have been produced by the official picture of the Utopia whose quintessence was the absence of money, the enjoyment of pleasures under the orders of Committees, and dining at tables d’hôte. But the ultimate rejection of the petition was partly owing to an informality in its’ terms, and to a technical justification having been found for the prohibition of the Grossenhain meeting.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/168.

George Strachey to Earl Granville, No 46, Dresden (November 1, 1884)

The [Reichstag] elections have rudely dissipated the illusions which, as my correspondence has shewn, have been entertained here on the subject of Social Democracy.

It has been a cardinal point of Conservative and official faith, that Socialism was being stamped out by the coercion initiated six years ago, and that its’ diminished followers were beginning to contrast the empty promises of demagogues with the philanthropic realities of State-Socialism. Tuesday’s polls show, that what has been happening is the reverse of this.

The Social-Democrats have completely emerged from the eclipse into which they temporarily fell after the Proscription of 1878, and have made a new departure in energy and enthusiasm, which is obviously a consequence of the political persecution that was to intimidate them, as their improved party organisation and discipline is the undoubted result of the attempt to draw them, by the offer of official

nostrums, from the leadership of [August] Bebel and [Wilhelm] Liebknecht.

Complete figures cannot be given until after the casting [runoff] elections, when the socialist vote may be largely augmented. I can say at present, that whereas after the dissolution of 1881, that vote in Saxony was 80,000, on Tuesday it reached nearly 127,000, the highest mark yet attained in the Kingdom. [...]

This large increase of votes has effected no corresponding change of seats. The Saxon contingent of the Socialist faction in the Reichstag will hardly be above its' former strength of four members. It is characteristic of the Dresden press, that it persistently ignores the statistics above given, which I have had to compile for myself, and makes the shameless assertion, that this favoured Kingdom offers an exception to the alarming growth of the Social-Democracy throughout the Empire!

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/168.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No 57, Dresden (October 25, 1887)

The local Legislature [Landtag] of Saxony meets next month for its biennial session, and the prescribed renewal of one third of the members of the Landtag, or Lower House, has just taken place. The result is, in a sense, favorable to the Government and the parties 'of order', for the constituencies have proved to be still under the influence of the Conservative reaction aroused last February at the dissolution of the German Parliament. [...] [T]he Social-Democrats have only carried the single seat (of the 21 [seats contested]) which they held before. This has given rise to excessive official and 'patriotic' jubilation which, however, the arithmetic of the facts shews to be mere 'dancing on a volcano'. The last appeals to the constituencies in question were in 1881, and a comparison between that year and this shews that the power of Social-Democracy has been growing at a portentous rate. I find that the combined Saxon vote of the parties 'of order' is now one third greater than it was in 1881: the Socialist vote is five times greater. [...]

These facts are the more significant, as in Saxony the enjoyment of the local [Landtag] parliamentary franchise is contingent on a certain property qualification,^[11] which probably deprives half the operatives [i.e., workers] of the kingdom of the suffrage. But such considerations do not defer the 'reptile-press', and its official inspirers, here and elsewhere in Germany, from quoting the Saxon elections as a splendid victory on the side of order – or stop the reiteration of the assurance that, thanks to Prince Bismarck's wise repressive Bill of 1878, and the beneficent measures of State Socialism now in process of inauguration, the force of German Social-Democracy is being gradually broken.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/171.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No 50 (November 8, 1889)

Yesterday I observed to [Saxon Minister of War] Count [Alfred von] Fabrice, that there was nothing of interest at present on the German political horizon except the Social Democracy law [...]. I asked Count Fabrice if he thought the allied Governments had the sympathies of the public in thus treating the Socialists as a proscribed class. He said that in his opinion, they had, and that the wish for permanent coercion was pretty general. [...]

As regards the Bill, I continue in the belief that coercion has augmented both the material and the moral strength of the proscribed party. And I do not doubt that the proposed measure [...] will, if it becomes law, bring more converts to Social Democracy than all the efforts and eloquence of [Wilhelm] Liebknecht and [August] Bebel.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 68/174.

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No 12, Dresden (February 21, 1890)

As long as I can remember, the leading personages here, ministerial civic and industrial, with the entire Conservative and National-Liberal majority, and the Government and Bismarckian newspapers without exception, have never ceased reiterating their assurance, that under the admirable system of joint proscription and cajolery devised [in 1878] by the wisdom of the Imperial Administration, the working classes of the Kingdom, and of the Empire, were being gradually, but surely, weaned from the Socialist heresy. [...]

Yesterday's polls rudely dispelled the received illusion. Recovering beyond all hope from the discouragements and reverses suffered under the 'Cartel' coalition of 1887, the Hydra of Social-Democracy has risen again with unprecedented vigor, and with such an augmentation of electoral strength, that some of the polls recorded appear scarcely credible.

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/175 (final).

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No 13, Dresden (February 24, 1890)

My previsional [*sic*] estimate of the results of the [Reichstag] polls understated the success of the Social-Democrats. In 1887, of the 23 members composing the Saxon contingent to the Imperial Parliament, 6 were Socialists, all of whom were displaced by 'Cartel' candidates at the General Election of that year. Friday's result was not, as at first seemed, the recovery by the Social-Democrats of the 4 or 5 of the seats thus lost, but that they regained the entire 6. [...]

[T]he present situation is one of arithmetic, and I must again resort to comparisons of figures. The Saxon Social-Democratic vote was:

In 1884: 128,140

In 1887: 151,000

In 1890: 236,140

The augmentation since the last election is therefore the overwhelming number of 80,000 votes.

The 'Cartel' poll on Friday was 70,000 below that recorded at the previous General Election, while the 'Freisinnig' Party nearly doubled their old insignificant force. These last are still a mere fraction of the constituencies not forming a tenth of the active electoral body. – Putting together the totals, I find that of 560,000 Saxon voters on Friday last, 270,000 polled for 'Throne and Altar', while nearly 290,000 protested, on various grounds, practical or Utopian, against the dominant political system. [...]

The population of Saxony, and in particular of Dresden, is, in all ranks, an unsurpassed model of decorous and obedient behaviour. But the authorities are constantly haunted by the fear of tumults whose occurrence is altogether inconceivable except by the official mind. During the evening and night of Friday, although the city was tranquil almost to somnolence, the entire garrison, consisting of 10 Battalions of Infantry, 5 Squadrons of Cavalry, and artillery ad libitum, was kept ready to move at a moment's notice [...]. Familiar as I am with the spirit which animates the governing class, and the higher military, I can say that if any disturbances had arisen there would have been alacrity rather than reluctance in using the troops, and in resorting to the "whiff of grape-shot."

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 215/40 (draft), FO 68/175 (final).

George Strachey to Marquess of Salisbury, No 47, Dresden (October 25, 1890) (draft)

His Excellency [Saxon War Minister General Alfred von] Fabrice said that he had now come to the conclusion that the proscription [i.e., the recently expired law against Social Democracy] has entirely

failed as an engine of discouragement and repression, and that it probably had mischievous effects in the way of engendering bitterness and hatred. The law was impotent because it was a half-measure. If you undertook to silence and extirpate opinions, you must not operate with flea-bites, but take means of the most drastic sort.

When I said – ‘you mean shooting’, the General intimated that he did [...].

NOTES

[1] Burnley is referring to the Brunswick Socialists’ manifesto of 5 September 1870. Hereafter the abbreviation “MW” indicates that a footnote originates with Mößlang and Whatmore, eds., *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich, 1871–1897*.

[2] August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht were arrested on 17 December 1870 for their criticism of the war and their plea for peace without annexation (MW).

[3] The University of Leipzig (MW).

[4] The Imperial Press Law of 7 May 1874 became effective on 1 July 1874; it introduced freedom of the press throughout the German Empire (MW).

[5] Strachey is referring to the imperial government’s original intention of including exemption clauses for the ultramontane and socialist press (MW).

[6] Fernando Álvarez de Toledo (1507–1582), the third Duke of Alba, was a Spanish general and governor of the Spanish Netherlands. He was nicknamed “the Iron Duke” because of his harsh rule (ed.).

[7] On 11 May 1878 Emil Max Hödel, a plumber from Leipzig, tried to shoot Wilhelm I in Berlin. The failed assassination became a pretext for the first draft of the Anti-Socialist Law in May 1878 (MW).

[8] In the Reichstag elections of January 1877 the Socialist Workers Party of Germany won two Berlin districts (MW).

[9] Strachey is referring to the repressive Six Articles of 28 June 1832 in the German Confederation (MW).

[10] Otto von Ehrenstein was a Conservative member of the Saxon Landtag 1873–78; counselor in the Saxon Ministry of the Interior 1882–87; and Regional Governor of Leipzig 1887–1906 (ed.).

[11] From 1868 to 1896, enfranchisement for Saxon Landtag elections depended upon the payment of at least 3 Marks in state taxes annually. Roughly 14 percent of the entire Saxon population – and only men – had the vote around this time, compared to about 21 percent for Reichstag elections (ed.).

Source: The National Archives, UK, FO 215/40.

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