Anton Ackermann, the "German Path to Socialism" (February 1946)

Abstract

As early as July 14, 1945, the four newly established parties in the Soviet occupation zone (KPD, SPD, CDU, LDPD) joined to form a "block of anti-Fascist, democratic parties." In the fall of 1945, with support from the Soviet occupying power, the economic and social structures of the East were altered in the direction of a socialist system. This was achieved through "land reform" and "industry reform" as well as through further expropriations and nationalizations. As late as February 1946, Anton Ackermann, the leader of the KPD in Saxony, was still arguing against the blanket adoption of the Soviet model and for a "German way," a position that later contradicted the official party line and provoked harsh opposition. Although Ackermann spoke out, he in no way questioned the basic political goal of introducing socialism.

Source

[…] It holds true for Germany, as for every other country, that Socialism cannot be built up if the entire power of the working class does not rise up. The next weeks and months will decide whether the working class, from its current starting point, will be able to come to full power peacefully and by limiting itself to purely legal means. And this will happen in the sense that, within this short period of time, a decision will be made as to whether the democratic republic will once again become an instrument of force in the hands of reactionary powers or whether a progressive state will be formed, one that will not pose an insurmountable obstacle for a later development toward socialism. No one wishes more ardently than we that new battles, new bloodshed can be avoided.

In all matters that do not concern the basic questions connected with the revolutionary transition to socialism described above, Germany's course of development will doubtless have its own specific character in this or that case. In other words, when it comes to the details, the very special character of the historical development of our people, its political and national peculiarities, the special characteristics of our economy and culture will strongly influence this development and give it shape. The opinion spelled out in the joint resolution of December 21, 1945, is thus thoroughly justified:

"The Unity Party shall be autonomous and independent. Its task is to develop its policies and tactics in keeping with the interests of the German workers and the special conditions that exist in Germany. In the realization of both the minimum program and the maximum program, the party shall pursue its own path, given the peculiarities of the development of our nation."

None other than Lenin emphasized that it would be the greatest mistake to overstate the truth about the universal validity of Russian experiences and "to extend them to more than a few principles of our (i.e. the Russian) Revolution." (See Lenin**:** *Radicalism, the Infantile Disease of Communism* [*Der Radikalismus, die Kinderkrankheit des Kommunismus*]**;** Chapter 1, "In What Sense can We Speak of an International Meaning of the Russian Revolution?" ["In welchem Sinne kann man von einer internationalen Bedeutung der russischen Revolution sprechen?"]).

In October 1916, Lenin articulated extraordinarily profound thoughts on the special nature of the development in every country in his "A Caricature of Marxism" ["Eine Karikatur auf den Marxismus"]:

"All peoples will arrive at Socialism, that is inevitable, but they will not all get there in exactly the same way. Each country will give something of its own to some form of democracy, to some variant of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the varying pace in the Socialist refashioning of the various aspects of social life. Nothing would be more pathetic in theory than to paint in this regard a picture of the future in a monotonous gray 'in the name of historical materialism.'" (Lenin: *The Complete Works* [*Sämtliche Werke*], volume XIX, p. 281.)

In this regard we say yes, unconditionally, to a special German path to socialism. […]

Everything else depends on subjective factors, that is, above all, on the degree of maturity, determination, and unity of the Germany working class. May the times find us equal to the task! Then the specific German path to socialism can be a relatively easy and peaceful one.

Source: Anton Ackermann, “Gibt es einen besonderen deutschen Weg zum Sozialismus?“ (1946), reprinted in H. Weber, *Von der SBZ zur DDR 1949–1968*. Hannover, 1968, pp. 265–66.

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