

“Give the People Arms or Give Them Death!” (June 5, 1920)

Abstract

This article appeared in the NSDAP party newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, the day before the Reichstag election on June 6, 1920. The author, identified only by the initials “Klr.,” calls in martial tones for the arming of all German men, excluding Jewish men in accordance with Nazi ideology. The background to this demand by the National Socialists was the dissolution of all militias [*Einwohnerwehren*] ordered by the Prussian Minister of the Interior after the failed Kapp Putsch of March 1920. These armed volunteer units had been formed after the end of the First World War to support the state and the police in maintaining public order – especially against socialist uprisings. Members of the USPD and KPD were excluded from the militias. However, many local units soon developed anti-republican tendencies, as demonstrated by their participation in the Kapp Putsch. From the outset, the Allies suspected that the militias were nothing more than substitute military formations, in violation of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and they insisted on their disbandment. After they were banned in Prussia, the other German states followed suit in the summer of 1920, with the exception of Bavaria, where the militias were not disbanded until 1921.

Source

Give the People Arms or Give Them Death!

The Next Defense

There is one means of preventing the terrible blow that will inevitably strike us. It is immediately to arm all German men who are prepared to save their people from bloodshed, their homeland from destruction, their future from servitude and annihilation.

Neither a citizen’s defense nor a red guard is suited to fulfilling such a task. But anyone, whether he believes in the possibility of salvaging anything or in the necessity of building everything again from scratch, is well aware that any kind of civil war can only mean destruction, servitude and horrific error. And as long as we still believe we can or even must arm the bourgeoisie against the working class or the working class against the bourgeoisie, we cannot hope to be of service to our people but must know that we are merely doing the business of foreign masters.

“Calm and order” are words as commonly misused as “revolution.” Neither the fears of the forever egotistical nor the fussy chatter of oily seducers must make us hope to preserve “calm and order” against the “threatened radicalization” of the working class. Nor must we be taken in tow by the thoughtlessness and shortsightedness of those who only want revolution for the sake of revolution and do not trouble their heads about the consequences, being of the opinion that Marr or Landauer already said everything that needed to be said. Believe you me, there is nothing about this in their works.

The progressive decay of old legal and social forms forces us to grasp a means of defense. For the individual, this means protecting his own life, his loved ones and his work, for communities, protecting themselves from plunder and violence, and for the people, preserving and uplifting their will to live. The situation in which we find ourselves quite simply demands that we draw the conclusions. There is no government to protect us, nor will there be one for the foreseeable future. Even if it did possess the

powers, the greater part of the German people has no confidence in it. Similarly, the citizen's defense is in no position to attain this trust, the army must be left out of the picture since its very weakness renders it inadequate, and a red guard will always suffer from the accusation that is now directed quite rightly at the citizen's defense, namely that it is the tool of class rule.

The absolute worst mistake when setting up the citizen's defense was to exclude members of certain political parties. This made the citizen's defense the exact opposite of what it should be—self-defense by free men. The second mistake was that the founders believed they could not manage without tight centralization, which frequently arouses fears of an abuse of the authority of command, and the third mistake consisted of requiring members to sign a form like a band of mercenaries.

It also works without paper, and it works much better without such an utterly worthless rag. Why do we not have the militiaman make his pledge eye to eye, hand in hand with an elder or head of his community? Isn't that the only means of restoring honor to good faith and trust, to manly character and a man's word? The times are too serious, the issues too great for them to be encompassed by an official form. What we need is to ground our sense of community, of national consciousness and fatherland in the hearts and in the relationship between man and man, out of the same hardship and the same intentions. Let us dare to reestablish our people in this way! Let us join together, neighbor with neighbor, town with town, land with land; in this way, even the inevitable collapse of Germany will not destroy us, but rather will find us ready to rebuild.

It is the case nowadays that a man has more confidence in an unknown Jewish party leader from the capital than in the neighbor he has grown up with and known all his life. And this is true only because the neighbor votes black and he votes red, or vice versa. Is this not madness? Bitter hardship thrusts us together. Remember that we do not want civil war, we do not want to slay each other at the behest of foreigners and those seduced by them, we do not want our fields, which provide the means of our sustenance, to be ravaged, remember that we are determined to define our own destiny according to our will, and that all of us want the same thing: the freedom of souls, of labor and of the fruits of our labor.

It will be impossible to prevent everything. We will still meet with some misfortunes. But we wish to arm and prepare ourselves, to follow the path up out of misery and disgrace to German liberty. Here are the demands of the hour:

1. The municipalities, or in larger towns the guilds, trade unions and professional associations, are to be assigned weapons for self-defense.
2. The weapons will be distributed at the personal responsibility of the community leader (director of the cooperative, etc.) and respected observers to those men who promise with a handshake before witnesses not to take up arms for any political purpose whatsoever and only when called upon by the community.
3. If an unknown man applies for a weapon, he must present respected men of his profession as guarantors and witnesses to his pledge.
4. Jews will receive no weapons, because they do not belong to the German people and have amply demonstrated that they do not appreciate the honor of bearing arms.
5. When providing a weapon to fellow Germans, it is not permissible to inquire into or investigate their political convictions. Only those who cannot honestly promise not to use their weapons for political struggle or to exert political pressure will be denied weapons.
6. Those who receive a weapon make the following pledge: I accept the weapon from the hands of my community leader (guild head, trade union chairman etc.) and promise to use it only to protect my life

(and that of my wife and children) and our property against violent attacks. I promise always to obey immediately the call of the community to protect my neighbors. I promise never to use or offer my weapon for the pursuit of political ends, to safeguard and care for it faithfully, and to ensure that no unauthorized person has access to it. I submit to the judgement of the community (guild etc.) if my adherence to duty must be adjudicated.

7. The life and property of outsiders is under the protection of the people's militia. Outsiders (e.g. Jews) must follow the instructions of the people's militia.

8. The communities enter into alliances and treaties for neighborly protection. Such agreements will be expanded into increasingly higher associations.

9. The communities make decisions within themselves and with their neighbors. No one who does not belong to the community may be found with a weapon on our territory.

10. Anyone wrongfully carrying a weapon will be placed before the court of people's militia and, if found guilty, executed.

11. Anyone using their weapon for an assault on life and property will be executed.

12. Anyone who allows his weapon to fall into the hands of someone not authorized to bear arms will be executed if found guilty and expelled from the militia if found not guilty.

13. Anyone who ignores the community's call to fight against a threat will be expelled from the militia.

14. Anyone who commits a common crime, usury or black marketeering, will be expelled from the militia.

These are the main outlines. How matters will be handled in detail is easy enough to determine. What is important, however, is that we join forces, that we recall the right to our honor and the power of our will and to defend ourselves against the brazen game that a few megalomaniacal criminals dare to play with us. It is too late to stop the fall. But it is not too late to neutralize the strike and, before we are crushed, to stand up again.

Let us demand weapons! Towns, cooperatives, trade unions, guilds: If we make the request unanimously, it is not too late. Step up, friends, in the local councils, committees and assemblies! Show the abyss into which we are being driven. Gather the men who dare to fight against our destruction. And in this way reestablish the Reich, which will be a stronghold of freedom, peace and prosperity!

Klr.

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