

“On the Outcome of the Election” (May 5, 1924)

Abstract

After the Reichstag was dissolved on March 13, 1924, new elections were held on May 4, 1924. As a result, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) remained the largest party in the Reichstag. This article published by the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* the day after the elections criticizes not only the new parliamentary system in Germany, which it claims was influenced by capitalism and foreign interests. Though critical, the author (only identified by the initials P. L.) recognizes the importance of cooperation among the parties in the Reichstag in order to govern. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, published in Berlin since 1861, had served as the unofficial government newspaper during the Bismarck era and retained a conservative bias in subsequent years. In 1920, the newspaper was bought by Hugo Stinnes, an influential industrialist and member of parliament for the national-liberal German People's Party (DVP). This article illustrates the newspaper's increasingly conservative, antirepublican politics.

Source

On the Outcome of the Election

P.L. It will take some time for the complete election results to become available. The figures known thus far suggest that the general expectations concerning the election results have been confirmed and that the radical wing has emerged stronger than before.

In any case, this strengthening is not so great as to challenge the formation of a government based on a solid majority. In today's Germany the Reichstag elections no longer have the importance for Social Democracy that Friedrich Engels once assigned to them, namely that they offered the revolutionary working class an opportunity to count. The great hullabaloo that people were expecting in those days has come to pass in the meantime, albeit in very different forms, under very different conditions, and above all with very different consequences than those assumed by Social Democrats at the time. Nowadays, the composition of the cabinet also follows the composition of the Reichstag, and the times when elections represented a sort of revolutionary algebra are long gone.

But the gnarl must get along nicely with the stump, as Lessing wrote, and the parties that can claim the right to representation in the national cabinet by virtue of their strength cannot refuse to join the circle of responsibility simply because they do not like the look of their neighbor's nose. In Germany we are accustomed when speaking of parliamentarianism to look to England and locate the natural precondition for this form of government in their two-party system. In reality, the two-party system is rooted in the exceptional character of society on that island, which could persist in its historical peculiarity only as long as England's world domination remained unassailed and the country's government remained the casual pastime of the upper classes, who took a bit of time out from their fox hunts and port wine banquets for the "state". As soon as competition on the world market shattered England's position, class conflicts rose up, and the emergence of the Labour Party and its entry into government—a matter unimaginable just a few years before, like the Russian Revolution in Tsarist times—brought an end to the two-party system in the classic home of parliamentarianism. In this respect, therefore, England is moving in the direction of conditions on the Continent. All the same, the multiple party system we have in Germany is far too strong. We bear the traces of our historical development and the baleful cultural and religious splintering of our nationality into North and South Germans, Protestants and Catholics, is also very apparent in the party system. In Germany, capitalism, which is otherwise inclined to bridge all historical contradictions and create new social antagonisms, did

only the latter. It has brought new extremes and exacerbated the notion of class struggle to an unprecedented degree. On the other hand, the fateful interruption that the normal course of capitalist development has suffered since 1914, that is for ten years now, has robbed it of the power to smooth out the old cultural contradictions in the German people, and so in those ten years we have experienced a revival of particularism and many oppositions we thought we had overcome, the outcome of which is the quite grotesque panoply of parties and nominations.

Even so, the momentum of the mass movement represented by parliamentary elections in the great European central nation swept most of the party crumbs from the table. And yet it is characteristic that the old parties were joined by two new ones, which either did not exist at the last elections or were just beginning and have now gathered a number of votes between them that makes it unlikely that they will disappear anytime soon. We mean the German National People's Party and the Communists. Both of them can be expected to act as fundamental opposition parties. And an opposition is as necessary as salt is to soup. As to the other parties, it will be up to them to decide how they join together and with whom.

We believe it is a matter of course for the German National [People's] Party to join the government. They owe it to their voters, who by electing a conservative did not intend to vote for a party that turns its back on the state because it is a republic. We can assume that the German National People's Party will take this step, which would be an important one towards national solidarity and internal balance. It is certain that the entry of the conservatives would solve the question of Social Democratic participation in the formation of the cabinet. And we can only agree with this. Through their previous participation in forming the federal cabinet, the Social Democrats already compromised themselves enough before the masses to put them in a position to deploy excessively unscrupulous agitational language and reject any responsibility for the conditions in state and society. The party has experienced a highly salutary defeat. Of the approximately 11 million votes for the Social Democrats and Independents [Social Democrats] in 1920, the united party lost about 50 percent. A substantial proportion of their former supporters have moved to the right, to the conservatives, which is especially evident in the election results from Merseburg. On the other hand, given Germany's foreign relations, it is absolutely imperative that the specific party of pacifism and the phraseology of international brotherhood be divested of any direct influence on the course of political events and decisions. The telegrams from the "brother parties" in hostile foreign countries that the Social Democrats have displayed like feathers in their caps render them wholly unsuited a priori to any participation in the government at the current moment. We therefore need to work towards a grand coalition composed exclusively of the mainstream parties from the right to the Social Democrats. A cabinet that can depend on such a majority would be far more capable of representing the German will and interests towards our enemies than the minority governments of today. Foreign countries should and must realize that in future, they can no longer impose certain naive vulgarities and impertinences upon Germany. We know that we live in a bitter predicament and that we must pay and bleed. But we also know that we are a strong and proud people that has been accustomed for many years to see the backs of our enemies, and that they cannot mistreat us forever with impunity.

It should be said in any case that the "grand coalition" being called for here is merely a demand in the current political situation, whose exigency may perhaps persist for a few years. At bottom, however, this "grand coalition" is only a small one. The German electorate must always be confronted as a heuristic principle with the call to form a government encompassing all parties from the conservatives to the Social Democrats. This may still sound quite daring nowadays. But anyone who recalls the terrible promises made for years in the Social Democratic camp, even by utterly harmless men like Hermann Müller, that they would never in a million years align with a party like the National Liberals—or as it is now called, the German People's Party—and above all not with such typical representatives of capitalism as Mr. Stresemann, and anyone who watched even the Independents silently tuck their red handkerchiefs into their pockets and even such a celebrated customer as Crispian, who knows no German fatherland, subside into the bosom of this capitalist party and help to command the march to

the right as party chairman and drum major of “United Social Democracy,” anyone who has watched and listened to this for years distrusts the pledges of politicians even more than the promises of lovers. The great direction of the march before us must be Westarp’s “grand coalition” with Müller. In the coming years, the process of disintegration and clarification within the parties of both Right and Left will continue, and the punishing hardship in the country, which is more likely to increase than decrease, will teach the politicians the bit of dialectics necessary to turn the idea of national solidarity from a party slogan into reality. Behind Social Democracy stands the German working class, and we need them. But they must not turn their backs on the republican state any more than the conservatives. To speak with Fichte, we need a ruler to push us toward Germanness.

Let us welcome the results of the Reichstag elections thus far as one step towards this objective.

Source of original German text: “Zum Wahlausfall”, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 5, 1924.
Accessible online at: <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/list/title/zdb/2807323X/>

Translation: Pam Selwyn

Recommended Citation: “On the Outcome of the Election” (May 5, 1924), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:document-4640>> [March 16, 2026].