

Social Democrat Julius Moses on the Increasing Impoverishment of Germany's Population (March 6, 1931)

Abstract

In this March 6, 1931, speech, the physician and SPD member of the Reichstag Julius Moses warned his colleagues in the chamber of the severe consequences that high unemployment had on the health and education of the German population, especially its youth. A physician by training, Moses was a member of the Reichstag from 1920 to 1932 and had a significant influence on social democratic health policy in the Weimar Republic. When five million Germans had no work, Moses pointed out, it meant that another 15 million Germans, mostly children, suffered from the absence of a paycheck, which often meant skipping meals, going without baths, freezing in the winter, sharing threadbare clothes and shoes, and suffering from lice. Moses shared stories that he had heard personally, including that some families had resorted to sending one child to school one day, and another the next, because they only had one pair of shoes, and the children needed to take turns wearing them. Children's clinics, declared Moses, compared conditions in 1931 to the worst periods of wartime suffering and even feared outbreaks of scurvy, a disease stemming from Vitamin-C-deficiency that had largely disappeared in the previous century.

Moses had served in the Reichstag since 1920, where he advocated for better housing, improved healthcare, and much more carefully regulated medical trials that involved human subjects. He issued clear and early warnings against Hitler, and for that reason, as well as his Jewish background, Moses suffered almost immediate persecution from the Nazis, once they had come to power in 1933. He died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942.

Source

Ladies and gentlemen, in the very few minutes available to me, which I actually wanted to use to make a few brief comments on the whole topic of health care, I would like to follow up on the remarks of Mr. Schlange, whom we have listened to with great interest.

Mr. Schlange was right to speak of the seriousness of the situation. And perhaps I may add in these few minutes, from the point of view of a doctor, that the situation in Germany is indeed extremely serious from this perspective as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, I took the liberty of presenting you with a memorandum some time ago entitled "Unemployment: a public health problem".

Ladies and gentlemen, 5 million unemployed in Germany means that 20 million in Germany are directly affected by this problem and the effects of the unemployment problem, and are affected first and foremost in the area of public health.

Ladies and gentlemen, when the directors of children's hospitals are already saying today that the deplorable state of affairs is vividly reminiscent of the worst hardships of the war years, when today there is talk again of pollution and vermin, which had disappeared for years and which can now be found again and again in the most diverse areas of Germany, when children could no longer be bathed because there was no more coal for heating, when there were no more suits, when children had no shoes, when it was found that in some families with several children, one child could only go to school today and the other child tomorrow because only one pair of boots were available [...]

Source: SWR 2 Archivradio,

<https://www.swr.de/swrkultur/wissen/archivradio/spd-warnt-vor-wachsendem-elend-in-der-bevoelkerung-1931-reichstag-vor-hitler-100.html>

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