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RUDOLF ROCKER AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN GERMANY

By Augustine Souchy

Translated by Dr. Arthur E. Briggs

In 1911 the widow of Joseph Peukert came to Berlin from America to request that Gustav Landauer consider publication of the memoirs of her deceased husband.

This circumstance recalls in the circles of our friends the old liberal movement in Germany and Gustav Landauer's reply: "There lives in London a notable man. He writes in German exceptionally well, but he is also a distinguished writer of Yiddish. He is an outstanding orator, and he reaches by his writings the libertarian literature of the Yiddish movement. He is not yet old to the old-timers, but he has belonged for more than a decade to the movement. That man is Rudolf Rocker."

It was then I heard Rocker's name for the first time. In 1919, after the troops sent by the Social Democrat Noske to Bayern had expelled the Council of the Republic from Munich, Gustav Landauer was bestially murdered by the soldiers. Yet the dream of the German Republic was accomplished. The fighters for freedom expelled by socialist laws and who remained in exile were finally permitted to return to their socialist homeland.

With them also came Rudolf Rocker. Then I had the opportunity in Berlin to become acquainted with him. My first meeting with Rocker in 1919 gave me a better impression of him than I had expected. Rudolf is a personality such as one seldom discovers. He stands not only above things but towers high over the run of men.

In the new Germany Rudolf began to work. He talked to the workers concerning

real socialism which they must create for themselves, not of that kind which is decreed by the government. He spoke of the new Germany which must be constituted on the federal principle. He opposed the militaristic Prussians and pleaded for recognition that only a federalized Germany could make the people independent and be a guaranty of peace to neighboring peoples.

These doctrines were not to the taste of the Social Democrats. The Weimar Constitution was indeed democratic but centralistic in its character. In the Rhineland there was a separatist movement and the Social Democratic government put Rudolf Rocker and with him Fritz Kater under "protection." The real reason for that was to disguise the fact that from Rudolf Rocker's publication of propaganda a great part of the industrial workers in the Rhineland and Westphalia began to turn toward libertarian ideas and to abandon the Social Democratic associations. It saw in that a threat to Social Democracy which it desired to divert by the sequestration of libertarian propaganda.

Rudolf Rocker was not the man to allow this to turn him aside from his purpose. Restored to liberty he was again a restless battler for his ideals.

About this time there was a free opportunity for new ideas. The spirit of youth was like foaming new wine that bursts out of an old leathern bottle. A large part of the labor unions realized that Social Democracy found itself in a false position and sought a new orientation. Rudolf knew how to direct

the undeceived masses to new goals and inspired them with new ideals.

The libertarian movement was divided in two camps. In one they propagated in the traditional manner the ideas of freedom and a state-free society. In the other, revolutionary trades organizations according to federalist principles grouped themselves independent of political parties. They set for themselves the goal to fight for the economic emancipation of the proletariat.

A clear conception of the realizable goal should have been neither the one nor the other. The man who did most to bring about and establish a clear objective in that movement was Rudolf Rocker. He expressed the formula of true libertarianism. He made known among the German workers the ideas of the First International not previously known there. He placed in the foreground the theory that the workers through taking over management and production must change capitalistic to socialist enterprise. Only through the worker himself can socialism be realized. This doctrine went far beyond the Social Democratic comprehension according to which the free folk-state decrees socialism. Rocker made clear that the labor unions must accomplish this work. Similarly he opposed the "pure" ideologies which repudiate the class struggle and which spread the idea that the workers cannot through ideological propaganda alone attain their goal.

In numerous speeches before the workers and intellectuals and in many debates with the politicians of the Weimar Republic Rocker had made known in Germany the ideas of libertarian socialism. Old and young listened intently to the powerful speeches of Rudolf Rocker, which in masterful formula made known the new doctrines of libertarian socialism. In books and brochures he gave to the German workers ever and again new impulses. A whole school of younger elements took to

itself Rocker's doctrines. Rudolf had become the founder and theorist of German Libertarianism.

This movement alas, was not strong enough to overcome the Social Democratic and communistic trend, and as Marxism in its weightiest and most radical form came to ruin, there arose in its place the authoritarian ideas which climaxed in Hitler and his horde preaching National Socialism. The prophetic word of Rudolf Rocker was realized: Socialism must be free or it cannot exist.

Rudolf was forced into exile for the second time.

The comrades in America can now alone preserve what he had accomplished in these last ten years. The moral and spiritual regeneration of the German people would be furthered more after this World War by the publication of this book, *Nationalism and Culture*, than by whole volumes of new statutes and decisions. *This book should be proposed for award of the Nobel Peace Prize.*

We stand at the point of a change in the times. At the end of this War Germany will be compelled to make a decision between undergoing a centralized Prussian militaristic organization or building up anew on federalized principles its freedom in every sphere. Only a federalized Germany in a new European federation can guarantee peace in Europe. Rudolf Rocker's counsel will be of immeasurable worth in the coming years.

I and all of the fighters for German freedom, now living in exile wish our friend and teacher, Rudolf Rocker, on his 70th birthday, health of body and renewed freshness of spirit. May he keep both, that his mighty word may save those of the young generation from despair and lead them to new ideals and new goals.

Los Tuxtlas,

Ver. Mexico.

At the end of February, 1943.



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HONORABLE MENTION

—Must be made of the fine cooperation and support given by numerous organizations to the work of Rudolf Rocker in favor of freedom in America, particularly here on the Pacific Coast:

Kropotkin Literary Society, Branch 413, Workmen's Circle, Los Angeles

Freie Arbeiter Stimme, (Oldest Yiddish Weekly in America)

Dr. Herman Frank, Editor. Published in New York City.

The Stelton Modern School Group of Los Angeles.

Associated Roman Forums, Dr. Frederick W. Roman, Director, Los Angeles

The host of others among Eastern Americans, British, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Scandinavian, Dutch, and even Chinese groups can not be overlooked.

A bibliography of this published work, intended to be printed herein, is not now available, but would indicate the widespread acceptance of Rudolf Rocker's written books in the world.