
Autocracy, Democracy, Hypocrisy.

by Victor L. Berger

An unsigned editorial in *The Milwaukee Leader*, v. 7, no. 266, home edition (Oct. 18, 1918), pg. 1.
Authorship attributed to *Leader* publisher Victor Berger based on content and style.

Vorwaerts, the official organ of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, is published in Berlin, a city far famed as the dead center of autocracy.

We have not seen a copy of the *Vorwaerts* for over two years, because his Royal Majesty, George V, King of England, Emperor of India, etc., by the Grace of God, has long ago prohibited the inhabitants of this great democracy from reading foreign newspapers emanating from outside his realm.

• • • • •

However, hardly a day passes that the Anglo-American press does not quote copiously from the Berlin *Vorwaerts*.

From these quotations we judge that the *Vorwaerts* is very much opposed to autocracy at home. The paper is saying things about its own government and the Kaiser, the Imperial cousin of our Royal Ally, King George, that no newspaper would dare to print in this great republic, were it directed against our own rulers.

• • • • •

In spite of its anti-Kaiser, anti-autocracy, anti-war, and pro-peace character, the Berlin *Vorwaerts* is still going through the mail — in Germany.

Even the government of William Hohenzollern, Hindenburg, and Ludendorf has refrained from laying its hand upon the most formidable enemy of autocracy — in Germany.

• • • • •

Outside of Karl Liebknecht, who is now serving

a 3-year sentence for having advised the common soldiers of Germany to shoot their officers and go home, and Fritz Adler, who is serving an 18-year sentence because he shot and killed the Prime Minister of Austria, there is another citizen of the Central powers who is greatly admired by the free, untrammled press of this country — Maximilian Harden.

No private citizen of the land of the free has had the privilege of feasting his eyes on Harden's paper during the last two years. But the extracts, which an English censor has graciously allowed to filter through, have shown that Harden is accusing the ruling class of Germany of being responsible for the war. Like *Vorwaerts*, he demanded Peace Without Victory when the German arms were still victorious.

Some issues of Harden's paper have been suppressed. But *Unsere Zeit* is still carried by the Royal Prussian post department with the same care and for the same price as the most reactionary junker sheet in the German Empire.

Moreover, anybody can write to Maximilian Harden, even a citizen of this Republic, and send him money and checks and be sure the plucky editor will get them, provided the letter is not confiscated before it reaches Germany.

Best of all, Maximilian Harden is still a free man. He is not even indicted. Neither has he been tarred and feathered or threatened with mob violence or with yellow paint.

• • • • •

There is something out of joint with an autocracy that permits the pernicious activity of a Maximilian Harden in times of war. What the German autocracy is sadly in need of in dealing with cases

like the *Vorwaerts* and *Unsere Zeit* is a law reading like this:

When the Empire is at war, the Postmaster General may, upon evidence satisfactory to him that any person or concern is using the mails in violation of any of the provisions of this act, instruct the postmaster at any post office at which mail is received addressed to such person or concern, to return to the postmaster at the office at which they were originally mailed all letters or other matter so addressed, with the words: "Mail to this address undeliverable under Espionage Act," plainly written or stamped on the outside thereof. * * *

• • • • •

Autocratic Germany has no such law, but we have. The above passage is taken from the Espionage Act, passed by the Congress of the United States, and signed by President Wilson, author of *The New Freedom*.

• • • • •

Under this law ONE MAN, the Postmaster General, upon EVIDENCE SATISFACTORY TO HIM, may deprive any person or any concern of the use of the mail.

Under this law, one man, without judge or jury, without due process of law, may ruin the business of

any person or any concern by simply cutting off its mail.

Not since the interdict has wielded by the Popes of medieval times has so much power been placed in the hands of one man.

Under this law, Mr. Bureson can bankrupt any Republican or Democratic newspaper in the country. His whim is law. There is no appeal. "The king can do no wrong."

But so far, the law has only been applied to *The Milwaukee Leader*.

• • • • •

And *The Leader* still lives because publications like *The Leader* have a vitality that neither Tsar nor Kaiser, crowned or uncrowned, can destroy.

Yes, dear reader, we are going to pull through — thanks to your loyalty — and in spite of the Espionage Act.

• • • • •

But, now that you have read part of this act, you also may understand why it is so hard for us to understand how the war is making "the world safe for democracy."

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.