

## INTRODUCTION.

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**P**REOCCUPATION with Russian affairs has rather diverted the attention of British Socialists customarily interested in the development of Socialism abroad from the activities of the Labour and Socialist Parties in other countries.

It is almost an instinct of the British Labour Movement that if the capitalist Press concentrates its attacks upon some movement or some person, we react and develop a degree of sympathy with the attacked which we should not do in the normal course of observation.

The time has now come when we must study Socialist activities in all the various countries of the world and not concentrate our minds upon one country only.

The British capitalist Press, with its own standards of news value, "features" the dramatic and sensational, but it should not be assumed from this that the Socialist Parties in countries other than Russia are not actively engaged in the fight against capitalism. As a matter of fact, owing to circumstances which are understood in varying degrees, social and economic development in Russia during the last few years has been, may be temporarily, in a capitalist direction, whereas Socialism in British Local Government and, as this pamphlet reveals, in Vienna Local Government, has been making distinct movements forward in a Socialist direction.

The present pamphlet gives to British readers an opportunity to study the great and mighty work of the Social Democratic Party in the local government of Vienna. The Vienna Municipality conducts operations probably of a considerably greater magnitude than those of the Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham Corporations, and has powers of local self-government far in excess of those enjoyed by the London County Council. It has also to be remembered that Vienna is a provincial government and that the City Council is also a Diet or provincial Parliament.

I am sure that British Socialists will read the following pages with pride and admiration, mixed with a considerable degree of envy. When one realises how fettered our responsible local governing authorities are by the fact that they can do nothing except those things that they are specifically empowered by statute to do, and when one reads of the enormous elasticity of the powers of

the Viennese municipality, one is filled with a yearning that here in Great Britain we may soon secure a similar degree of local self-determination, at any rate to the extent provided in the Labour Party's Local Authorities (Enabling) Bill.

British Local Government has great traditions. It is satisfactory to know that in certain respects it suffers far less from central government dictation and control than many of the Continental and American cities. Nevertheless, we are still tied down within the strict limits of statutory authority, and Parliamentary powers must be sought and vested interests must be fought when we want to secure even simple extensions of municipal activity.

The following pages reveal a remarkable elasticity of municipal powers. The power of the Vienna Municipality to determine its own budget in the sense that it can fix the nature of the local taxes which it imposes, would be an enormous advantage in this country, subject to proper safeguards for the general system of national taxation.

The "burden of the rates" is still the most effective cry of the reactionaries against the Labour Party in Local Government. It is a cry which is largely ignorant and is associated with the most wicked misrepresentation of Labour policy, but up to a point it is effective in many areas because of the rigid system of local rating under which we live. It is satisfactory to observe that Viennese Social Democracy has not only introduced better systems of local taxation, but has proved to our opponents that Socialism, far from being inconsistent with true economy, tends to secure the most economical ordering and the best possible use of our national and local resources.

Local services under the Socialists of Vienna are more efficiently administered than previously, and are imposing less burdens in taxation on the citizens. Rates as we understand them have been practically abolished.

Let it be remembered that the work of the Vienna Social Democratic Party has been done during a period of very great difficulty for the City. Up to the Revolution of 1918-19 and the Peace Treaties, Vienna was the capital city of the far flung territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a result of the Austrian Revolution, the monarchy was abolished and a republic established, and as a consequence of the Peace Treaties the Austro-Hungarian Empire was disintegrated and Vienna became the capital of the relatively insignificant territories of the new Austrian Republic. The full story of the revolution and these happenings is clearly related in Dr. Otto Bauer's "The Austrian Revolution."

Shrinkage of the national territory itself was bound to involve economic reactions in the capital city of the former empire; it is

well known that the economic fabric of the Austrian State smashed almost completely after the peace and that politically the republic went through great troubles as a result of Bolshevik and counter-revolutionary influences from neighbouring States.

The heroic struggles and the intellectual self-control of the Austrian proletariat during these times constitute one of the outstanding chapters in the story of the great struggles of the Socialist working class of the world.

It must not be thought, therefore, that the Viennese Municipality has had a relatively easy task—it has had an exceedingly difficult task; and the triumph of the Viennese Social Democracy is, therefore, all the more remarkable and creditable.

In presenting the present pamphlet to British readers Robert Danneberg, President of the Vienna Diet, as the author, and H. J. Stenning, as the translator, have rendered us a great service. Not only Labour people but many others actively interested in Local Government will read with profound interest about the great constructive doings of the Social Democratic Party in Vienna in connection with municipal organisation, health, housing and welfare services, and municipal enterprise.

This pamphlet tells a great story, of far-reaching permanent work, and I trust that it will receive the sympathetic and widespread attention of British readers.

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