

## The King of Prussia and Social Reform

In response to the Silesian revolts the King of Prussia has issued a Cabinet Order, in which he:

1. Reproves the authorities, for having lacked in oversight and care for the unlucky poor, the homeless children, the unemployed, those criminals capable of improvement, the workers who through sickness have fallen on hard times, etc. And yet this oversight and care is essentially necessary to prevent the great evils that result from the neglect in which the children of the lowest classes are raised, and in order to pre-empt social disruptions, which is portrayed as a consequence of impoverishment and lack of support, which society is duty-bound to provide for the needy and the repentant criminals.
2. The King knows that redressing this evil is only possible through the union of all [strong] Christian charitable hearts.
3. He thus demands that all authorities, that deal with poor relief and administration, to seriously accept all associations or societies, that have also been or will be formed to address this issue, and to see this care as a holy duty and a part of their official activities.
4. The King expects from them plans and suggestions about this situation.
5. He orders, the leaders of the provincial authorities to acquaint themselves with his will, and calls on them to consider this question to be of the highest importance, and to encourage the formation of charitable organisations everywhere where they do not yet exist.

The 'Reforme' has rightly found this Cabinet Order worthy of note. It is the Christian answer of the Prussian state to the events in Silesia. While the worldly or legal response has already been in part carried out, and in part, with its usual hardness, is still to be expected.

The 'Reforme' says in their Premier Paris from the 20<sup>th</sup>: 'The King of Prussia acts out of

the double influence of vague alarm and religious feeling. The breakthrough of the worker's misery alarms him as a disorder of the administration, and not as a sign of social revolution, and against the distressing situation of things he knows no other response than private charity, encouraged and ordered by the authorities; yes, he even goes so far as recognizing a duty of society to provide a helping hand to the needy.' The day before, the 'Reforme' even admitted that 'Apart from an ignorant and scandalous mixing of the freed criminals and needy workers, we find in this document the presentiment, the instinct, of the great social reforms of civil society which the situation of Europe necessitates everywhere.'

The 'Reforme' would not be wrong, in their understanding of the King, if next to the official ideas of the document they also understand the entirety of the German situation. The King and the German society has not yet reached the 'presentiment of its reform', even the revolts in Silesia and Bohemia have not created this feeling. It is impossible, in an unpolitical country like Germany, to present the partial misery of the factory districts as a matter of general affairs, let alone as an affliction of the whole civilised world. The event has the same character for Germans, as some local flood or famine. This is why the King treats it as an issue of lack of administration and charity. For this reason, and because only few military resources were needed to defeat the weak weavers, the demolishing of factories and machines inspired no 'alarm' in the King and the authorities. Yes, not even 'religious feeling' influenced the Cabinet Order, it is a sober expression of Christian statesmanship and a doctrine that sees no obstacle that cannot be treated with the medicine of the good feeling of 'Christian hearts'. Poverty and criminality are two great evils, who can solve it? The state and the authorities? No, but the 'union of all Christian hearts' can.

Out of this, one can explain the strange admission that 'the children of the lowest classes are allowed to grow up in neglect.' Where this occurs there is a lack of Christian feeling, and can be addressed with a known exhortation. The King does not blame the State and the order of society, he ascribes it to the lack of Christian feeling, that he believes can be expected of, partly, the poor relief authorities (which is made up of unpaid communal officials and representatives) and partly the wealthy population. This 'reflection' is the purpose of the Cabinet Order, and the authorities are made aware, that they are not to place obstacles in the path of the development of these charitable societies (which they normally would have done), and are instead to support them.

Why does the King not at the same time order the education of all neglected children? That exceeds his power, only the 'combined powers of all charitable hearts' are in a position to afford it, when they all come together.

'The normal poor relief of the municipalities is not enough': what is to be done? 'All charitable hearts must unite themselves!' They are more powerful, than even the 'Chief of the Provincial Authority'.

So what is the Cabinet Order of the King of Prussia? It is nothing else than the decisive helplessness of the politician, who turns to the exhortations of Christian feeling of the pious preacher; all the reports and studies, the plans and suggestions, will of course not prejudice the opinion of the King.

The good words and the good feelings are cheap; insight and successful acts are expensive. They are in this case more than expensive; they are not even impossible.

From this position of helplessness, and very behind England and France, Germany was surprised by the proletarian movements in Silesia and Bohemia; from this position it will also be surprised by a new famine in the Saxon Ore Mountains, and surely the same will be the case in Berlin

and other big cities when the proletarian question arises again.

The German poor are not smarter than the poor Germans, i.e. they nowhere look beyond their own hearth, their own factory, their own district; absent from the whole question *up to this point* has been the penetrating political soul. All revolts will suffocate in blood and incomprehension, that break out in this disastrous isolation of mankind from the community and of their thoughts from social principles. Once this misery has produced the understanding and uncovered the political understanding of the Germans the root of social misery, then also will in Germany these events be 'perceived as a symptom of a great upheaval.' A social revolution without a political soul (i.e. without the organising perspective from the general standpoint) is impossible. In this France and England will undoubtedly have the initiative, however much the King of Prussia is concerned with new plans and great reforms.

A Prussian.