

Political Crisis in Austria

Proletarians all countries, unite!

POLITICAL CRISIS IN AUSTRIA

“Every political crisis, whatever its outcome, is useful in that it brings to light things that have been hidden, reveals the forces operating in politics, exposes deception and self-deception, catch-phrases and fictions, and affords striking demonstration of “things as they are”, by forcibly driving them home.” ¹ (V. I. Lenin)

As part of the General Crisis of the ruling world system, which is currently taking place unevenly but on a world scale, the political crisis of the bourgeoisie is also deepening. It is an expression of the intensifying class struggles, as well as the increasing falling away of significant sectors of the working class and the masses from the fraudulent system of parliamentarism and their rebellion and struggle against the old rotten order. We are in the period of the decline of imperialism and its decomposition phenomena are getting stronger expression again especially since the 90s of the 20th century, which fully confirms that the *“main tendency is revolution and that it remains so, just as Chairman Mao stated that it is developing”*.²

The deepening political crisis of the bourgeoisie in Austria is taking place in the midst of and as part of the political crisis on a world scale. In Austria, the sharpening of contradictions is expressed in struggles of the working class, which, although mostly still developing on a regional level, are more frequent and also increasingly prolonged. Significant sectors of the masses are also coming into deeper contradiction with the ruling class, which in the last period

found expression in a prolonged popular movement. At the same time, premature changes of government, reelections or the replacement of ministers express the crisis of parliamentarism, in which the masses can be appeased less and less with the previous means of deception. In the last two years, health care also became a significant arena of class struggle and accelerated the political crisis, leading, among other things, to the replacement of two health ministers in the first two pandemic years (we see similar developments in other countries, for example, more than half of all health ministers in EU countries were replaced in the first pandemic year). However, the political crisis did not develop with the pandemic, it intensified and condensed with it, and it is essential to understand its foundations and specific conditions. As Chairman Mao Zedong teaches, the internal contradictions form the main side and the external contradictions work through the internal ones. As a small but mainly regionally influential imperialist, Austrian imperialism comes under particular pressure in the midst of the general crisis, which further accelerates the political crisis. A change of chancellor twice in only three months (at the end of 2021), but also the relatively rapid rise of new parliamentary "alternatives" such as the reformist KPÖ Styria or the MFG (Menschen. Freiheit. Grundrechte) express the need for new means of deception for the bourgeoisie. The crisis of parliamentarism experiences a condensation in the midst of the political crisis: Thus, in the past 20 years, there was only one government out of six that lasted the entire legislative period, while in the 40 years before "only" every second government broke down because of internal contradictions between the different factions of capital and the loss of confidence of broad sections of the masses.

As noted at the beginning of the article, the political crisis is developing in the midst of and as part of the General Crisis. Two important premises for the current deepening of the political crisis in Austria will be addressed in the

following section.

Crisis of Social Democracy and Reformism

The crisis of Social Democracy is one of the most essential premises for the deepening of the political crisis, since it still represents the main instrument of the bourgeoisie for the political suppression of the working class and the influence of Reformism within it. In contrast, communists and revolutionaries must be very vigilant and understand the meaning of this crisis in order to develop and apply a correct political line. *“What is new at the moment is that, in contrast to the last periods when the semi-proletariat, white-collar workers and civil servants were the main carriers of the daily political and trade-union protest of the working people, now the industrial proletariat, the core of the workers’ movement, is also coming into activity, even outside collective bargaining, which is a bastion of social democracy and trade-union leadership and is therefore particularly extensively and firmly controlled by it.”*³ The basis for the crisis of Social Democracy, apart from the intensifying process of attrition of the labor aristocracy, lies in the falling away from it of ever broader layers of the working class, the increased activity of the industrial proletariat being of particular importance to the communists and revolutionaries. The spontaneous and “wild” strike in April 2020 at the Greiner industrial company (Upper Austria region), which was carried out without and against the trade union bureaucracy, must be seen as a harbinger of this development. Along with several other examples, the struggle against the closure of the MAN automobile company in Steyr is the turning point of this development, where the industrial proletariat was no longer under reformist and social democratic leadership for a whole section of its struggle, but under proletarian leadership. Although social democracy is not yet losing its hegemony within the working class on a national scale, the increasing loss of influence and hegemony in local and

regional working class struggles should be understood as part of the consolidation of its relative hegemony. The relative hegemony of social democracy means that it is in erosion, rotten and porous, but the new is not yet strong enough to advance into this "gap" on the national level as a whole. The communist and revolutionary forces must know well how to fight for the leadership and hegemony of the working class in those local and regional struggles, but not to lose themselves in them, but at the same time promote the national unification of the class struggles in order to develop class consciousness and raise it to a higher level. On the other hand, it would be wrong not to take up the struggle for the leadership of the industrial proletariat under the pretext that it is still strongly tied to social democracy on a national scale, because that would mean closing one's eyes to the new, that this tie is brittle and rotten.

The labor aristocracy, the main social pillar of Social Democracy, is coming under increasing pressure in the midst of the General Crisis, losing privileges and tending to be triturated and diminished. Among other things, this means that it can no longer exert its influence on the working class to the same extent and intensity as before, thus accelerating the crisis of Reformism. The decline of the influence of Social-Democratism in the working-class movement is clearly expressed in the development of the party membership. Whereas the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) had 620,000 members in 1990, it had only 180,000 members in 2017, a decline of 440,000 members in 27 years, or 16,296 per year. The crisis of social democracy is also reflected in the trade unions, although there the influence has declined less rapidly in comparison, which shows that the trade union apparatus (ÖGB) is still an extremely important instrument for mitigating the crisis symptoms of the SPÖ. Nevertheless, in 1981 the ÖGB still reached an organizing density of 60% of all employees, while in 2019 it was only 32%. The shrinking of the labor aristocracy and the increasing falling away of the proletarian

masses from the SPÖ are forcing the latter to look more and more for a new mass base, which it is finding in the petty bourgeoisie.⁴

The crisis of Social Democracy must therefore be given high attention by communists and revolutionaries because, as part of the General Crisis, it is an expression of the decline of imperialism and the main tendency of the revolution. Here should also be emphasized the teachings of Generalissimo Stalin, who pointed to the crisis of Social Democracy as part of the general decline of imperialism. *"It is impossible to put an end to capitalism without putting an end to Social-Democratism in the labor movement. That is why the era of dying capitalism is also the era of dying Social-Democratism in the labor movement."*⁵ Even if social-democracy can still exert an influence on the labor movement that cannot be underestimated, one must speak of a relative hegemony, with the tendency of erosion in ever larger sectors. How profoundly and rapidly this erosion will take place depends not only on various objective factors, but also on how well the communists understand how to apply this general doctrine of Marxism to the developing class struggles, to increase their influence in the industrial layers of the proletariat, to expose Reformism and Revisionism, and to push back the influence of Social Democracy.

Process of shattering the petty bourgeoisie

The second premise for the deepening of the political crisis is to be found in the process of shattering the petty bourgeoisie, which in the current situation is taking place on a particularly rapid and profound scale. This process finds its immediate political expression in the popular movement of critics of the measures, which has been developing unevenly throughout the country for about a year and a half now. Not only does the political orientation of this mass movement

correspond in many respects to the petty bourgeoisie, which has come under pressure, but in terms of its social composition it is also a movement of the intermediate strata, which, however, also mobilizes certain sectors of the proletariat. For the communists, this movement is therefore of particular importance, since it concerns the question of the proletariat's allies.

What is the basis for the accelerated shattering of the petty bourgeoisie? The current cyclical crisis, which is taking place within the framework of the General Crisis of the ruling system, leads in economic terms to an increased concentration and centralization of capital. In order to stand up to this, the petty bourgeois must raise its stakes, which in turn puts it under greater pressure. In particular, the pressure is further increased by the fact that the cycles of crises shorten and their effects last longer. With each crisis, however, the stakes that must be brought to transform a certain sum of value into capital increase. In this regard, the founder of Marxism, Karl Marx, teaches: *"The minimum of the sum of value which the individual owner of money and commodities must have at his disposal in order to turn himself into a capitalist changes at different stages of the development of capitalist production and, at a given stage of development, is different in different spheres of production, according to their technical conditions."* ⁶ The deepening general crisis means for a relevant part of the petty-bourgeois intermediate strata a descent into the proletariat and the number of those parts of the petty-bourgeoisie for which the prospect of social advancement really exists is reduced. The communists have to know how to increase their influence among these sections of the people, and they are struggling to mobilize, organize and politicize them under the leadership of the proletariat. At the same time, the characteristics of the petty bourgeoisie bring specific tasks for the proletarian vanguard, which also demand specific methods and forms of struggle. Here, too, the teachings of

Karl Marx are of great importance for the current development of the class struggle: *“The petty bourgeois is made up of on-the-one-hand and on-the-other-hand. This is so in his economic interests and therefore in his politics, religious, scientific and artistic views. And likewise in his morals, in everything. He is a living contradiction. (...).”*⁷

The upsurge of class struggles and popular movements and the role of the proletariat

It is only the proletariat, the only growing class, which, by virtue of its class position, is capable of gathering the broad mass of oppressed and exploited around it and leading it to the defeat of the bourgeoisie. The capitalist production process multiplies, centralizes and organizes the proletariat, although politically the proletarian movement is still fragmented and regionalized to a significant degree. Substantial sections of the petty-bourgeois and semi-proletarian intermediate strata are coming under increased pressure and are on the move, significantly widening the political crisis of the bourgeoisie in that it is also affecting sectors that have so far been relatively well appeased by the bourgeoisie. The proletarian vanguard must therefore develop tactics and establish appropriate methods that will allow it to mobilize, politicize and organize the proletariat as a leading force capable of also leading and organizing sectors of the people in the front. The great teacher Lenin defined the special role of the proletariat of large-scale production as follows: *“The overthrow of bourgeois rule can be accomplished only by the proletariat, the particular class whose economic conditions of existence prepare it for this task and provide it with the possibility and the power to perform it. While the bourgeoisie break up and disintegrate the peasantry and all the petty-bourgeois groups, they weld together, unite and organize the*

proletariat. Only the proletariat – by virtue of the economic role it plays in large-scale production – is capable of being the leader of all the working and exploited people, whom the bourgeoisie exploit, oppress and crush, often not less but more than they do the proletarians, but who are incapable of waging an independent struggle for their emancipation.”⁸

The political crisis of the bourgeoisie deepens with the development of the General Crisis. The old instruments of the bourgeoisie for engaging and holding down the masses are less and less capable of preventing the working class and the people from falling away. The class struggles in the current period, the new situation, reflect a certain culmination of contradictions, which further shakes the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie and accelerates the development of an acute pre-revolutionary crisis. In order to prepare the proletarian revolution, which today takes the form of the people's war, it is necessary to win the vanguard of the proletariat and bring substantial sections of the people under the hegemony of the proletariat. The new situation in which the communists and revolutionaries find themselves today must make optimistic about these tasks and raise the efforts for their fulfillment to new heights!

References

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