

THE DISCUSSION OF A PARTY PROGRAM AND THE CRISIS IN THE GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC WORKERS PARTY (DSAP) IN THE CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

Martin K. Bachstein

The author supports the thesis, that not only the economic depression of the thirties, but also the aimless policy of the established DSAP-leadership around aging Dr. Ludwig Czech should be blamed for the gradual disintegration of that party when faced by the radical challenge of the National Socialist Sudeten German Party of Konrad Henlein.

In the late twenties, when the DSAP entered the government coalition without a clear concept, it became apparent, that two factions vied for party-control: the Austromarxist, more internationally-oriented leadership against a younger, more nationally-inclined group represented, among others, by Wenzel Jaksch, Richard Reitzner, and Dr. Emil Franzel. Their aim was to reshape the ideological makeup of the DSAP so it could better account for the fact that social problems in multinational Czechoslovakia more often than not were also national problems; that German workers felt economically disadvantaged not only due to stagnating trade and commerce, but more so due to their being part of the unwelcomed German minority in a predominantly Czech State.

Preoccupation with daily political issues, with literally being used up in the government, combined with the inflexible stand of party leader Ludwig Czech to keep the German Social Democrats in Czechoslovakia from solving their ideological problems. Indicative for this was the fate suffered by the reformist *Socialist Action* group, composed of a few young Brno students, advocating the adoption of a militant socialist program in collaboration with the younger element in the Czech Social Democratic Party as an effective countermeasure against the rising tide of National Socialism in Central Europe. Unable to comprehend the magnitude of the issue, the orthodox DSAP-leadership expelled and silenced the *Socialist Action*, although it had gained wide support among party functionaries. The remaining intraparty opposition was forcefully integrated and the program-issue indefinitely postponed.

In doing so, the DSAP — once the largest German party of the Czechoslovak Republic — lost every opportunity to develop a political alternative to the growing irredentist Sudeten German Party. In the parliamentary elections of 1935 this formerly unrepresented group drew nearly two thirds of all German votes in Czechoslovakia, reducing the Social Democrats to a rather insignificant position, from which it could do very little to prevent the radicalization of German-Czech relations thereafter.