Handout: Poor relief, public health, social insurance

Social question

- downside of industrialization and urbanization
- no social safety net
- lack of education/ unemployment → prostitution
- suicide, sexually transmitted diseases, abortions, tuberculosis, cholera, summer diarrhea
- spoiled milk and water/ bad air in overheated tenement houses cause diseases
- often the elderly and the very young who fell through first

Social Democrats

aim:
- draw attention to discontent of society/ public awareness
- social equality/ solidarity in community

Bismarck’s "carrot and stick"-policy (with respect to the social democrats)

Anti-socialist laws:
- legal repression\(^1\) and political intimidation
- repressive laws → wanted to curtail\(^2\) the growth of German democracy
- banned all social democratic associations, meetings, newspapers
- between 1878 and 1890: 1500 social democrats sent to prison
- censorship

Social Reforms:
- wanted to take away the social democrats’ support
- introduced social welfare legislation:
  - Europe’s first labor protection acts, compensation for workers during illness, old age pension, poor relief, social insurance etc.
- population saw it as a blessing

Conclusion:
- measures to weaken social democrats were unsuccessful
- SPD created underground network
- Bismarck couldn’t ban caucus\(^3\) of the SPD from Reichstag → gained majority
- persecution of the SPD created a strong feeling of solidarity amongst them

\(^1\) Unterdrückung
\(^2\) drosseln
\(^3\) Ausschuss
Kaiser Wilhelm I’s Royal Proclamation on Social Policy (November 17, 1881)

We, Wilhelm, German Emperor by the Grace of God, King of Prussia, etc., are announcing and hereby decreeing for all to know:

As early as February of this year, We let Our conviction be known that curing social defects will have to be pursued not only through the repression of Social Democratic excesses but also through the consistent and positive promotion of workers’ welfare. We deem it Our Imperial Duty to urge the Reichstag to take this task to heart once again, and We would look back with all the more satisfaction on the many successes with which God has blessed Our government if one day We could be content in the knowledge of having left the fatherland new and lasting guarantees of internal peace and having given the needy greater security and the abundance of assistance to which they are entitled. We are certain that our efforts toward this purpose enjoy the support of all the allied governments, and we trust that we have the support of the Reichstag, despite party differences.

As a first step along these lines, the draft bill submitted by the allied governments during the last session on insuring workers against industrial accidents will be revised with a view to the debate that took place in the Reichstag on this same bill, in order to pave the way for still more debate on this proposal. As a supplement, another bill will be added; the additional bill will aim to give consistent organization to the commercial health insurance system. [It should not be forgotten], however, that all those persons who have become unfit for gainful employment through age or disability also have a legitimate claim to a greater degree of state welfare than they have received thus far.

Finding the proper ways and means to ensure this level of welfare is difficult, but it is also one of the highest tasks of any community that rests upon the moral foundations of a Christian national life. Closer connection to the real forces of this national life and the combination of those forces in the form of corporate cooperatives under state protection and state support will, as We hope, allow us to successfully accomplish even those tasks that are beyond the reach of state authority alone. But reaching the goal, even in this way, will still be impossible without the investment of substantial funds.


Tasks:

1. Outline the situation of the working class. (⇒M2)

2. Evaluate whether the Emperor’s measures (⇒M1) are appropriate and sufficient! Add further ideas to change the situation. (⇒M2)

Report of a Poor-Relief Doctor in Berlin (c. 1890)

In those days, Eichendorffstraße [...] belonged to the Quartier latin [latin quarter]. [...] The name Quartier latin meant that it was populated by a lot of petite bourgeoisie, particularly old people, who made a living by renting out rooms to students, and there was a huge amount of prostitution. Moreover, there were a lot of workers, even though not all of them came from the lowest strata: the lumpenproletariat. [...] Here, I looked for the first time – and with ever-increasing sympathy and mounting horror – at the gorgon’s head of the social question. The doctor’s practice here was for the little people, often for the poor people. More and more frequently, very poor families turned to me instead of the official poor-relief doctor. [...] As a physician at the ambulance station, I often had to treat injuries resulting from severe brawls. Once, I was called into the most terrible milieu I had ever encountered: an old prostitute had been seriously injured by her pimp; this was supposedly done with a broken plate but probably with a more dangerous instrument. The edge of her shoulder blade was exposed in the gaping wound in her back. Every couple of weeks, I was called to one of the small, dark, cheap flophouses in this area to make out death certificates for a pair of suicides. [...] Heinous brutality, shameful lack of education, terrible ignorance!

And what about the rest of the practice?! At the top of the list was the deadly disease that killed one tenth of the infants in big cities back then: children’s cholera, the summer diarrhea [...] We knew the cause: spoiled milk and bad air in overheated tenement houses, where even night could not bring cooler temperatures, for the closely built masses of walls radiated the heat they had absorbed all day long. The disease raged in the narrow backyards in particular. Full of bitter outrage, a famous doctor remarked back then: “The poor children only cool down when they lie on their deathbeds.” [...] In terms of numbers, second on the list of scourges was tuberculosis, especially in the form of pulmonary tuberculosis. [...] This usually struck people without unfavorable backgrounds: men and women who were healthy to begin with, but had fallen victim to the effects of factory dust, flats without light and air, and insufficient diet, or who had been infected through cohabitation with other sick persons. We had to watch them die and see the families go to ruin. If we occasionally managed to get a patient admitted to one of the few existing institutions at the time, this was almost always just a short reprieve – the patient had to go back to work, of course, and the voracious creature in his lungs triumphed over him. Third on the list was the enormous number of artificially induced miscarriages for which I had to provide follow-up treatment; these “miscarriages” were perpetrated in dirty corners by even dirtier women who conned their victims out of their last penny and often brought them lasting infirmity or even death. And then, of course, there was the army of venereal diseases, prostitution of all different shades, ranging from the elegant mistress of several men all the way down to the completely degenerated whore on the street. Even today, all of humanity’s misery grips me when I recall the wretchedness that passed before me like a grotesque movie.