

# Persons and Personages

OTTO BRAUN, PRUSSIAN PRIME MINISTER

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IF we had no political parties, and if party struggles in Germany did not involve permanent self-mutilation of the country, it would not be difficult to pass unanimous judgment on Otto Braun. That there is no personal stain upon him and that he is untouched by political corruption distinguishes him from many others, but, happily, independent integrity is not so rare in German political life that the man who possesses it is famed for this quality alone. What makes Otto Braun unique is his statesmanship, which is something that few others possess to a like degree.

Herr Braun is one of the few great figures of abiding worth who have endeavored to mould the future of Germany since the War. If he did not belong to a party which has become, not wholly unwillingly, an object of animosity to much of the population, if he were not the powerful leader of 'black-red' Prussia, which the massed armies of its opponents are trying to overwhelm every day, one would have to be blind indeed not to recognize that he is a complete man and a true statesman.

Otto Braun need not worry. There have been greater men than he who have not been spared his experience. Moreover, he lacks the advantage of having performed statesmanlike labors of a spectacular nature. Most of us have an exaggerated idea of what a man must accomplish in order to deserve the title of statesman. Herr Braun did not establish the new Reich, although he was not inactive in creating the state that was founded at Weimar. Herr Braun did not win any war. He did not have any ready-made plan that would redeem the state and the economic system from disaster overnight. No one has ever heard of his possessing an infallible receipt for reforming the Reich. His achievements do not lend themselves to popular slogans. He has never said what he would do if he had the power. Herr Braun makes no false promises, but he does not dodge issues either. He does not promise what he cannot perform, but devotes his attention to discovering what can actually be done. At the moment very few people are studying the real potentialities of the situation in Germany. Most people have no inclination to investigate the factors that now limit either our foreign or our domestic political possibilities. They simply confine themselves to proclaiming what they want. Men like Braun and Brüning have learned from experience that desire can accomplish nothing if there is no path that it can follow, but most spectators are deafened by heroic phrases.

There are those who regard Hugenberg and Hitler as statesmen. But the kind of politician who has not yet chanced to run his head against a

wall whose existence he denies though everyone else knows that it exists cannot be called a statesman. That would be too optimistic. The man who has experienced for himself the limits of what is possible, the man who has discovered with dismay the incredible limitations of the political field in which he must move, the man who has worked year after year, and who has had to override prejudices, illusions, and party wishes in order to follow the only possible path, the man who has been attacked by his own followers just as vigorously as by his opponents during the nerve-racking struggle—such a man is a true statesman. No leader can relentlessly oppose the fundamental tendencies of his party,—Hitler himself is the prisoner of his storm battalions,—but every leader must have the courage and the power of persuasion to turn his party in the right direction at the decisive hour.

**O**TTO BRAUN has often been displeasing to his party, incomprehensible even to many of his friends, but the main lines of his policy are clear even to his critics. The policy of the Social Democratic Party in tolerating Brüning and his emergency decrees has involved the destiny not only of the Social Democratic Party but of all Germany, and this policy could never have been put through if the Prussian Prime Minister had not been the energetic leader of a strongly governed state. His opponents have described his toleration policy as undemocratic speculation devoid of character. Actually, it represents the intelligent attempt of a party to rise above its own sentimental and doctrinaire opinions and to accomplish a national task. This is a fact that may possess immense significance in the political future.

We have traveled far since the pre-war period when laws were passed against Socialists. Otto Braun is certainly not the only man who has traveled this road, but he is an outstanding example. The former state that wanted to uproot Socialism when Socialists made demands that would seem like child's play nowadays laid a heavy hand on Braun when he was a young man. He was thrown into prison on groundless charges and was given no attention when he was threatened with appendicitis there. One cannot expect much kindness from those whom one has mistreated, but when this Social Democrat came into power he did not act revengefully. No victorious party, after winning a difficult battle, can avoid handing out a great number of political jobs. But, if we stop to compare what has happened in Prussia with what would happen if Herr Hitler were triumphant, we must admit that Otto Braun is a very moderate conqueror.

He is not one of those whose youthful party experiences as a proletarian have filled him with relentless class hatred. His parents were poor East Prussian agricultural workers and he himself was brought up in Königsberg. Before he received the highest office in Prussia, his life work was not to overthrow the upper class but simply to strengthen the class from which he himself had come and whose misery and impotence he knew from his

own experience—the agricultural workers. Thanks to his efforts, they won the right to form unions and thus achieved decent living and working conditions. He interested himself in their instruction and education but he did not depend on their support alone. During his four years as Prussian minister of agriculture, he proved not only that his heart lay with the workers but that he was trying to open up new paths and possibilities to agriculture.

Of course, he was never a great landowner. He was simply a German peasant with his own little garden, dumping manure on his own soil, a man without conventionality in speech or bearing, a very powerful man with a mighty head who never felt better than when he was in the East Prussian forests. He is no pleasure lover, no horse trader, not even in political matters, and he is nothing of a demagogue. He is simply a sound human being who would gladly be the lifelong comrade of us all, from right to left, if there were no such thing as party strife or if we were all to learn gradually that a good, independent political opponent is a gift of the gods.

In other countries Otto Braun would have been a popular figure long ago, but here in Germany it is hard to unearth even a few details about his life. He himself says little; he does n't like to pose in the spotlight. Occasionally he makes a speech before some political gathering and sometimes he delivers an official public utterance that is clearly thought out but quite unpretentious. Now and then one hears of his getting into some political struggle, and at such times he is obdurate. He knows how to fight his way through to victory.

**AT LAST** a little book has appeared describing Otto Braun's public achievements. It is entitled *Otto Braun* and is published by the Historisch-Politischer Verlag of Berlin. The author, who conceals his identity behind the name of Hans Steffen, must hold a position not far from Braun himself, and he describes with laudable tact and excellent style the chief virtues of Braun's political achievements. Would that all those who cast aspersions on the 'Red' Prime Minister, on his party doctrines and his Marxism, would take the trouble to draw up a list of everything Braun's régime has accomplished. Many people believe that it was a mistake for him to strengthen the position of the agricultural workers by giving them the right to form unions, but are his efforts to settle people on the soil and his efforts to increase agricultural production crimes? Not even his opponents can seriously attack him for enunciating the principle that the German people should be able to grow their own food in so far as their country is able to provide it. Furthermore, was it a crime to promote reforestation and the cultivation of moorlands and to organize agricultural schools? He had to refuse to impose a tariff as long as agriculture would not work for its own good.

At this point we come to the long list of misdeeds for which his opponents cannot forgive him. But he has made it hard for them, because his policy must be completely misrepresented if it is to be denied the national

purpose of which he is most justly proud. This man who walked out of the room because he could not bring himself to vote for the signing of the Versailles Treaty, who lost his only son in the War, who did everything in his power to strengthen the Rhineland in its fight against France and separatism, who has opposed the French thesis of German war guilt, this man who is proud to call himself a Prussian is not easily to be despised and undermined, although many attempts have been made. How talented we Germans are in attacking one another.

Of course, all attacks must be concentrated on Braun and the new Prussia if the Reich is to be overthrown. Here is its bulwark. For Otto Braun seems to have chosen to fulfill the historic task of forming a bulwark against the German storm. Hence his foresight in relation to reforms of the Reich, whose necessity he recognizes as clearly as we all do; hence, likewise, his refusal of offers to enter the Reich government. More than once this possibility was almost realized, especially in September 1930 and July 1931. Since Brüning sets a higher value on prudence than on any other quality and since a veil must regrettably be drawn over the most interesting events, we cannot tell what offers were made or how ready Braun was to accept them. In any event, the combination of Brüning and Braun was nearly made on both occasions, and the second time Braun was not unwilling to leap into the breach. If, sooner or later, new tasks are required of him he will know how to meet them. For a man of sixty need not be considered old nowadays unless he so desires. But these tasks will not be party tasks, because Herr Braun, like Germany itself, has passed beyond that stage.

### THE WORK OF LEONID LEONOV

By MAXIM GORKI

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I AM not a critic and do not feel inclined to 'interpret' an artist; I am merely attempting to explain my own feeling about Leonid Leonov.

He is one of the chief representatives of the contemporary group of Soviet writers who continue the work of classical Russian literature—the work of Pushkin, Griboiedov, Gogol, Turgeniev, Dostoievski, and Leo Tolstoi. It is too early to determine the degree of his talent, for that faculty, like any other, is developed by exercise. No one could foresee that Dostoievski, author of that sentimental and, on the whole, lamentable novel, *Poor Folk*, would turn out to be capable of writing the vitriolic *Notes from Underground* and *The Brothers Karamazov*; Tolstoi's *Childhood* and *Youth* give us no ground for supposing that he could create *War and Peace*.

It seems to me, however, that Leonid Leonov's talent is increasing with extraordinary rapidity; and that from *The Badgers* to *The Thief* or that other novel, *Sot*, he has made such progress that I personally do not find in all our literary history a single case of such rapid and indisputable