

# ***Proletarian***

International Communist Party («programme communiste»)

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## ***The Tragedy of the german Proletariat after the First World War***



# Parti communiste international

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**THE TRAGEDY  
OF THE GERMAN PROLETARIAT  
AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

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# INTRODUCTION

For all Marxists at the beginning of the 20th century, Germany was the country predestined for the victory of socialism. In May 1918, as the war still continued, Lenin wrote: “And history (...) has taken such a peculiar course that it has given birth in 1918 to two unconnected halves of socialism existing side by side like two future chickens in the single shell of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany and Russia have become the most striking embodiment of the material realization of the economic, the productive and the socio-economic conditions for socialism, on the one hand, and the political conditions, on the other.

A successful proletarian revolution in Germany would immediately and very easily smash any shell of imperialism (...) and would bring about the victory of world socialism for certain...”(1)

During the previous decades, it was in Germany where the productive forces had grown the most rapidly, transforming the country, formerly dominated by the peasantry, artisanal production and small industry producing shoddy goods at a cheap price, into a very great industrial power where a form of “State capitalism” prevailed (in the sense of the interpenetration of capital and the State) with gigantic enterprises; this expansion placed it in the first ranks of the world’s imperialisms (and on a collision course with the dominant but already declining British imperialism).

It is also in this country that a proletariat in full growth (nearly 12 and a half million in 1907 according to some estimates) (2) had built up in the space of a generation, in legality as well as in illegality, the most powerful socialist party in the world, the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). As 1914 dawned, the SPD numbered close to a million members, the trade unions which it controlled had two-and-a half million (the christian and company unions together numbered about one million). Moreover it was the main pillar of the II<sup>nd</sup> International and Karl Kautsky, the editor of its theoretical review *Die Neue Zeit*, before becoming the “renegade” excoriated by the Bolsheviks at the outbreak of the war, had been the meticulous guardian of Marxist theory, to the point of being dubbed the “Red Pope”: Socialists of all countries, it was

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(1) Lenin, “ ‘Left-Wing’ Childishness ”, Works, April 1918 [MIA]

(2) According to Sombart, who estimates that the proletariat in the broad sense of term, counting families, would constitute 67 to 68% of the population. See Broué, “*Revolution en Allemagne (1917-1923)*”, p. 18.

said, received his opinion on the most difficult questions of theory and program with as much confidence as did Catholics when they took note of the papal bulls from Rome.

This gigantic increase could not but be accompanied by the progression of petit-bourgeois and opportunist tendencies in the party, already denounced a few decades earlier by Engels (3), the leading party functionaries being recruited more and more from petit-bourgeois elements or from the aristocracy of labor; from the beginning of the century the party bureaucracy grew rapidly, reaching 15,000 full-timers on the eve of the war; a tenth of the members (roughly one hundred thousand) of the party were then employed in various social administrations, co-operatives, industrial tribunals, etc (4). This numerous stratum was obviously the breeding ground for all of these reformist tendencies.

It was a socialist leader, Bernstein, who had been a close collaborator of Engels before becoming his testamentary executor, who at the turn of the century attacked the very basis of the Marxist program of the SPD. According to Bernstein, the regular and peaceful development of capitalism, the disappearance of its economic crises, the improvement of conditions of the working class, had all contradicted the catastrophic analyses of Marx; the SPD has to revise its program, to give up the Marxist positions which were nothing other than antiquated residues of the 1848 revolutionary period, in order to openly become what it already was in fact: a party working to improve capitalism by reforms, and not to overthrow it. These iconoclastic positions were rejected with indignation; Bernsteinian revisionism was officially condemned and the revolutionary program reaffirmed in the congresses of the party.

However “opportunism”, that is the tendency to abandon revolutionary principles, continued to develop quickly in spite of proclamations of orthodoxy; it was indeed caused by bourgeois pressures and was sustained by party practice which theorized the formalized separation between “the maximum program” (revolutionary program) and “the minimum program” (the fight for reforms).

Conditions of the time did not allow for the appearance, in reaction, of a real left tendency organized in the party: revolutionary elements, like Rosa Luxemburg, Mehring, Liebknecht and others, prisoners of the traditions of party unity, remained personalities respected if not listened to, but isolated by the apparatus of the SPD.

The treason of the SPD in August 1914 which, like practically all the other parties of the International with the exception of the Bolshevik party, aligned itself with the enemy class in calling for participation in the imperialist war, was a devastating blow to the workers of which it is difficult to over-estimate the importance. At the decisive moment, the proletariat which patiently, with unsparing efforts and sacrifices, had built up these formidable organizations, found itself without organization, without party, thrown into the inferno of the world war without being able to resist!

The German proletariat which throughout the following years, during and after the war, gave innumerable proofs of its combativeness and heroism, which fought violently

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(3) “The petit-bourgeois bring with them their narrow class prejudices. In Germany, we have too much of this and it is they which form this dead weight which impedes the work of the party”, see Engels-Lafargue, correspondence, volume I

(4) See Gilbert Badia, “*Histoire de l’Allemagne contemporaine*”, Volume I, p. 35.

against the shock troops of the bourgeoisie, never succeeded in overcoming this decisive blow.

The revolutionaries, more numerous in Germany than in the other countries, remained prey to the greatest confusion, weakened by semi-libertarian or spontaneist currents. When a mass Communist party finally succeeded in stabilizing itself, it was to fall into rightist deviations, followed by adventurist putsches.

One rare day of lucidity, Paul Levi, the rightist leader of the Unified Communist Party, the slayer of “sectarians”, the critic of the “too left-wing”, “too minoritarian”, constitution of the Communist party of Italy after the scission of Leghorn, recognized: “Today in Germany there is not one Communist who does not regret that the foundation of a communist party had not been implemented long ago, during the pre-war period, that the Communists did not group together as early as 1903, even as a small sect, and that they have not formed a group, even a small one, but which could at least have expressed clarity.” (5).

This lesson, which Levi forgot at once, has a universal importance; the party must be prepared and must be constituted before the outburst of the revolutionary period, as had been done in Russia, if not then it is too late and the immaturity cannot be made up for. This is where the tragedy of the German – and world – proletariat resides.

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In this brochure we are publishing the text of a report at the General Meeting of the party on February 12 and 13, 1972, “The tragedy of the German proletariat after World War One”, which produced a synthesis of former studies. We added an article more particularly devoted to the aforementioned “November Revolution” of 1918, along with one of the correspondences of 1920 by Amadeo Bordiga in “Il Soviet”, the organ of the Abstentionist Communist Fraction. Bordiga who had gone to Berlin en route to Moscow where the II<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Communist International was to be held, took the opportunity to meet the leaders not only of the KPD, but also of the KAPD, its “leftist” fraction which had been expelled by Levi. The assessments he gives are particularly interesting.

We invite interested readers to refer to other studies over this period within the framework of the History of the Communist Left and in particular: “The Marxist left of Italy and the international communist movement”, Communist Program n°58 («La gauche marxiste d'Italie et le mouvement communiste international», Programme Communiste n°58 where all the articles of Bordiga among others on this theme are published), and “The process of formation of the national sections of the CI: the German Communist party”, Communist Program n°86 («Le processus de formation des sections nationales de l'IC: le Parti Communiste Allemand», Programme Communiste n°86.)

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(5) “Die Internationale” n°26, 1 12/1920, cited in Broué, op. cit., p. 438.

## GERMANY 1918-1919: THE TRAGIC RETARDATION OF THE PARTY

(«le prolétaire», Nr 491, Nov.-Dec. 2008 / Jan. 2009)

In November 1918, the proletarians and revolutionaries of the world had their eyes turned towards Germany and the German Revolution: the German Revolution, hoped for for such a long a time by Marxists, awaited impatiently by the Bolsheviks, seemed about to commence...

In October a new government had been formed, for the first time with representatives of the Social-Democrat Party (a minority, further left, had already been constituted into the Independent Socialist Party, expressly to prevent the formation of a real revolutionary proletarian party); at the moment when military defeat was complete and facing increasing social agitation it acted to preserve the established order by giving the proletarians the impression that “democratic peace and reforms” were the objective of this coalition government which would carry out a “peaceful revolution”, according to the declarations of the Social-democrats. But that was quite unable to prevent the movement of the masses. On November 2 the sailors of the war fleet mutinied in Kiel with the announcement that the ships would sail – probably to deliver themselves over to a desperate, hopeless, last-ditch struggle against the English fleet. They seized the battleships and threaten to fire on the official buildings if their comrades were not released.

In a matter of days a gigantic spontaneous movement of revolt breaks out in Germany. Throughout the country Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils are formed, in the face of which the civil authorities and military are impotent.

But behind this revolutionary blaze, there was enormous confusion, a complete absence of perspective and organization. Thus it came about that the insurgent sailors of Kiel who shot their officers and hoisted the red flag on their warships could acclaim the Social-democrat Noske dispatched in all urgency by the government to contain the revolt. Worse, they allowed him to impose himself at the head of the soldiers’ committee and as commander of the military installation. This fact is doubly symbolic.

In the first place it demonstrates the role which the Social Democracy, the so-called “majoritarians”, the SPD, will play in the months and years to come. When facing the soldiers and workers it affirms itself as authentically socialist, it claims to represent them, to defend their aspirations and their interests. But actually its only goal was to maintain order, to safeguard legality, and to prevent the revolutionary explosion at all costs. It makes a show of accepting the authority of the Councils which are born spontaneously, but this is to better prevent them from exerting any effective power and to make them responsible to the government of the bourgeois State of which it is part. Comprehending much better than certain reactionary bourgeois circles that it was

impossible to frontally oppose this enormous elemental thrust (1), it lets itself be carried along by the current in order to be able to contain it as soon as it starts to weaken.

It is this government which strives to organize a reliable armed force of the bourgeois State with the “Freikorps”, in order to mitigate the decomposition of the traditional army; a good part of which had passed over to the side of the “disorder”. Thus having entered Berlin on December 10, 1918 with 40,000 men, by the 23rd General Lequis had no more than 2,000 under his command to resolve the People’s Marine Division affair! It is this government of “peaceful revolution” which will undertake as its responsibility during the following months the **decimation of the proletarian vanguard** by a skilful interplay of provocations and of **blood-thirsty** repressions.

This then shows the **inevitable weakness** of the spontaneous movement. In the absence of a real political leadership capable of giving it clear objectives and an effective coordination, one part of this movement becomes mired in Social-democrat machinations while the other exhausts itself in local and dispersed “head-butting skirmishes”, magnificent in themselves but which the counter-revolution crushes all the more easily one after the other so that they would end up amounting to nothing.

What is demonstrated by this episode and which will ring out with tragic clarity in the weeks and months to come, is the inability of the spontaneous movement of the masses to take power. The angry outburst of the masses, their desire to be finished with the war, with misery, can certainly deliver some very hard blows against the bourgeois State, paralyze and undermine its military and administrative apparatus.

But to smash this State from top to bottom, to **seize** control of society, to establish itself as the **ruling class**, to exert their characteristic class power, the proletarian masses require this organizational and political **organ of leadership** which is the **class party**.

Unfortunately, what then characterizes the situation in the developed capitalist countries of Europe, is the enormous retardation in the constitution of the party in relation to the explosion of class struggles; and it is in Germany that this **absence of the party** is most cruelly felt, precisely because the masses there are projected into the most radical struggles. Whereas in Russia the spontaneous struggle of the masses could crystallize around a party which had been constituted and delimited for a long time and which had commanded the attention of and aligned itself with the masses through long series of economic and political struggles, both immediate and revolutionary, the German proletariat could not find the leadership which it required.

Without any doubt there existed in Germany revolutionary currents which not only had fought the social-chauvinist policies of the Social-Democracy, but who aspired to

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(1) At the Council of Ministers, the conservative Naval Minister asserted: “We must make an example. We cannot subjugate the city by starving it, we must penetrate it with considerable forces and bombard it from the sea.” to which the Social-democrat Scheidemann replied: “You have to wonder about what will happen if we intervene abruptly in Kiel. Other cities will proclaim their solidarity with Kiel. Moreover we cannot attack the mutineers, they have too much ammunition and naval artillery. It is more adroit to say to them: we’ll discuss your demands.”cf “*Les Spartakistes*”, G. Badia, pp 56-57.

transform the spontaneous rising of the proletarian masses against imperialist war into socialist revolution. But an ensemble of factors, among which was their own lack of clarity and of political soundness – sometimes going as far even as the negation of the necessity for this leadership! – effectively prevented its constitution.

However, what the masses need when their urgent immediate requirements oblige them to confront the bourgeois state with weapons in hand is not a “spiritual guide” but an **organ of leadership** in every sense of the term - a body which certainly represents the historical program of proletariat, but which can connect this to immediate requirements; which is not only a propagandist for socialism, but an organized force; which has already started to assert itself as leader and organizer through the daily and partial struggles of the class, and which can then tend to conquer a determinate influence not only politically but also practically on the broad masses.

In Germany, even the more advanced elements had remained prisoners on the one hand to the fascination with workers’ “unity”, and on the other hand to a spontaneist vision making them **wait** until the workers themselves break with social-chauvinistic ideology and opportunist politics, instead of understanding that it was incumbent on themselves to **precede** this movement to make it possible. A vision which believed that the masses would be put into motion after “having become aware of Social-democratic treason”, and did not understand that, even when material determinations push the masses to shake off through their activities the guidance and supervision of the “agents of the bourgeoisie within the proletariat” (Lenin), the influence and the weight of these parties never disappears by itself. It is the struggle of the class party which allows it in these favorable circumstances to tear the proletarians away from the influence of the social traitors and to gather them around it and its leadership.

Although they denounced and fought the open betrayal of the Social-democracy in 1914 and its increasingly close cooperation with the bourgeois State during the war, the Spartakists (according to the name of the bulletin that they published: “*Spartakus*”) hesitated to break with the SPD: they were waiting for the proletarian masses to **first** turn away from social-patriotism. And when the masses began to move in this direction, not by political assertions, but by **struggles**, demonstrations and strikes, strikes like those of January 1918 which affected nearly a million workers in Berlin, the Spartakists still allowed themselves to be lead along by *centrist hypocrisy*.

#### FROM THE NOVEMBER “REVOLUTION”...

To prevent the increasing agitation from crystallizing around the Spartakists, the left wing of reformism had taken the initiative and in 1917 had constituted itself into the Independent Socialist party (USPD). In this party which gave itself a revolutionary veneer although it was even more rotten than the SPD, the Spartakists will recommence their labor of Sisyphus to try to win it to revolutionary positions, a work that the German CP will continue for years: to win or at least influence the majority, or at least the left of the USPD. Unfortunately, each time the rock rolled back down the mountain it crushed the proletariat on the way.

As a matter of fact, the Spartakists are **prisoners** in this party which despises them and tolerates them only to prevent them from acting in an autonomous way, and because they are used by it as a **guarantee** of close ties to the advanced workers. This guarantee was all the more necessary to the USPD which was itself used as a left cover

for the worst rightists of the SPD, Scheidemann, Ebert, Noske and company: for the crucial period of November-December 1918, it shares governmental responsibility with them. The presence in this alleged “Council of Peoples’ Commissars” (sic!), of this party of which Spartakists **are members**, as its “left opposition”, this party which speaks as they did about a “socialist republic”, of “change of the economic system”, etc, **prevented** any general offensive against the bourgeois State and even any political clarification.

On November 9, the spontaneous uprising having gained the whole country, the emperor abdicates and the chancellor “transfers his powers” to the majority Social-democrat Ebert who himself tried for a while to save the monarchy, then collaborated with the right-wing parties. But confronted with the proletarians’ and soldiers’ uprising, the only possible bourgeois government is a government with “socialist” colors. On the evening of November 10, the general meeting of the Berlin Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils, under the pressure from the soldiers organized by the SPD, ratifies the formation of the provisional government negotiated beforehand between the SPD and the USPD; the opposing positions of Liebknecht, representative of the Spartakists, are widely rejected in the name of “unity”. On November 11, the Spartakists organize themselves in the “Spartakus League”, but, refusing to constitute themselves into an independent party, they choose to remain only a “propaganda group” within the USPD.

This attitude of the Spartakists inevitably reinforces in the workers the idea, somehow defended by Rosa Luxemburg herself, according to which the “political revolution” had already been made and that it would only be a question “of continuing the revolution” by socialist measures.

In her editorial of November 18 in *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg demands the organization of a “proletarian Red Guard” to protect the revolution and “In the administration, in the judiciary and in the army, elimination of the organizations inherited from the old absolutist, militarist police State”. After having accused the government of “tranquilly leaving the counter-revolution alone”, she concludes: “All this is perfectly normal. It is not in 24 hours that a reactionary State can transform itself into a revolutionary (...) and popular (?) State. The current view of the German revolution corresponds perfectly to the degree of maturation of the internal situation. The Scheidemann-Ebert team constitutes the qualified government of the German revolution at its present stage (...). But revolutions do not remain motionless (...). In order that the counter-revolution should not triumph all down the line, it is necessary that the masses be vigilant” (2).

There is complete confusion here; the revolution is seen as a process in motion of which the government is one of the fruits, without doubt still immature, the task assigned to the proletarian masses being only to remain “vigilant” to ensure the continuity of this process during which she seems to think that the State can “transform” itself...

The German High Command understood the situation perfectly. On November 10

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(2) “Rote Fahne” (Red Flag) was the daily newspaper of the Spartakists; its first number appeared on January 9 after the occupation of the printing works of a large bourgeois newspaper. cf Badia, Op cit., p. 160.

a circular of the High Command to commanders of the major units had called for the constitution of soldiers Councils loyal to them in all units to keep control of the troops. On November 16, a note signed by the head of the High Command (Hindenburg) specified: “We can announce that the High Command has decided to make common cause with chancellor Ebert, head of the moderate Social-Democrat Party, to prevent the extension of terrorist Bolshevism in Germany ” (3).

In mid-December, the National Congress of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils where partisans of the SPD were the majority (and which refused to accept Luxemburg and Liebknecht in its midst), vote on principle to abandon all attempts at power in favor of a future constituent assembly; the demonstrations convened by Spartakists to put pressure on the members of the congress do not succeed in changing their minds.

As the number of unemployed doubles, agitation, strikes for wages, street demonstrations and bloody incidents with the police multiply during the month of December while *reaction* raises its head. However the Spartakists cannot think of anything better to do than to request (without result)... that the USPD leave the government and convene an extraordinary congress: “If Haase and his friends leave the government, this gesture will shake the masses, will open up their eyes. But if you persist in covering up the acts of the government, the masses will rise up and sweep you away. At present, in a revolutionary period (...) what is important, is the explanation by action” (4). It is once again this senseless illusion of being able to make use of the USPD to “act” on the masses...

In fact, the “socialist” measures, “the qualified government of the German revolution” was able to carry out with the aid of the military hierarchy to regroup and reorganize an armed force on which it could rely; it used to occupied itself in diminishing the (Oh, so timid!) aspirations of the Executive Committee of the Councils. The government offensive at the end of December against the “Peoples’ Marine Division”, a unit of 3000 revolutionary sailors decamped in the heart of the capital, causes a massive response by the Berlin proletariat; but in spite of dozens of fatalities during the confrontations, the affair ends in a compromise which neutralizes these soldiers: they will remain impassive during the most bloody weeks of January. Since the government passes to the offensive without concern for its desideratas, the USPD breaks the coalition and leaves the government. It played its paralyzing role; after the bloody confrontations, to remain in the government would be too compromising! In any event it will be more useful for the maintenance of the bourgeois order in the opposition.

### ... TO THE JANUARY COUNTER-REVOLUTION

On the same day on which the USPD ministers withdrew, December 29, 1918, the Spartakists, after ultimate hesitations and attempts to convene an extraordinary

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(3) Ibid, pp. 127-128.

(4) Speech of Rosa Luxemburg 15 December, at the Greater Berlin meeting of USPD militants. Luxemburg’s motion for the convocation of an extraordinary party congress garnered 185 votes, against 485 for the motion to prepare for the elections to the Constituent Assembly.

Congress, finally leave this party. **At last**, we arrive at the constitution of the Communist Party, with the Spartakists converging with other groups, in particular the “International Communists” of Bremen.

We showed elsewhere that this party was born not only too late, but also on a not-very-clear and not-very-solid basis. It is true that its best militants will be pushed by the same necessities of the struggle to go beyond their spontaneist, anti-authoritarian and anti-centralist vision and to assert the need for a centralized leadership; but *reaction* did not allow them to draw the final conclusions of this lesson. In the article which she wrote on January 8, 1919, one week before being assassinated, Rosa Luxemburg ends up recognizing that the duty of the revolutionists is not to await the illumination of consciousness, but “to seize all the positions of real power, to hold them and to utilize them”. She understands that “the lack of existence of a center charged to organize the Berlin [and more importantly German!] working class cannot continue”; that “it is necessary that the revolutionary workers set up leading organs to guide and utilize the combative energy of the masses”.

Just like Liebknecht who, the day before his assassination, allots the defeat of workers of Berlin to the fact that “their force was paralyzed by the irresolution and the weakness of their leaders”, Rosa Luxemburg speaks about “the irresolution, of the hesitations, the shilly-shalling of the leadership” which produced the disintegration of the movement, disarray of the masses and the tragic isolation of the more combative elements who by themselves did not know where they were going.

It is in fact a terrible **self-criticism** of the Spartakist movement. Even after the constitution of the KPD, its leaders do not want to regard themselves as the leadership of the proletariat. They seek this leadership elsewhere, in the left Independents, or in the “Workers’ Delegates” when not waiting for a new “leadership which emanates from the masses”.

It is this hesitation of the revolutionists to assume **their own responsibility** throughout this period which continues until May 1919, and enables the vile game of the Independents and the left of the SPD “majority”. The combativity of the proletarian masses is still intact and they respond to all the calls to struggle, when they do not spontaneously launch strikes, demonstrations, occupations of newspapers, attempts at uprisings, etc.

But each time, from Berlin to the Ruhr, from Hamburg to Munich, we witness the same scenario; the movements break out spontaneously, are launched by the Independents or even the SPD majority, or answer a call by the KPD, each time Communists take part in the various unitary bodies which claim to direct them. These bodies oscillate between “to the barricades!” phraseology and compromises with the government and, instead of orienting and leading the struggle, they disorient and disorganize it. This goes on until the moment when the State has gathered enough forces to pass to the counter-attack; then the “unity” ruptures, everyone flees and only the Communists remain to face the repression along with those workers who despite their disarray, still have the force to fight.

By the end of 1918, the Social-Democrat government thinks that it can and must crush the “subversion” in Berlin as quickly as possible (Noske will say that he agrees to assume the responsibility of being the “blood-hound” of the repression). On January 4 his government dismisses the Chief of Police Eichhorn, an Independent Socialist, whom he sees as an obstacle to this repression (5). This measure unleashes the very next

day a gigantic protest movement of Berlin workers who understand that the government had taken the route of confrontation. A “revolutionary” committee where the KPD takes part alongside side Independents and workers’ delegates, decides on principle to overthrow the government. But it does not give any practical instruction and as of the 6th, Independent Socialists start negotiations with this same government, even as groups of insurgent workers spontaneously occupied... the headquarters of the SPD newspaper. The leadership of the KPD is divided on what to do. During this period the government prepared the “Freikorps” which then begin attacking the sites occupied on January 10. Luxemburg and Liebknecht are captured and assassinated on January 15; the KPD is prohibited and repression will be unleashed against the revolutionary proletarians during the months which follow.

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Our current has endeavored to clarify and to transmit the harsh lessons of these struggles, as heroic as they are tragic. Any attempt “to reinforce” the movement by unity with the reformists, proven agents of counter-revolution, or even with the “centrists”, these “left” reformists, **revolutionaries in word, counter-revolutionaries in deed**, weakens it and leads it to massacre. Any attempt to rely on political forces alien or hostile to communist principles in order to constitute the revolutionary leadership, leads to catastrophe: nobody other than authentic Communists can lead the revolution, and they should share this leadership with **nobody**.

If the party is weak and not very influential, there doesn’t exist any miraculous formula to reverse this relationship of forces. To desperately seek support and allies within other political parties can only further **weaken** it. The party cannot be reinforced and extend its influence other than on the basis of its program and principles, while showing proletarians that only it corresponds to their need for organization and orientation by imposing itself through partial struggles as the **effective leadership** of the class movement.

The party cannot await the eruption of the revolutionary crisis to constitute itself: at this time it is almost always too late! It must constitute itself, reinforce itself and link itself with the vanguard, **well before** the huge masses are precipitated into violent confrontation with the bourgeois State. The party must precede the masses, it must know how to prepare for their arrival. The masses cannot wait for the party: at the moment when objective factors oblige them to rise up, it is necessary that they find their **organ of leadership** under penalty of being crushed. To prepare the party, is to prepare the future revolution.

This is the constant and continuing lesson of the tumultuous struggles and the defeat 90 years ago in Germany!

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(5) On November 9, Eichhorn, at the head an armed demonstration, had taken control of Police Headquarters, releasing 600 political prisoners. Afterwards he took up the duties of Chief of Police, trying – without success! – to impose a “revolutionary” orientation on its functionaries. A confirmation anew of what Marx wrote after the Paris Commune: it is impossible to seize the apparatus of the bourgeois State to make it serve the the proletariat, it must be destroyed.



# THE TRAGEDY OF THE GERMAN PROLETARIAT AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

REPORT TO THE GENERAL MEETING  
OF THE PARTY (1972)

In several reports held during preceding general meetings, of which it was unfortunately not possible to publish the integral report, we endeavored to re-traverse the dramatic historical cycle during which the German Social-democracy played the part of “assassin of the revolutionary proletariat” in the country which was then the epicentre of the class struggle in Europe. It played this role, not as “German” Social-democracy, but as a fraction of international Social-democracy: As the direct executioner, in its Majority wing, and as the executioner’s assistant, in its “Independent” wing, made more infamous still because it was all the more hypocritical and draped itself in an alleged Marxist “orthodoxy”.

We did this not out of “historiographic” mania, but to draw from the events themselves the decisive confirmation of a constant thesis of the Communist Left. Indeed, with the leadership of the CP of Italy as within the International, we always fought against the fetishism of “workers’ unity” and, even more, against the illusory tactical operations by which it was believed that it would be possible to win to the Communist cause forces less reduced numerically than those which the situation created by the end of the first world massacre made it possible to move onto the terrain, magnificently prepared by Red October, of the preparation of the revolutionary conquest of power and the proletarian dictatorship exercised by the party, leading to the socialist society by the long and tormented road of a despotic civil war, of terror

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and interventions in the economy. This thesis, as we have very often pointed out, found its most lucid expression in an article from February 1921 which we precisely entitled “*The Function of Social-democracy*”, and whose central idea is contained in this concise passage:

“Social-democracy has a specific function, in the sense that in the Western countries there will probably be a moment when the Social-democratic parties will go into government, alone or with bourgeois parties. But where the proletariat will not have the force to avoid this, such an interlude will not represent a positive condition, a requirement for the advent of revolutionary forms and institutions, a useful preparation for the proletarian assault; on the contrary it will be an initiative, deliberated by the bourgeoisie, to deprive it of its force and to deviate it and, if there remains enough energy in the working class to revolt against the legitimate, the humanitarian, the benevolent Social-democratic government, to pitilessly crush it under the blows of reaction” (article published in our booklet “*Communism and Fascism*”, p. 35).

The article exhorted the Italian proletariat to see in any Social-democrat government “a declaration of war, not a promise of a truce in the class struggle and of a peaceful solution to the problems of the revolution” and this being the case, a “purely” reformist government, or of a coalition between the reformists and other parties, openly and constitutionally bourgeois (as this was several times the case in Germany during the period 1919-1922). Lastly, the article finished with this warning, not only to the Italian proletarians, but to the proletarians of the whole world: “This is why we say that revolutionary tactics must be founded not only on national but international experiences and that (...) the martyrdom of the proletariats of Hungary, Finland and other countries should be enough to spare the Western proletariat from learning at the cost of its blood, the true historical function of Social-democracy. Social-democracy will fatally try to follow its path until the end, but Communists must propose to bar it from this path as soon as possible, before it manages to plant the dagger of treason into the back of the proletariat”.

It is precisely in this spirit that we wanted to evoke, with supporting documents (and they are documents which stream blood), the role of the Social-democracy in Germany during this crucial period, while addressing ourselves especially to the young militants separated from these decisive “experiments” by many long years. It was the Social-democracy which dragged the heroic proletariat of Central Europe into the world massacre.

After the war, once the so-called “Republic of Councils” was founded with a government of Majority and Independent Socialists, it was the Social-democracy which decapitated the vanguard of the proletariat, depriving it of its most combative militants, sowing distress and panic in its ranks – during these nightmarish months where Scheidemann and Noske released the “free corps” of reaction against the “Spartakist criminals”. Lastly, it was the Social-democracy which founded the reign of bourgeois democracy in its operetta version: the Weimar Republic, on the “scorched earth” of Berlin and Munich, Hamburg and Dresden, Essen and Bremen. And yet, it should be said to the glory of the German proletariat, never during these long months and years of ardent struggles, did the Social-democracy succeed in preventing the hated spectre of communist revolution from raising its head each time, always seeming

to draw new forces from its very wounds.

The history of this “function of Social-democracy” is emblazoned in letters of fire on the events of these tragic years, and no revolutionary militant can allow himself to ignore or to avoid these terrible lessons. It is precisely in the Central Europe of the first post-war period that the “*Lessons of October*” found their most imposing confirmation, even if unfortunately this confirmation remained purely objective, instead of becoming an integral part of the consciousness of the Party, and to guide it on this “Road to Golgotha” (to take up once again Rosa Luxemburg’s expression) where history had condemned it to march towards a victory which seemed very near and which was on the contrary terribly distant.

However, to point out this historical assessment, the definitive balance-sheet for all proletarians of all countries, is still only half of the task which falls to us and which we consider necessary so that the unique world party of the proletariat reappears and, much more, has from the beginning the essential theoretical and practical weapons for the combat that it will have to carry out and which will perhaps again have Central Europe, and in particular Germany, as an epicentre. We must also look at the other side of the coin, not that engraved with the porcine snouts of Noske-Scheidemann, but with the heroic effigies of Liebknecht-Luxemburg, to understand the other aspect of the tragedy of the proletarian post-war period in Germany: we want to speak about the appalling retardation of the proletariat and of its political leadership, in relation to the ripening of the material conditions and the objective of a German revolution which the Bolsheviks awaited as the saviour of the October Revolution and which resolved itself on the contrary into a terrible bloodbath, without even leaving behind it the line of a solid tradition to which the following generations would have been able to cling. Therefore we must – and this is an infinitely painful and difficult task – write a record, not to file away, but to make flesh-and-blood for the present and future revolutionary generations, of the balance-sheet of the indecisions, confusions, the proofs of immaturity, which characterizes, alas, all the political forces which converged in the Communist party of Germany (Spartakus League) at the end of December 1918 and at the beginning of January 1919. It is this immaturity which allowed the counter-revolution directed by the Social-democrats to break out well before the Communists could, we don’t say “make” the revolution; but “to prepare it” and “to lead it”. Reaction uncoiled in to prevent this revolution, to crush in embryo the generous efforts of a working class able to fight in the street for three long months, and to put an end to the “madness” of these “urchins of Karl and Rosa” – as the “learned” Kautsky said shaking his head in a professorial manner – and of the millions of anonymous proletarians who recognized themselves instinctively in them.

There was no “German revolution” – as is too often stated and as the historians, unable to see beyond the surface of the things, repeat – but a bloody preventive counter-revolution.

This preventive counter-revolution, fully justified in the eyes of the ruling class by the tumultuous agitations of these workers in blue overalls or in uniform, was launched at a speed all the more devastating since the enemy of the proletariat had the confused, but terribly correct, feeling that this armed workers army did not have a political leadership – or at least one that offered any defense from the blows of the enemy.

Admittedly, it would be anti-marxist to claim to explain a tragedy of such a range by purely “subjective” causes; moreover, it would be unworthy in the presence of a collective martyrdom which perhaps, by its amplitude and its gravity, has no equal in the history of the workers’ movement. But we are not here to provide a “explanation”: we make a painful observation. If the first might be of interest to historians, the second must be useful for militants. Even a magnificently armed revolutionary leadership can fail in its task, if it misses the combination of circumstances which no social force has, by itself, the power to create. What history does not forgive parties and their leaderships, is not falling during an unequal fight, but fighting on an erroneous line, or at least one of a not completely correct nature, and failing to have transmitted into the future the seed or rather, because the term feels evangelical, the fulcrum necessary for a vigorous recovery. Marx addressed a ringing homage to the defeated Communards, but that did not prevent him from recognizing and denouncing their errors, or learning from them a fertile lesson for the proletarians called upon to raise the flag of the Commune in the future and finally to lead it to victory.

On the other hand, many young people looking for a light in the darkness of the Stalinist counter-revolution drew from the “missed revolution” of 1919-20 in Berlin precisely its negative lessons, brought to their paroxysm by Gorter and Pannekoek in their KAPD and their Unionen. That is why our fight for full restoration of revolutionary Marxism must necessarily include the most ruthless, but the most objective, critique of this immediatism, this spontaneism, this workerism, this enterprise socialism, this councilism, which was, if not the primary cause of the tragedy of German proletariat, at least its external manifestation, its “epiphenomenon”, and to that extent, one of its causes.

#### **EFFECT OF THE RETARDATION OF THE POLITICAL VANGUARD ON THE DYNAMICS OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE**

The terrible retardation with which, in spite of the proof provided by August 1914 and the experience of the months and the years which followed, the group of splendid revolutionary militants gathered around Karl Liebknecht and of Rosa Luxemburg finally separated themselves from the stinking corpse of the Social-democracy has often been emphasized: indeed, it only managed to constitute itself into a party at the moment when the battle, in the immediate future at least, was already lost, – and lost to the point that, less than three weeks later, Karl and Rosa were assassinated, the most horrible collective crime with which degenerated “socialism” covered itself in filth during its over-long history.

In his 1916 polemic with “Junius” (pseudonym of Rosa Luxemburg), Lenin had criticized this loathing of the Spartakists to break with the “unitary” tradition of the Party, indicating it as the weak point of Junius, in spite of her tough opposition to the dominant social-patriotism and her reverberating demand for proletarian internationalism; and that he had expressed the hope that the “Die Internationale” group be released from the weight of this “historical inertia” and could recognize as enemies not only the declared instigators of the “Union sacrée”, but more especially the underhanded partisans of “centrist” opportunism (Kautsky, Hilferding). However the rupture was

not effected in 1916 since it was necessary to await the end of 1918 so that it took place still with much hesitation on behalf of its protagonists. It is not by chance, nor of an error of appreciation, nor of an inescapable external coincidence, but very much of indecision, confusion, evidence of immaturity, a delay due to the theoretical vision which the Spartakists and, above all, Rosa Luxemburg, had of the revolutionary process.

At the end of the XIXth century and at the beginning of the XXth, Rosa Luxemburg had been in the forefront in the fight against Bernsteinism, Millerandism, revisionism. She had been first (as Lenin will recognize) to discover in Kautsky, during the polemics after 1905, the seed (which later will become a solid trunk) of opportunist deviations. In a perfectly coherent way, she was the first in Germany to denounce the treason of August 1914, and to pay for this by prison. What in 1906 had been a wind-squall in the interior of the party, produced as the by-product of the Revolution of 1905 in Russia, had become a general catastrophe for the class in 1914; the path which in 1906 seemed to be only temporarily lost, had been literally abandoned for the opposite road, that of the ruling class in 1914. But in the vision of Rosa Luxemburg, this rout belonged, with a thousand others, in the revolving pages of the book of proletarian emancipation, in its secular "Stations of the Cross". Nothing could prevent the proletariat from finding the way of Marxism, but that was to occur only at the end of a long process during which the entirety of the working class would rediscover itself, in and by the struggle, i.e. would arrive at the full and complete consciousness of the goals of its instinctive movement, in the global and definitive possession of the socialist doctrines. The agents of this rediscovery could be neither the individual militants, nor the party, but the masses themselves; and they would achieve this goal – identified with socialism – neither by divine illumination, nor by a gradual accumulation of partial "conquests" as in the aberrant vision of the reformists, but through the struggle pushed forward until its supreme expression, the general strike, which, in German, is called *Massenstreik* or, Mass Strike.

It was precisely in the heat of battle and even the class war that the party had been purified in 1905 and 1906; it is the general strike in Petrograd and Warsaw which had brought a whiff of oxygen to the ossified organizations of the Western parties; the same thing would occur, should occur now, in spite of the war and its emergency laws. Reviving in the whirlwind of the class struggle, the proletariat as a whole was going to reconquer its program, and thus its party: it would burn off the slag, it would eliminate illusory protagonists, in short it would rebuild this unity which the corrupted leaders thought they had shattered forever or had forever put at the service of the enemy. The realization of this purifying turning point did not fall to individuals, groups, conscious vanguards; at most they could accelerate it:

"Men do not make history of their own volition, but they make it themselves. The activity of the proletariat depends on the degree of maturity reached by social evolution, but social evolution does not advance further than the proletariat; it is the engine and the cause, as much as the product and the consequence. Its action itself is a determining weight on History. And if we cannot jump over historical evolution, we can, certainly, slow down or accelerate this evolution (...). The victory of the socialist proletariat is related to the iron laws of History, at the thousand stages of a former

evolution full of torments and too many delays. But this victory could never be gained if, of all the mass of the material conditions accumulated by History, a spark does not ignite the conscious will of the great masses". (Rosa Luxemburg: "*Junius Pamphlet* [The crisis of Social Democracy]").

Faithful to this conception, Rosa Luxemburg, just like all the Spartakists, did not accept being excluded from the party: it was the leadership of the party which had excluded itself by its treason of August 1914 and its later faults, and historical Nemesis would sanction its irrevocable judgment by irrevocably throwing it on the refuse heap of the dominant bourgeoisie and its war-crazed saturnales: "The liquidation of the heap of organized decomposition which is today called Social-democracy is not an private affair which depends on the personal decision of one or more groups. It will inevitably occur as a consequence of the World War".

After having long tolerated an "opposition" which enabled it to provide a safety valve the indignation and the rancour of the militants without prejudicing the "supreme good" of unity, the Social Democrat majority finally decided to expel the Spartakist group at the same time as the "rebel" wing of the Independents. The Independents officially constituted in a party in 1917 – aiming to channel the proletarians who, if they had been left to themselves, were at risk of radicalizing and going to the Spartakists. The Spartakists had at once denounced the cynical distortions of the "Independents" and had uncovered their wretched hypocrisies; however they accepted the hospitality of this party which was offered to them hypocritically, against the simple promise of "autonomy" of propaganda. Why this error? Surely not because they lacked the necessary and sufficient courage "to separate" (how can we reproach the future martyrs of January 1919 of lacking courage?), but because they were pushed there by the very logic of their vision of the historical process of emancipation of the class and redemption of the party as a simple result of this process.

Such is the only explanation for the retardation – still apparently most inexplicable – with which Communists constituted themselves into a party, after the Independents had for three months shared with the Majority the scandalous responsibility for the government which endeavoured to ensure the painless passage, in this Germany, bourgeois but overflowing with revolutionary ferment, of the regime of the Kaiser to the republican regime, and to reabsorb the gigantic thrust of which the Workers and Soldiers Councils had been and continued to be the tangible expression. The Councils were condemned to fall back under the dominant influence of the Independents and even of the Majority, precisely to the extent where a revolutionary party, with a well defined program and character able to be the catalyst of at least of the most combative workers' vanguard, and being clearly differentiated from all the other parties, not only in its political proclamations, but in its practical action, did not exist.

This also explains the many uncertainties and hesitations which remained in the Spartakusbund when it left the U.S.P.D. to be constituted in the K.P.D.(S); and this, although the Independents excluded Luxemburg and Liebknecht from the General Congress of the Councils which was held in mid-December, because they would have been obviously awkward and dangerous guests in an assembly which was to sanction the total subordination of the Councils and their central leadership bodies into the "Council of People's Delegates" (i.e., in less pompous terms, into the Council of

Ministers of the young German Republic) and the announcement of the coming elections for the Constituent Assembly. Finally this explains how the name and the militants of the Spartakus group appeared beside those of the U.S.P.D. in strike committees and even in “revolutionary committees”, so that the young Communist party underwent the blackmail of these alleged “cousins” and wound up being the victim of their ignoble manoeuvres.

Of course, our critical judgement on Spartakism must be carried in the spirit which was that of Lenin when, in October 1916, he commented on the theses of Junius-Luxemburg contained in the pamphlet “*The Crisis of Social-democracy*”: from revolutionary to revolutionary. In the fatal hesitation of the Spartakists to break with the center, to recognize the link between the “social-chauvinism” of the Majority and the “opportunism” of the Independents, to give “a complete form to the revolutionary watchwords and to systematically educate the masses in this spirit” (Lenin), we must know how to recognize a fact which was not subjective and individual but objective and general: the “weakness” of a Left “totally ensnared in all its parts in the wretched net of Kautskyite hypocrisy” and subjected to the pressure (or even only the inertia) of a hostile environment.

Contrary to the Bolsheviks, none of the Spartakists could recognize in time that the policy of June 4 was not only: “the fruit of the illusions of the leaders, who would dissipate themselves under the aggravated pressure of class antagonisms. Experience demonstrated that we were mistaken. First this policy was not only that of the leaders: there was behind it a whole category of workers who did not want anything other than these leaders. And it would be a fatal illusion to wish to explain that today, behind these leaders, there are no masses, or that, if they are behind them, it is only because they are not sufficiently enlightened. The split goes right through the working class masses themselves” (Radek in 1917).

It is because it was unable to recognize this tough reality, that the communist political vanguard found itself “unprepared” in regard to the reprise (i.e. on the first demonstrations of the rupturing of the bonds of dependence between the masses and opportunism) of the mass movements which verged on civil war at the end of 1918.

### BIRTH OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GERMANY

In 1916 Lenin could speculate on whether this retardation in relation to the impetuous march of the actual facts was “by chance”, and to hope that it was by chance. Alas in retrospect we must affirm that it was not by chance. In another extraordinarily lucid passage, also written during the war, Lenin recalled the memorable fight, led by Rosa Luxemburg in 1905-1906, which led the German Social-democracy to recognize the general strike as one of the fundamental weapons of the class struggle. But he added that in time of war (and for him the same was true during the incendiary post-war period) the general strike is necessarily transformed into civil war and that, if the civil war necessarily implies the strike, it cannot however stop there, but must lead to armed insurrection. The Spartakist vision is very different. Nothing shows this better than the speech of Rosa Luxemburg to the founding Congress of the K.P.D., on January 1, 1919; in this speech there is a vigorous recapitulation of the revolutionary essence of

Marxism, and the ringing demand for a “return to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*” against the repugnant parliamentarist and gradualist practice of the IInd International. However this speech is the clear demonstration that, for the Spartakists, the general strike is not one of the manifestations and one of the means of the proletarian revolution: it is its unique manifestation and its unique means, to the point of hiding from the eyes of the proletarians (i.e., for Communists, to exclude) the armed insurrection and the central and centralizing function of the party, of the unique Marxist revolutionary party, in the insurrection.

This point is of vital importance. For Rosa Luxemburg, the transfer of power from the gang of William II to that of Ebert-Scheidemann and the proclamation of the Republic was already a revolution, and not a simple changing of the guard achieved against the revolution quivering in the entrails of Germany; it was a revolution, with all the “embryonic, insufficient, incomplete character”, with the “lack of consciousness” of any purely political revolution. The “fight for socialism” starts only now, i.e. when the revolution “becomes an economic revolution, tending to the upheaval of economic relations, and at the same time, and then only, a socialist revolution”. Socialism is not established with sweeping decrees even if they are promulgated by “the most beautiful Socialist government” (so the Ebert government is a Socialist government, and its measures are “socialist measures”): “socialism must be made by the masses, by each proletarian; where the chains of capital are forged, it is there that they must be broken. That alone is socialism, it is thus only that one can make socialism. And what is the external form of the fight for socialism? The strike. This is why we have seen that now, in the second phase of the revolution, it is the economic phase of the movement which has moved into the foreground”.

### November 1918 : Mass demonstration in Wilhelmshaven



The revolutionary process is thus the following: return to the methods of open and intransigent class struggle; extension of the strikes on an increasingly broader scale, from the cities to the countryside; under the impulse of these strikes, the Workers and Soldiers Councils acquire “such a force that, when the Ebert-Scheidemann government or any other similar government collapses, it will truly be the last act”. Logical deduction: “The conquest of power should not be done in one fell swoop, but in a progressive way by opening a breach in the bourgeois State until occupying all their positions and defending them inch by inch... It is a question of fighting step-by-step, hand-to-hand, in each area, each city, in each commune, to tear off piece by piece all the instruments of the State power from the bourgeoisie, and to transfer them to the Workers and Soldiers Councils”.

Of course the struggle must be carried out with an intransigence and a relentless firmness; but its goal is not the destruction of the power of the bourgeois State, but its dismissal, and the means by which it is conducted is the “undermining of the terrain, in order to make it ripe for the upheaval which will crown our work”. The revolution is thus made “from below”:

“From below, where each owner stands opposed to his wage slaves; from below, where all the executive bodies of class political domination stand opposed to the objects of this domination, the masses. It is there, from below, that we must wrest the instruments of power step by step from those who rule and take them into our hands”: a task much more difficult than that of the bourgeois revolutions, “where it was sufficient to cut down the official power in its center”!

It is, on the whole, an inverted conception of the revolutionary process: instead of the political seizure of power at the central level (which is also, and inseparably, the destruction of the bourgeois State apparatus), as the premise of the economic transformation, we have the conquest of political power at the local level, by the means of the class struggle pushed to its culminating point (the general strike), as the only act needed to achieve the “overthrow of the economic relations”. At the end of this process, the catastrophe of the bourgeois regime occurs like the crashing branches of a tree, beneath which one has “undermined the ground”. It consists, according to the “Program” voted by the Congress, in that the workers “seize control of production and finally of its effective management”. What is repeated as an obsessive leitmotiv in this Spartakists design, is the vision of the “proletarian masses which, from machines without life applied by the capitalist to the production process, learn how to become the thinking, free, autonomous managers (Lenker) of this process”; who acquire “the sense of their responsibilities which is proper to the active members of the collectivity in which the possession of all social riches lies”; and who, in and by struggle, acquire the “socialist virtues” “of diligence without the knout of the owner, maximum performance without the sadistic slave-drivers of the capitalist, discipline without the yoke, order without submission”, in addition to assimilating the essential knowledge and abilities to direct the socialist enterprises, because “without [these virtues] the emancipation of the working class would not be the work of the toilers themselves”.

Thus it can be understood why the Program of the Spartakus League which became the Communist Party of Germany mentions neither the civil war (before and after the revolution) nor the armed insurrection. It is understandable why a whole chapter (of

the three chapters of the Program) is devoted to demonstrating the fact that “the proletarian revolution does not need to use terror... because it does not combat individuals but institutions, because it does not enter the arena with naive illusions whose disappointment it would seek to revenge”, because it is not “the desperate attempt of a minority to mold the world forcibly according to its ideal, but the action of the gigantic masses of the people, destined to fulfill a historic mission and to transform historical necessity into reality”. It is understandable why the dictatorship of the proletariat appears in the Program only as the means “of smashing with an iron fist and ruthless energy” the relentless and ferocious resistance of the bourgeoisie cut off in its innumerable *Vendées* and assisted by its foreign colleagues, i.e. with a purely defensive role, and why it is reduced, in its most general form, to the “armament of the proletariat” and the “disarmament of the bourgeoisie”, considered as two aspects of the clear vision of the goals, of the vigilance and continuous alertness of the proletarian masses. It is understandable why the party as the leading force and not only as an active force, and moreover an illuminating one, is absent and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is identified with “true democracy”. Finally it is understandable why, in her too-famous criticism of the Bolshevik revolution, Rosa Luxemburg demands the sharing of power by all the “workers’” parties, or at least their freedom of activity and agitation. It is understandable why the Program ends with these famous words:

“The Spartacus League is not a party that wants to rise to power over the mass of workers or through them. The Spartacus League is only the most conscious, purposeful part of the proletariat, which points the entire broad mass of the working class toward its historical tasks at every step, which represents in each particular stage of the Revolution the ultimate socialist goal, and in all national questions the interests of the proletarian world revolution... The Spartacus League will also refuse to enter the government just because Scheidemann-Ebert are going bankrupt and the Independents, by collaborating with them, are at an impasse. The Spartacus League will never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany, never except by the proletariat’s conscious affirmation of the views, aims, and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League... The victory of the Spartacus League comes not at the beginning, but at the end of the Revolution: it is identical with the victory of the great multi-millioned masses of the socialist proletariat.”

We’ve returned to the point of departure. The conquest of the central political power is not the necessary premise, essential to the economic transformation (which is at the same time a “transformation of the men”, a revolution of “consciousness”); it is the point of arrival of a process of conquest of the political but especially economic levers of control, “from the bottom up”, by the brute force of industrial action pushed to its highest level, the general strike. It does not precede the necessarily long and complex realization of socialism: but coincides with this very realization. It expresses the complete adherence of the working class to the goals of socialism; and the party is the reflection of this total “awakening of consciousness”, and not the organ of the preliminary revolutionary conquest of political power and the dictatorial exercise of power in conjunction with the momentum of the working masses, an instinctive momentum but influenced by the work of propaganda, agitation and marshalling of the

party; if not, the revolution would not be socialist, since it would not be “the work of the proletarians themselves”.

The conclusion that we can draw from this is, above all, that this conception deviates radically from the Marxism restored by the Bolshevik revolution and, even previously by the theoretical struggle of the party of Lenin. It is on the contrary a convergence (almost a magma) of currents foreign to Marxism, which run from spontaneism to enterprise socialism, from councilism to revolutionary syndicalism, from workerism to idealist and humanist educationism. This is why there is practically no line of demarcation, at the outset, between the K.P.D. and the current which will later form the K.A.P.D., on the one hand, and between the K.P.D. and the multiple alternatives of syndicalism or better “unionism” of de Leon (including in the partyless version of the I.W.W or the “shop stewards”) on the other hand. In the second instance, the later path of the communist movement in Germany is incomprehensible (for those who do not wish stop at the surface of things, at the judgement of individuals, at the gossiping about “power struggles”), without going to the theoretical and political roots of the movement. We said that there was “practically no line of demarcation”, because the founding Congress revealed that if Spartakism was vulnerable to immediatist influences (a more adequate term than that of “syndicalist” used at the time, including by our fraction), other currents which had converged in the K.P.D. were made its spokespeople without having the theoretical “antibodies” which prevented Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogisches and others, from letting themselves get carried away: this speaks, in particular, of the “Communists Internationalists” (I.K.D.) of Hamburg and Bremen.

These two groups, especially the second, had a long tradition of radical criticism not only of majority social-chauvinism, but even Kautskian opportunism. Since 1916, but especially since 1917, they had opposed to the Spartakist formula “neither split, nor unity, but reconquest of the party from below”, the slogan of an open and immediate split, strongly deploring even conditional adhesion of the die Internationale group (which was the name the Spartakist went by) to the U.S.P.D. While they had always recognized that the Spartakists were the only revolutionary force having survived the shipwreck of August 1914, and the only one having an at least embryonic domestic network, they evinced a strong mistrust towards them, caused by the antipathy of the Spartakists towards fashioning a split: this is why the I.K.D. decided to meld itself into the Spartakusbund only after the fundamental obstacle of their adhesion to the Independent Party had fallen, at the December 15-17, 1918 conference in Berlin (so that 29 I.K.D. delegates were present at the founding Congress of the K.P.D. alongside 83 Spartakists). They brought into the new party the prestige of having held intransigent positions over a longer period than that of the other left currents of the Social-democracy, but also the weight of an intellectual formation closer to the American de Leon or Latin revolutionary Syndicalism than Marxism: worship of “spontaneity without centralization and thus without effectiveness” (as Engels would have said), opposition of the mass – to the leaders, organizational federalism (1), exaltation of “workers democracy” incarnated in the Councils, stress laid on the economic struggle at the expense of the political struggle, reduction of the function of the party to a role of education of everyone’s consciousness (and even, in certain groups, negation of the

party), etc.

But despite the resistance of Rosa Luxemburg in particular, when confronted with formulations obviously foreign to Marxism, the Spartakist terrain was prepared to a certain extent to receive and to cultivate these seeds in the searing climate at the end of the year 1918. This is what can be seen in regards to discussions within the KPD on the following three points: stance on the traditional economic organizations (trade unions), revolutionary parliamentarism and organization from the new party. With regard to the first point, after Fröhlich had supported the thesis of the immediate withdrawal of the trade unions and the formation of unitary economico-political organizations “whose base consists of the groups of our militants in the factories”, and to which Rosa Luxemburg had opposed the thesis – for other similar reasons – : “The functions of the trade unions from now on are provided by the Workers and Soldiers Councils and by the Factory Councils”, the question was returned to a special commission, the Congress having considered that it demanded a thorough examination (it was besides accessible to the facile demagogy of the slogan: “Out of the trade unions”). On the second point (hearing in addition the unanimous aversion towards parliamentarism and the unanimous will to work for its destruction), the thesis which clearly won was that of an abstentionism based not on the purely Marxist arguments developed at the same time by our Fraction, but on the horror for the Leaders, who trample “self-determination of the masses” underfoot. On the third point, the Congress unanimously adopted the Eberlin motion which made the new organizational structure of the Party rest: 1) on the model of the Factory Councils, starting from the communist groups constituted at their center; 2) on the “total autonomy of [local] organizations”, which “should not await watchwords from above, but work on their own initiative”, so that the *Zentrale* has nothing other than a simple role of “unification of what happens outside it, and political and spiritual leadership”.

## THE MARTYRDOM OF SPARTAKISM

It is only too clear that, constituted late and on a very uncertain basis, the German Communist party dragged behind it a weighty heritage of uncertainties and even confusion: its “base” was combative, but had barricadist tendencies ; as for its “Summit”, against which all forces of counter-revolution were savagely unchained, lead by the Majority Socialist government (something which the participation of the Independents hid from view from the outside), they remained subjugated to the fascination of “workers unity”.

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(1) Radek recalled that Knieff had expressed his doubts on the possibility of a union with the Spartakists: “They are not Leninists, they are for centralization” – which is all the more astounding in that the Spartakusbund had and claimed to have a constitutionally elastic structure and, when compared to Bolshevik centralism, quasi-federalist. Radek’s amazement equaled that he had experienced when confronted with the refusal on principle of terror by Rosa Luxemburg, who was indignant because an old comrade in struggle such as Dzerzhinsky could agree to direct the Cheka!

For long months, from the end of 1918 through the spring of 1919, the young party and the proletarian masses which had carried out a certainly confused but nevertheless fierce struggle, paid a heavier blood tribute than in Finland and Hungary, in spite of the ferocious cynicism of the reactionary forces after the failure of revolutionary attempts in these countries; and they paid not for a completed revolution, but for a revolution that the dominant class and its henchmen had firmly decided to prevent, and during these nightmarish months, the macabre game which will recur in Budapest repeats itself continuously.

### **January, Berlin:**

The movements burst out under the aegis of the “Independents”. Not only does the K.P.D. agree to subscribe to proclamations in common with the U.S.P.D. and Révolutionäre Obleute (Revolutionary Stewards – the workers’ “men of trust”), but it enters a hybrid “Revolutionary Committee”, oscillating between ill-considered putschism (directives for “street fighting”) and a dubious practice of behind-the-scenes negotiations with the government. On his own initiative, Liebknecht even agrees to join the leadership triumvirate with the Independent, Ledebour, and one R.O., Scholze, in the illusion of thus being able to overthrow the government and to seize power (Rosa Luxemburg will strenuously deplore this initiative, but only because the situation is not ripe, not for reasons of principle).

On January 10, the Spartakists representatives left this pompous and impotent Committee, denouncing its complicity with the enemy. But, on this date, the mercenar-

### **1918: Insurgent Troops**



ies recruited by Noske from among the worst remnants of the Prussian army, joined by Social Democrat volunteers, succeeded in dislodging the demonstrators from the newspaper offices (they had occupied only the newspapers!), while benefiting from the defection of the “Independents” and the lassitude of the workers disorientated by contradictory watchwords. But it is only against the “armed gangsters”, the “madmen and criminals of the Spartakus League” that the ferocious police rampage under government orders unleashed itself without restraint or scruple. Faithful until the end to a “spontaneity” of the masses, certainly heroic, but “deprived of centralization” because deprived of political line, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg fell victims to a double crime (the most horrible of these cruel months and years) perpetrated in cold blood after terrible tortures.

### **February, the Ruhr:**

After the shattering then the repression of the revolutionary attempts in Hamburg, Bremen, Halle, Düsseldorf by Social-democratic bullets, the campaign for “socialization” (!!!) of the mines begins in the Ruhr. It is directed in concert by the Communists, the Independents, and the representatives of the “rank and file” of the SPD. The USPD and SPD withdraw just in time to leave the field open to wild repression by the Reichswehr, which Noske had reconstituted and entrusted with exceptional police functions. A little later in the Halle region, Spartakists, Independents and Majority once again proclaim the general strike for “socialization from below” (!!!) and for the “democratization of the factories”: new desertion of the Social-democrats, new hesitations of the Independents, final massacre of the Spartakists.

### **March, Berlin:**

The immense wave of strikes ebbs from central Germany to the capital, where still yet another strike committee of the three parties is created, from which the Majority Socialists quickly withdraw. Agitation is powerful, but confused. It is directed by the Spartakists and, at the beginning, by the “revolutionary delegates” who ended up abandoning them. The committee makes as much effort as it can to prevent the movement from falling into putschist adventurism, but amongst the strikers mix all kinds of derelicts, demobilized soldiers, the rootless and uprooted coming from the small and large bourgeoisie. Noske exclaims: “The brutality and the ferocity of the Spartakists who fight against us force me to give the following order: whoever takes weapons in hand and fights the government will be shot forthwith”, and he unleashes its killers on the capital. From 1,500 to 3,000 died there, among which Leo Jogisches.

### **April, Munich:**

While a “singleminded and bloodthirsty repression” still rained down on the Ruhr, then on Saxony (with after-effects which will be prolonged until mid-May), a group of Independent and majority SD’s mount the atrocious farce consisting of proclaiming a Council Republic in Bavaria. The Communists denounce this wretched demagogic operation, but they then yield to the pressures the Independents, inter-mingled with various and diverse anarchists and adventurers: they then stand to defend the “Power of the Councils”, that their allies are underhandedly preparing to hand over to the

majority SD minister Hoffmann, then General-in-Leader of the forces of repression. On May 1, remaining alone at the head of the Council Republic improvised by others (we know of Lenin's anxious telegram indicating elementary and essential measures which must be taken, but never will be because they will not have time), the Spartakists will be savagely eliminated. With a superb defiance of death, Eugen Léviné faces the firing squad amid the screams of a petit-bourgeoisie thirsting for revenge. The few executions of hostages to which the "Council Power" proceeded and which struck at the cowardly adherents of the "Thule Society" (the representatives of these racist dregs will make the fortune of Nazism before long) provide the pretext for the umpteenth carnage. Three months later, the Hungarian Soviet republic of Bela Kun will fall, itself also a victim of "unity", the simple smokescreen of the treasonous policy of the **left** Social-democrats, the only policy of which they were congenitally capable.

The obsession with "proletarian unity" at all costs is expensive – wrote *Il Soviet*, organ of our current – about the events in Munich and Budapest. The young German party paid with the sacrifice of its best militants, disorganization of the survivors and isolation of the party from the masses who remained on a war footing, although cruelly decimated and disorientated.

And this obsession was all the more powerful after the replacement of Karl and Rosa by leaders like Levi and Zetkin, who did not have their revolutionary tempering. The horror which the leadership of the party had always evinced with regard to "putschism" (and which was justified as a reaction against the tendency "to play at

### January 1919: Barricades in Berlin



insurrection", as Engels would have said) increased to the point of being transformed during the course of 1920 into a renunciation of even the prospect of insurrection and into a timorous and degrading legalism, which by a tragic irony, could only revive nostalgia for "unity".

Levi will be expelled in 1921 for having publicly repudiated the split at Leghorn as "too far left" and for having denounced the action of March in Germany as putschist and reckless; Zetkin will remain, but it will be to vouch for, sometime later, the possibility of constructing "Socialism in one country", according to the desires of the father of the peoples, Joseph Stalin!

"Putschism" was officially liquidated (moreover in correct terms) at the National conference in Berlin and June 14th and 15th. Polemicizing with the revolutionary trade unionists who were within the K.P.D., this same Conference affirmed the need "for the requirements of the struggle at this moment [only at this moment?], 1) that the proletariat organize itself in a political party; 2) that, in the present stage [yet again!] of the revolutionary struggle, the organization of this party be rigorously centralist". The K.P.D. was obviously on the road to pulling itself together under the energetic impulse of the Bolsheviks. In one of the splendid articles written shortly before her death, Rosa Luxemburg affirmed emphatically: "The current state of the Berlin proletariat, deprived of leadership and a center of organization, cannot last long" ("The Resignation of the Leaders", in *Die Rote Fahne*, January 11). But the recognition of this necessity had never gone beyond the assertion that "if the victory of the proletariat, if socialism should no longer remain a dream, the revolutionary workers must create a leadership organ able to guide and to use the combative energy of the masses"; it never went as far as recognizing the central role of the Party, and less still of a centralized party. In her famous article "Order Reigns in Berlin", she still say: "It lacked leadership, but the leadership can and must be created *ex-novo* only by the masses, and in the masses: the masses are the decisive element, they are the rock on which one builds the victory of the revolution!"

There is no doubt that Rosa Luxemburg had an acute awareness of the dangers of putschism and yet it is not to her but Radek, not as an individual but as spokesperson for the for the Bolshevik party and the International, that the credit of having denounced these dangers belongs. As of January 9, he warned the German Communist Party against the action of convergent forces of the counter-revolution, entreating it not to involve itself in taking responsibility for premature movements in a situation where "It is not not the Communists, but the social-patriots and the Independants who dominate the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils", and inviting it, since the action was decided on and it could not avoid fighting, to give it "the character of a protest action" (and not of an insurrectionary attack).

Only Radek dared to recall (in his declarations which could have been ours and which the Bolsheviks would too quickly forget) that in the pre-revolutionary phase from February to October 1917, the Bolsheviks did not have "to undergo combat as hard as that of January... where so many lives were sacrificed so absurdly"; indeed, the Bolsheviks had mass organizations, they were not confronted with labor organizations which had become "the base of the counter-revolution" and they did not have opposing them a bourgeoisie still as terribly powerful as the German bourgeoisie. No



representative of the German left could have made the lucid forecast of Radek: “The civil war in Germany [we would have said, with Lenin: in the entire West] will be much more ferocious and destructive than that in Russia”.

### THE HEIDELBERG CONGRESS

It is this awareness of the mortal danger of putschism, as well as a superior theoretical vision, which inspired the theses of the Heidelberg Congress of October 1919 of which *Il Soviet* underlined, immediately after having attained knowledge of them, their perfect Marxist orthodoxy (“the German Communist party”, in *Il Soviet* of April 11, 1920), but which are extremely far away from the authentically Luxemburgist current.

From the beginning, the “Theses on Communist Principles and Tactics” bring to the forefront the seizure of power and the proletarian dictatorship, as conditions for “the substitution of socialist organization of production for capitalist relations of exploitation”. They affirm that at all the stages which precede the revolutionary conquest of power by the proletariat “the revolution is a political struggle of the proletarian masses for political power”. They entrust “the leadership of the mass revolutionary struggle” to the party. They define it as “counter-revolutionary to renounce the class organizing itself into a party or to confine the party with purely propagandistic tasks”; they call for “the most rigorous centralization”, so that the party can achieve its historical tasks in the revolutionary period (a restrictive precision which is perhaps an echo of federalistic nostalgias?), and also demand this condition for the economic organizations.

Recognizing the major importance of the Workers’ Councils in the revolutionary process, the theses affirm however that in fact it is not statutes, electoral regulations, etc. that can give them life, but the momentum of the proletarians in struggle for the conquest of power. They affirm that Communists must work in the economic organizations to make them instruments of the political struggle; they qualify “the idea that one can produce them by means of a formula of special organization of the movements of mass, and thus that the revolution is a question of form of organization” as a petit-bourgeois utopia.

The Theses on Parliamentarism leave no doubt about the need to destroy Parliament as an organ of bourgeois domination; they deny that parliamentarism is a means for the conquest of the exercise of the class power of the proletariat, and recommend it as pure tactical expedient to widen the influence of the party on the masses by means of elections and the parliamentary platform.

The inspiration of the Theses on the Trade-union question is also correct and in agreement with ours. They reject the syndicalist theory which proposes unitary organizations, i.e. political and economic at the same time, and denying the function of the party. They reaffirm the need to raise the economic struggle to the level of a political struggle for the conquest of power. Lastly, they condemn both the desertion by the Communists from the trade unions directed by the opportunists, which would be equivalent of surrendering the broad masses to the pitiless yoke of the counter-revolutionaries’ forces, as well as the demand from the “dissidents” to constitute

economic organizations restricted to the basis of political affiliation or, more generally, ideologic professions of faith of the members.

All these theses thus announce the positions taken later by the II<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the International and which fundamentally diverge from the platform of the founding Congress of the K.P.D. One can regret only the inaccuracy of certain formulas such as “the struggle of the proletarian masses for power is carried out by all political and economic means” (a formulation already condemned in the program of the Independents by *Il Soviet*). One can also consider it regrettable that they justify “revolutionary parliamentarism” by distinguishing “the small” means (precisely the struggle in parliament for propaganda against Parliament) and “the great” means (the boycotting of Parliament and elections), because this distinction points out the old and absurd dichotomy between maximum program and minimum program. Besides, even the formula of “revolutionary parliamentarism” was not only insufficient, but dangerous, as recalled in the article of *Il Soviet* referred to above, because we must always clearly demonstrate to the proletariat the radical antithesis between the communist dictatorship and democracy, which is “at the same time the mask and the rampart of the dictatorship of Capital”.

But the best of the programs may not be enough to set right a party which is heterogenous from its inception, and moreover torn from the beginning between contradictory requirements from the inside but especially from the outside. The condemnation of “syndicalism” in its most idealistic form (of which we will speak again in connection with the K.A.P.D.) at the Heidelberg Congress had been correct and energetic. But the Hamburg and Bremen sections – confused and not very orthodox groups, still badly defined, but on the other hand animated by a generous revolutionary instinct –, were invited to accept the official theses without discussion or to go away.

In a party which still needed to be formed ideologically, such an ultimatum carried with it the suspicion of the leadership wanting to get rid of troublesome opponents to give free rein to an essentially legalistic praxis (a suspicion which our fraction did not fail to express), and was in any event a sign of narrow bureaucratic intolerance, which the Bolsheviks were the first to deplore. Similarly, the condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Independents seemed irrevocable, but the months which followed showed that no one had really assimilated the final cry of Rosa Luxemburg: “The settling of score with the Scheidemannites presupposes the liquidation of the U.S.P.D. which is used as a protective shield in Ebert and Scheidemann” and that the isolation in which a savage persecution imprisoned the Spartakists more every day, revived – at least “at the top” – the old regret of having broken with the U.S.P.D. Centralism is one of the pillars of Communist doctrine; but the fact that the Centre of the Communist Party was going to adopt it after a long half-federalist tradition without serious preparation within the party, could well make one think that it wanted to have a free hand to move in the direction of the Independent “cousins”. It is understandable that, persecuted, decimated, reduced to a minimum of contacts with the masses contained within the two social democrat parties and their gigantic trade unions, the K.P.D. suffered from its isolation. But by contrast it is monstrous that it drew from this conclusions such as those which were expressed in Levi’s report to Moscow:

“From all this, we learn the same lesson that this second Congress of the

International Communist drew for the proletarians for all countries (!!): during revolutionary periods when the masses are radicalized, contrary to the periods when the process of transformation in a revolutionary direction is slower and more painful, the primacy of radical and communist opposition groups in the great parties is advantageous (!! ) provided that they have the possibility of being able to operate openly and able to carry out their agitation and propaganda without obstacles. Today, the most important problem for the development of the proletariat in Germany in a revolutionary direction and of knowing how to tear off from the leadership of the U.S.P.D. the revolutionary masses of the Independent party, which are deeply communist and already involved themselves in hundreds of battles. This problem would not arise if Spartakusbund (said Levi with regret) had used the possibility that it had to continue to develop its activity within the U.S.P.D.”.

To condemn the abandonment of the traditional trade unions, i.e. of the great organized masses, and their replacement by “unions” on the tightly based (if general) affiliation with communist ideas, was an excellent thing. But (as opposed to what the Theses of IIInd Congress in Moscow will state), the Theses of Heidelberg did not make even an allusion to the fact that – to once again take up our words at the time – “in certain cases, the corruption of the reformist leaders can reach such a level that it becomes necessary to abandon to its own devices an organ which is completely rotted”, such as for example the enormous German trade-union confederation. And that was a serious omission.

The “bolshevization” of Spartakism was thus not very solid as the well-known Kapp Putsch of March 1920 proved only too well.

### Workers and Soldiers Council from Gruben



## THE KAPP PUTSCH

We have said that the Kapp-Luttwitz putsch of (13 March 17, 1920) provided proof of the feeble degree of bolchevisation of the K.P.D. This *coup de main*, the work of the partisans of the Kaiser and of the power of the Junkers and thus viewed in a bad light by the big bourgeoisie itself, failed miserably thanks to the immediate strike of the workers, on the one hand, and to the firm decision of the trade unions to save the young Weimar Republic on the other hand, in a situation which resembled the eve of a civil war, especially in the Ruhr. However, the Zentrale of the Communist Party initially showed a regrettable passivity, followed by an incredible precipitation into action. It started off by declaring that the quarrel between republic and monarchy did not directly interest the workers (but the question was much vaster: behind Kapp-Luttwitz the Freicorps decided that they were going to do away with the chronic “insubordination” of the German proletariat!); it also commenced by warning against the dangers of a general strike which the working class would be right to start and would surely start “in the circumstances and with the means which it would consider most opportune” (as if it were always possible for the oppressed class to choose the best moment to act, and as if the general strike was to be used only for ultimate revolutionary objectives!); then, under the pressure of the formidable rising to arms of the working class, it executed a 180° turn by mobilizing the workers on the slogan “All power to the Councils!”, as if the problem was to destroy the bourgeois State, out of the blue and without any preparation, and not to defend itself by force of arms. The candidate for dictatorship, Kapp, flees on the counsel of the industrialists themselves: “The unanimity amongst the workers is such – Ernst von Borsig had said to him – that one cannot distinguish the agitators from the millions of workers who stopped work”. Trade-union mandarin n° 1, Legien, sensitive to the frame of mind of the workers, then decided to prolong the strike until the government of his Social-democrat accomplices gave serious guarantees of reform: above all to eliminate Noske and to take energetic measures to prevent attacks against the Republic and the political and economic associations of the proletariat. To reinforce and concretize these claims, Legien became the promoter within the U.S.P.D. of the constitution of a “workers’ government” where the three parties issuing from the old trunk of the Social-democracy from the pre-war period, as well as the trade unions would be represented .

It is from this moment that the splendid German proletariat, which had launched itself body and soul into struggle in all the industrial centers, north and south, east and west, witnesses a painful merry-go-round of orders and counter-orders, manoeuvres and counter-manoevres, advances and retreats. The U.S.P.D., so as not to lose face on the left and not to burn themselves on the right, rejects the proposal to take part in the government. The delegates of the K.P.D., among whom is W. Pieck (the first steps... of a glorious Stalinist future) declare themselves “available”, but they are contradicted immediately by the Zentrale which affirms that it “never supported the proposal to form a coalition government with the trade unions and the Independents”. On the evening of March 22, the Independents, while repeating that they did not want to assume ministerial responsibilities, proclaim that the “pacifying” counter-proposals of the new Social-democrat cabinet, the Müller cabinet, are acceptable, and they vote

for the suspension of the strike which also occurred (more subtly, the so-called “left” Independents suggest that it “is interrupted!”). Putting an end to the see-saw between lethargy and the policy of conciliation, the K.P.D. invites the workers to denounce the Social-democratic treason and to continue the strike. The next day, however, it announces that, since “the objective bases for the dictatorship of the proletariat” are lacking, and that it is initially necessary to work for the conquest of the working masses to Communism, it regards as of “greater importance (...) a situation where one can use political freedom without limits nor prohibitions, and where bourgeois democracy does not have the possibility (!!!) to act as the dictatorship of capital”. Guided by these strategic considerations, the K.P.D. declares that it regards “the formation of a Social-democrat government from which the bourgeois capitalist parties would be excluded, as a condition for the autonomous action of the masses and to enable them to prepare to exert the proletarian dictatorship. It will practise [therefore] a loyal opposition with regard to this government, as long as it provides the necessary guarantees for the activity of the masses, as long as it will fight [always awaiting!] the bourgeois counter-revolution by all the means at its disposal, and does not oppose the social and organizational reinforcement of the working class”. Lastly, the K.P.D. adds that “by loyal opposition, it means the renunciation of preparing a violent action, while of course retaining its freedom of political agitation for its own goals and its own watchwords”.

This declaration causes an uproar in broad layers of the party. Having the freehand, the Social-democrat government offers von Seeckt’s Reichswehr the opportunity to take its revenge extinguishing by force the insurrectionary hotbeds in the Ruhr and elsewhere, and again pouring the blood of proletarians in spite of the scandalous agreements of... pacification of Bielefeld and the efforts of the local and central Communist leaders to prevent the demonstrators from going too far (but, under such conditions, repression is also unleashed, and perhaps above all, if one holds back!). Attacked by the Majority, betrayed by the Independents, disorientated by the Spartakists, the workers ended up surrendering their weapons after a few days. The next move is up to the war tribunals!

### AN OLD AND TENACIOUS EVIL

These sad events cause a long string of recriminations, charges, defections from the party. Few militants understand that actually the evil comes from further afield. In a violent philippic, Radek writes – and he is not wrong – that “the anti-putschism [of the leaders of the party] led them to a kind of quietism: from the impossibility, shown by the experiences in 1919, of conquering power in Germany, they deduced, in March 1920, the impossibility of action in general, a conclusion which was already false last year”. A little later at the IVth Congress of the K.P.D., he accuses them of having acted as “quarrelers rather than as combatants”, in substituting a kind of “governmental cretinism”, a communist variant of “possibilism” for the “parliamentary cretinism” of the Social-democrats. A few days later, profiting from an undeserved glory for not having taken part in the deplorable manoeuvre, the “extremists”, already expelled at the Heidelberg Congress, constitute themselves into the Communist Workers Party of

Germany (K.A.P.D.). It was the end of a cycle. Was another, happier one going to commence?

*Il Soviet*, organ of our fraction, had only been able to follow the tragic events of March second hand and after some delay, as had all the socialist press in Italy. But it had denounced the treason of the reunited Majority and the Independents, and while being in agreement with the theses voted by the K.P.D. at Heidelberg the previous year, it had not failed to deplore the uncertainties, the oscillations, and the legalist tendencies of the Party Zentrale. On March 28, it posed the question: “Will Spartakus manage to raise itself, throughout the openly militarist reaction, against the reaction of the renegades of socialism? Will the proletariat avenge its heroic dead of January 1919?”. But it had immediately added that “once again the Independent Socialists, with their ambiguous attitude of oscillation, have betrayed the cause of the revolution”, and it had drawn a confirmation of this from our old thesis which affirmed that “in spite of their hypocritical program, that many take for a communist program, the centrists are always the abettors of the bourgeois regime and deserve even more mistrust than the Majority”: there was thus no reason to regret, as the Maximalists did, “the scission between these notorious weather vanes and our heroic communist comrades”.

On April 23, it reproduced an article from the Viennese review “*Der Kommunismus*” which stigmatized the absurd “combination of negotiation, strike and armament” of which the U.S.P.D. had become the spokesperson in the last phase of the Kapp-Luttwitz affair, and which had definitively arrested the destiny of this imposing labor movement. On May 16, while justifying the prudence with which the Spartakists had acted in a situation fraught with chaotic thrusts and uncontrolled impulses, *Il Soviet* had endorsed the criticism of Bela Kun of the Zentrale. Indeed, “although preparing the revolution does not mean always having weapons in hand, it implies however that one stays constantly on the terrain of struggle, which has as a consequence the construction of the organization and the attitude of taking up weapons at any time. ‘No preparation of violent actions’ means that one gives up revolutionary preparation”. Lastly, writing in Berlin, on the way to Moscow, our delegate to the IIInd Congress of the I.C., while reiterating basic criticisms made by our fraction of the young K.A.P.D., did not conceal his severe judgement on the passivity of the Communist party and its dangerous parlementarist tendencies.

This episode will have long-term repercussions. All the history of the K.P.D. in the months and even years that followed, will bear the stigmata of fragility and inconsistency inherited from its belated birth, with abrupt passages from passivity to ultra-activism; from a parliamentarist and legalist praxis to the discovery of a “theory of the offensive” based on an abstractedly economist appreciation of the crisis of German capitalism and world capitalism in general; from the launching of proposals for an united action with the U.S.P.D. to the refusal of united action even in wage disputes and within the trade unions. The worst tactical innovations of the K.P.D. (open letters, united fronts, support for so-called workers’ governments) will end up contaminating the International itself, accentuating and progressively augmenting its state of crisis. As for the principle of centralism and discipline, which had been hastily plated onto the old spontaneist and federalist stump and which was not attached to solid programmatic positions, sometimes it will be used as cover for equivocal manoeuvres

(including with a kind of “National-Bolshevism”, which, while initially condemned in the K.A.P.D., will then be adopted by its very censors), sometimes it will be violated by the innumerable coteries of a contingent and personal nature rather than theoretical and political, which caused the K.P.D. to present such a sad spectacle right up to the moment when it will fall into the waiting arms of Stalinism.

Faced with this veritable disaster, which was to weigh on the whole world communist movement, it should be noted with bitterness that our Communist “Abstentionist” Fraction was only too right and only too realistic, when it obstinately repeated that a truly “surgical” selection of the young sections of the International, and especially among those of Central Europe, the crucial terrain for the revolution, was necessary. At the end of 1920, in the name of an illusory “conquest of the broad masses”, the K.P.D. will accommodate in its fragile boat the “left” (become majority besides!) U.S.P.D., even if it means to have to jettison, one year later, a great part of it into the sea like cumbersome ballast. But the course which a party follows has nothing to do with that of a ship. Fusions accomplished and defeated, tactical zigzags, programmatic turns can apparently straighten the prow of the vessel against the drift, but they cannot prevent the crew from becoming disorientated and disappointed by them, so that the necessary discipline is slackened, so that the partisans move apart, and the prow itself ends up going in the wrong direction. Rigour is a condition of effectiveness with the proviso that it not be a formal and “administrative” rigour, but of continuity in action and coherence in the pursuit of an appropriate goal. It is a lesson which we draw from this time, and which we must today put into our heads and our hearts so that it is not lost once again!

Let’s be clear: to recognize and to demonstrate the insufficiencies, the errors, the alarming zigzags of the German party, and to see in them the roots, beyond the contingent events of a particular month or year, does not mean saying that one allots the cause only to internal or, as is said, subjective factors: those are, indeed, inseparable from the ensemble of material factors, they are the product as much as one of the causes. That does not mean saying either that one diminishes the heroic firmness of militants who, even if they were mistaken in line, fought selflessly, and throughout extremely arduous years. That does not mean abandoning oneself to vain hypotheses, wondering what the party would have been like if it could have had the leadership of Luxemburg, Liebknecht or Jogisches until the end. The node of the question is elsewhere, and it is vital for the general comprehension of the problems of the communist tactic. When the objective determinations have been taken in consideration, it remains the need to understand – as Trotsky says – that “reality does not forgive one single theoretical error”. Once made and translated into action, these errors become objective facts, hard as rocks, which condition those who fell into them and which may perhaps be perceived one day or another, but in any event too late. Worse still, they have the power to polarize around them men and groups who, by tradition, are already not inclined to recognize them for errors. Individuals in themselves, do not count; but it is not by chance, precisely because it is about an objective social phenomenon, if the tactics, like the situations, choose their instruments, their machine-men: it is not by chance that Levi deplored the scission of Leghorn and if he shamefully denounced as adventurists, even during the course of the struggle, the combatants of March 1921; it is not by chance

if of the rare militants who in 1920 had opposed manoeuvres of the “loyal opposition” type, even those which will later form the dubious left of R. Fischer and Maslow, in the following years accepted the watchword of exterior support (or even interior) to the “workers” governments of Saxony and Thuringia, regretting only the... technique of application. Nobody, in the K.P.D., ever understood – so persistent was the old fetishism of “unity” – the lesson that the Italian Left had already drawn from the hard reality of the years 1918 and 1919 and which it condensed in 1921 in the article which we quote above, “*The Function of Social-democracy*” (and by Social-democracy, it meant not only the right but indeed the center).

Not only did the German party not assimilate this lesson, but the animated debates of its fourth Congress showed, on the one hand, that parliamentary and legalist quietism in the guise of anti-putschism was far from over and that, on the other hand, the dominant issue within the party tended increasingly to become, despite protests from some delegates in contact with the harsh experience of the struggle in Hamburg and the Ruhr, that of the recuperation of an independent “left” which it covered in praises whereas at the third Congress (Karlsruhe, 25 and February 26), it had been condemned for its capitulation before the right which had openly betrayed. Fusion of the K.P.D. with the left of the Independent Party, which was carried out during the autumn which followed the Halle Congress and which our fraction of the Communist Left deplored as a dangerous precedent to the relaxation of the conditions of membership to the Communist International, was in the air as of April: the obsession with unity had a tenacious life!

#### THE IMMEDIATISM OF THE LEFT

The absence of a single or almost single geographical center, and thus its fragmentation into several powerful and concentrated but relatively closed-off urban cores, constitutes one of the characteristic aspects of the German workers’ movement: a negative aspect certainly, although it is also symptomatic – eg. if one compares it with the situation in France – of the degree to which large-scale industry had penetrated all the pores of the “nation”. Berlin was undoubtedly a pole of strong working class concentration, but less than in 19th century Paris, or at the beginning of the 20th century in Petrograd. This characteristic – moreover firmly rooted in the history of Germany – had as a consequence, in 1919, the formation a little everywhere in Germany of long-lived revolutionary centers and the birth of embryonic “communes”, which were quickly swept away; but already during the war and even before, it had been reflected by the constitution of a myriad of relatively autonomous groups within the S.P.D., and the worst is that this irrefutable fact tended towards being theorized by precisely those forces which, at the decisive time, could have expressed the momentum and the combativity of the proletarian masses that the tempest of the war and, more importantly, the post-war period projected in the arena of the social struggles.

In a sense, the proliferation of the so-called immediatism of the left in 1919-1920 was the reflection of an objective localism unable to break from its own limitations with a comprehensive view of the problems of the proletarian revolution: the Spartakists themselves felt its effects, though to quite a lesser degree and were thus in a superior

position of strength. The self-styled left radicalism, which more or less converged in the K.A.P.D. in April 1920, had Hamburg, Bremen, Berlin, and Dresden as centers, within the framework of a common general vision of the syndicalist type, it presented considerable nuances, sources of conflicts and splits which were either potential or ready to appear. The common characteristic which literally jumped out, was the tendency of all these groups to seek the key to victory over opportunism and the alignment of the workers' movement in a revolutionary front, and thus the key to the victory of the proletariat over capitalism, in immediate economic forms of organization, in which the will of the class, considered overall, expressed itself directly, without deforming intermediaries. For some, these forms could be the Factory Councils (which were moreover often confused with Soviets); for others, Industrial unions opposed to the traditional craft unions; for others still, the Unionen, conceived as organizations exceeding the dichotomy between economic and political struggle (something like the "One Big Union" of the American I.W.W.); but always, they were built on federalist bases to avoid the odious and dangerous dictatorship of the leaders, to prevent a leadership deciding "from above" from crushing down the will of the masses.

The question of the revolution was thus reduced to a "question of forms of organization" – and, moreover, economic forms – which they considered as revolutionary in themselves precisely because they were immediate organizations, accurately reflecting the will to struggle and the "consciousness" of the proletarian class. This was therefore no more "alienated" – so to speak – from itself because of the mediation of the party, the very function of which certain groups denied, whereas others reduced it a task of theoretical "clarification" of the masses and to the work of intellectual propaganda, and that others finally, simply rejected with horror. From which followed: the slogan of leaving the traditional unions, regarded as bureaucratic organizations, and thus counter-revolutionary by nature, and of Parliament regarded as a temple not so much of the democratic lie as of the supremacy of the "leaders" over "those lead", of those who guide (Parliamentary Führers on the one hand, trade-union Bonzen on the other) over those who are guided, i.e. as the negation of "workers' democracy"; the over-estimation of the economic struggle at the expense of the political struggle, the economic struggle being regarded as a gradual process (although violent in each one of his stages) of the conquest of the productive mechanism at its "source", i.e. within the factory; the lapse of memory of this fundamental Marxist thesis, and which we have always reaffirmed, that "before being a process of transformation, the proletarian revolution is, in its acute phase, a struggle for power between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, struggle which culminates in the constitution of a new form of State whose conditions are the existence of the proletarian Councils as political organs, and the supremacy of the Communist Party in these Councils", and this decisive historical passage presupposes for its realization a "centralized and collective action lead by the Party on the political terrain", by "the Marxist party, powerful and centralized, as Lenin said" (quotation of an article from *Il Soviet* of 1920). Itself a reflection of an objective fragmentation of the workers' movement, immediatism worsened this fragmentation by theorizing it as a factor of force whereas it was a factor of weakness.

It would be an error to believe that this current expressed only an exasperated revolt in the face of Social-democrat treason during the war and, therefore, the post-war

period: much more than a deviation, it is a current radically foreign to Marxism, the resurgence of a old disease of the workers' movement of which it is not necessary to mention its affinity with anarchistic anti-authoritarianism or with syndicalist anti-partyism and anti-politicism, as well as its fundamentally idealist origins and which had some precedents in Germany (although less clearly so than in the workers' movement of the "Latin" countries) since it dates back to well before the World War.

To get out of the impasse of an organization which is not an... organization, and of a class struggle which is not... political, the anti-partyism and anti-authoritarianism of these currents lead however to various and contradictory solutions: whether to support this or that party (although always from the outside), or to deny the original function of an economic and mass organization, by claiming that the new Unionen or that the factory Councils is born not on the basis of adhesion of the wage-earners as wage-earners, but of the proletarians "who accept the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet system", and thus comprising elitist workers' associations... The K.P.D. might have been weak and legalist, but the theoretical theses defended by its Zentrale and fought by the dissidents were precisely – for us as for the International – "on the right Marxist basis".

#### BIRTH OF THE K.A.P.D. (APRIL 1920)

These dissidents were the same groups which, at the founding Congress of the K.A.P.D. had launched the watchword: "out of the unions". On the question of

#### Berlin, 1920, Workers and Soldiers Patrol



elections, they had obtained victory, always in the name of the refusal of the dictatorship of the leaders, and they insisted that the party have an organizational structure which left the broadest autonomy to the local sections. Throughout the year 1919, the Hamburg group had been the most active spokespeople of this immediatism whose contours were still vague. It was this group which had launched the appeal of the eighteen deputies excluded at the Heidelberg Congress:

“All K.P.D. organizations which think that proletarian dictatorship must be the dictatorship of the class and not the dictatorship of the leadership of a party, and who consider that revolutionary mass actions should not be ordered from above by a secret group of leaders, but be proposed and prepared by the will of the masses, by means of the regrouping of revolutionary proletarians into mass revolutionary organizations on the broadest democratic basis, are invited to contact... the section in Hamburg”. It is again this same group which inspired the statute of the “General Union of Workers of Germany” (Allgemeine Deutschlands Arbeiter-Union, or A.A.U.D.), which we will speak of later, and which was constituted on February 14, 1920 in Hanover, splitting from the F.A.U.D., an anarcho-syndicalist organization. This statute declared: “The A.A.U.D. organizes the wage-earners for the final struggle against capitalism and for the introduction by the force of the Council Republic. It is to this end that it invites the wage-earners to unite on the basis of the unitary revolutionary organization, to form one big Union”. The A.A.U.D. rejected on principle “the organizations which: 1) take part in the application of the law on the Factory Councils (a law which recognized the Factory Councils juridically and inserted them into the new structure of the republican State); 2) refuse the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) do not recognize as an organizational basis organization by enterprise”.

While the Hamburg group developed from the end of 1919 the theory which will later be named “national-Bolshevism”, and lost, for this reason among others, the preeminent role which it had at the time of the foundation of the A.A.U.D. and in the following months, it was the Dresden and Eastern Saxony organization which carried its anti-authoritarianism and its anti-partyism on principle to their ultimate consequences. At the founding Congress of the K.A.P.D. in April 1920, Otto Rühle, who will be excluded from it by November 1920, affirmed that “the party as an organizational structure is attached, in the justification of its historical existence, with the postulate of bourgeois parliamentarism, that in the era of the revolution, we reject on principle. If democracy is the traditional form of bourgeois domination, the party is the traditional form of assertion and representation of bourgeois interests”. The policy of every party thus leads necessarily “to opportunism and the corresponding tactical methods (negotiations, compromise, reforms), which we reject on principle”. In 1921, he declared: “the State of the bourgeois-capitalist class, the Parliament and the Party are one and the same thing; they are born and develop together. One conditions the other; they only function one in relation to the others”. It was no longer a question “of destroying the trade unions” which, just like the party, was seen as the product of the bourgeois regime, and counter-revolutionary by nature, because founded on centralism. It was indeed a question “of destroying the political parties, these fundamental obstacles to the unification of the proletarian class and the development of the social revolution, which can be neither the task of parties, nor of the trade unions”, to replace

them by “the regrouping of the revolutionary proletariat in the factories, which are the original cells of the production, and the base of the future society”. It is for this purpose which the A.A.U.(E). [Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union (Einheitsorganisation)], the secessionist trade union founded by the Dresden group after its exit from the K.A.P.D., was to work

## THE ANTI-MARXISM OF PANNEKOEK AND GORTER

We have just recalled the most extreme and aberrant positions, in the revolutionary syndicalist and even the anarchist sense. But the intermediate position of the groups in Bremen and Berlin-Brandenburg, and of its theorists Anton Pannekoek and Hermann Gorter, the idols of so-called “Left” groups of today, is no better, even if it is more subtle and is draped in a completely formal obedience to “Marxism”. It is necessary for us to concentrate on this point, because it is precisely and especially in relation to them that our Fraction, like the International as well, had to demark itself – which obviously does not prevent fashionable historians from assimilating us to them, or, in the best of the cases, to have them derive from the same strain as us...

Contrary to the Hamburg group and especially to the Saxony group, the “Left Communists” of Bremen and Berlin had not recognized their exclusion from the party as irrevocable; they had even proposed amendments to its theses which would have enabled them to remain within the organization.

The IIIrd Congress of the K.P.D., in completely confirming the Heidelberg program from the IIrd Congress, had sanctioned the exclusion of the dissidents, and these ones also sanctioned the conduct of the Spartakists during the Kapp “adventure”, which prohibited any rapprochement. The so-called “Left Communists” however had not deduced from this in any categorical way that every party, precisely by being a party, incarnates the principle of evil nor that this principle had elected to ensconce itself in Moscow, as will soon be decreed by O. Rühle and D. Pfemfert in Dresden. It is the Berlin section, immediately after the March events, which convened the representatives of all the currents of “communist opposition” in the capital, on April 4. Then came into existence what was to be, finally, a new party, the Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands (K.A.P.D.). Its strongest bastions, numerically, were in Berlin and in Rhineland-Westphalia, the A.A.U., more or less reformed, was its syndical appendage, and it possessed the first nuclei of a “combat organization” (as a matter of fact, very ephemeral) which constituted its military network in the factories. It is probable – an impression also confirmed by an article in *Il Soviet* – that in first half of the year of its existence and perhaps still at the beginning of 1921, the K.A.P.D. attracted a considerable number of workers, among them the most combative and without any doubt the most sensitive to the mood of the great masses. They were perhaps attracted less by the specific characteristics of the K.A.P.D. program, than by disgust for the tendency to legalism and for the eternal hesitations of the official party. In the same way, it is quite as probable that the A.A.U. depending on the K.A.P.D. gathered together the wage-earners revolting against the arch-conformist directives of the large reformist [trade union] Zentrale. These two factors as well explain the efforts of the Communist International, up until the IIIrd Congress (which will be held the

following year), to extend a hand to the K.A.P.D., than the decided and unconditional opposition of the K.P.D. to any prospect, even remote, of reunification.

Beyond the tactical divergences on the parliamentary and trade union question, it was clear for the Bolsheviks and for us – especially when the positions of the former dissidents were theorized by Pannekoek and Gorter – that what separated us from all the opposition currents which had converged in the K.A.P.D., were fundamental questions of principle. These divergences of principles had not prevented the “Socialist (later becoming *Communist*) Internationalists” of Hamburg and Bremen from lining up alongside of the Left at Zimmerwald and Kienthal during the war and to carry out a fight parallel with that of Lenin against Kautskyism: but in front of the realities of the proletarian dictatorship, they could not help but be thrust onto the other side of the barricade. With hardly any knowledge of their tactical conceptions, our Abstentionist Fraction noticed that the dissidents of the K.P.D. suffered from “syndicalist heterodoxy”, on the one hand in the sense that they devalued the role of the party and affirmed the supremacy of the economic struggle over the political struggle, on the other hand in the sense that they shared the “anarchistic-petit-bourgeois conception according to which the new economy would be the result of the creation of enterprises directly managed by their workers”. But, actually, the divergence related to all the theoretical background of the K.A.P.D. Its members indeed belonged to a radically idealistic ideological family, and which only the adoption of some rules of interpretation of the capitalist mode of production and structure of bourgeois society could make pass as Marxist: the family which produced anarchism, revolutionary syndicalism, enterprise socialism, councilism, ordinoevism, wherein one can find, although in different proportions, all the ingredients in their ideology. It is this idealism which, in spite of their initial dissensions, before long had all these currents lining up on the same front, that of the negation of Marxism (thereafter, they will prefer to say of “Bolshevism”, as if these were different and even opposed currents!). It is on the same front, against them, that we line up with the Bolsheviks, although with them we recognized that instinctively communist proletarians militated in their ranks, more by the “fault” of the K.P.D. that thanks to the “merits” of the K.A.P.D., and although we had a different opinion from that of Moscow on the manner of reconquering them to our cause.

For Marxism, the revolutionary process is first of all the material and physical clash of two classes; the oppressed class is thrust by material determinations to attack the power of the enemy class; it acts without knowing (and before knowing) the final goal towards which it proceeds, and on the way it meets the Party – i.e. the program, or the “consciousness”, of the final objective and the stages obligatory to reach it, and the necessarily minoritarian organization of the communist vanguard crystallized around this program. On the contrary, for Pannekoek as for Gorter (or perhaps in an even more obvious manner still), the revolutionary process consists in the collective conscious awareness by the exploited of the revolutionary means and goals, a conscious awareness which is the “prerequisite” for their revolutionary action. What among the Spartakists, in January 1919, still seemed a deviation in relation to the correct Marxist doctrines, here becomes the pure and simple inversion of Marxism. As Gorter already wrote in 1909, the new society can be only the product of a new man, self-aware and self-acting: “The spirit must be revolutionized!”. As Pannekoek will say in 1920, in order to

achieve the revolution, “it is necessary that the proletariat, the immense masses, clearly distinguish the means and the goal”.

If opportunism seized the majority of the working class, it is not for reasons for which Marxists must seek the material roots, but because this process of spiritual (or intellectual) emancipation had not come to its completion. And it is precisely “because the masses are still entirely subjected to a bourgeois way of thinking that after the collapse of bourgeois domination (it will be noticed that, in exaggerating the formula of Rosa Luxemburg referred to above to an absurdity, they turn the movements of October 1918 in Germany into a real political revolution having brought about the overthrow of the bourgeoisie!) they restored it back by their own hands” (2). Not only must the masses conquest of self-consciousness or self-activation (or self-motivation, or self-assertion in practical life – various translations of the German *Selbstbetätigung*) precede the revolution or at least, coincide with it at its apogee; it must also be a self-conquest, an acquisition the class makes through its own forces, a “qualitative leap” achieved by the subject-class as a whole. Otherwise, one would fall back down into the dichotomy mass-leaders, the subject of such great scandal to the Dutch tribunists and thus the German Kaapedists, the “real” reason (according to them) for which the proletariat capitulated to the unleashing of the war, renouncing its historical initiative and consciousness of how to act to entrust it to the “leaders”, to the Führers, thus promoted from instruments of history to the ranks of creators of history. If therefore the existence of the party still has a sense for Pannekoek, it is only “to propagate in advance a clear understanding, so that there appear within the masses of capable elements, in the great moments of the world politics, the knowledge of what is advisable to do and to judge the situation for themselves” [Pannekoek, p. 169]. The party has no task any more but to advise, to educate, to illuminate the masses or rather to help them to become conscious themselves, to rediscover this science which is Marxism...

The party is no longer the combat organ which guides the masses, it is no longer the weapon of unification of the instinctive proletarian revolt which directs a real movement of which, as a collectivity, it has the conception, and never does it exert power in the name of the masses. These alleged “Marxists” had not understood and will never understand that the class will be able to arrive at a consciousness of the real movement only after having destroyed the apparatus of its economic and social exploitation, i.e. after being itself also emancipated from an intellectual slavery which, in any event, will be the last of its chains to be broken.

It can thus be understood why the authentic expression of the revolutionary assault and, more so, the realization of socialism, is represented for the Kaapedists by the Councils, the Räte or, on a more elevated level, the Soviets, considered as revolutionary forms of organization in themselves, even when it is admitted – as an extreme concession – that they are to be flanked by the Party as “expert” and “adviser”: it is so that the welding between the masses and their self-conscience/self-activation is complete and “transparent”. These forms are revolutionary in themselves because they “make it possible for the workers to decide by themselves on everything that relates to them”.

For the same reason, Pannekoek considers the dictatorship of the proletariat such

as conceived by the Bolsheviks as the arbitrary dictatorship of a “narrow revolutionary minority”, or rather of “its centre”; “a dictatorship exerted even inside of the party, from which it expells anyone as it pleases and excludes any opposition by underhanded means”; in short, as a new form of Blanquism, as a resurrection of the spectre of *Führerschaft* (authority of the leaders) which tramples its defenseless subjects underfoot. He opposes it to the idea of a party, or better of a sect of enlightened folk which “is a hundred miles away from the goal of any political party (...): to take directly into its hands the State machinery” [Pannekoek, p.154].

Thus, the antithesis between mass-leaders replace the antagonism between classes. If Pannekoek and Gorter reject Parliament, it is not because it is the specific body of the class domination of the bourgeois class, but because it is “the typical form of the struggle through the intermediary of leaders where the masses have only a subordinate role” [Pannekoek, p. 177]. Thus, “Communism, instead of taking in all of the class, becomes a new party, with its own leaders, which is added to the existing parties, thus perpetuating the political division of the proletariat”; its destruction is thus “a crucial step on the path which leads to autonomy and self-liberation”. In the same way, with regard to the trade unions, “it is their form of organization itself which prohibits making them an instrument for the proletarian revolution”, it is this form which “reduces the masses to impotence” and which “prohibits them from making it the instrument of their will” [Pannekoek, p. 180]; on the contrary in the factory organizations Gorter explains why “the workers have the leaders and thus the political line under their control(...); every worker has power (...); insofar as the thing is possible in the capitalist regime, he is even the craftsman and the Master of his destiny; and, since that is valid for all, it is the mass which starts and directs the struggle”.

### 1918: Revolutionary Artillerymen in the Castle Courtyard in Berlin



It will be noticed that neither Pannekoek nor Gorter deny that the “Bolshevik” idea (in other words the Marxist conception, our idea) of the party has a justification. But, for them, it corresponds to the historical situation of Russia, engaged in a double revolution, half-proletarian, half-bourgeois: either the inert mass of the peasantry needs to be directed (from which comes the need for a “new Blanquism”), or the conjoined existence of two different revolutions requires the art of the manoeuvre, privilege of the “leaders”. This idea of the party would not be applicable on the other hand in the Occident, where “the proletariat is alone and must make the revolution against all the other classes”, where “it must have the best weapons for the revolution”, and where, “having to make the revolution all alone and without any help, it must rise spiritually and intellectually to great height, while getting rid of the leaders, of the political parties in the usual sense of the term, of the craft unions and, for the same reason, of the parliamentary institutions. Being in the ranks of the proletariat, the Communists “endeavor above all to raise the masses, as a unit and as the sum of individuals, to a much more elevated degree of maturity, to educate the proletarians, one by one, to make revolutionary fighters of them, by clearly demonstrating (not only in theory but also in practice), that everything depends on their own forces, that they should not await assistance from the outside from other classes, and very little from the leaders”. It will be noticed that, while courting the masses, Pannekoek reduces them to nothing more than an unconscious herd which one must educate to... no longer have need of a teacher! Hence the celebrated opposition, which Lenin mocks in “*An Infantile Disease*”:

“Two Communist parties are now arrayed: one is the party of the leaders, which intends to organize the revolutionary struggle and to lead it from above (...); the other is the party of the masses, which awaits the rise of the revolutionary struggle from below (...). There, the dictatorship of the leaders; here, the dictatorship of the masses! Such is our slogan”.

It is this ideology, whose homogeneity is not decreased by unimportant, personal nuances, that inspired the “appeal” and the “program” approved by the constitutive Congress of the K.A.P.D. the appeal notes the “political and moral bankruptcy” of the K.P.D. which has fallen prey to a “clique of leaders acting through all means of corruption” and which had decided “to sabotage the revolution in the interest of their egoistic goals”. It declares that the new party is not a party in the traditional sense (“To express in all circumstances the autonomy of the ensemble of adherents, such is the basic principle of a party which is not a party in the traditional sense”. It should be said that this is a return to Bakunin on the one hand, and to Proudhon on the other, in short back to the old polemic against “authority”, the “General Council”, the “dictatorship of Marx”, etc).

“It is not a party of leaders; its main [nota bene!] work will consist in supporting with all its forces the German proletariat in its fight to liberate itself from all dependence in relation to the leaders”, – the most effective means for this “unification of the proletariat in the spirit of councilism”, which is the “real goal of the revolution”. As for the program, it recapitulates the history of the class struggles in the world since the end of the war and, denouncing the mortal crisis in which capitalism flounders, it sees the cause of the delay of the subjective factors of the revolutionary crisis on



objective factors in the fact that “the psychology of the German proletariat is still under the influence of bourgeois or petit bourgeois ideological factors”. This is why “the problem of the revolution, is the problem of the development of the self-consciousness of the German proletariat”. Declaring war on opportunist methods of struggle, Parliament and the trade unions (“only the destruction of the unions will give a free hand to the forward march of the revolution”), the program puts at the center of revolutionary action “the Factory Organization”, where “the mass is the motive apparatus of production”, where “the intellectual struggle, the revolutionizing of consciousness is achieved in a ceaseless confrontation of man with man, of mass with mass”, and which has as an essential task, among others, “the preparation for the construction of the communist society”, of which it is “the beginning”. To this organization, “the backbone of the factory councils”, “all the workers who declare themselves for dictatorship of the proletariat” can belong; there the K.A.P.D. will make its propaganda in “deciding the watchwords with it” and organizing itself so that “the party, also, more and more takes on a proletarian character... and obeys the criteria of the dictatorship from below”. This will ensure that – “the Factory Organization is the guarantee – that with the victory, i.e. with the conquest of power by the proletariat, the class dictatorship begins, and not the dictatorship of some party leaders and of their cliques”. Needless to add that “the form of political organization of the communist community will be the Council system”; here the Kaapedists fall into the error where the Independents, whether in good faith or not it does not matter, had fallen; i.e. they suppose that the “communist society” will have a particular form of political organization, copied in addition from a “type of organization” born from the class struggle in a fully bourgeois regime.

From this rapid analysis of “Kaapedist” ideology it follows, – and we said this as early as that era – that on the level of theory and principles, as well as on the tactical level, it was at the antipodes of the position which was constantly defended by the Italian Abstentionist Communists and which was condensed in the Theses of the Fraction in June 1920, as well as in the series on the constitution of the Soviets in Italy in polemics with “*Ordine Nuovo*” and in other articles of the same period. There is no point of contact between these two positions, not even on the question of abstentionism. For Gorter and Pannekoek, this had the value of a principle, just as for the anarchists, as well as the negation of “authority” for the latter. For us, on the contrary, abstentionism is a tactical solution in connection with a given phase of capitalism and proletarian struggle, and not a viable solution always and everywhere in the absolute. Even today where, after a bitter historical assessment, we have the right to regard this question not as secondary but a primordial question of communist tactics in the areas of advanced capitalism, we would not have the absurd notion of affirming the same thing for the countries which are still struggling to achieve their “bourgeois revolution” and where Parliament, because of the evolution of the world in a totalitarian direction, is undoubtedly a still more secondary arena than the Bolsheviks considered it at the time, but still remains however one of the battle fields where the various classes clash. And then the K.A.P.D. and its theorists put – beside all logic – the “parliamentary question” and the “trade-union question” in the same bag: i.e. on the one hand they put on the same level an institution like Parliament, which is constitutionally an institution

of the State and which is at the same time the expression of the domination of the exploiting class and, as its ideology says, the representation – maybe artificial -, of several classes; and, on the other hand, a form of association – workers’ trade unions – which may well be absorbed into the bourgeois state apparatus (and this is increasingly so), but which gather together only wage-earners, which necessarily reflects the pressure of economic determinations, the root of the political struggle, and who, when it is conquered (or reconquered) by the party, constitutes for it a necessary field of action, propaganda and especially of agitation in the ranks of the working class which, in one way or another, is organized by the trade union (even by a czarist spy, Lenin would have said).

## THE K.A.P.D. AND US

The error of the Kaapedists and Tribunists is thus double, as *Il Soviet* remarked on Jan 11 and May 23, 1920: 1) to claim to build forms of economic organization revolutionary in themselves, wherein each one of these forms “acts in a revolutionary way under the bourgeois regime insofar as it is impregnated with communist spirit and acts according to communist directives, under the pressure and control of the Communists”; 2) to forget that the trade unions – whether they are the existing trade unions but reconquered to their class function, or whether they are new bodies necessitated because the proletarians “have abandoned” a “rotten corpse” to itself – will in any event be “useful and effective organs in the Communist regime, and not only by their constitutional form”; in other words, that the trade unions are organs which will have not to be destroyed like the bourgeois Parliaments, but put at the service of dictatorship of the proletariat.

The severe critique of the International on the party born from the Spartakusbund is not enough to amalgamate us with the K.A.P.D. In its “open letter” of June 2, 1920, the Executive of the C.I. addressed to the “comrades of the Communist Workers’ Party of Germany” tried to convince them of their errors in the central question of the Party and of its role in the proletarian revolution, on the vital question of membership in reactionary trade unions which include the vast majority of the workers, and in their “theoretical” motivation for abstentionism. It invited them, moreover, to repudiate “National-Bolshevism” and anarchism and considered a reunification of the two parties under the aegis of the Comintern if the decisions of IInd Congress were accepted. This letter, completely parallel to the whole of our own critical analysis, is no less harsh in its condemnation of the hesitations and of the deviations of the K.A.P.D. than we had been ourselves.

The parallelism established by some “historians” between the Tribunists-Councilists and ourselves on the basis of a “common” distinction between double revolutions and a “pure” proletarian revolution does not hold up either. Above all, this distinction can be found with Lenin as with ourselves. It is Lenin himself who affirms (the sentence is drawn from the “*Report on War and Peace*”, of 1918, but is repeated, to a significant degree, in “*The Infantile Disease*”) that it is “infinitely more difficult to begin the revolution in Europe and infinitely easier to begin it in Russia”, even if, in Russia, it is “more difficult to continue it and to bring it to its conclusion”. In the second place,

from this common distinction, we drew the conclusion that in Europe, it was necessary to make sharper still the sword that the Bolsheviks had brandished in a double revolution, and we maintained that the leadership of the struggle for power and the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat be by the only Communist party, and not a “shapeless Labor Parliament” (i.e. by the Soviets without the material, not “spiritual”, leadership of the party).

The crushing weight of democratic traditions, the deep roots of the opportunism materially anchored in a broad fringe of the workers’ aristocracy and in a whole ensemble of welfare benefits, even if precarious, the existence of “bourgeois workers’ parties” or even of a “workers’ imperialism” (according to the expressions of Lenin and Trotsky) required that the Bolshevik experience of the liquidation of any political alliance of the Communist Party with other parties or other groups, and abandonment of tactics like that of revolutionary parliamentarism even during a non-revolutionary period time, be pushed to their ultimate consequences. Gorter and Pannekoek, on the contrary, drew an opposite conclusion from this: the need for liquidating the party to the profit of a vague “workers’ democracy”. Finally Lenin had a thousand reasons to reproach the “Links-Kommunisten” of their absurd conception of the “pure” proletarian revolution: instead of keeping a “rigorously objective and precise account of **all** the class forces of the State in question”, the Tribunist-Councilists themselves authorized the “purity” of this revolution “to ignore” in a simplistic (and infantile) manner the contribution that the even limited layers, of the non-proletarian semi-classes **can** provide to the revolution, the need for neutralizing other layers (particularly in the countryside) and they put them in the same bag as the henchmen of the counter-revolution, which we never did. In the years 1921 and after, Gorter, and with him a good part of the K.A.P.D. (the “current of Essen”), will go as far as denying the economic struggle and the recourse to the strike... except for the assault for power: the revolution or nothing! , which means: the revolution, never! At the same time, on the contrary, the Left with the leadership of the Communist party of Italy, born from the Leghorn Congress, led impetuous and brilliant union actions in the cities and in the countryside.

There does not exist a “Western Marxism” opposed to “Leninist” or “Eastern” Marxism. There exists a Marxism which assembled the Bolsheviks and ourselves on the same line of doctrine and principles, and a para-Marxism, or better an extra-Marxism, which gathered together the K.A.P.D. and for example Ordine Nuovo, and which today inspires all the spontaneist, workerist, anti-party groups. Perhaps in 1920, the Bolsheviks and ourselves did not see completely clearly that such was the matrix of these currents or these parties, and that the opposition in principle of Marxism to them was much clearer and deeper than any more conspicuous tactical divergence; but today, those who have courage to read the indigestible doctrinal production of the one and the others can see it very clearly; the violent reaction of Lenin in “*The Infantile Disease*” is however explained – and is sanctified – by the instinctive theoretical loathing of the genetic Marxist in the face of this idealistic infection, which was less an “infantile disease” than a veritable gangrene. Let us go further: we have to regret that Lenin (who moreover excused himself for knowing too little about us) put us in the same bag as these individuals, whereas precisely we had fought and we fight savagely against their family of origin, just as before 1914 we had fought that of the anarcho-

syndicalists unionists or the culturalists and, in 1919-1920, that of the Ordinovists; but we can understand historically why the great Marxist, smelling under certain “tactical” theorizations the eternal ideological enemy, had railed against this extremism even with the risk – as he will say one year later – of passing for “a rightist”; why he could suspect in us, because of our apparent affinities with them, the actual or potential “anarchist”. Among the bad services rendered to the movement by K.A.P.D. style immediatism, one of the *bêtes noires* attacked by Lenin in his pamphlet, one of worst is that of having clouded the terms of a polemic which should have proceeded only between Marxists and on the only terrain where Marxists can agree to hold it, and which should have brought the international communist movement, on the one hand, to condemn, as was required, this form of abstentionism (or, better, this tactical nihilism), and its theoretical matrix; in addition, to affirm not only an imperative doctrinal body (as we would have liked the II<sup>nd</sup> congress to have done) but an ensemble of tactical directives more rigorous even than those which the Bolsheviks had suggested, but by no means unrealistic, to be imposed as obligatory on the national sections.

## THE TRADE-UNION ORGANIZATIONS

In the preceding chapters, we endeavored to follow until the middle of 1920 the political evolution of the K.P.D. on the one hand and, other, alleged left currents which converged more or less durably in the K.A.P.D. We will examine the later history of these two organizations in another study, but at the moment we want to supplement this by drawing up the table of the trade-union organizations which flourished alongside the large reformist *Zentrale* reconstituted in July 1919 under the name of the A.D.G.B. (Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) and in opposition to it.

This examination is hardly easy, because the secessionist organizations were innumerable and their development very uneven. Their birth is only partially ascribable to the influence of defined political currents and during their existence, they were subject to the influence of various successive groups before being stabilized in a given form.

The surge of proletarians in their ranks expresses not so much a conscious adhesion with any given programmatic platforms, since these were continuously modified, but rather the dislike that the at the very least conciliating policy of the powerful A.D.G.B inspired in the combative workers and their confused tendency to place confidence in the trade union organization rather than in the political party for struggle, or even to prefer the factory councils to the unions, considered to be closer to them and their interests and as less likely of “bureaucratization”.

Moreover, one should not forget the weight of the localist and decentralized tradition of the German labor movement, which the various political dissidents partly reflected, and partly aggravated by theorizing it, i.e. by presenting it as a perfect model for all authentically revolutionary action and any authentically revolutionary organization. Final, it should be taken into account that the dispersion and the fragmentation of the movement were still worsened by the savage blows of the counter-revolution directed by the social democrats, since in almost all the German states, after each great strike, the most active organizers were arrested, and the recently-born industrial unions

which had already particularly distinguished themselves in the mass struggles and street battles, dissolved.

The common characteristics to all the trade or factory organizations born in opposition to the reformist trade unions are the federalistic structure, the open or veiled rejection of any hierarchically arranged organization, the horror of the “leaders” considered as the incarnation of Evil and the tendency either to reject political action (identified with parliamentary activity), or to equate it with industrial action.

Idealizing the general strike, they very much considered it as the decisive weapon of the class struggle, independent of, or rather instead of armed insurrection. Lastly, it is to the trade unions (or to the factory councils) that they allotted the task of managing the economy, whereas, for Marxism, this is the specific task of the party after the seizure of power. Moreover, unlike the American I.W.W, these new economic associations did not even marshal the great mass of laborers, of temporary or immigrant workers, usually excluded from the official confederations reserved for the workers’ “aristocracy”, i.e. for the most qualified and best paid workers. Thus they failed to fulfill not only a legitimate but a capital requirement of the class struggle, since they tended on the contrary to constitute closed, elite organizations gathering the proletarians not as wage-earners, but as militants willing to fight for goals indicated more or less clearly in their programs. Thus they implicitly disavowed their original claims to “apoliticism” and lined up on the political front of “workers” or “direct” democracy, and other such nonsense common to a differing degree in revolutionary trade unionism, anarchism and “councilism”. So they ended up becoming trade-union appendices of these various political movements, obviously completely minority appendices compared to the gigantic reformist trade union. We will examine these organizations, by gathering them under two headings corresponding roughly speaking to their more or less declared ideology.

### 1918: Demonstration in Berlin



## ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST ORGANIZATIONS

Although not having a tradition in Germany as long and as important as in the Latin countries, “revolutionary syndicalism” had succeeded in preserving a certain continuity and preserving a certain clandestine organization, even during the war, and it is him which, towards the end of December 1918, the first trade-union confederation outside the newly constituted A.D.G.B : the Freie Vereinigung Deutscher Gewerkschaften (Free Federation of German Unions).

The syndicalist inspiration of this new organization, which remained transitory, appears clearly in the “call” launched on December 14. It sets itself as a goal “abolition of wage labor; the expropriation of the land, the factories and the means of production of the large capitalists; and the introduction of Socialist-Communist production”; it rejects not only reforms, but the economic struggle within the framework of the bourgeois regime; it opposes direct action to parliamentary and minimalist activity ; it indicates, as the specific means of struggle for “the introduction of socialism”, the general strike and solidarity strike, boycott and the sabotage of capitalist production; it proposes to go beyond the old separation between economic and political organizations, by joining them together them in one politico-economic association; it entrusts the management of “socialist production” of the future to the revolutionary syndicalist unions. In the current phase, it suggests to its members “working in concert” with “the groups on the left of the labor movement, i.e. the Independents and the Spartakists”, and it does not refuse the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, provided that this one is exerted not by a party, but those “Parliaments of the working class which are the workers’ councils”. Thus it is not astonishing that the Communist Party of Germany, born in the extreme atmosphere of the last months of 1918, amid the cries of “Out of the Traditional Unions!” and “All Power to the Councils! ”, collaborated closely with this first secessionist organization until the middle of the year 1919, before the Heidelberg Congress, while endeavoring to influence its best elements politically and to clarify the serious theoretical defects of revolutionary syndicalism.

Things changed with the victory of the anarchists over the pure syndicalists. Struck hard during the great fights of 1919, the first secessionist syndicate reorganized in December of the same year under the name of F.A.U.D. (Freie Deutschlands Arbeiter-Union, Free Workers’ Union of Germany). It preserved its “syndicalist” designation, but its “statement of principles” reflected a mixture of syndicalism and anarchism: refusal of the political party in general and dictatorship of the proletariat directed by the party in particular; no links, therefore, with the existing workers’ parties, even if “left” ones; attribution of the tasks of economic construction of socialism to the trade unions which are thus “not transitory products of the capitalist company, but the origin of the future socialist economic organizations”, and must now prefigure in the federalistic structure of the local free workers’ associations the characteristics of the future social community (“organization of the factories by the Factory Councils; organization of production on a general scale by industrial and agricultural associations; organization of consumption by the labour exchange”; in short, “reorganization of all the social life on the basis of free Communism, i.e. without the State”); the assertion that “socialism is, in last analysis, a question of culture, which can thus be

solved only upwards from below, by the creative activity of the people”; refusal of organized violence which precisely denies this free creative activity. All the rest was in the same vein, constituting a mixture of individualism and culturalism pushed to the extreme on the one hand and, on the other hand, of syndicalism and attenuated trade unionism, with all the contradictions specific to these currents which Marxism has denounced hundreds of times as petit-bourgeois, idealist and congenitally democratic.

### ORGANIZATIONS RELATED TO SO-CALLED “LEFT COMMUNISM”

As we noted above, the line between syndicalism (indeed even anarchism) and so-called “Left Communism” (Linkskommunismus) was always very blurred in Germany. With regard to the adhesion of many rank and file militants, one can speak about pure and simple “infantile disorder of Communism”, to take up Lenin’s expression; but with regard to the theorists and their programmatic declarations, it is necessary to speak about a-Marxism and extra-Marxism.

The horror of power, the State, the Party, the leaders, and centralization is, indeed, an inheritance common to both currents, and it is an inheritance which has nothing to do with dialectical materialism, i.e. with Marxism. In addition, just as on the strictly political level, German so-called “Left Communism” never had coherent principles and a program and disintegrated in local currents, provisionally linked by their common aversion to the fundamental Marxist theses on the role of the party in the proletarian revolution, by their fundamentally anarchizing anti-partyism and their aversion to the traditional trade unions; in the same way on the trade union level, the heterogeneity of the theoretical conceptions – which varied from the Bremen group to that of Berlin, or the Hamburg group to that of Dresden – had as a consequence different manners of conceiving economic associations more or less born on the initiative or with the contribution of the “Left Communists”.

Thus in the statutes of Allgemeiner Arbeiter-Union (A.A.U., General Workers’ Union), drafted in August 1919 in Essen and which was to be used as a basis for the reconstitution of the trade unions hit hard by repression, the miners in particular, the influence of American syndicalism can also be pointed out (the “One Big Union”, at the same time a political and economic organization) so that for German councilism, still partly endorsed by the K.P.D. “the victory of Socialism and Communism – it declared – is realizable only by the union of the workers in a unitary organization of struggle”. Its objective is “to prepare and, at the time of the social revolution, to carry out the passage from the capitalist mode of production to the socialist mode”, whose first stage will be “the introduction of the system of the councils” which will become “the economic organization of the new society”. The basis of the Union is thus the factory; its delegates constitute the first link of an elastic organizational structure which ends up at the Central Committee. This “must remain in permanent contact with all the existing revolutionary organizations, while aiming at uniting them on the basis of the pure system of councils”.

In February 1920, in Hanover, at the first National conference of what from now on will be called the A.A.U.D. (Allgemeiner Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands), it is still

the general line of the Hamburg group which wins. The constitutive theses reflect the ideas of American syndicalism, proclaiming that it is a question “of organizing the wage-earners for the final fight against capitalism and for the introduction of the Council Republic” and inviting them “to constitute one single big union” to do that. One can adhere to this on the condition of accepting a program which dissociates itself from that of the reformist organizations and at the same time that of the trade unionist or anarcho-syndicalist organizations. Indeed, “an organization cannot belong to the A.A.U.D. if it: 1) takes part in the application of the law on the Factory Councils [the law which inserted them in the constitution of Weimar and made them one of the administrative cogs of the German Republic]; 2) rejects the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) do not recognize as its organizational basis the factory organization”. On the one hand, industrial organization is rejected, and is replaced by an organization based on the factory at the initial stage; in addition, possible agreements with the “revolutionary” political parties were no longer spoken of: the new organization is, indeed, by itself, a mixture of trade union and political party, or rather it is a substitute for the party whose role in the proletarian revolution and especially for the “dictatorship of the proletariat” which they wanted to completely ignore. The bridges are thus burned not only with the reformist or syndicalist economic organizations but also with the K.P.D. and all parties, even “workers” ones.

In a few months, however, and parallel to the formation of the K.A.P.D., the new organization becomes filled with new programmatic contents, mainly reflecting the ideas of Pannekoek and especially of Gorter; the headquarters is transferred to Berlin; and the A.A.U.D., while reaffirming its general anti-party position, attained a certain presence in collateral economic organization of the German Communist Workers’ Party, their relations being as contradictory as they are ill-defined and thus subject to numerous new divisions. The “directives” (Richtlinien) of the new organization again take up the characteristic positions of the workerist immediatism of Pannekoek-Gorter: “The formation of political parties is connected to parliamentarism: this is why parties [all parties!] have the character of a capitalist organization; they are made up on the basis of the principle: leaders and masses; leaders above the masses; the leaders order, the masses obey... The leader is the employer (!!!), the party is its property”; as for the trade unions, they “are a bureaucratic organization born of the world of private economy, to which its leaders are attached as permanent functionaries (civil servants)”.

To the parties and the trade unions they oppose “the Council organization, which is born from the revolutionary process and incarnates class consciousness, social consciousness, the consciousness of solidarity”; “mortal enemy of all bureaucracy”, it is the expression on the one hand of the “increasing liberation [of the proletariat] from the chains of capitalism and especially of the world of the bourgeois intellectual”, on the other hand the “growing development of the self-awareness of the proletariat; will to translate the proletarian class consciousness into activity, to give it a visible expression”. On this basis new economic organizations must be born which, joined together in the A.A.U.D. “are neither a political party nor a trade union”, but express the tendency of the proletariat “consciously organize themselves for basic overthrow of the old society from top to bottom” and “to unify itself as a class”.

The A.A.U.D. rejects centralism “which controls and disciplines the masses to the profit of a few” and which is “the devil that must be destroyed”. It also rejects its twin brother, federalism. On the other hand it wants (understand those who are able!) “the closest union of the workers for the going beyond capital”, a union which is carried out only through the ‘continuous development of the Council system’ ” because in this system, “with its control from below, with its ability to unleash all the abilities and all the energies of the proletariat, with its ties between the leaders and the masses, all contradictions are solved... initially on the intellectual level then, in the social community, also on the economic plan”. The antithesis leader-mass is overcome here (only on paper, alas!) because “the mass is no longer a formless aggregate of confused egoists, but the proletariat in the sense that, endowed with a class consciousness, it becomes indissolubly united in thought and social will” and that, in addition, “the leader becomes a member of the conscious class, connected to it by close ties” and constantly animated and controlled by it. Lastly, the realization of dictatorship of the proletariat presupposes “the exclusive self-determination of the will of the proletarians, over all the political and economic institutions of society, through the Council organization”. But all that does not prevent the A.A.U.D. from collaborating with... the K.A.P.D.! In the program voted at the Leipzig Conference in December 1920, these same ideas are expressed in a more synthetic way:

- 1) The A.A.U.D. fights for the union of the proletariat as a class.
- 2) Its goal is the classless society, the first stage towards this being the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the exclusive self-determination of the will of the proletariat, over all the political and economic institutions of society, by the intermediary of the council organization.
- 3) The gradual assertion of the idea of the councils coincides with the increasing development of working class self-awareness . The true dictators are the council delegates, which must carry out the decisions of the latter and are revocable constantly. The “leaders” are admitted only as advisers.
- 4-8) The A.A.U.D. rejects any participation in Parliament, because this would sabotage the idea of the councils; any participation in legal factory councils, because they are a dangerous form of community of interests with the employers; trade unionism, because it is opposed to the council idea”. But it stands with particular bitterness against the trade unions, considered as “the main obstacle to the development of the revolution in Germany and the unification of the proletariat as a class”.
- 9) ( ...) Without recognizing that the existence of the political parties is justified, the A.A.U.D. does not fight against the political organization of the K.A.P.D., which has the same goal and the same method of struggle as itself, and it endeavors to proceed in the revolutionary struggle in agreement with it.
- 10) The task of the A.A.U.D. is the revolution in the factories [!!!], and its specific mission is political and economic education of the workers.
- 11) In the phase of the conquest of the political power, the factory organization becomes a cog-wheel of the proletarian dictatorship, which is exerted in the factories by the factory councils which were constituted on its basis. The organ-

ization of factory struggle for political power is still exerted by the Council Executive”.

However, as we already noted above, the group of Otto Rühle (Dresden) did not accept the intermediate position of the A.A.U.D. Not only did it detach itself from the K.A.P.D. in the second half of 1920, but it constituted itself into a characteristic “syndicalist” organization: the A.A.U. (E) [Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union (Einheits-organization)] which proposed “the destruction of the trade unions and political parties, which are the principal obstacles on the way to the unification of the proletarian class and the development of the social revolution, which is the task neither of the parties, nor of the trade unions”.

As for the other organizations which, although of anarchist-syndicalist origin, adhered to the Red International of Trade Unions, we will speak about them when we study the following period of the tormented history of the German proletariat. For the moment we will content ourselves with concluding that the unquestionable combativeness of these secessionist organizations does not remove anything from the burden of their origin: on the one hand their immediatist, workerist, and localist programmatic base and on the other hand the fact that while claiming “to link”, “to unify” the class, they are actually isolated from the great mass of the wage-earners. Based on hazy programs of “direct democracy”, of “self-awareness of the proletariat”, of negation of the party (which, of course means as always that they are affiliated with very precisely defined political currents, with clearly recognizable petit bourgeois idealistic and even individualistic ideologies), these elitist organizations are reduced to oscillate between the negation of the party, the replacement of the party by politico-economic organizations with badly defined contours and to support of this or that party.

Reflecting the fragmentation of the German proletariat, they only aggravated it. In the long run they all ended up being aligned on openly democratic positions or they are dissolved as the revolutionary impulse caused by the economic crisis lost its force. Factors of confusion and dispersion, not of clarity and unity among the exploited, they cannot even be praised – unlike the I.W.W or Shop Stewards Committees – as having been mass organizations open to all exploited beyond divisions of category and political differences in the membership. They were thus at the same time an aspect and a factor of the tragedy of the proletariat of Central Europe, in particular of Germany and, beyond, the world proletariat.

# THE SITUATION IN GERMANY AND THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

(A. Bordiga, "Il Soviet", N° 18, July 11, 1920. The French translation appeared in "programme communiste", N° 58, April 1973)

Berlin, June 28. Great Germany leads an abnormal existence. After the terrible war in which it wasted incalculable energy, it succumbs today under the iron fist of the victors who loot it of raw materials, railway rolling stock and tons of gold; it suffers from an asphyxiation whose symptoms appear in the heroism of the Berliner proletariat as well as the sheer magnitude of the incessant movement agitating the country.

I learn, from comrades who have studied and who continue to study the situation attentively, that the economic crisis is at its peak. Factories close, agricultural production is insufficient, even if the harvest is enough satisfy the needs of the country.

The proletariat lives badly and shivers in hostile silence.

Given the current situation in Europe, the political situation is even more threatening. The policy of the Entente had succeeded in constituting between Bolshevism and bourgeois Europe a chain of buffer-states, one of the principal being Poland. But this same policy pushed Poland to enter into conflict with Soviet Russia, and today its counter-revolutionary forces withdraw before the irresistible red counter-offensive. Despite all its efforts, the Entente will not be able to save Poland, neither in the forceful manner wanted by France, nor by the more subtle game played by England. Moreover the latter, even if it wished to, could not use force, because it is paralysed henceforth by the situation in Ireland, in Egypt, in India, and by the impressive events in Asia Minor.

In a few weeks undoubtedly, the buffer-state will no longer exist. Soviet troops will enter a Warsaw which has become in the meanwhile the capital of a new Soviet republic, because, in Poland also, the social and political situation tends to the extreme and the masses are ready to rise.

If the Entente cannot avoid this reverse, and we cannot see how it could, Germany will become the last bulwark between Sovietism and capitalist Europe.

The Entente will continue to strengthen its political pressure on Germany to force it to fulfill its new function. The German bourgeoisie, immobilized by the chains of the victors will not have the elbow room to follow its own policy. The social and economic crisis will continue to be accentuated and the masses will not be able to remain indifferent. The Kapp putsch will reproduce itself on a widened scale when the Entente imposes on Berlin an extreme right-wing government and

this time, the proletariat will have to meet the challenge by launching itself into a decisive struggle.

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Faced with this perspective, what is the social and political preparation of the German working class? Unfortunately, one cannot answer this question without a certain pessimism.

A large part of the toiling masses is still under the influence of the S.P.D. (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) which directs the traditional bureaucratic trade unions. It is superfluous to recall to the Italian readers the nature and the mission of the party of Noske, Scheidemann and Ebert. The watchword of this party is to work in order to save the German fatherland. It is thus against even economic strikes, and for open collaboration with the bourgeoisie, which has as its counterpoint the hunger of the workers and their resignation to capitalist exploitation.

The mineworkers are living proof, at least in the physical sense of the term. They are reduced to a state of living death... Will this proletariat lose even the ability to wield the weapons of its liberation?

Then we have the U.S.P.D., the Independent Socialist Party, all fired up by its wonderful recent electoral victory. It is a party of large numbers and which is often credited with an evolution to the left. Everyone knows that it comes out of the II<sup>nd</sup> Internationale and hesitates to enter the III<sup>rd</sup>. It is also known that it is divided into several currents and that its right wing flirts with Scheidemann, whereas its left leans towards the Communists.

But it is possible that the Italian comrades, through the articles published in "Avanti" on several occasions, have formed a quite false notion of this party.

The Independent party is the party of indecision, of theoretical confusionism, of the inability to act, and of passivity. The left has obtained against the right the approval of a program which contains some communist phraseology, but which is congenitally stunted regarding theory and principles; on the other hand, the right easily imposed on the left its tactical directives, and the leader of the right, Daümig, much praised as the leader of the German revolution, is himself also an "opportunist" who has beat a retreat in the face of the influence of Crispian and Hilferding on the party.

This contradiction between words and action that one encounters in the U.S.P.D. points out very well what also occurs in broad layers of the Italian Socialist party.

I attended a discussion between Communists and Independents. A Communist comrade had spoken about the German situation and the task of the revolutionary proletariat; many Independents had replied. Only one of them argued that the U.S.P.D. is a revolutionary party in the same way as the Communist Party, but without being able to demonstrate this.

All the others developed an argumentation which replicates, everywhere and at all times, the reformists: the proletariat is unconscious, it is reactionary, it is not ready. They are really for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Soviets, the III<sup>rd</sup> Internationale, but their revolution will not repeat the "Russian" methods, red terror, the suppression of the bourgeois press, all measures worthy of "savages". The Soviet system should adapt to a coexistence with democratic institutions, at least for all the time necessary for their apprenticeship to power. That's what kind

of people the German Independents are. Naturally, I was assured that in electoral meetings they do not say these things, that on the contrary they blaze with revolutionary condemnations. Nothing here seemed new to me.

\* \* \*

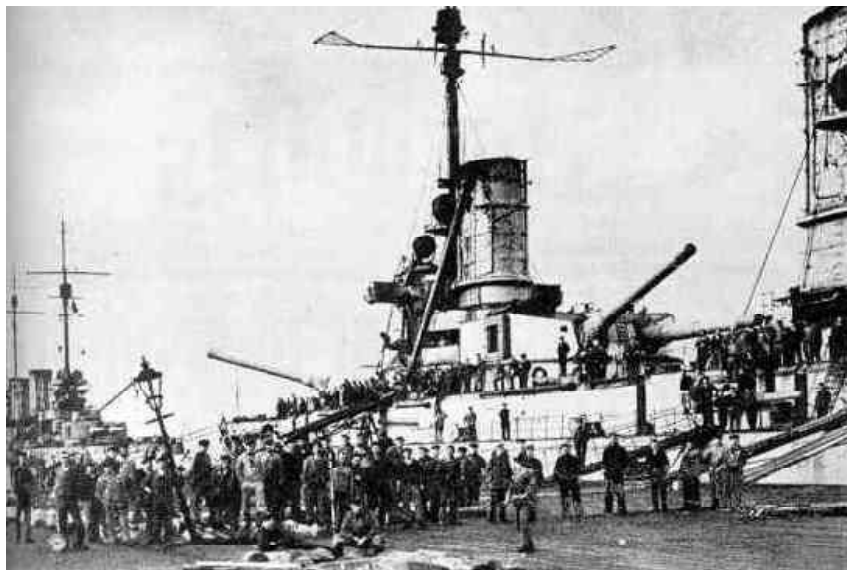
There is only one valid argument, unfortunately, in defense of the Independents, and even this is a specious argument. It consists in saying that the Communists have not done very much more or better to prepare for revolution. Even if this were entirely exact, this could not be used to give safe-conduct to all the damaged goods which the Independents dissimulate under their banner.

The Communists, as you know, are divided. There is the K.P.D. (German Communist party) and now, the K.A.P.D. (German Communist Workers' Party). What divides the two parties? I asked comrades from each organization.

It is all about the history of the scission. In the Communist party, after the collapse of the insurrection of January 1919, after the death of the two great leaders Liebknecht and Luxemburg, two burning questions arose. One concerned the trade unions (*Gewerkschaften*) dominated by reformism and the Social-democrat bureaucracy: it was a question of knowing if one would continue to work there or if they would be boycotted in order to constitute new organizations. The other question related to participation in elections.

The Party Centre was at the time for entry into the trade unions and participation in the elections. The conference, convened in July in Heidelberg (Berlin) approved the program of the Center. The opposition again challenged the legitimacy of the conference and asked that it convene another, after a full preliminary discussion of the two questions in the Party organizations.

#### Mutiny : Kiel, Novembre 1918



The Centre, on the contrary, fixed the date of the second congress at October 1919 according to a strange criterion: the delegates who did not arrive with a mandate in conformity with its directives, on the two questions of parliamentarism and the trade unions, would be excluded from it. Therefore only those who were of the same opinion as the Center came to the congress, in particular numerous Party functionaries, and the opposition was declared excluded from the organization.

The comrades of the K.A.P.D. affirmed to me, rightly, that they did not intend to form a new party, but that they were excluded by an extraordinary process, whereas if the Congress had been regularly convened, they would have had the majority there.

In April 1920, seeing that any attempt to obtain satisfaction was useless, they held the constitutive Congress of the K.A.P.D. (*Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*). This party is less numerous than the K.P.D., but it predominates in Berlin and Hamburg and seems to enjoy the sympathy of the industrial workers. In addition to the two questions already mentioned, two other essential positions separate it from the K.P.D.: first of all, it is against centralization of action and for federalism; and then, it accuses the KPD Centre of weakness and hesitations.

There is moreover the famous question of National-Bolshevism: the leaders of this current, Laufenberg and Wolffheim, from Hamburg, who in a manifesto launched a slogan of an alliance with even the bourgeoisie for the war against the Entente and struggle against Versailles. They say that if the Russians make use of Brussilov, they might as well make use of the German militarists; they do not see the huge difference in the two situations, because the Russian proletarians are in power, and Brussilov is present as a technician of war and not as a class or a party.

However the leaders of the K.A.P.D. have assured me that the two Hamburgers and their few followers, even if they are still formally in the party, were repudiated and will move out of it very quickly.

As for the attitude of the K.P.D. and its passivity, the charges of exclusion against the Centre are undoubtedly not without foundation. The Left of the K.P.D. itself agrees with them.

During the days of the Kapp putsch, the policy of the Party did not keep up with the situation, it showed that the Center had lost contact with the masses and could not motivate them with clear revolutionary slogans. The polemics in this respect are very sharp. Actually, the conditions which rule in Germany do not make it possible for the Communist party to rally the proletariat behind it. The fact of having taken part in the elections cannot have improved the situation much. The Party today has two deputies in the Reichstag: Paul Levy and Clara Zetkin. Paul Levy is the intellectual leader of the Party; however he is a man of the right; the readers of "Il Soviet" know his unfortunate position of loyal opposition to the possible "socialist" government. (See n° 14.).

The K.A.P.D. supports the constitution of factory councils (*Betriebsräte*), but its theses are confused and it boycotts the legal factory councils which exist in Germany and which in their majority follow the Independents.

The Kaapedists work outside of those as they work outside the trade unions, with a view to forming illegal factory councils coordinated by a Revolutionary Workers' Union ("*Betriebsorganisation*"), which is no longer, in my opinion, an economic body since all workers cannot enter it, but which is still not yet a political body. Thus we cannot say that these factory councils lead the whole

proletariat on the true revolutionary path.

If I were to express an opinion on the directives of the K.A.P.D., I would modify few things that I wrote in n° 8 and 13 of this newspaper.

Similarly, the abstentionism of the K.A.P.D. is different, as I have said, than that of our fraction, because while making use of analogous arguments and observations, it is partially based on a different conception of political action and of the Party in general.

On the other hand, the new organization is in large part more combative and revolutionary and it develops a broader activity in the masses; its partisans are the workers who tolerate neither the lack of intransigence which the old party demonstrates periodically, nor its conversion to parliamentarism, which brings it closer to the Independents, who uses its tactic to show themselves off to advantage in the eyes of the German proletariat and the International. One should not hide that in the K.P.D. there are also abstentionists, particularly among the youth.

The Communist Youth is about to split itself into two camps, divided between the two parties.

Admittedly, the crisis is not without gravity and its solution cannot be foreseen. Will the congress of the Communist International be able to bring it about?

Meanwhile the rush of events unfolds precipitously. Perhaps they will awaken the workers and the Communists. The German proletariat, which had as its militants giants of thought like Marx, Engels, W. Liebknecht, Mehring and its apostles of sacrifice like Karl and Rosa, cannot be lower than the requirements of the struggle for the triumph of Communism in the heart of Europe which perhaps is called on to decide between the two huge adversaries: world capitalism and the hosts of rebels which it whips up under all the skies on earth.

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## Berlin, January 5, 1919

*To protest against the removal of the Independent Socialist Eichhorn, as Leader of Police, the Communists, the Independent Socialists, the "revolutionary delegates" (elected trade-unionists) called for a demonstration on January 5. While this unexpectedly massive demonstration is being held, the Communist leaders (Liebknecht and Pieck), the Independent Socialists and the trade unionists meet to democratically decide what they are going to do...*

What was seen [on this Sunday] in Berlin was perhaps the greatest proletarian mass action ever seen in history. We do not believe that even in Russia were there mass demonstrations on this scale. From Roland (the statue in front of city hall) to Victoria (statue in the Konigsplatz) proletarians stood shoulder to shoulder. They reached as far as the Tiergarten. They had brought their weapons, and their red flags. They were ready to do everything and to give everything, even their life. An army of two hundred thousand men, the like of which no Ludendorff had ever seen.

Then the incredible occurred. The masses were standing from nine in the morning in the fog and cold. Somewhere their leaders were sitting and deliberating. The fog got thicker and the masses still stood waiting. But the leaders deliberated. Noon arrived and in addition to the cold, came hunger. And the leaders deliberated. The masses were delirious with excitement: they wanted an act, a word which alleviated their fever. Nobody knew what to do.

The leaders deliberated. The fog increased again and with it came the dusk. The masses returned home filled with sorrow. they had wanted to do something great and they hadn't done anything. And the leaders deliberated. They had deliberated in the Marstall, then they continued at the police headquarters, and still they deliberated. Outside the proletarians continued to occupy the now emptied Alexanderplatz, rifles in hand, with their light and heavy machine-guns. And inside the leaders deliberated. At police headquarters the cannons were loaded, the sailors occupied all the sight-lines, and everywhere outside, a swarming crowd, soldiers, sailors, proletarians. And inside, the leaders sat and deliberated. They sat all through the evening, and they sat all during the night, and they deliberated. And they sat the next morning when the day dawned gray, and on and on and on, and still they deliberated. And groups returned again on the Siegesallee and the leaders still sat and they deliberated. They deliberated, deliberated, deliberated.

(Anonymous account published in the daily newspaper of the KPD, *Die Rote Fahne*, on September 5, 1920. Cited in Broué, "Révolution en Allemagne 1917-1923", p238-239)

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Trotsky would write: «the party can await the masses, the masses cannot await the party»



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Organ of the international communist party**

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## Program of the International Communist Party

**The International Communist Party is constituted on the basis of the following principles established at Leghorn in 1921 on the foundation of the Communist Party of Italy (Section of the Communist International):**

1. In the present capitalist social regime there develops an increasing contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, giving rise to the antithesis of interests and to the class struggle between the proletariat and the ruling bourgeoisie.

2. The present day production relations are protected by the power of the bourgeois State, that, whatever the form of representative system and the use of the elective democracy, constitutes the organ for the defence of the interests of the capitalist class.

3. The proletariat can neither crush or modify the mechanism of capitalist production relations from which his exploitation derives, without the violent destruction of the bourgeois power.

4. The indispensable organ of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat is the class party. The Communist Party consists of the most advanced and resolute part of the proletariat, unites the efforts of the working masses transforming their struggles for group interests and contingent issues into the general struggle for the revolutionary emancipation of the proletariat. It is up to the Party to propagate revolutionary theory among the masses, to organize the material means of action, to lead the working class during its struggle, securing the historical continuity and the international unity of the movement.

5. After it has smashed the power of the capitalist State, the proletariat must completely destroy the old State apparatus in order to organize itself as the dominant class and set up its own dictatorship. It will deny all functions and political rights to any individual of the bourgeois class as long as they socially survive, founding the organs of the new regime exclusively on the productive class. Such is the program that the Communist Party sets itself and of which it is characteristic. It is this party therefore which exclusively represents, organizes and directs the proletarian dictatorship.

6. Only the force of the proletarian State will be able to systematically put into effect the necessary measures for intervening in the relations of the social economy, by means of which the collective administration of production and distribution will take the place of the capitalist system.

7. This transformation of the economy and consequently of the whole social life will lead to the gradual elimination of the necessity for the political State, which will progressively give way to the rational administration of human activities.

\* \* \*

Faced with the situation in the capitalist world and the workers' movement following the Second World War the position of the Party is the following :

8. In the course of the first half of the twentieth century the capitalist social system has been developing, in the economic field, creating monopolistic trusts

among the employers, and trying to control and manage production and exchange according to central plans with State management of whole sectors of production. In the political field, there has been an increase of the police and army potential of the State, governments adopting a more totalitarian form. All these are neither new sorts of social organisations as a transition from capitalism to socialism, nor revivals of pre-bourgeois political regimes. On the contrary, they are definite forms of a more and more direct and exclusive management of power' and the State by the most developed forces of capital.

This course excludes the progressive, pacifist interpretations of the evolution of the bourgeois regime, and confirms the prevision of the concentration and the antagonistic array of class forces. So that the proletariat may confront its enemies' growing potential with strengthened revolutionary energy, it must repel the illusory revival of democratic liberalism and constitutional guarantees. The « Party must not even accept this as a means of agitation ; it must finish historically once and for all with the practice of alliances, even for transitory issues, with the middle class as well as the pseudo-proletarian and reformist parties.

9. The imperialistic wars show that the crisis of disintegration of capitalism is inevitable because it has entered the phase when its expansion, instead of signifying a continual increment of the productive forces, is conditioned by repeated and ever-growing destruction. These wars have caused repeated deep crises in the workers' world organizations because the dominant classes could impose on them military and national solidarity with one or the other of the belligerents. The opposing historical solution for which we fight, is the awakening of the class struggle, leading to civil war, the destruction of all international coalitions by the reconstitution of the International Communist Party as an autonomous force independent of any existing political or military power.

10. It is from its revolutionary nature and not its conformity to any existing constitutional model that the proletarian State draws its power for social reorganization.

The most complete historical example of such a State up to the present is that of the Soviets (workers' councils) which were created during the October 1917 revolution, when the working class armed itself under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. The Constituent Assembly having been dissolved, they became the exclusive organs of power repelling the attacks by foreign bourgeois governments and stamping out inside the country the rebellion of the vanquished classes and of the middle class and opportunist sections which are inevitable allies of the counter-revolution at the decisive moment.

11. The integral realization of socialism within the limits of one country is inconceivable and the socialist transformation cannot be carried out without failures and momentary set-backs. The defence of the proletarian regime against the ever present dangers of degeneration is possible only if the proletarian State is always co-ordinated with the international struggle of the working class of each country against its own bourgeoisie, its State and its army ; this struggle permits of no respite even in wartime.

This co-ordination can only be secured if the world communist party controls the politics and programme of the States where the working class has seized power.