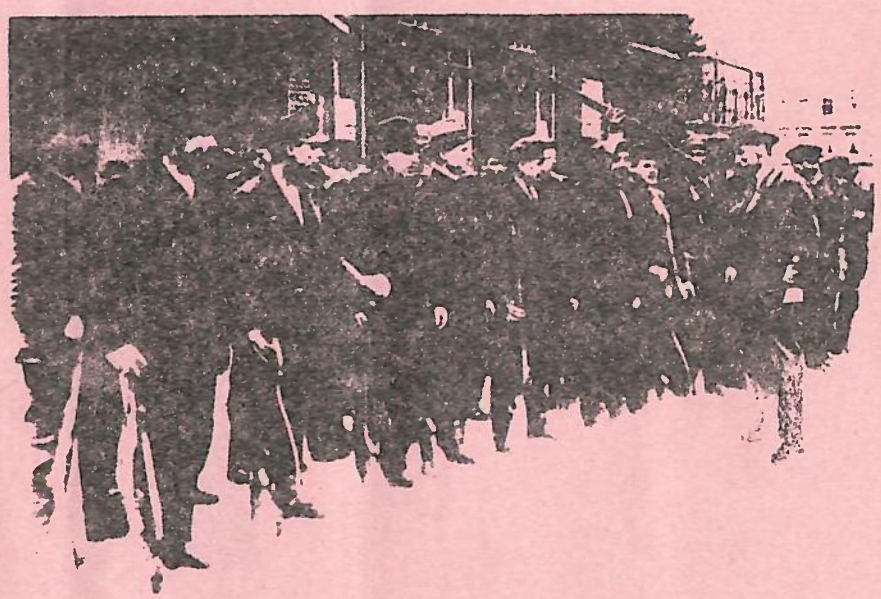
spartakism to national bolshevism

the K.P.D. 1918–24



AN ABERDEEN SOLIDARITY PAMPHLET

1/6

INTRODUCTION

One of the likeliest responses from the Left, to the production in 1970, of a pamphlet dealing with events in Germany in the confused and bloody years after 1918, will be the levelling of an accusation of indulgence in the esoteric. Why do we chose to publish this text, apart from the desire to contribute to socialist antiquarianism?

A knowledge and analysis of past revolutions is an essential part of revolutionary theory, which in turn guides our actions in the modern world. For the socialist movement, the German Revolution remains the greatest unassimilated experience of the 20th century. It is not merely that no convincing analysis has been made, but polemics, analyses of particular events or personalities aroused by other revolutions have not occurred. For socialists who believe that the German Revolution is important, this fact must be first explained, and then combatted.

The answer lies in the fact that the revolt in Germany was indisputably defeated, and that history (both bourgeois and bureaucratic) is the history of the victors; history supresses the defeated. Not even in the limited ways in which it could be claimed that the Russian, Spanish, and Hungarian Revolutions were successful is it so of Germany. Local seizures of power, sporadic risings all weltered and drowned in a sea of defeat and reaction. The result of this has been a stunning neglect of the events of the Revolution, and of those who fought and forged their theories in it. For us this is a serious defect. For of all the revolutions, it is the German one which socialists in the advanced West should be studying. What happened there, was of profound inportance in two ways.

In the first place, Germany in 1918 was the second most advanced industrial power in the world; where the proletariat numbered over 65% of the population and had created in the course of it's struggles vast social democratic and trade union structures. In many ways it was similar to Britain, being in addition governed (within limits) by a system of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. This does away with certain factors (backwardness, isolation etc.) which hamper discussions on the Russian and Spanish revolutions. The bureaucratic practices of the German 'Bolsheviks' cannot be blamed on foreign intervention (unless of the Russian variety).

The second importance of the German experience is that from 1918 to February 1920 (when the Works Council Law was passed,*) Workers Councils were an established fact in the political life of Germany. Although we believe that the Councils are the forms through which the proletariat will exercise power, we do not make a fetish of them.

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* This circumscribed their function. Allowance for Inspection of the books, attendance for representatives at board meetings etc., were given. For this the Councils had to "help the employer in the fulfillment of the establishment's purpose."

Events in Germany allow us to make a critical appraisal of the successes, failures and potential of the Councils in this particular situation; and of the attitudes taken towards them by the revolutionaries.

What are the main lessons to be drawn from the revolution? The first concerns the role of politics in the Councils, and the second, related one, the crucial question of clarity on the meaning of socialism. One of the dilemmas facing us, is the apparent divergence of form and content in the Revolution in Germany. On the one hand there were the new forms of working-class organisation - the Councils - but on the other, few of the Councils attempted to introduce workers' management in the factories, and the social democrats initially had a majority inside them.

At first glance this seems to support the contention that Councils are a mere form of organisation, devoid of any revolutionary content until this is given them by some revolutionary Party. But this mechanical explanation takes no account of the specific features of the German experience. In the first place, as is shown in the text, many of the 'councils' in Germany were not real Councils at all; but the answer lies deeper than this. The role facing revolutionaries in a revolutionary upheaval is to promote the discussion and acceptance of revolutionary ideas inside the councils where they exist. This task will be aided by events to a greater or lesser degree, e.g. whether there exists a reformist labour movement, the quality of the revolutionary crisis, and the general level of consciousness. In Germany, the odds were against a radicalisation of the content of the Councils, but during 1919 the process <u>was</u> proceeding. In many regions where the councils had a real existance, social democratic hegemony was overthrown and those of Communist or Independent (U.S.P.D.) sympathies elected. In addition there were instances in Berlin and the Ruhr of factories and mines being taken over by the workers, and in some districts the Councils took power for short periods.

But the growing strength of reaction, the Works Council Law, and to some extent the changed attitude of the K.P.D. towards the Councils, meant that this process was halted. The second conclusion to be drawn concerns the necessity for mass socialist consciousness as a prerequisite for socialism. The ideas held by the mass of the German proletarist, schooled in the S.P.D. tradition, as to what socialism was, were shallow. Socialism was achieved by nationalisation and reforms through the activities of the S.P.D. and Trade Union bureaucrats, without the need for the masses to act on their own behalf. Many workers sincerely believed that the 8-hour day, legalisation of the shop-stewards and Councils, and an all-socialist government were great steps towards socialism. And the K.P.D., after it's first year, did little to change these ideas. When Rosa Luxembourg insisted that,

> "Without the conscious will and conscious action of the majority of the proletarist there can be no socialism."

She was in a small minority.

Few people in Germany accepted the idea that socialism was man's domination over production and society through organs which he had created and controlled. That it involved mass participation in decision making and execution by the working class. The acceptance of these ideas was aided by events from 1918 - 23, and many felt then, with Ruhle, that,

"nationalisation is not socialisation ...."
but these new conceptions only motivated a small minority of the proletariat.

The pamphlet given here is not intended to be the last word on the German Revolution. Since we could not write an encyclopedia, selectivity was necessary, and the K.P.D. was chosen as it's subject, for it was in this organisation that the struggles between those who believed in the rule of the councils, and those who believed in the rule of the Party, was fiercest waged; and also later between those who wanted the German movement to remain independent (for right or left reasons) from the Russian party, and those who aimed at subservience. The pamphlet deals with the evolution of the Communist Party from it's foundation through five years of revolution to the October 1923 insurrection.

Someone who, afterreading the pamphlet can still claim that the victory of the K.P.D. would have meant the salvation of the Russian Revolution, or socialism in Germany clearly does not share our idea of what socialism is; the organisational and ideological autonomy of the working- class. This cannot be mediated through a Party; especially one which had the character of the K.P.D. One of the purposes of the pamphlet is to help people to realise this.

CHRONOLOGY

1917

6 - 9 April	Foundation of Independent Social Democrats (U.S.P.D.)
16 April	Strikes in Berlin and other areas. Factory committees appear.

1918

28 January	Strikes for peace and reform. In Berlin 400,000 down tools.
3 October	Social Democrats enter the Government.
9 - 10 November	Revolution in Berlin. Joint S.P.D. - U.S.P.D. government. Ebert of S.P.D. becomes President.
16 - 21 December	Congress of Workers and Soldiers Councils in Berlin; votes against rule of Councils.
30 December - 1 January	Foundation Congress of the K.P.D. (German Communist Party.)

1919

6 - 12 January	"Spartakus Rising" in Berlin. Councils take power in Bremen. Strikes throughout Reich.
7 April	Council Republic proclaimed in Munich.
Feb. - July	Action of Freikorps and Reichswehr suppresses revolutionary centres throughout Germany.
20 October	Second Congress of K.P.D. Split in the Party.

1920

February	Law on Works Councils passed in Parliament.
13 March	Kapp Putch. General Strike.
March - April	Government troops crush Ruhr Red Army.
April	Foundation of K.A.P.D. in Berlin
4 - 7 December	Congress of unification of K.P.D. and U.S.P.D.

1921.

March	Attempt by K.P.D. at insurrection crushed.

1923

January - April	Negotiations between Bolsheviks and Reichswehr for production of arms in Russia for Reichswehr.
October	Further K.P.D. attempt at insurrection crushed. Short-lived Red governments in Saxony and Thuringia.

I. ORIGINS

The Communist Parties of Western Europe, founded after the first World War, had varied origins. In many cases the groups which came together to form the new parties came from different sources, and had divergent analyses of society. Long struggles were waged inside these parties to impose a unified ideology on the members, control of the members by their leaderships, and subservience to the Comintern, which were the characteristics of the Communist Parties of the Third International.

In Germany the situation was singular. The German Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands: K.P.D.) was composed of individuals who had been members, functionaries, officials of the old Social Democratic Party (S.P.D.), and who had broken with the S.P.D. over it's support for German Imperialism in the war.* It is true that, after the revolution broke out, various new elements - young workers, soldiers, declasses, joined the Spartakists, but, in the period under survey, almost the entire leadership and the majority of the membership were ex-social democrats.

The Spartakus Group - originally the International Group - were the most determined of the anti-war activists. The "Spartakus Letters" as well as illegal leaflets and demonstrations helped keep the internationalist spirit alive; many of the Spartakists were jailed, including both Liebknecht and Luxembourg. Originally spreading propaganda inside the S.P.D., in 1917 they joined the Independent Social Democrats, an anti-war breakaway from the official party, it's members ranging from pacifists to revolutionary socialists. The Spartakists maintained their autonomy within the Independents (U.S.P.D.) and formed no distinct organisation during the war. In this they were following the idea of Rosa Luxembourg that "To shepherd the workers into different party pens is based on a sectarian concept of the Party." They hoped in addition to use these bodies as fields of recruitment.

That this policy was a failure was seen by the small numbers of the Spartakists on the outbreak of the Revolution, and of the failure of the most advanced workers to see the Spartakists as clearly distinct from the Independents. It was to the Spartakists that many looked for the founding of a new revolutionary organisation in Germany, and it provided the bulk of the members for the K.P.D. when it was founded.

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* This was important. Many of the Spartakists accepted, in a mediated form, much of the old S.P.D. philosophy, e.g. the role of the party as regulator of social life under socialism. In addition, they demanded nationalisation (Liebknecht was impressed by the results of State control during the war), and Luxembourg, in her address to the founding congress of the K.P.D., said that with 'trifling variations' the demands of Marx in the 'Communist Manifesto' (nationalisation of the banks, State control of the economy, etc.,) should be those of revolutionaries in the German situation.

the councils

The Revolution had conquered most of Germany by the 9th November 1918 when Berlin at last rose; the unified momentous force of the upheaval met with little resistance, and within a few days a network of Councils - Workers', Soldiers', Sailors' and Peasants' covered the German Reich. These Councils - whose forerunners were the factory committees of the great 1917 and 1918 strikes - assumed much of the functions of the old State apparatus-order, transport, rationing. In a few areas they were genuine organs of workers' power, factory councils being elected and federated into central councils covering whole cities. In Hamburg, Bremen and Brunswick the councils had a real existence, formed Red Militias, banned the bourgeois press, dismissed reactionary officials. In Wilhelmshaven the sailors tried to contact the Russian sailors at Kronstadt, while in Berlin the Executive Council of the Berlin Workers and Soldiers Councils called on the international working class to speed the world revolution. This body became for a period a near-Soviet, countermanding the orders of the S.P.D. leader Ebert, which once again gave the officers the power of command, and announcing on November 23rd,

"Political power lies in the hands of the Workers and Soldiers councils of the German socialist republic."

However, In many areas the councils were hollow shells. When it had become obvious that nothing could halt the revolution, the Social Democrats had joined in the movement; in many areas they jointly formed councils with the right wing of the Independents; the delegates in these councils were therefore mainly officials of the S.P.D. and the Trades Unions. Even non-socialist parties participated in the movement. In the Army, councils were established by officers* and the few peasants councils which were established were non-revolutionary. Thus the majority of the 'councils' were not councils at all, but merely instruments of the Social Democrats, which saw their functiion as the maintenance of order until the State apparatus was repaired and a democratic National Assembly convened.

congress of councils

The Executive Council of the Berlin Councils convened an all-German Congress of Councils which opened in Berlin on the 16th December 1918. The delegates to this congress were not elected, but appointed by their local councils, so that of the 490 persons there, 288 were Social Democrats, 88 Independents, and only 10 Spartakists. The soldiers were over-represented having almost 20% of the delegates, while there were over 250 professional people and officials of the old labour movement, compared with only 179 workers.

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* Hindenburg gave orders to the officers, "Since the movement to form Soldiers Councils cannot be contained, the movement must be got into the officers' hands. Councils of 'trusted men' are to be formed in all companies." (quoted in "The Reichswehr and Politics" by Carsten P.10)

Muhler, for the Executive Council,* opened the Congress with the propnetic warning that "If the Councils fall, nothing will remain of the Revolution." His speech was interrupted by a demonstration of Berlin workers, demanding all power to the Councils, and the abolition of the S.P.D. cabinet. However, neither this, nor the speeches of Daumig of the left Independents, or Laufenberg of the United Revolutionaries who insisted,

"Supreme power had devolved upon the councils. As representatives of the workers and soldiers councils of Germany, this Congress takes possession of political power.**"

had any effect. The Congress rejected by 344 to 98 a motion in favour of the Council system, and called for elections to a National Assembly. Daumig said that the Revolution had hanged itself.

spartakists and councils

The Spartakists had participated to the best of their limited ability in the formation of Councils, as had other ultra-left groups. They were among the first to see the potential of this new form of proletarian organisation, and had called for them in illegal leaflets before the revolution. As early as 10th November, Luxembourg was demanding in the Spartakist paper, "Rote Fahne,"

"Abolition of the Reichstag; taking over of the government by the Berlin Workers and Soldiers Council, until one representing the entire Reich can be formed."

However, it would be a mistake to see the attitude of Luxembourg to the Councils as being straightforward. In mid-November she said,

"The Spartakus League will never take power except in accordance with the clearly expressed will of the great majority of the proletarian masses" (quoted in Rosa Luxembourg, P.301 by Frohlich). This and other statements give the impression that there was room in her scheme for a Spartakist government ruling along with the Councils, which confuses the issue of 'all power to the Councils.'

The Spartakists were not blind to the preponderance of the S.P.D. in the Councils, and during the first weeks of the revolution, they repeatedly called for new elections to be held, to bring the Councils into line with the rapidly changing events.

The results of the Congress of Councils were a deep disappointment to the Spartakists, and hastened the move towards an independent German Communist Party. Liebknecht, in a pamphlet 'The Crisis in the U.S.P.D.' began to accept the necessity of a break with the Independents.

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* This body came in for much criticism, from the left as well as the right; Luxembourg called it the 'coffin of the revolution.' Despite it's faults, it tried to form a Red Guard, and to support workers in efforts to "exercise control and participate in all decisions arising from the productive process."

** Some of the proceedings of this congress (in English) are given in "Political Institutions in the German Revolution" by Burdick and Lutz. Included is a speech by Daumig, which states, inter alia, "the democracy of the proletariat finds it's expression in the Council system."(P.255)

Speaking of the Congress of Councils Liebknecht wrote,

"The reactionary decisions of the Congress of Councils were achieved with the co-operation of the Independent cabinet members. The large majority of the Independent leaders made propaganda for the National Assembly and against the Council System."

Demands for the foundation of a Communist Party were also coming from the I.K.D. (International Communists) in Bremen. This was another breakaway from the S.P.D., much smaller than the Spartakists, and also more sympathetic to the Bolsheviks. The I.K.D. was influenced by Karl Radek, who had come to Germany, with the support of Lenin, in his efforts to form a Communist Party. In their journal "arbeiterpolitik," they had called, from May 1917, for the founding of a separate organisation, and their insistance that the new party would be formed "with or without them," finally overcame the doubts of the Spartakists. However, some of the leaders continued to believe that the foundation was premature, and that work inside the Independents should have been continued and these included Levi.

The Final breach occurred when the U.S.P.D. leaders refused to call a national congress demanded by the Spartakists.

foundation of the k.p.d.

At the foundation Congress of the German Communist Party, * held from 30th December to 1st January 1919, and attended by over 80 delegates, the old Spartakist militants were re-elected to head the new party. They were not to have powers of decision, but to act as co-ordinators of information. One delegate, Eberlein stated,

"It is not permissable to delegate from above, ... individual organisations must have complete autonomy."

On the debate on the National Assembly, the majority followed the motion of Ruhle, favouring abstention from the elections. Ruhle's view was that,

"(Participation) will help to take the struggle from the streets and into parliament ..... If they remove the National Assembly from Berlin, for fear of the masses, we will have to form a new power in the capital."

By 62 votes to 23 the Congress decoded on a boycott* and the same attitude was apparent on the discussion of the Trades Unions. Lange spoke in favour of leaving the Trades Unions, which were seen as accomplices of Imperialism, since they had wholeheartedly supported

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* The proceedings of this congress are available in French in "Spartakus et la Commune de Berlin" by Prudhommeaux 1949.

** At a congress held the day before the founding of the K.P.D., the International Communists (I.K.D.) had decided to boycott the elections with only one dissenting voice.

the war effort.* Lange moved that in the new situation

> "the organisations necessary to bring about socialism are the factory councils (which will) take over the entire direction of the factory."

On the intervention of Luxembourg, the question of participation in the Unions didn't go to the vote, but was left aside for further consideration; however the attitude of the majority was clear.

The attitude of Rosa Luxembourg at this congress can only be explained as a result of the disappointment caused by the outcome of the Congress of Councils. In her address on December 30th, she made the observation,**

> "The Councils are as yet far from understanding the purposes for which they exist." P.20,

but from this she concluded that electoral activity was necessary. "We wish to be prepared for all possibilities, including the utilising of the National Assembly for revolutionary purposes should the Assembly ever come into being." (Page 16)
This is 'staying with the masses' with a vengeance; if the revolution commits suicide, there is no necessity for the revolutionaries to do the same. And it was Luxembourg who correctly stated "parliamentary cretinism was a weakness yesterday, today it is an ambiguity, tomorrow it will be treason." (Ausgewahlte Reden II P.607)

The leaders of the party regarded the results of the first Congress as a disaster,*** there were no K.P.D. members in the first Republican parliament, and because of the attitude expressed towards the unions, the Berlin Revolutionary Shop Stewards (a rank and file body, adhering to the left Independents) refused an invitation to join the new party. Some of the old Spartakists wanted to give up the attempt and ditch the K.P.D., and Luxembourg wrote that electoral participation should have been a pre-condition of membership. However, until the death of Luxembourg and Liebknecht, little was done.

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* During the war, the Newsheet of the C.C. of the Trades Unions had stated "The policy of the 4th August accords with the most vital interests of the trades unions; it keeps all foreign invasion at bay, protects us against the dismemberment of German lands, against the destruction of flourishing branches of German industry" Quoted in Grebing, "History of the German Labour Movement" P.96. They had reason to worry, in 1907 their funds stood at 33,000,000 marks.

** Published in English by the Socialist Workers Federation (1957).

*** The decisions of this congress upset not only those later to become Stalinist apparatchniks (Radek) or to re-enter the S.P.D. (Levi), but also such revolutionaries as the Trotskyist Pierre Brabant, who, in his "La Revolution Allemande" (1959) denounces the "tendences ultra-gauche et sectaire" which triumphed at this time. The attitude of some English Trotskyists to Luxembourg should also be mentioned. Both T. Cliff in his biography of Luxembourg (1968) and R. Black, in "Newsletter" (21.1.69) claim her as their own, by pointing out that she was posthumously denounced by Stalin as a Trotskyist. We don't go in for historical big-game hunting, but it is important to point out that neither of these writers mention Rosa's severe criticism of Engels in her address to the first Congress of the K.P.D. After all, this introduces a smell of illegitimacy into their line of ideological ancestors.

january fighting

Less than a week after it's foundation, the K.P.D. was thrown into events that history was to designate the "Spartakus Uprising." Berlin was the main stronghold of the left-wing forces in Germany; in the workshops of the city lay the strength of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards (Obleute), and the left wing of the Independants had a mass following.

In late December the counterrevolution became a possibility. The S.P.D. government had used troops against revolutionary sailors, and was taking the first steps to organise the Freikorps, a military formation of ex-officers, students, and peasants which were to be used to restore order. Leaflets and posters urged soldiers from the front to 'kill Liebknecht', and there was a price on his head.

In this atmosphere occurred the incident which sparked off the rising. After the affair of the sailors, the Independents had left the government, which had then dismissed Eichhorn, the chief of police. Eichhorn had organised a force of 1500 armed workers - the Security Force - sympathetic to the left. The Security Force had supported the sailors, and had also disarmed counterrevolutionary student militias. Eichhorn refused to be dismissed, except by the Berlin Executive Council, which had appointed him. The young Communist Party joined with the Shop Stewards and the Independents in defense of Eichhorn, issuing a joint statement on the 5th January,

"The Ebert-Sheidemann Government has heightened it's counter-revolutionary activities .... it intends to establish in Berlin a despotic rule, antagonistic to the workers."

On this day over 700,000 workers, many of them armed, responded to the call to defend Eichhorn in the biggest demonstration ever seen in the capital. The leaders were carried away by the enthusiasm, held a meeting and decided to overthrow the government. The majority at the meeting where the decision was taken, were shop stewards and left wing Independents, only Liebknecht and Pieck of the K.P.D. attended, and neither of these had been mandated by the Communist Party. On the 6th a statement declared the government deposed in the name of a Joint Revolutionary Committee with one member each from the shop stewards, Independents and K.P.D. This statement read;

COMRADES! WORKERS!

The Ebert-Sheidemann government has made itself impossible. It is declared deposed by the undersigned revolutionary committee.

Lebedour Liebknecht Scholze.

That day, the centre of Berlin was again filled with armed workers, responding to the General Strike call, while the Committee debated. The Government was now preparing to flee the city, having no troops at it's disposal. In addition to the armed workers, the forces of the revolution had as potential allies both the Security Force, and the 3,000 armed sailors (the Volksmariene Division); but little attempt was made to involve these groups, and only fragments joined the fighting. The Revolutionary Committee spent all it's time debating, first among themselves and then in attempts at mediation, which the S.P.D. government used as an opportunity to gather troops. What limited actions occurred were carried out spontaneously, by groups of armed workers. For example, the occupation of the railway stations to prevent the introduction of troops, and the occupation of the S.P.D. printing-house and destruction of thousands of copies of their paper. Luxembourg, who had initially opposed the rising, was now against any attempts at a compromise, which Liebknecht and the Revolutionary Committee were trying to negotiate. She criticised the Committee sharply,

"The masses have followed the appeal to action with impetuous energy .... they are waiting for further instructions. What have the leaders done? Nothing. There is no time to be lost .... disarm the counterrevolution, occupy all strategic positions."
(Rote Fahne January 7th.)

On the previous day, the masses had waited in the cold and mist while the leaders debated. With no plan of offensive given, they dispersed, cold and disillusioned, and very few of them participated in the later stages of the fighting.

The Government took advantage of the demoralisation to organise repression. The Freikorps units moved in from the suburbs of Berlin, methodically crushing resistance; in this they were aided by a 'Social Democratic Auxiliary Force' of S.P.D. stalwarts. Several hundred people were killed before order was resored, and these included Liebknecht and Luxembourg.

This stuggle was forced upon the revolutionaries, and to retreat would have been suicide; but by the inept way the struggle was waged, instead of halting reaction, it strengthened it. Determined action could have led to a Berlin Soviet, the forces available for crushing it being puny. Uprisings occurred at this time in other places: Bremen, the Rheinland and elsewhere. A Berlin Soviet could have been the rock against which the counterrevolution crashed, and the radicalisation which occurred throughout 1919 may not have been so easily suppressed.

Although the communist rank and file were involved in the fighting, probably to the very end, most of the central committee of the K.P.D. opposed the rising. Radek wrote to them on the 9th urging that the rising be called off, "The fight is hopeless" he said, and the majority of the c.c. agreed with him. The so-called Spartakus rising was, then, mainly the affair of the shop stewards, left-wing Independents and their thousands of followers in Berlin. The K.P.D.'s 3,000 members at this time were not the decisive element.

In the next few months the counterrevolution was consolidated. Many socialists were jailed or killed, and the K.P.D. was for a long time illegal. The Freikorps became a well equipped force crushing left-wing action all over Germany.

There were many uprisings and violent strike movements in the early months of 1919. In Bremen, Brunswick and the Ruhr, Soviet power was declared for short periods, and over 48 million working days lost in the year through strikes, many of insurrectionary proportions. Further Disturbances rocked Berlin in March. A general strike led to fighting with the Army (Reichswehr) in which about 1500 people were killed. Rote Fahne demanded (on 3rd March) abolition of the National Assembly, and all power to the councils; the K.P.D. bore the brunt of the fighting, but the Army was now much stronger, and the struggle crushed brutally.

the munich soviet

However, it was in Munich that Soviet power was longest lived, and here the K.P.D. played an important role. Bavaria was the most backward State in Germany, with an overwhelming Catholic peasant population and industry confined to Munich itself. The revolution installed an Independent socialist regime; in Munich the anarchist Muhsam worked with the Spartakists inside the Munich Workers Council for the transfer of power to the Councils.

Unrest in Munich spread; rising prices and unemployment led to huge workers demonstrations in the city, Muhsam proposed in February to the Munich Council, "that Bavaria be declared a Soviet socialistic republic," but this was rejected by 234 - 70. The State Parliament of Bavaria (in which the peasants had given the non-socialist parties 66% of the votes, although the socialists had a majority in Munich itself) was due to meet on the 4th April. But the Central Council of the Munich Workers Council now thundered, "The Central Council is taking steps to have the summoning of the Landrat (State Parliament) withdrawn. The convocation will therefore not take place." *

* Quoted in "Revolution in Bavaria" by Mitchell. An excellent account of the revolution in this state.

The Munich garrison declared it's support for the action of the Councils, which had, however, failed to make any statement about assuming power. Carried away by the general euphoria, a group of anarchists, left Independents and others, in a meeting of less than 100 people, declared a Soviet Republic. The Government fled.

The attitude of the K.P.D. was sober. Since the arrival in Munich of Levine to head the local branch, co-operation with the anarchists had ceased; in addition Levine took in all the membership cards of the party in Munch, and only re-issued some of them. The Communists denounce this "pseudo-soviet" as the 'product of leaders whom the masses have refused to follow' Levine was under instructions from the K.P.D. leadership not to engage in any hasty action, instructions he at first followed.

The first Soviet republic lasted a week. Landauer, an anarchist who believed in small-workshop socialism, sent a postcard of himself to a friend, saying, "I am now commissar for education, science, propaganda and a few other things ... "Anarchist muddle-headedness has a long pedigree. The Foreign minister declared war on the Pope, and after a week of this farce, the 'Soviet' was overthrown when a section of the garrison revolted. Muhsam and Landauer were arrested. *

But armed communists now crushed the counterrevolutionary rising and installed themselved in power, announcing that a 'true' Soviet dictatorship had been established. As much a minority regime, the communists at least armed the workers, seized the banks and tried to requisition food from the peasants. But with an army of 30,000 Freikorps advancing on the city, no food and few arms, the situation was obviously hopeless; Communist rule was overthrown by a vote of the Munich Council, which attempted to open negotiations with the government. But the military leaders of the K.P.D. were for none of this. Englehofer (later shot by Freikorps) said,

> "The Red Army will not allow itself to be forced into a betrayal of the social revolution by any faction, not even the factory councils." (Quoted in Mitchell, op.cit P328).

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* In "Anarchy" No.54, C.W. claims that in declaring the Soviet Republic, the anarchists had the support of the Munich Workers Council, which adopted a motion to this effect from Muhsam by 234 - 70. But this was the proposal defeated in February, not accepted in April. C.W. also worries, "Was the Landauer cabinet a government?" This may be of vital importance to the anarchists in their fairy-tale world, but for serious revolutionaries, the question is whether the working class ruled in Munich; The answer being no more under Landauer than under Levine. This uncritical attitude which anarchists take to their tradition is often supplemented by claims that such and such a revolt, etc., was really anarchist objectively. Thus on Page 32 of the Coptic Press pamphlet, "Workers Councils in Germany" we read, "There is little difference .... between the most advanced forms of council communism and anarchism." Here an uncritical approach to history, and a feeble attempt at 'retrospective identification' are combined.

So now the Red Army ruled in Munich. Of this period the East German historian, Beyer, has written, "The trust of the masses for the Communist Party grew steadily ...." (Quoted in Appendix to Mitchell.)

On May the 1st, the Freikorps entered the city, and killed about 1,000 people; Landauer was beaten to death, Levine later executed for treason. The putchist tactics of first the Anarchists, and then the communists had sealed the fate of the revolution in Munich.

II Bureaucratisation

Paul Levi took over the leadership of the K.P.D . in March 1919, after the deaths of Luxembourg and Liebknecht. He was one of those who had opposed the founding of the party as premature, and along with others in the leadership he felt that all efforts should be centred on winning the independents en masse into the Communist Party; and for this certain 'mistakes' made at the first Congress and afterwards had to be rectified.

In an article on the Munich Soviet, he doubted the wisdom of the enterprise, * and to prevent the liklihood of it's repetition dissolved the "Red Soldiers League" during the summer. These had developed from an organisation founded by Liebknecht to carry on propaganda inside the Army, into semi-militia units (K.O.) used to defend strikers, demonstrations, etc. Since these units mainly adhered to the left-wing of the Party, Levi was supported in this move by the rest of the executive. But most of these units continued to exist and defy the control of the centre. The leadership was thus beginning to assume powers it had not been granted at the first congress. Simultaneous with this move, negotiations were entered into with the left-wing of the Independents.

the second congress

The second Congress of the K.P.D. was held in Heidelburg in October 1919, and was to mark a turning point in the history of the party. The conference was held illegally, since the K.P.D. was banned, and about 60 delegates represented 105,000 members, compared with 80 delegates for 3,000 members at the founding congress.

At this congress, Levi, with the knowledge and tacit support of the rest of the leadership, submitted theses which were designed to force a breach with the left-wing of the Party. These had not been discussed, or even published before the Congress, and on them delegates had not been mandated; this was in fact Levi's intention.

* See "The Bolshevisation of the Spartakus League" in Saint Anthony's Papers No.9, by Lowenthal P.34.

Among other things these "Theses on Communist Principles and Tactics" * stated,

> "The struggle will be waged with all political and economic means ... including parliamentary" (Thesis 3)
> "Federalism makes united action of the workers impossible. The K.P.D. rejects federalism." (Thesis 6)

Wolfheim defended the opposition from some of the accusations made against them,

> "We have never held the existance of the K.P.D. to be superfluous; the Party has a propaganda mission. (But) the dictatorship of the proletariat is not the dictatorship of a party." **

The 'Theses' in general were adopted by 31 votes to 18, and the final thesis, declaring 'seceded' all those who disagreed, enforced by only 29 to 20, with the six executive members present voting in favour.

However, in the Party as a whole, support for the left-wing was greater; by the admission of the leadership at the Third Party Congress in February 1920, half (50,000) of the members had left the Party, including all of the armed elements, and most of the workers in Bremen, Berlin and Hamburg, where the K.P.D. retained only a few dozen members; also lost were many of the able thinkers of the Party, who joined other organisations, e.g. the K.A.P.D. when it was founded.

Radek had tried to avert the split at the last minute; he was a great enemy of Levi's, whom he denounced for his "exaggerated anti-putchism" and insistance that "communists should never fight without a certified guarantee of victory." However, for Radek these were tactical moves, designed to undermine Levi's authority, since he suspected him of disloyalty to Moscow.

The attitude in Moscow itself was shock at the split, which had been carried out without their knowledge. But in April 1920, when he published "Left-Wing Communism," Lenin largely endorsed the actions of the K.P.D. leadership,

> "A split is preferable to confusion, which impedes the ideological, theoretical and revolutionary growth and development of the Party." (Left-Wing Communism P.85)

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* The theses are given in full in Weber's "Volker hort die Signale" 1967 Pages 49 - 50.

** Quote given in Bricanier "Pannekoek et les Conseils Ouvriers" P.159.

The excluded railed at the official Party, which they accused of trying to form a coalition Government with the Independents, denounced the 'party of leaders which tries to direct the struggle from above', and denied the necessity for a revolutionary Party in some cases.* But the anti-parliamentarians founded no new organisation, and seem, until April 1920, to have regarded themselves as still Communists, making several attempts to convene a democratic Congress.

In their bureaucratisation of the Party, the old Spartakist leaders were aided by two factors; firstly the illegality of the Party at the time, which made difficult democratic communication, meetings, etc., and secondly by the fact that their turn towards parliamentary activity seemed a 'sober' attitude after the decision of the Congress of Councils. The tendency for the leadership to separate itself from the rank and file, and to increasingly take decisions on it's own was increased by events during and after the Kapp Putch, launched when the gathering reaction felt strong enough to launch a full-scale attack on the German working-class.

kapp putch & ruhr rising

The split in the Communist Party had consequences during the Putch. On the 13th March, sections of the Freikorps and German Army (the Reichswehr), under Luttwitz, marched into Berlin and overthrew the republican-S.P.D. government. The forces behind Kapp, who was installed in power, were the die-hards of the ruling-class, not it's progressive wing which saw in the alliance with social democracy the most certain way of saving German capitalism. In many Reich towns, the Putch was far from wholeheartedly supported, and the military forces of the two wings of the bourgeoisie faced each other uneasily.

Now began a momentous movement of the German workers, which brought 12 million workers out of the factories on strike, the biggest in German history. In Kiel the fleet rose again and arrested it's officers, who were sympathetic to the Putch. In Chemnitz in central Germany, armed workers brigades defeated the Putch, and Soviet power was declared. In the Ruhr, the Reichswehr were defeated in a pitched battle with a makeshift Red Army, hastily organized, in which the local communists were very active. The working-class was now faced with it's greatest opportunity since January 1919, with the ruling class split and a mass movement in motion.

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* e.g., Karl Erler "The Dissolution of the Party" in Kommunistische Arbeiterzeitung Hamburg, Feb.2 1920.
"The working class cannot destroy the bourgeois State without destroying borgeois democracy and it cannot destroy (this) without destroying Parties." Quoted in Lenin, op.cit.

Unlike the rank and file of the K.P.D., the leadership in Berlin denounced the strike; on the first day they issued leaflets asking the workers not to lift a finger for the 'Noske Government'. However, on the second day they changed their minds, and joined in the movement that led to the defeat of the Putch within a few days. The leadership now offered 'loyal opposition' to a proposed joint S.P.D. - Independent government, brainchild of Legien, arch Trades Union patriot during the war. Within a week, the leadership had utterly altered course. In Chemnitz, the communists dissolved the Soviet, and disbanded the workers' brigades; and they appealed to the Ruhr Red Army to lay down it's arms.

The Red Army had been created by action committees in which communists, independents, syndicalists and K.O. units were active. These had forged a fighting force, 50,000 strong, which was on the offensive, and to which army deserters had fled. The Reichswehr were pushed back to the edges of the Ruhr, which was totally controlled by the Red Army. But the Independents and communists withdrew from the rising, and a compromise agreement was drawn up at Bielefeld. This promised socialisation of the mines (i.e. nationalisation under workers' control), no victimisation, etc. This led to the disarming of the workers in the Eastern Ruhr, but in the West the call went unheeded. After much skirmishing and with many atrocities the remnants of the Red Army were wiped out and order restored. Needless to say, the Bielefeld Agreement was never kept.*

Even though Lenin himslef had expressed approval of the 'loyal opposition' offer, the majority of the delegates at the Fourth Party Congress in April denounced it; Levi was accused of sacrificing the revolutionary opportunities which had offered themselves by going personally to the Ruhr to persuade the workers to surrender. He was also blamed for the 'loyal opposition' offer, but although he expressed his approval of it, he was actually in prison, when it was made.

A further jolt to the leadership came with the foundation of the K.A.P.D. in April.

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* Borkenau "World Communism" gives a good account (P.153 - 6) of the antics of the K.P.D. at this time. A Red Army leaflet is given in Weber, op.cit. P.51 - 2; this lists Reichswehr atrocities.

the k.a.p.d.

The Communist Workers Party (Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands K.A.P.D.) was founded in Berlin in April 1920, among it's founders being Ruhle and Laufenberg, veteran revolutionaries. Most of those excluded from the K.P.D. joined the new Party, which also recruited new layers of workers from the Ruhr, whom the K.O. had galvanized. The K.A.P.D. claimed 38,000 members, only a few less than the K.P.D; it was in fact much stronger throughout 1920 in Berlin and Hamburg than the K.P.D.

From this Congress came the "First Appeal of the K.A.P.D." * which illustrates some of the contradictory aspects of the K.A.P.D. which were eventually to lead it, also, to a split. It declared their "irreconcilable struggle against the counterrevolutionary institutions of Parliament, the Trades Unions, and the legalised Works Councils."
But the document exhibits contradictory attitudes to the Party and the leadership. It states schitzophrenically,

"The K.A.P.D. is not a Party in the traditional sense. It is no leadership party."

and

"The K.A.P.D. is the determined vanguard of the German proletariat."

The Party was also permeated with elitist thinking. Gorter (another founder-member, and early opponent of the War) defended the necessity for a small Communist Party in his "Reply to Lenin" "Most proletarians are ignoramuses ... they act when they should not and do not act when they should. They repeatedly make mistakes." There was also confusion in the Party as to whether the councils would rule directly, or the K.A.P.D. rule through the Councils. Many of them saw the A.A.U.D. (a federation of factory committees under K.A.P.D. control) as the embryos of the future councils. Further to this the K.A.P.D. was mechanical in it's analysis of the dynamics of revolution. Socialist consciousness was the product of economic misery, which was inevitable as capitalism had entered it's death-crisis. **

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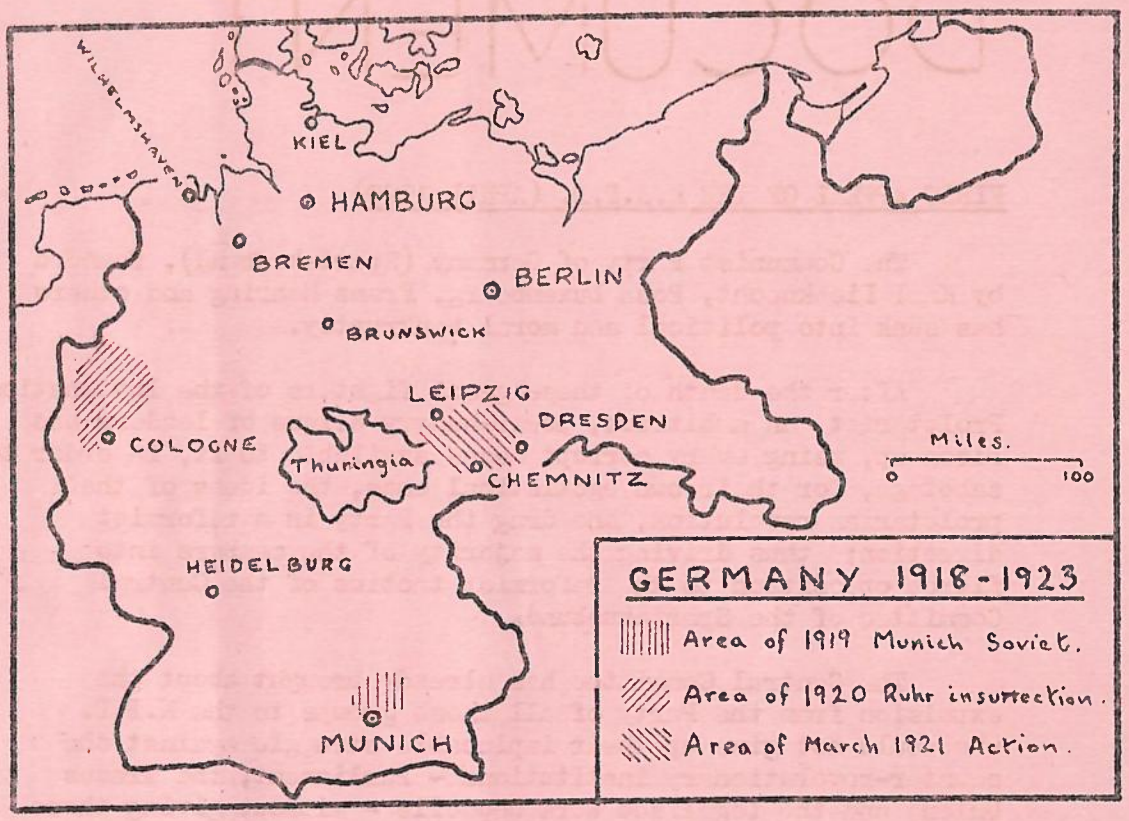
* The text of the "First Appeal" is given (in German) in Weber, op.cit. Pages 146 - 7.

** For material (in English) on the K.A.P.D.'s philosophy, see "Workers Councils in Germany" by Raden (Coptic Press) and the interview with a founder-member in 'Solidarity' Vol.6 No.2.



the ruhr red army 1920

DOCUMENT

FIRST APPEAL OF THE K.A.P.D. (APRIL 1920)

The Communist Party of Germany (Spartakusbund), founded by Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxembourg, Franz Mehring and others has sunk into political and moral bankruptcy.

After the death of these great fighters of the International Proletariat, an ambitious, power-hungry clique of leaders has risen up, using every corrupt means available to it, in order to sabotage, for their own egotistical ends, the ideas of the proletarian revolution, and drag the Party in a reformist direction; thus driving the majority of the members into fierce opposition to the reformist tactics of the Central Committee of the Spartakusbund.

The Central Committee has already brought about the expulsion from the Party of all those groups in the K.P.D. who would not give up their implacable struggle against the counter-revolutionary institutions - Parliament, the Trades Unions and the legalised Work Councils - without giving these groups the opportunity to state and prove their position to the Party Congress.

Thus the Central Committee of the Spartakusbund themselves furnished the proof that they wanted the split in the Party, because the revolutionary will of the membership was opposed to the counter-revolutionary machinations of the Central Committee.

The opposition has now constituted itself as the Communist Workers Party of Germany (K.A.P.D.) The K.A.P.D. is not a party in the traditional sense. It is no leadership Party. It's main work will be in helping the German proletariat to it's utmost on it's way to liberation from every leadership. Liberation from treacherous, counterrevolutionary leadership - politics is the most effective method for the unification of the proletariat in the spirit of council thought.

Workers! Comrades! The K.A.P.D. is the determined vanguard of the German Proletariat. Comrades, make our Party so active, that it will lead the German Proletariat to victory.

Long live the world revolution. Long live the Third International.

(Translated from Weber, op.cit. Pages 146 - 7).

That attitude of the Party to the Comintern is also interesting. In the "First Appeal" they proclaim their support for this body, to which they immediately applied for membership. They achieved a special status in the Comintern, and were at one point offered equal status with the official K.P.D., an offer which led to a threat from the K.P.D. to leave the Comintern. One of the members of the K.A.P.D. even achieved membership of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. They were accused by Trotsky of trying to establish a Fourth International,* but they had no real intention of doing this. Zinoviev expressed the Russian view in 1920 when he stated,

> "the K.A.P.D.'s good working-class elements must be won at any price for the united Party."

While Lenin, although denouncing their views on Parliament, hoped for a re-unification which he believed possible if the K.A.P.D. expelled their anti-bolshevik elements. Lenin's attitude was possibly influenced by the fact that all of the armed elements had entered the K.A.P.D., and that by his own admission "The left communists in Germany are better agitators among the masses" (Left-Wing Communism P.86.)

The K.A.P.D.'s links with the Third International were finally broken in 1921; they claim they left, others say they were expelled.

the einheitlern

In late 1920, a further split took place; the conflict being fought out mainly within the factory organisations. A group - the Einheitlern ('united') - which opposed the existence of a party separate from the factory organisations, established a new group, the A.A.U.D. - E. The Einheitlern denounced the Bolshevik dictatorship in Russia, and the K.A.P.D. as being only distinguishable from the K.P.D. through it's rejection of parliamentarism. Some of the dissidents, inc. Ruhle, left the K.A.P.D., but others, including Laufenberg, were expelled. The Einheitlern also gave far more autonomy to it's separate groups than the K.A.P.D., which was more centralised.

In his history of the K.A.P.D., Reichenbach denounced the "Einheitlern under the leadership of Ruhle" as part of "a tendency of an outspokenly anarcho-syndicalist nature, shot through with petty bourgeois ideology, negating the Party as an organ of the proletariat altogether." **

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* In "The First Five Years of the Communist International" Vol.III P.26

** Quoted in 'Solidarity' Vol.6 No.3 (P.17).

The Einheitlern held that if the proletariat was too blind to take correct decisions, no party could remedy this; the proletariat must overcome it's own defects. Ruhle and the Einheitlern at this time stood for the emancipation autonomy of the working-class.

The K.A.P.D., in limbo between workers' autonomy and the rule of the Party, resembles the "Workers' Opposition" group in the Russian Bolshevik Party.* After 1923 most of it's members became inactive, or re-joined the traditional organisations. The split with the Einheitlern (who took perhaps 3,000 members with them) weakened the K.A.P.D., and led to divisions in the field of action later.

growth of k.p.d.

While the K.A.P.D. was being rent asunder, the bureaucratic tendencies inside the K.P.D. were strengthened. At the Fifth Party Congress in November 1920, Organisational and Political bureaux under the control of the leadership were established, and a system of political commissars introduced, to liase the groups with the centre. The Business Report of the Central Committee stated **

"The Party has opted for centralism ... the tightest centralisation and iron discipline are necessary for the strengthening of the combativity of the Party."

One delegate objected, "We do not want a bureaucracy, but democratic centralism," and he also called for the door to be left open to those who had been expelled from the Party; but his appeal went unheeded.

The next month, a congress of unification of the K.P.D. with the majority of the Independents (U.S.P.D.) was held in Berlin. The Independents had finally accepted to 21 conditions of affiliation to the Comintern, and the policies of Levi borne fruit. The K.P.D. now had over 400,000 members, with a greatly increased representation in parliament, influence in the Trades Unions, etc.

Levi could be proud of his achievements; but paradoxically his bureaucratisation of the Party and Manoeuvres against the ultra-left prepared the way for his own downfall. For the K.P.D. was now to be brought under stricter Russian control; a policy which Levi opposed, but whose success would have been impossible without the bureaucratisation of the Party.

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* It was a member of the K.A.P.D. who took Alexandra Kollontai's text "The Workers Opposition" out of Russia. This has been published as 'Solidarity' Pamphlet No.7.

** Quoted in Weber Op.cit. P.132.

III Bolshevisation

Levi did not long enjoy his success; he came under attack from both the "Berlin Left" and the Soviet apparatchniki.

A new left wing had been emerging in the K.P.D. ever since the fiasco of the Kapp Putch, and the 'loyal opposition' offer. In the winter of 1920, the left gained strength when it denounced Levi's attempts to rally petty-bourgeois elements to the Party. It became known as the "Berlin Left," and it's leaders Fischer and Maslow began to look to some extent towards the Workers Opposition in Russia. These left bureaucrats had much influence in the rank-and-file of the Party, whom they roused against the offer, on January 8th 1921 in "Rote Fahne," by the K.P.D. of a united front. This was made to everyone, from the S.P.D. to the K.A.P.D.* As with the 'loyal opposition' offer, Levi was blamed, although others were also responsible. Lenin approved of the United Front offer and took a firm stand against the Left who were seeking a more active policy in the K.P.D.**

"The German Party should send Maslow and two or three of his overzealous supporters to Soviet Russia for a year or two.... the German Party would gain a great deal by it." (Sel.Works X P.295 - 6)

The apparatchniki, especially Radek, were also on the move; and in Moscow Radek was increasingly trusted, and Levi distrusted. The Bolsheviks blamed him for the threat of the K.P.D. to leave the second Congress of the Comintern when the K.A.P.D. were admitted on equal status; and he expressed doubts to Lenin whether the German workers would rise if the Red Army appeared on German borders. This was at a time when others in the Party, were proving their 'loyalty' by making statements such as that of Mayer that Russia must be supported,

"Even if it's present defensive war against the capitalist States is transferred into a military offensive." ***

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* In the event, only the anarcho-syndicalists, who had about 200,00 members, accepted the offer.

** For the Berlin Left's hour of glory, see section on 1923.

*** Quoted in Lowenthal, op.cit. P.46. This gives an account of the Italian split.

Under attack from right and left, Levi's fall was finally provoked by the Executive Committee of the Comintern; this had ordered a section of the Italian Socialist Party to split and form an independent Communist Party. The central committee of the K.P.D. passed a resolution of full support for the actions of the Comintern and Levi resigned from the leadership (although not the Party) in protest, along with a few others. He and the others who resigned in early March were replaced by those more ready to take orders from Moscow; which were not long in coming.

Germany was a country very important to the Bolsheviks, since they believed that a revolution there, would prevent the Russian one from being crushed through isolation. But at the same time, the main enemies of Germany (The Entente countries) were those of Russia, and the idea was formed that perhaps an alliance with a bourgeois Germany could serve the same purpose. Lenin commented,

"The German bourgeois Government madly hates the Bolsheviks, but the interests of the world situation are pushing it towards peace with Soviet Russia against it's own will." Sel. Works XXVI P.14 - 15).

According to which of the two analyses events favoured, Bolshevik policy varied from pushing the K.P.D. into offensive actions, and wooing some extremely dubious allies in the ruling class of Germany.

the march action

In March 1921, Bela Kun (leader of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet in 1919) was sent to Germany by the Comintern (Zinoviev, Bukharin), and there, with the help of Frohlich and others, he persuaded the central committee of the K.P.D. that the time was ripe for action; that the K.P.D. could not wait passively for a mass movement to emerge, they must force the destiny of the revolution by determined action.

At this time in Russia, Bolshevik power was threatened. Strikes in Petrograd had lead to the Kronstadt rising with it's demands for the return of Soviet democracy. By pushing the German Communists into action, the Bolsheviks were making a desperate effort to avoid the forces threatening to swamp them. Thus the crisis which led to the March action had it's roots in Russia, and not in Germany.

On the 18th March, "Rote Fahne" published a 'Call to Arms', drafted by Kun, which announced "Every worker defies the law and gets himself a weapon where he finds it!" Kun had persuaded Brandler, then head of the K.P.D. to have this printed.

The movement which followed was localised and sporadic. It was confined mainly to actual K.P.D. members, who made frantic attempts to stir the proletariat into action. In Hamburg, communists and unemployed invaded a shipyard after failing to get the workers out on strike; they then fought with the workers and occupied the yard, later to be evicted by the police. This was repeated all over Germany, and it was only in central Germany that there was wider participation for a while. Here the call for a General Strike was heeded, and armed miners from Mansfeld, chemical workers from the Leuna works and armed bands under Max Hoelz, sympathetic to the K.A.P.D., fought the Reichswehr for a week. But even in central Germany, where trouble had been brewing for some time and an explosion was unavoidable, the rising was decisively defeated, the workers disarmed and the organisations of the K.P.D. and K.A.P.D. smashed.

When the K.P.D. saw that the rising was flagging, they resorted to such tactics as blowing up certain of their own offices in order to enlist sympathy. Not only did this fail, but it was discovered to be a fraud. The whole rising now collapsed, communists were sacked from the factories, and membership fell from 400,000 to 150,000 in a few months.* The main lesson drawn from the defeat was that it was caused by the 'leaden lethargy' of the masses, and the pre-empting of communist plans by 'the provocation of the authorities'. For the K.A.P.D. the rising, although defeated, showed a 'radicalisation' of the K.P.D. rank-and-file. Their newspaper commented,

> "The masses of the Communist Party adopted our slogans; they forced their leaders to." **

The rising was directed by a central action committee of K.P.D. and K.A.P.D. members in Berlin, the armed elements of the K.A.P.D. doing much of the fighting.

The Einheitlern, on the other hand refused to participate in the Action, which they saw as an attempt to cover up events in Kronstadt. Ruhle, in addition, criticised the form of the action as a 'bourgeois military operation'.

Instead of hindering the progress of Russian control, the March Action increased it. Levi was expelled from the party after denouncing the whole affair as a putch, and condemning the role of the Comintern. Zetkin and Daumig also narrowly escaped expulsion for supporting Levi's views, as did others of the "Luxembourgist" right-wing. The K.P.D. congratulated itself that this "opportunist" trend had been forced to reveal itself.

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* The K.P.D. did not regard this as a defeat. "The Party turned the corner from decay to purification" was the official account of the exodous. (See Lowenthal op.cit. P.63.)

** Quoted in Bricanier, op.cit. P.219.

alliance with reaction

The Reichswehr, which, with the Freikorps, had been the main instrument for crushing the revolutionary workers in 1919 - 21 was not a completely unloved body; it had friends in Moscow.

The exact extent of Russian military collaboration with the Reichswehr will probably never be known, but it is likely that preliminary contacts were established in 1919, and the German military negotiated as early as 1920 with Trotsky. During 1922 Reichswehr officers and pilots were training in Russia, and Naval exchanges carried on between the two countries. An organisation of German military and industrial enterprises in Russia - GEFU - was established, and continued it's activities throughout the 1920's. Under it's auspices, shells, poison gas and aircraft were all manufactured in Russia for the Reichswehr before 1923. In April 1923, Menzel of the High Command concluded an agreement for the production of 35 million gold marks worth of war material in Russia for the German Army. * These facts make Stalinist and Trotskyist denunciations of the contacts between the S.P.D. and the High Command in 1918 - 19 ring rather hollow.

With this military rapprochement between Germany and Russia went increasing trade between the two countries. After the Treaty of Rapallo, Krassin, the People's Comissar for Foreign Trade warned the German workers (in an interview in "Rote Fahne") against strikes which could lead to the interruption of deliveries of essential materials to Russia. Already the interests of the Soviet State were above those of the German proletariat.

With K.P.D. now an instrument of Russian foreign policy, it too was drilled into the campaign for the alliance. As Russian shells arrived throughout 1923 for the Reichswehr, the K.P.D. enforced it's so-called "Schlageter Line" of co-operation with fascist and nationalist groups. During the summer joint meetings with them were held, where both communists and fascist speakers urged an alliance with Soviet Russia against the Entente powers who had occupied the Ruhr, joint pamphlets written by members of the two groups were sold in thousands, and Count Reventlow, a fervent nationalist and later Nazi, wrote aritcles in the K.P.D.'s "Rote Fahne." Zetkin, now an apparatchnik, announced in Parliament that"A collaboration is quite possible between the Reichswehr and the Red Army." The object of this projected exercise was to be Poland. **

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* For a documentation of the military collaboration, see Carsetn "Reichswehr and Politics 1919 - 33."

** Much material on this period is given in E. H. Carr's "Interregnum 1923 - 4."

However, the Germans were finally allowed to chose their own date. Stalin was initially against the rising, but was won round to it and sent a letter on October 10th to the K.P.D. congratulating them in advance.

Saxony, where the K.P.D. had entered into a coalition with the social democrats and formed a government, was to be the springboard of the revolution; a Red Army military expert was sent to Saxony to help guide the rising. "Proletarian hundreds" were organised and armed to launch the 'revolution.' So confident were the K.P.D. that, according to Serge * they had already issued portfolios of a German government to their leading members!

But the Reichswehr forced the issue by marching into Saxony, dissolving the government and disarming the "proletarian hundreds" after a few minor disturbances. The K.P.D.'s call for a general strike met little response, and Brandler called off the rising. But 300 men had risen in Hamburg and attacked the police stations; the proletariat watched these antics with indifference, and after days of skirmishing, they were liquidated. The insurrection had been a complete failure.

Trotsky later said that in October "the proletariat, it seemed, had stretched out it's hand to power" and denounced "the panicky retreat of the German Communist Party." ** Actually, what did happen on the 7th of November, was not Trotsky's coup, but a dinner at the Russian Embassy in Berlin for German officers, industrialists and officials to celebrate the anniversary of the other October. The Comintern had new allies. ***

The aftermath was, once again, recriminations. Brandler pleaded guilty to panicking and damaging the revolution. The Berlin Left claimed that the rising had failed due to the co-operation with the Social Democrats, and they gained control of the Party, ceased work with the S.P.D., and toyed with leaving the Unions, **** incidentally carrying out a witch hunt against dissidents, and achieving an unsurpassed bureaucratic control of the Party.

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* "Memoirs of a Revolutionary," Victor Serge P.171.

** Quoted in C.W. Mills "The Marxists" P.304.

*** In the light of these tragic events it is sad to read latter-day Trotskyists speak of the need for planning and a party to push through the first spontaneous acts of a revolution to their utmost. for here was the Party, here was the planning (here even, was Trotsky!) - where was the revolution?

**** This was not as 'revolutionary' as at first sight. The Unions lost 4 million members in 1923; in 1919 when the original call to leave the unions went out, they had gained about 5 million members since the war.

A theory of National Bolshevism was used to justify this alliance of right and left. * Radek from Moscow insisted that "The emphasis on the nation in Germany is a revolutionary act," while Thalheimer, in "Die Internationale" (theoretical organ of the K.P.D.) February 1923 claimed,

> "The German bourgeoisie has aquired an objective revolutionary role in spite of itself."

We are now a long way from the insistence of Liebknecht that for socialists, the main enemy lies in your own country. The activities above need outlining, not refutation. It cannot be claimed that arming capitalist armies, or working with fascists helps raise the consciousness of the working class. What is important is to point out how by 1923, the activities of the supine K.P.D. were tailored to fit the needs of Russia, in this case an alliance with Germany. In fact, so supine was the K.P.D., that the "Berlin Left" went along with the "Schlageter Line" throughout 1923, even when the Party toyed with anti-semitism.

october insurrection

A mass strike movement in the summer had led to the downfall of the then German government; the K.P.D. had done very little, being too busy with the fascist alliance. Mass unemployment and inflation had led to a radicalisation of the working-class. But once stabilsation was returning to the economy, and the strike had petered out, the K.P.D. decided that, once again, the time was ripe for action. In September, when the strike was over, the journal of the Profintern (Communist Trades Union International) announced,

> "Revolution is knocking at the door in Germany and demanding admittance ... it is only a question of months." **

One of the staunchest in favour of a renewed offensive was Trotsky, the desire being to refute the growing notion that the revolutionary epoch in Western Europe had temporarily abated. Once again the roots of the action lay in Russia, not Germany.

Brandler and other K.P.D. leaders were called to Moscow, and their doubts overcome. Trotsky insisted that the date of the revolution be fixed as November 7th, the anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power and insisted that, "to adopt a waiting attitude for the growing movement of the proletariat" was - Menshevism! ***

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* This was not a new theory. It was originated by Laufenberg and Wolfheim in 1919; they sought an alliance with the right and a levee en masse against the Entente.

** Quoted in Carr op.cit. P.203

*** This was in an article entitled, "Can a revolution or a counter-revolution be planned to an exact date?"

However, with little difficulty they were deposed in 1924. The central committee was summoned to Moscow and ordered to break with Fischer and Maslow, and a new central committee, with Thaelmann at the head recognised. The "Left-Opposition" continued to exist till 1927, when they were expelled from the party and then sought a rapprochement with the tiny rump of the K.A.P.D. The K.A.P.D. had once again participated in the K.P.D.'s actions, although they were to express doubts about the wisdom of this later. In 1927 they sent an open letter to the K.P.D., asking whether those killed in the insurrection had been so by weapons supplied to the Reichswehr by Russia .....

conclusion

The road travelled from the First Congress of the German Communist Party to the October insurrection is a long and devious one. From being a party of autonomous groups, calling for the transfer of power to the Workers Councils, the K.P.D. had become a supple tool of Russia's interests; thoroughly bureaucratised, and their victory after 1919 would have meant neither the 'salvation' of the Russian revolution, nor socialism in Germany, but would have merely seen the establishment of another State capitalist regime, this time in central Europe.

To some extent the factors favouring bureaucratisation were inherent in the situation. The first stage, against the ultra-left and led by Levi, was carried out by old Spartakists who formed a closed group, motivated by ideas close to those of the Independents. They stood for nationalisation, parliamentary action, the rule of the party, with some role given to the Councils. After the results of the Congress of Councils, this was a 'realistic' attitude to ex-social democrats. But external factors also played a hand. From 1920 the struggle against the Luxembourgist right-wing, waged by the apparatchniki, led to a further degeneration of the Party (possibly better termed bolshevisation) until it's most important task was seen as the furtherance of Russian interests. They still demanded nationalisation, etc., but this was now secondary to Russian interests. As the revolutionary wave declined, the transferrance of the loyalty of the K.P.D. to Russia was facilitated.

Throughout the period under survey, the K.P.D. was consistently out of touch with the feelings of the masses; in 1919 during the January fighting, in 1920 after the Kapp Putch, during the 1921 rising, and finally in October 1923. It's activities did incalculable harm to the most militant and advanced workers, and to some extent contributed to the defeat of the German Revolution. We wish to be clearly understood. We are not saying (as should be obvious) that if the K.P.D. had done such and such, or if this group had triumphed at that Congress, then the victory of the revolution would have been assured; this is manipulating history at a distance of 50 years.

But the question of whether the revolution in Germany had any chance of success is posed. If by the 'Revolution' you mean the K.P.D. , then the answer is yes; it is concievable that a bid for power earlier in 1923 could have succeeded. But this would not have been socialism. The question of whether the German proletariat was capable of taking power on it's own is more difficult. It is impossible to say what could have happened if the workers had pursued the opportunities of 1919 and 1920 more vigorously; but the fact that even here they waited on orders, or obeyed (however unwillingly) their traditional organisations, points towards a pessimistic conclusion. But before we make a definite answer we need to know more; more about the functionings and activities of the Councils, more about the structure of the Ruhr Red Army, and occupation of mines in the Ruhr. We also need to know more about the shop-floor activities of the K.A.P.D., and about those of the Einheitlern. In fact more about those things which the German bourgeoisie and the K.P.D. have systematically suppressed.

But what we can say at this stage is that the activities of the German Communist Party did little to help the growth of the adequate socialist consciousness which alone could have meant a successful revolution in Germany. Revolutionaries must engage in actions which help the growth of a socialist consciousness in the working class. This was the task in which the majority of the German revolutionaries failed; it remains ours today.

I.R.M.

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