

THE ORIGINS OF THE MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS COUNCILS IN GERMANY 1918-29



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INTRODUCTION

The pamphlet produced here in English was apparently first published in Dutch in "Radencommunismus" (No. 3, 1938) the journal of the Council-Communist Group of Holland, and subsequently translated into French and published in Internationalisme (No. 45, 1952). Revised and completed and with a resume of the Principles (see second part starting on page 21) which were written for the Bordiguist journal "Bilan" (Nos. 19-21, 1935) and then published by "Informations Correspondence Ouvrieres" (No. 42, 1965), from which it has been translated. It was first published in English by Coptic Press in 1968.

It falls into two parts:- (a) a critical analysis of council-communism in Germany between 1918 and 1929, when it disappeared temporarily from the historical scene, and (b) the "Principles" which were produced in 1930 in a study on the "Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution" which was drawn up by the Dutch Council-Communist Group.

The first part is a useful introduction to British militant and revolutionary workers - and students - of a very important period of German working class history which has its parallel in this country. Very little information is readily available in English on the period 1918 to 1920 on the activities and ideas of the council communist movement in Germany and even less on its history prior to 1918 before it acquired its known "theoreticians".

For working class history always pre-dates the theories of the "theoreticians" who usually come from outside the working class and interpret what has already been historically set in motion. The ideas and forms of organisation which the working class set up in the long course of their struggle with the capitalist class do not, as so many "intellectuals" seem to think, appear spontaneously without thought. Action and thought - thought and action - are intimately bound together.

The ideas about objectives and forms of organisation of workers councils originated with the working class itself. The basic ideas are not new. They have existed since the very beginning of the emergence of the working class.

In so far as the British working class is concerned, the idea that workers' councils are both the means whereby a new system of society could be brought into existence and when it does exist

becomes the dominant means of organisation for the administration of the new society can be found in the activities of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union which existed in Britain at the beginning of the 19th Century.

The impression has been created in some academic and political circles that the concept of Workers' Councils (or Soviets) had its sole origin in the Russian revolution of 1905 and that subsequently the idea was exclusively developed only in Russia, Germany and Italy, in the period 1917-1921. This is probably due to the fact that these events have been written about very exhaustively by prominent international revolutionaries such as Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci, Monatte and Polloutier, etc. Indeed, in the early programmatic documents of the Third International (Comintern) and later in the programme of the RILU (Profintern), the decisive role of the Soviets is dealt with in great detail. But it should be remembered that in the 1905 Russian Revolution, Lenin and the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party had a first a very ambivalent attitude to a working class institution which had emerged without their theoretical prognostication. The initiative in the 1905 Russian Revolution is now known to have been first taken by the very close knit Russian print workers unions and it started initially as a print workers strike over bonus payments for setting type.

Lenin, always very flexible where tactics are concerned, was particularly concerned since it appeared that the Soviets might prove to be a "rival" institution to his conception of the revolutionary party. He had to recognise the facts of the Russian experience and shortly afterwards was writing enthusiastically about the revolutionary initiative of the working masses and had incorporated the idea of the Soviets in the Bolshevik programme. It can be said, as a matter of historical record, that the Mensheviks who had, at this time, a greater influence in the working class movement, very quickly participated in the Soviets through their worker-delegate members on the Soviets set up. Trotsky, although not a member of any elected factory delegation, made his political name by his presence at, and subsequent chairmanship of, this Soviet. With the subsequent deification of Lenin under the influence of Stalin, Lenin was accorded with forethought on the subject of the Soviets and the Workers' Council concept was attributed to him.

It is a matter of some interest to British workers that the concept of workers' councils reappeared in the great upsurge of "new unionism", as it is called, around 1889, following the great Dock Workers' strike, which led to the organisation of masses of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in transport, engineering and which also led to the formation of entirely new general workers' unions of which the Transport Workers' Federation, the gas workers

in the General and Municipal Workers and the National Society of Operative Printers and many others. It arose firstly in connection with the development of a shop stewards form of organisation, since it became necessary in many work places to combine together both craft unions and general workers unions. Since the most prominent trade unionists involved in helping the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the general workers unions were also members of the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League or the Independent Labour Party, it was a matter of intensive debate among the workers organised in unions as to how a new society could be organised.

The idea of industrial unions began to be discussed, which would combine in one union both craft and unskilled workers: not without considerable opposition at first from the old craft unions. Within this milieu of discussion around union organisation on a shop floor basis, the advanced workers - those with a socialist understanding - opened a debate on the possibility of using the development towards industrial unions as the institution through which the working class could bring about a change in the system of society from capitalism to socialism through the industrial unions organise the economic life of the new society. Some went even further and advocated that the industrial unions should organise the whole life of society after the working class had won both political and economic power from the capitalist class.

Subsequently, with the turn of the present century, these ideas were strengthened by the activities of the Socialist Labour Party inside the British trades union movement, through the extensive circulation of the ideas of Daniel De Leon. Rank and File members of the British Socialist Labour Party played an extremely important role in expounding not only De Leon's ideas of industrial unionism as a means of conducting the economic struggle against the capitalist class but also the concept that the industrial union could become the type of institution which could organise the economic life of society under socialism.

As a matter of interest, it should be recalled, that following the Russian October Revolution in 1917, American trade unionists and socialists in Russia drew Lenin's attention to the theoretical and practical work of Daniel De Leon and he readily accepted the contribution made by De Leon, independently of what had been developed in Russia.

In passing, it may be of interest to draw attention to the existence within the British printing industry of the "chapel" form of shop floor organisation, which has existed for so long that its origins can be traced back to the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union at the beginning of the 19th century.

The "Federated House Chapel" organisation, which is a permanent feature of the printing industry in this country, with its "Fathers of Chapels" meeting at regular intervals to discuss common problems - roughly analogous to a combine shop stewards committee in engineering and other industries - has assumed significance. In print workers' circles whenever the question of workers' ownership and control, of workers' councils is raised, print workers generally assume that if and when "factory councils" are elected when the working class is ready to take over the means of production from the boss class, the Federated House Chapels will be the instrument and institution through which this will be done, and the link-up with other printing establishments and with other industrial units will be made. Politically conscious printworkers are never slow to point out that the printworkers who sparked off the Russian 1905 Revolution had a similar form of organisation to that of their British counterparts.

That the factory floor organisation, as part of the trades union movement, first appeared in Britain is not due to any particular special quality of the British working class movement but merely that it was the first coherent trade union movement to come into existence, since the capitalist class - as a result of the development of industrialisation - was the first fully fledged capitalist class.

Since socialism or communism is not a "national" question but of world significance, the development of capitalism in other countries also brought forth the organisation of the working class in one form or another, first in Europe and later in the New World. As a consequence the question of a new society based on production for use, and not for profit, and how it was to be achieved, and once achieved, how it was to be administered, has engaged the attention of the most advanced sections of the working class. In particular, the ideas developed in France, Germany, Italy, Holland and other countries on the continent of Europe, in addition to ideas developed in the United States, have all contributed to a cross-fertilisation of ideas from one country to another. Nor should we leave out of account the actions and ideas developed by the relatively small working class in Russia and Poland in more backward industrialised conditions which, since 1905, have become known by the Russian term "soviets".

These ideas are, however, not set out for all time but are themselves in process of motion, continuously expanding and developing. Thus the historic and heroic action of the French in the Commune of 1871 has contributed to our understanding of how the working class can overcome the many obstacles on the path to working class power and the eventual establishment of a world classless society.

The lessons of the Paris Commune, France, 1871, the Russian "Soviets" of 1905 and 1917, must also be assimilated, primarily because they were thrown back and diverted into channels which no longer served the interests of the working class leading the poor peasantry but became the instrument of a new strata in society which used the "soviets" to rule over society - the bureaucracy.

Since then the working class has gone through very similar experiences of attempting to overthrow capitalism but have been defeated, largely because the lessons of the past have not been fully assimilated both in theory and action.

For example, the experience of the General Strike in 1926 in this country needs to be studied again and again. Similarly the experiences of the Spanish Workers in 1936. More recently the Hungarian uprising and the overnight creation of workers' councils must be studied and the lessons assimilated. Even more pertinent are the May Days in France 1968 where once again the question of the nature and the role of workers' councils was the key question as to whether the workers were to go on to victory or thrown back into defeat. The most interesting of the recent developments was in Poland in December, 1970, where workers councils sprang up along the Northern coast, particularly in Szczecin. There the bureaucrats had to negotiate with the workers councils over new wage rates before the general strike, against the previous wage cuts by increased prices, was brought to the end. Mass meetings were held in many factories demanding the punishing of the person responsible for shooting down demonstrating workers in Gdansk, General Moczar, head of the internal security forces. The working class is even more confident after its victory over the bureaucrats.

It is not without significance that in both Germany and France, in Italy and to a lesser extent in Britain the question of the need for the development of workers' councils is once more on the agenda of history, after a long period of being very nearly forgotten. Similarly, in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and in Russia itself, the question of how to win back power for the working class is again the subject of wide discussion - even if it has to be held in clandestine conditions. Once again, the key issue is workers' councils. How they are to be brought into existence in the face of the bitter opposition of the bureaucracy. And who can say what the newly emergent working class of China are thinking and doing in the same general direction?

The following short account of the workers' council movement

in Germany is therefore of considerable importance in throwing light on developments in that country. Of necessity the short study is controversial. It is a partisan account. There are other versions of the same events it describes. There are other interpretations of the actual events themselves as there are of why this movement virtually ceased to exist in 1929. However, this does not distract from the value of the present short historical account, for free debate and discussion is the lifeblood of the working class movement and must be continuously fought for.

We must not assume in such a discussion that only militant and revolutionary minded workers and students will participate and that these ideas will then percolate through to wider sections of the workers in a "pure" form.

The capitalist class, its social reformist "ideologues", are also busy trying to counter the concept of workers' councils as the means of achieving working class power, and once power is obtained by revolutionary action of administering the new society with them.

The main strategic line of the capitalist class is, of course, to deny that the capitalist system must give way to socialism, and that the workers' councils are the means whereby the new society can be administered.

However, this does not suffice to put off the working class looking for solutions to class oppression. The capitalist class through its mainly social reformist sociologists, political economists and publicists of all kinds, pour out a constant stream of propaganda to divert attention from the real role of the workers' councils.

The Labour Party, the left arm of the capitalist class in this country, has published a pamphlet as a basic policy statement : "Industrial Democracy", which seeks to incorporate the idea of workers' councils in a statified capitalist system. They wish to de-gut the whole revolutionary conception of workers' councils and to turn them into adjuncts of the capitalist class, and capitalist state, in order to further the life of capitalism.

Others, using the tactics of the Fabians, seek to assimilate the ideas of workers' ownership and control through workers' councils, with the capitalist class and state, in workers participation in the administration of capitalist society, so that the workers become directly involved in establishing new "industrial" machinery for their continued exploitation by both private and state sectors of capitalist economy.

Fundamental to these capitalist ideas is that of nationalisation which is the complete negation of workers' ownership and control exercised through workers' councils. The working class are being sold the idea of "nationalisation" with workers' control. Unfortunately, at the present time, these ideas have become very prevalent among sections of the working class, due to the propaganda carried out by the Stalinist Communist Party and sundry Trotskyist groupings. These ideas must be fought, and this pamphlet is a useful addition to the meagre material in this country which consistently puts forward the concept of workers' power being solely instituted through workers' councils.

The acid test for all industrial militants and, in particular, for revolutionaries is the attitude to be taken on the question of the state. The conception that the existing capitalist state can not be used in the transfer of political and economic power from the capitalist class to the working class and that the state must be abolished has been clear at least since the Paris Commune of 1871, although the Paris Commune in actual fact did not throw up Workers' Councils, since large scale industry had not yet made its appearance in France at that time. The Commune itself, it is often not understood, was not made up of delegates coming from the various workshops (employing in those days only small groups of workers) but was elected on a district basis. The essential difference between the Commune - an abortive experiment in proletarian democracy because the productive forces had not yet developed sufficiently - and subsequent workers' councils in Russia, Germany and Italy is in the development from territorial representation to representation from the key points of production, namely the factories themselves.

The establishment of workers' power through the coming to power of the democratically elected and where necessary recalled delegates from the various factories to the workers' councils stands in sharp confrontation both to the continuation of capitalist society and the capitalist state. The state power of the capitalist class is immediately challenged when the workers' councils come into existence on a wide basis.

Such a confrontation of power between the capitalist state through its institutions of Parliament, the civil service, the armed forces, etc. on the one side and the democratically elected delegates on the workers' councils and nationally through their Congress of Workers' Council Delegates on the other, has been described as a period of "dual" power. "All power to the Workers' Councils" then becomes the issue which will decide the future - whether they exercise their power over the whole of society, or whether they retreat and allow state power to be continued to be held by the capitalist class. Any attempts to divert the workers'

councils into an alliance or merger with the capitalist state institutions, whether the legislative arm is called a parliament or a constituent assembly, would divert the struggle for working class power and throw it back. Needless to say, it cannot be assumed that the capitalist class will voluntarily relinquish its power to the working class - it is against all historical experience. Social reformist theories that the capitalist state legislative arm, parliament, can be used to transfer power to the workers' councils has no historical foundation, even where a so-called "workers" or "social democratic" or "Labour" majority of parliamentary delegates is obtained, prepared to pass such legislation. Workers' power cannot be brought about through parliament - it has to be instituted by workers' councils.

To make clear the process of history whereby political and economic power can be transferred from the capitalist class to the working class is urgently needed. The carrying out of agitation, propaganda and education, among the working class, particularly in the factories and workshops, thus becomes the major task of any genuine revolutionary "workers" party. The need for such parties in the advanced industrial countries of the world becomes more and more apparent. Without the building of such a party to campaign for Workers' Councils as its major priority, the task of winning the working class for this conception will be postponed and the struggle for socialism delayed.

The second part of the pamphlet is, I think, less valuable than the first part. It is highly controversial. For example, it would be valuable to have Sebastion Faure's ideas known in this country (see p. 22) in full rather than in precis form. The claim (p. 27) that they claim a more precise exposition of the concise principles of Marx and Engels as laid down in 'Capital', 'The Critique of the Gotha Programme' and 'Anti-Duhring' "is questionable. Other works of Marx have become available since Faure wrote his work which might throw light on the subject he discusses - 'The Measurement of Labour'.

The Appendix I is useful. It does not however cover a wide variety of material in English. Appendix 2 is interesting because it is a statement of the K.A.P.D. positions of its objections to parliamentarism as outline in Lenin's "Left Wing Communism".

It is hoped that further translations and works of the tendencies that opposed Lenin's "tactics" during the early years of the Comintern will soon be made available in English.

J. Thomas

THE REVOLUTION BREAKS OUT

In November 1918, the German front collapsed. The whole war machine broke up. At KIEL, the officers of the fleet decided upon a last stand "to save their honour". They found, however, that the sailors refused to obey. This was not, in fact, their first mutiny; previous attempts to protest against the war had been put down with bullets and promises. But this time, they scored an immediate success. The Red Flag went up, first on one warship, then on another.

The sailors elected delegates who ship by ship formed a Council. From now on the sailors determined to make the movement spread. They had declined to die fighting the enemy; neither did they wish to die fighting the so-called loyal troops who would be called in on the side of repression. They formed the backbone of the movement for Soldier' Sailors' and Workers' Councils. And meanwhile they were going ashore and marching on the great port of Hamburg; from there, the message poured out all over Germany. Delegates left, by train and otherwise, for all parts of the country.

The first blow of freedom had been struck! Events now moved rapidly. Hamburg welcomed the sailors with enthusiasm. Soldiers and workers joined in the movement; they too elected Councils. While this kind of organisation was unknown in practice, within four days a vast network of workers' and Soldiers' Councils covered Germany. Perhaps some talk had been heard of Russian Soviets (1917/18) but in view of the censorship, very little. At all events, no party or organisation had proposed this form of struggle. It was an entirely spontaneous movement.

FORERUNNERS OF THE COUNCILS.

It is true during the war, somewhat similar organisations had, in fact, made their appearance in the factories. They were formed in the course of strikes, by elected representatives, the equivalent of our shop stewards. Given minor offices in the union machinery, in the tradition of German Trade Unionism, they were the link between the local and central headquarters, to transmit the demands of the workers to H.Q. These demands, and the number of grievances, were naturally very high during the War. In the main they concerned intensified work and price increases.

But the German unions (like those of other countries) had formed a united front with the Government. They guaranteed social peace in exchange for slight advantages for the workers and in particular for participation of the union leaders on various official organisations. Thus the stewards in presenting grievanances found themselves hammering at a brick wall. The "hotheads" and "trouble-makers" were, sooner or later, shanghaied into the Forces, in special units. It became difficult to take up a struggle within the unions.

As a result, the stewards gradually lost contact with union headquarters. Union affairs ceased to interest them, but the workers' demands remained what they were. The stewards began to meet in secret. Then, in 1917, a flood of unofficial strikes suddenly swept out over the country. No stable organisation led it. It was entirely spontaneous. It proceeded naturally from the work done by the stewards and the unsatisfied demands of the workers.

THE NEW MOVEMENT.

This new labour movement had come into existence without the aid of any party, and without any leadership. Any ideological considerations of any nature had to give way before the demands of the moment. In 1918, this sporadic movement, consisting of trends cut off from one another, became united by reason of its identical form of struggle. They came to form a new means of administration. On the one hand were the "normal" forms - police, food control, organisation of labour; on the other hand, in all the important industrial centres, were the workers' council. In Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, the Ruhr, Central Germany, Saxony; the workers' councils had to be recognised and reckoned with. But they had up to that time few concrete results. Why?

AN EASY VICTORY !

This arose from the very ease with which the Workers' Council were formed. The State apparatus was breaking down, but not as a result of a persistent struggle by the workers. It was breaking down in the stress of war, and the workers' councils met a vacuum. Their movement was growing without resistance, without the need to fight. All that the population of Germany was speaking of was Peace, and an end to the war. This, of course, was an essential difference with the

Russian position in 1917. In Russia, the first revolutionary wave (the February revolution) overthrew the Czarist regime; but the war went on. The workers' movement had to become bolder and more decided; it had to tighten the pressure on the State. But in Germany, the first aspiration of the population, Peace, was immediately fulfilled; the war ended, and the imperial power gave way to the Republic. What did the Republic mean?

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC. Before the war, working - class practice and most working-class theory was that approved of and carried out by the Social-Democratic Party and the Trade Unions, adopted and agreed to by the majority of organised workers. To this Socialist democracy, the bourgeois democratic State was to be the lever for socialism. They felt it would suffice to have a majority in Parliament, and the socialist Ministers would be socialist.

There was also, it is true, a revolutionary current, of which Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were the best-known representatives. Nevertheless, this current never developed a conception clearly opposed to State Socialism. It formed only an opposition within the Social-Democratic Party, and was not distinguishable from it by the majority of workers.

NEW CONCEPTIONS. But new conceptions came about with the great mass movements of 1918/21. They were not the creation of the so-called "vanguard" but were created by the masses themselves. The independent activity of the workers and soldiers adopted the organisational form of Councils as a matter of expediency; these were the new forms of class organisation. But because there is a direct connection between the forms taken by the class struggle and the conceptions of the future society, it goes without saying that, here and there, the old ideas of nationalisation etc. began to totter.

The workers were now leading their own struggles, outside the apparatus of party and trade union; and the workers began to think that they could exert a direct influence on social life, by means of their own councils. There would be a "dictatorship of the proletariat", they said, but it would be a dictatorship not exerted by a party, but would be the expression of the unity,

complete and lasting, of the whole working population. Of course, such a society would not be democratic in the bourgeois sense of the term, since that part of the population not participating in the new organisation of social life would have no voice either in discussion or in decision.

We were saying that the old conceptions began to totter. But it quickly became evident that the parliamentary and trade union traditions were too rooted in the masses to be quickly wiped out. The bourgeoisie, the social-democratic party and the trade unions called upon these traditions in order to break down the new conceptions. In particular, the Social-Democratic Party congratulated itself in speeches about this new means the masses had of asserting their part in social life. It went as far as demanding that this new form of direct power be approved and codified in law.

But despite this ostensible sympathy, the old working-class movement in the main reproached the Councils for not respecting democracy, although excusing them because of their "lack of experience". The lack of democracy consisted of not yielding a large enough place to the politicians, and in competing with them. In demanding what they called "working class democracy" the old party and unions demanded that all the currents of the working-class movement be represented in the Councils, in proportion to their respective importance.

THE TRAP. Few workers were capable of refuting this argument which corresponded with their own ingrained beliefs. Despite what they had achieved, they still believed in traditional forms of organisation. Thus they allowed the representatives of the social-democratic movement, the unions, the left social-democrats, the consumers' co-operatives etc. all to be represented on the councils as well as the factory delegates. The councils on such a basis could no longer be directly representative of the workers on the shop floor. They became mere units of the old workers' movement, and thus came to work for the restoration of capitalism by means of the building of democratic State capitalism through the Social-Democratic Party.

It was the ruin of the workers' efforts. The Council delegates no longer received their mandates from the shop floor but from their different organisations. The workers were called on to respect and assure the rule of "order", proclaim-

ing that "in disorder there is no socialism". Under those conditions, the Councils rapidly lost all value in the eyes of the workers. The bourgeois institutions regained their functions without caring about the opinions of the Councils; this was precisely the goal of the old workers' movement.

The old workers movement could be proud of its victory. The law passed by Parliament fixed in detail the rights and duties of the Councils. Their future task was to see that social legislation was respected. In other words, they were to become cogs of the State. Instead of demolishing the state, they were to help in making it run smoothly. Old-established traditions had proved stronger than spontaneity.

But despite this "abortion of the revolution", it cannot be said the victory of conservative elements had been simple or easy. The new climate of feeling was still strong enough for hundreds of thousands of workers to struggle obstinately in order that their Councils should keep the character of new class units. There was to be five years of ceaseless conflict (sometimes armed fights) and the massacre of 35,000 revolutionary workers, before the movement of the Councils was finally beaten by the united front of the bourgeoisie, the old workers' movement, and the "White Guards" formed by the Prussian landowners and reactionary students.

POLITICAL CURRENTS. Four political currents can be roughly distinguished among the workers.

(A) THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS. They wanted the gradual nationalisation of the large industries by parliamentary methods. They also wanted to reserve for the unions the right to mediate between the workers and the State ownership.

(B) THE COMMUNISTS. Inspired more or less by the Russian example, they advocated direct expropriation of the capitalists by the masses. They maintained the revolutionary workers should "capture" the Trade Unions and "make them revolutionary".

(C) THE ANARCHO)SYNDICALISTS. They opposed the taking of power, and of any kind of State. According to them, trade unions

were an integral part of the form of the future; it was necessary to struggle for a growth of the unions in such a way that they would be able to take over the whole of social life. One of their best-known theoreticians wrote in 1920 that the unions should not be considered as a transitory product of capitalism, but rather as seeds of the future socialist organisation of society. It seemed at first, in 1919, that the hour of this movement had come. These unions grew after the crumbling of the Reich. In 1920, the anarchist unions had about 200,000 members.

- (D) However, this same year, 1920, the effective forces of the revolutionary unions were reduced. A large part of their membership now made its way towards quite a different form of organisation, better adapted to the prevailing condition namely, the revolutionary factory organisation. In this, each factory had, or should have had, its own organisation acting independently of the others, and which did not depend upon the others. Each factory was to be an "independent republic".

These factory organisations were a creation of the German masses, spontaneously; but it should be pointed out that they appeared in the framework of a revolution which, though not yet defeated, was stagnant. It was quickly evident that the workers could not, in the immediate period, conquer and organise economic and political power through the medium of the Councils; it was necessary first of all to carry on a merciless struggle against the forces which opposed the Councils. The revolutionary workers began therefore to muster their own forces in all the factories, in order to keep a direct grasp on social life, Through their propaganda they strove to re-awaken the workers consciousness, calling upon them to leave the unions, AND join the revolutionary factory organisation; the workers as a whole would then be able to lead their own struggles themselves and conquer economic and social power over all society.

On the face of things, the working class thus took a great step backwards on the organisation plane. While previously the power of the workers was concentrated in some powerful centralised organisations, it was now separated in some hundreds of little groups, uniting some hundreds of some thousands of workers, depending on the importance of the factory.

In reality, this showed itself to be the only form of organisation that allowed the outline of workers' power; and therefore, despite its relative smallness, it alarmed the bourgeoisie and the social-democrats.

Development of the Factory Organisations.

The isolation into small groups factory by factory was not premeditated nor a matter of principle. It was due to the fact that these organisations appeared, separately and spontaneously, in the course of unofficial strikes (e.g. among the Ruhr miners in 1919). Many tried to unite these organisations and present a united front of factory organisations; the initiative for this came from Hamburg and Bremen. In April 1920 there was the first conference for unification of the factory councils. Delegates came from every industrial region of Germany. The police broke up the Congress; but too late. The general unified organisation had already been founded; and it had formulated its principles of action. This was given the name of the GENERAL WORKERS' UNION OF GERMANY (Allgemeine-Arbeiter Union-Deutschlands) -AAUD. The AAUD was based upon the struggle against the trade unions and the legalised workers' councils, and rejected parliamentarism. Each organisation affiliated to the Union had a right to maximum independence and freedom of choice as to tactics.

Almost immediately, the AAUD began to grow. At that time the trade unions had more members than they ever had, or were likely to see again in the foreseeable future. The socialist unions in 1920 grouped almost eight million paid-up members in 52 unions; the Christian unions had more than a million members; the company (or "yellow") unions, had about 300,000. Then there were the anarcho-syndicalist unions (the Freie Arbeiter Union-Deutschlands, FAUD) and also some breakaway unions which, a little while later, affiliated to the Red Trade Union International (Moscow-controlled).

At first, the AAUD numbered 80,000 (April 1920); by the end of 1920, this was 300,000. It is true that many of its constituent members were at the same time adherents either of the F.A.U.D. or of the Red Unions.

There were, however, political differences in the AAUD and in December, a number of associations left it to form a new association, the AAUD-E (United AAUD: E- Einheits-organ-

isation, or united organisation). Even after this break, the AAUD reckoned on more than 200,000 members (4th Congress, June 1921); but this was by then a paper organisation. The defeat of the Central German rising in 1921 led to the dismantling and destruction of the AAUD. It could no longer resist police persecution.

The German Communist Party (K.P.D.)

Before examining the splits in the factory organisation movement, it

is necessary to refer to the role of the Communist Party. During the war (1914-18) the Social-Democratic Party had placed itself alongside the ruling classes, to ensure "social peace", with the exception of a militant fringe including some party officials of whom the best known were Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. These agitated against the war and violently criticised the Party. They were not alone. In addition to their group, the "Spartacus-League" there were groups like the "Internationalists" of Dresden and Frankfurt; the "Left Radicals" of Hamburg and the "Workers Party" of Bremen. After November 1918 and the fall of the Empire, these groups (which came from the social-democratic "left") were for "a struggle in the streets" that would forge a new political organisation and to some extent would follow the lines of the Russian Revolution. They held a congress of unification in Berlin (30.12.1918) and formed the Communist Party of Germany (I).

Within the Party there were many revolutionary workers who demanded "all power to the Workers' Councils". But there were many who, from the first, regarded themselves as the cadres of the Left; they felt they were the leaders by right of seniority, notions which they had brought with them from the old party. The workers who came into the K.P.D. in growing numbers, did not always stand up to their leaders; partly from respect for discipline, partly by their own yielding to outdated conceptions of leadership. The idea of "factory organisations" was a vastly different conception. But of course it was open to misinterpretation. It could mean, and the leadership of the K.P.D. most certainly took it to

(I) The translation of the proceedings of this Congress (into French) with other interesting information, will be found in Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin, Prudhommeaux, Cahiers Spartacus, Oct-Nov 1949.

mean, a mere form of organisation, nothing more, subject to directives imposed on it from outside. It could also mean, and this was what the militants had been taking it to mean, a vastly different matter: a means of control from the bottom up. In its new sense, the notion of factory organisations implied an overthrow of ideas previously held with regard to:-

- (a) the unity of the working class;
- (b) the tactics of struggle;
- (c) the relationship between the masses and their leadership;
- (d) the dictatorship of the proletariat;
- (e) the relationship between state and society;
- (f) communism as an economic and political system.

These new problems had to be faced: they had to be answered, or the whole new idea of revolution would disappear. But the Party cadres were unwilling to face these ideas. All they thought of doing was to rebuild the new (Communist) Party on the model of the old (Social-Democratic) Party. They tried to avoid what was bad in the old Party and to paint it in red instead of pink-and-white. There was no place for the new ideas. And then, these new ideas were not presented in a coherent whole, coming from a single brain, or as if fallen from Heaven. They were the new ideas of the generation, and many of the young militants of the K.P.D. supported them; but side by side with support for the new ideas was respect for the old ideological foundation.

Parliamentarism

The K.P.D. was divided on all the problems raised by the new notion of "factory organisation" from its very inception. When the Social-Democratic President, Ebert, announced elections for a Constituent Assembly, the party had to decide whether to participate in the elections, or to denounce them. It was debated hotly at the Congress. The majority of the workers wanted to refuse to participate in elections at all. But the Party leadership, including Liebknecht and Luxemburg, declared for an electoral campaign. The leadership was beaten on votes, and the majority of the Party declared itself Anti-Parliamentarian. It stated that in its view, the Constituent Assembly was only there in order to consolidate the

power of the bourgeoisie by giving it a "legalistic" foundation. On the contrary, not only were the proletarian elements of the K.P.D. opposed to participating in such an Assembly; they wished to "activate" the Workers' Councils already existing and to create others, through which they would give meaning to the difference between parliamentary democracy and working class democracy, as advocated in the slogan: "ALL POWER TO THE WORKERS' COUNCILS".

The leadership of the K.P.D. saw in this Anti-Parliamentarism, not a revival of revolutionary thought, but a "gression" to Trade Unionist and even Anarchist ideas, which in their mind belonged to the beginning of industrial capitalism. But in truth the anti-parliamentarism of the new current had not much in common with "revolutionary syndicalism" and "anarchism". It even represented its negation. While the anti-parliamentarism of the libertarians centred on the rejection of political power, and in particular, rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat, the new current considered anti-parliamentarism a necessary condition for the taking of political power. It was "Marxist Anti-Parliamentarism".

The Trade Unions. On the question of trade union activities, the leadership of the K.P.D. differed from that of the factory organisations. This was only to be expected. It aroused fierce discussion after the Congress (by which time Liebknecht and Luxemburg had disappeared from the scene, having been murdered by the Reaction). Those who supported the Councils said: "Leave the Trade Unions! Join the factory organisations! Form Workers' Councils!" But the Communist leaders said "Stay in the Unions!" It did not think it could capture the Union H.Q. but it did think it could capture the leadership of the local branches. It might then (reasoned the K.P.D.) be possible to unite these locals in a new, "revolutionary", Trade Union Movement.

But once again the leadership of the K.P.D. was defeated. Most of its sections refused to carry out these instructions. The leadership was firm, however, even at the expense of expelling the majority of its members. It was, of course, supported by the Russian Party, and its chief Lenin (who at this time published his disastrous pamphlet on "Left-Wing

Communism: An Infantile Disorder

At the HEIDELBURG Conference, Oct. 1919, the leadership succeeded in expelling "democratically" more than half the party.... Henceforth the German Communist Party was able to go ahead with its conduct of parliamentary and trade union policies (with pitiful results). The expelled members united with a party of left socialists (and quadrupled their members, but for three years only): they formed a new party, the K.A.P.D. (Workers' Communist Party of Germany). The Communist Party proper had lost its most militant elements and had thenceforth no alternative but to surrender itself unconditionally to the Moscow line.

The Communist Workers' Party. The K.A.P.D. entered immediately into direct relationship with the AAUD. At that time, the K.A.P.D. was a force that counted. Its criticism of trade union and parliamentary actions, and its practice of direct and violent action, and its struggle against capitalist exploitation, made it a positive influence first of all on the factory floor; also through its press and publications that were the best that Marxist literature had to offer in this time of decadence of the Marxist movement. Even so, the K.A.P.D. retained some encumbrances in the form of the old Marxist traditions.

The KAPD and the AAUD: Differences

Let us leave the parties for a moment and go back to the

factory organisations. This young movement had shown that important changes had been made in the working-class world. There was general agreement on the following points:-

- (a) the new organisation had to be built up and continue to grow;
- (b) its structure must be such that no clique of leaders could establish itself.
- (c) once it had established itself with millions of members it would establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

There were two major points of controversy within the AAUD. The first was: Should there be a political party of the workers

outside the AAUD: the second was the question of the administration of social and economic life.

At first, the AAUD had only rather vague relations with the KPD. Its differences were of no importance. But it was different once the KAPD was formed. The KAPD immediately became involved in the affairs of the AAUD. Many of its members did not agree to this. In Saxony, Frankfurt, Hamburg etc. there was strong opposition to working with the KAPD. Germany was still extremely decentralised, and its decentralisation was reflected in the workers' organisations; hence the possibility of the KAPD working with the AAUD in some districts and not in others. As a consequence, the militants who opposed the formation within the AAUD of a "leadership clique" (namely the KAPD), left, and formed their own organisation, the AAUD-E, which rejected the idea of a party of the proletariat and held that the factory organisation was all-sufficient.

THE COMMON PLATFORM

These three currents agreed in their analysis of the modern world. They accepted that because of the change in society, the proletariat no longer formed a restricted minority in society that could not struggle alone and had to seek alliance with other classes, as had been the case in the days of Marx. At least in the developed countries of the West, that period was over. In those countries, the proletariat was now the majority of the population while all the layers of the bourgeoisie were united behind big capital. Henceforth revolution was the affair of the proletariat alone. Capitalism had entered its death crisis. (2)

But if society had changed, in the West at least, then so had the conception of communism to change. The old ideas, in the old organisations, represented quite the opposite of social emancipation. Otto Ruehle, one of the chief theoreticians of the AAUD-E, said this (in 1924):-

"The nationalisation of the means of production, which continues to be the programme of social-democracy at

(2) This was, of course, an analysis of the 'twenties and 'thirties.

the same time as it is that of the communists, is not socialisation. Through nationalisation of the means of production, it is possible to attain a strongly centralised State capitalism, which will have perhaps some superiority to private capitalism, but which will none the less be capitalism."

Communism could only arrive from the action of the workers themselves, struggling actively and on their own. For that, new forms of organisation were necessary. But what would such organisations be? Here opinions diverged, and conflicting views could cause endless splits. Although by this time, the workers had turned away from revolutionary action, and any decisions the movement might take were of little consequence, it may be of interest to note what their interpretation of the future society were.(3)

THE DOUBLE ORGANISATION.

The KAPD rejected the idea of the Leninist party, such as prevailed after the Russian Revolution (a mass party) and held that a revolutionary party was essentially the party of an elite, based on quality and not quantity. The Party, uniting the most advanced elements of the proletariat, must act as a lever within the masses, i.e. must spread propaganda, keep up political discussion etc. Its strategy was class v. class, based on the struggle in the factories and armed uprising; sometimes, even, as a preliminary, terrorist action (such as bombings, bank robberies, raids on jewellers' shop etc.) which were frequent in the early 'twenties. The struggle in the factories, led by action committees, would have the task of creating the atmosphere and the class consciousness necessary to mass struggles and to bringing ever greater masses of workers to mobilise themselves for decisive struggles.

Hermann Gorter, one of the principal theoreticians of this Party, justified thus the necessity of a small communist party:-

"Most proletarians are ignoramuses. They have little notion of economics and politics, do not know much of

(3) Especially since these have now been taken up by German youth. - Trans.

national and international events, of the relations which exist between these latter and of the influence which they exert on the revolution. By reason of their position in society they cannot get to know all this. This is why they can never act at the right moment. They act when they should not, do not act when they should. They repeatedly make mistakes." (Answer to Lenin: Gorter, Paris 1930)

So, according to this theory, the small select Party would have an educational mission, it would be a catalyst of ideas. But the task of regrouping the masses and organising them, in a network of factory organisations, would be that of the AAUD. Its essential objective would be to counter and overthrow the influence of the Trade Unions, through propaganda, but more particularly through determined action (that of a "group which shows in the struggle what the masses must become" - Gorter). Finally, in the course of revolutionary struggle, these factory organisations would become Workers' Councils, uniting all the workers and controlled by them. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" would be nothing more than an AAUD extended to the whole of German industry

THE AAUD-E ARGUMENT

The KAPD was, as has been said, opposed to a political party separate from the factory organisations. It wanted a united organisation which would lead the day-to-day struggle, and later on, take over the administration of society, on the system of the Workers' Councils. It would have both economic and political aims. It differed from revolutionary syndicalism in that it disagreed with the hostility to working-class political power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the other hand, it did not see the usefulness of a political party (KAPD style). though granting the same arguments about the backwardness of the working-class. for them, the factory organisation itself would suffice for the educational role so long as freedom of speech and discussion were assured within them.

The AAUD-E criticised the KAPD for being a centralised party, with professional leaders and paid editors, only distinguished from the KPD by its rejection of parliamentarism. They derided the "double organisation" as a "double pie card" for the benefit of the leaders. The AAUD-E rejected the notion of paid leaders: "neither cards nor rules nor anything of that kind", they said.

Some of them went so far as to found anti-organisation organisations.

Roughly, the AAUD-E held that if the proletariat is too weak or too divided to take decisions, no party decision could remedy this. Nobody could take the place of the proletariat. It must, by itself, overcome its own defects, otherwise it will be beaten and will pay a heavy price for its defeat. For them the double organisation was a hangover from the political party & trade union partnership.

As a result of the differences between these three treads, KAPD, AAUD and AAUD-E, the latter refused to participate with the other two in the Central German insurrection of 1921. This was launched and led in a great part by the armed elements of the KAPD (still at that time regarded as sympathetic to the Third International), since the AAUD-E claimed it was merely to camouflage the events in Russia and in particular the repression of the Kronstadt sailors and workers by the Red Army under Trotsky.

Despite continued internal dissension, always very high and often obscured by personalities, in spite of excesses provoked by disappointment, the "communist spirit", that is to say, the insistence on violent and direct action, the passionate denunciation of all political and trade colours (including the "palace mayors of Moscow") continued to permeate the masses. All financed by illegal means; their members, though often thrown out of employment because of their subversive activities, were extremely active in the street and at public meeting etc.

DISAPPOINTMENT. But it had been believed that the growth of the factory organisations 1919/20 would continue at the same rate, that they would become a mass movement of "millions of conscious communists" which would override the power of the allegedly working-class trade unions. This was not however to prove the case. They started from the hypothesis that the proletariat would struggle and win as an organised class, and would work out the way of building the new organisation. In the growth of the AAUD or the AAUD-E, the development of the fighting spirit and class consciousness of the workers could be measured. But these organisations drew in on themselves after the economic expansion of 1923/29. In the years

of depression they were reduced to a mere few hundred members, a few cells here and there in the factories which employed some 20 million. By the time the Hitlerites came on the scene, the factory organisations had shrunk from being "general" organisations of the workers to being cells of conscious council-communists. Not-with-standing what their aims might be or their press might say, the AAUD and the AAUD-E had become no more than minor political parties.

THE FUNCTION OF THE ORGANISATIONS.

Was it however merely the withering away of their membership that transformed the factory organisations into minor political parties? No. It was a change of function. Though the factory organisations never had for their proclaimed task the leading of strikes, negotiations with employers, formulation of demands (all of which they left to the strikers themselves) they were organs of struggle. They restricted their functions to those of propaganda and support. Every time a strike was launched the factory organisations helped to run it; their press was the strike press; they put on speakers, AAUD or AAUD-E, and ran meetings. But so far as conducting negotiations was concerned, it was the task of the strike committee and the members of the factory organisations did not represent their group as such but the strikers who had elected them and to whom they were responsible.

The KAPD, as a political party, had a different function. Its task was seen as being above all propaganda, economic and political analysis. At election times it undertook anti-parliamentary activity; it called for action committees in the factories, streets among the unemployed, etc.

After the bloody repression of 1921, and during the period of economic prosperity, the above-named functions became purely theoretical. The activity of the factory organisations became solely that of propaganda and analysis, that is to say, political activity. Many members were discouraged and left the movement. As a result of that, too it meant that the factory was no longer the basis of the organisation. Meetings began to be held outside the factory; on the basis of district, perhaps in a bar where, German-fashion, they sang the old workers' song of hope and anger ...

No longer was there a practical difference between KAPD,

AAUD and AAUD-E. In practice they put forward the same line, and were all political groupings whatever they called themselves. Anton Pannekoek, the Dutch Marxist who was one of the great theoreticians of council-communism, said in this respect:-

"The AAUD, like the KAPD, is essentially an organisation whose immediate goal is the revolution. In other times, in a period of decline of the revolution, one could not have thought of founding such an organisation. But it has survived the revolutionary years; the workers who founded it before and fought under its flag do not want to let themselves lose the experience of those struggles and conserve it like a cutting from a plant for the developments to come."

Three political parties of the same colour was two too many! With the dangers threatening the working-class as the Nazis started on the road we know so well today, and with the inertia and cowardice of the old and powerful "working-class" organisations, there were moves to unity. In December 1931, the AAUD (having already separated from the KAPD) fused with the AAUD-E. Only a few elements remained in the KAPD, and some from the AAUD-E went into the anarchist ranks (the FAUD). But most of the survivors of the factory organisations were in a new organisation, the KAUD (Communist Workers Union of Germany). This expressed in its title the idea that the organisation was no longer a "general organisation" of workers, as the AAUD had been, at one time. It united all those workers who were declared revolutionaries, consciously communist, but did not claim it united all the workers any longer.

The K.A.U.D. With the change of name, there was a change of conception. Up till then, council-communism had only taken note of "the organised class". Both the AAUD and the AAUD-E had believed from the beginning that it would be, they who would organise the working-class, that millions would rally to them. It was an idea close to that of revolutionary syndicalism, who looked forward to seeing all the workers join their unions; then the working-class would be "an organised class".

Now, however, the K.A.U.D. urged the workers to organise for themselves their own action committees and to create liaison between these committees. No longer was the "organised" class struggle to depend on an organisation formed previously to the struggle. In this new conception, the "organised class" became the working class struggling under its own leadership.

This change of conception had other consequences. It affected the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for instance. If the "organised struggle" was no longer the exclusive affair of organisations formed before the struggle, those organisations were no longer able to be considered as the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Thus disappeared one of the causes of dissension: whether the KAPD or the AAUD would have to exercise power. It had to be agreed that the dictatorship of the proletariat could not be in the hands of specialised organisations; it would exist in the hands of the class which was in struggle. The task of the new KAUD would amount to communist propaganda, clarifying the objectives of the struggle, urging the working class to struggle, principally by means of the unofficial strike, and showing it where its strength and weakness lay.

Communist Society and the
Factory Organisations.

This evolution in ideas had to be accompanied by a revision of recognised notions concerning the communist society. The general ideology in political circles accepted by the masses was State Capitalism. There were many shades of State Capitalism, but "state cap." ideology could be brought down to some very simple principles: the State, through nationalisation, through planned economy, through social reforms etc., represented the lever for socialism, while parliamentary and trade-union action represented the means of struggle. According to this theory, the working-class had hardly any need to struggle as an independent class; instead they should entrust "the management and leadership of the class struggle" to Parliamentary and Trade Union commanders. Needless to say, in this ideology, Party and Trade Unions became a component part of the State, and the management and leadership of the, socialist or communist society of the future would be theirs.

Indeed, during the first phase (following the defeat of the revolution in Germany) this tradition still strongly impregnated the conceptions of the AAUD, the KAPD and the AAUD-E. All three were in favour of an organisation "grouping millions and millions" of workers in order to carry out the political and economic dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1922, for instance, the

AAUD declared that it was in a position to take over, on its reckoning, based on its active membership, "6% of the factories" of Germany.

But these conceptions altered. When there were hundreds of factory organisations, united and co-ordinated by the AAUD and AAUD-E, they could demand the maximum of independence as to the decisions they took and could avoid "a new clique of leaders". But it was asked whether it was possible to preserve this independence in the midst of communist social life? Economic life is highly specialised, and all enterprises are directly interdependent. How could economic life be administered if the production and distribution of social wealth are not sometimes in centralised forms? Was the State dispensable or indispensable as a regulator of production and organisation?

It is easy to see there was a contradiction between the old idea of communist society and the new form of society that was now proposed. While there was fear of economic centralisation, it was not clear how to guard against it. There was discussion about the greater or less degree of "federalism" or "centralism": the AAUD-E leaned rather more towards federalism, the KAPD-AAUD towards centralism. In 1923, Karl Schroeder (4), the theoretician of the KAPD, proclaimed that "the more centralised communist society is, the better it will be".

In fact, as long as one remained on the basis of the old conceptions of the "organised class", this contradiction was insoluble. One side rallied more or less to the revolutionary syndicalist conception of "taking over" the factories through the unions; the other, like the Bolsheviki, thought that a centralised apparatus, the state, must regulate the process of distribution and production, and distribute the "national income" among the workers.

But to discuss the communist society on the basis of "federalism or centralism" is sterile. These are problems of organisation, technical problems, while the communist society

(4) KARL SCHROEDER (1884-1950), Spartacist fighter with a price on his head, then professional leader of the KAPD, was expelled from the KAPD in 1924; later he became an official of the Socialist Party. He was one of the few of his party to organise "resistance" to Nazism. Imprisoned in 1936 with other KAPD veterans, he is today a figure in German socialist "martyrs".

is basically an economic problem. Capitalism must give way to another economic system, where the means of production, the products of labour power, do not take the form of "value" and where the exploitation of the working population to the profit of privileged layers has disappeared.

The problem of "federalism or centralism" is devoid of sense if it has not been shown beforehand what the form of organisation and its economic basis will be. Forms of organisation are not arbitrary: they derive from the very principles of the economy. For example: the principle of profit and surplus-value, of its private or collective appropriation, lies at the bottom of all forms of capitalist economy. That is why it is insufficient to present the communist economy as a negative system: no money, no market, no private or State property. It is necessary to show up its positive character: to show what will be the economic laws which will succeed those of capitalism. This done, it may well be that the problem of "federalism or centralism" is no problem at all.

THE END OF THE MOVEMENT IN GERMANY.

The AAUD had separated from the KAPD at the end of 1929. Its press then advocated a "flexible tactic": support of workers' struggles solely for wage demands, the improvement of conditions or hours of work. More rigidly, the KAPD saw in this tactic the bait for a slide towards class collaboration, "horse-trading" politics. After expelling its leader, Adam Scharrer (5), for "making a pact with the enemy" (i.e. having a novel published by the German Communist Party publishing house), the KAPD turned to the advocacy of individual terrorism. One of those who accepted this idea was Marinus VAN DER LUBBE. In setting fire to the premises housing the Nazi Parliament, and burning the Reichstag, he wished by a symbolical gesture to urge the workers to abandon their political apathy and rise against the Nazis. (NOTE by trans: Effective Stalinist propaganda has effectively obscured the heroic role of

(5) ADAM SCHARRER (1889-1948) metalworker, Spartacist fighter, afterwards professional leader of KAPD from which he was expelled in 1930. A novelist (like Schröder) he lived in Moscow after 1934. Today in East Germany he is regarded as "a pioneer of proletarian literature". Needless to say, some features of his past life are not exactly advertised.

Van Der Lubbe, who in English-speaking countries, at least, has been classified almost as a Nazi stool-pigeon! - a slander begun by Dimitrov and Thaelmann, Communist leaders, in their defence).

But neither tactic had any results. Germany had gone through an economic crisis of major depth. There was a huge army of the unemployed. Unofficial strikes became impossible. While it is true nobody any longer thought of obeying their trade unions, the latter were collaborating directly with employers and State. The press of the council-communists was frequently seized. The supreme irony was that the only great unofficial strike of that period - the transport workers of Berlin in 1932 - was organised by the Stalinist and Hitler high priests acting together against the high priests of the Socialist unions.

After Hitler's rise to power, the militants of all tendencies were hunted down and imprisoned in concentration camps, where large numbers disappeared. In 1945, some survivors were executed, by orders of the GPU, when the Russian Army entered Saxony. As late as 1952, in West Berlin, one of the old leaders of the AAUD, Alfred Weiland, was kidnapped in the open street and taken to the East, where he was sentenced to a heavy term of imprisonment.

No trace remained of this movement of council-communism. The men were liquidated, so were their ideas. Commercial expansion and prosperity directed feeling elsewhere. (NOTE by trans: This was written just before the revival of all these ideas in the new students' movement, featuring Rudi Dutschke and others). How has this movement enriched out knowledge of the struggle for Workers' Power?

ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS OF WORKERS' POWER

To understand the fundamental economy of communism, the AAUD had to be freed from the old traditions of the "organised class", and to understand that the working class could only achieve its real unity in the mass all-embracing struggle without the need for a specialised organisation which at best could only represent a fragmentary part of what the total proletarian aspirations consist of. In 1930 it published a study (drawn up by the Dutch Council-Communist Group) on the Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution).

This analysis did not propose a "plan" of any kind, to show how it would be possible to build a "finer", "more equitable" society. It concerned itself only with the problems of organization of the communist economy as an organic whole, the practice of class struggle and social administration. The "principles" give a theoretical idea of the economic consequences of the struggle by the independent mass movements at a political level. When the Workers' Councils have taken power, they will have learned to "manage their own struggle" directly, and they will be obliged to give new bases to their power by introducing new economic laws by which the measure of labour time will be the pivot of all production and distribution of the products. The workers are able to run production themselves, but only through calculating labour time in the different branches of production, and dividing produce with this means.

The 'Principles' examine this problem from the viewpoint of the exploited worker who not only aims at the abolition of private property, but also of exploitation in general. The history of our times has shown that the suppression of private property does not necessarily mean the end of exploitation.

The Anarchist movement understood this fact much sooner than the Marxists, and its theoreticians have given it careful attention. In the last analysis, they came to the same conclusion. But whereas the Marxists (Social-Democrats or Bolsheviks) wanted to put capitalism, which had reached the monopoly stage, under the control of a so-called workers' State, without changing anything fundamental in its mechanism, the Anarchists advocated a federation of free communes and rejected every form of State.

One of the best known Anarchist theoreticians, Sebastien Faure (My Communism, Faure, Paris 1921) stated that the members of a commune would have to take a census of their needs and their productive possibilities; then, with "the whole of needs of consumers and possibilities of producers at the regional level at their disposal ... the National Committee could set and make known to each Regional Committee what quantities of products its region can dispose of and what productive total it must provide. Equipped with this knowledge, each Regional Committee can do the same work for its region: set and make known to each communal committee what its commune has to dispose of and what it can provide. The last-named does the same with members of the Commune!"

Sebastien Faure had earlier advocated that "all this vast organisation has the basic and vital principle of Free Agreement as its cornerstone." However, an economic system requires economic principles and not noble proclamations. One can say the same with respect to the following quotation from Hilferding, the famous Social-Democratic theoretician, for there also economic principle is lacking:-

"the communal, regional and national commissioners of the socialist society decide how and where, in what quantity and by what means, new products will be obtained from natural or artificial conditions of production. With the help of statistics of production and consumption covering the whole of society's needs, they change the whole of economic life according to the needs expressed by these statistics." - Hilferding (Das Finanzkapital).

The difference between these two fundamental points of view is not very noticeable. However, the Anarchists had the historic merit of advancing the essential slogan: "Abolition of the Wages System". In this perspective, however, the "National Committee", the "office of statistics", etc. that which the Marxists refer to as the "People's Government", is supposed to practice "natural economics", i.e. an economy without money circulating. Housing, food, electric current, transport -- all this is "free". A certain portion of goods and services remain payable in money (generally indexed upon the relationship between population and consumption).

But despite appearances, this manner of suppressing the wages system does not signify either the abolition of exploitation nor social freedom. In fact, the larger becomes the "natural" sector of the economy, the more the workers depend on the fixing of their "incomes" by the apparatus of distribution.

We have an instance of a "moneyless" economy, where exchange was carried out, in great part, naturally" - so far as housing, lighting etc. were concerned, all was "free" - and that was in the period of "war communism" in Russia. This showed quite clearly that not only was the system not permanently viable, but moreover that it could co-exist with a regime based on class domination.

Reality has taught us:- First, that it is possible to abolish private property without abolishing exploitation;

Second, that it is possible to abolish the wages system without abolishing exploitation.

If this is so, the problem of the proletarian revolution is posed in the following terms:-

What are the economic conditions that allow the abolition of exploitation.

What are the economic conditions that allow the proletariat to maintain power once the latter is won, and to lay the axe to the roots of the counter-revolution,

While the "Principles" study the economic foundations of communism, the point of departure is more political than economic. For the workers it is not easy to seize political power, but it is still more difficult to maintain it. The present-day conceptions of socialism and communism tend to concentrate in fact if not in theory) all powers of administration either in the State or in certain social offices. But, according to the "Principles", the communist economy is the extension of the revolution and not some desirable state of affairs that may be realised in a hundred or a thousand years. It seeks to define at the level of principles the measures to be taken, not by some party or organisation, but by the working-class and its immediate organs of struggle: the Workers' Councils. The realisation of communism is not the business of a party, but that of the whole of the working class, acting and deliberating through its Councils.

Production & Social Wealth. One of the great problems of the revolution is to set up new relations between the producer and social wealth, relations which (within capitalist society) are expressed in the wages system. The wages system is based on an antagonism between the value of labour power (wages) and labour itself (its product). If for example the worker provides 50 hours work for society, his wages are only the equivalent of ten hours. In order to emancipate himself, the worker must ensure that it is not the value of his labour power which determines the pay which comes to him from social production, but that this share is fixed by his labour itself. Labour equals measure of consumption: that is the principle he must establish.

The difference between the sum of labour provided and what the worker collects in exchange is called surplus labour and represents unpaid labour. The social wealth produced during this labour time is the surplus product and the value embedded in this surplus product is called surplus value. Every society, whatever it is, and therefore also communist society, rests on the formation of a surplus product, because out of the workers as a whole producing necessary or useful labour, some do not produce tangible goods. Their conditions of life are produced by other workers (the same as for the health services, the care of the sick and old, the administrative services, scholars etc). But it is the manner in which this surplus product is formed, and that in which it is distributed, that constitutes capitalist exploitation.

The worker receives a wage which may suffice for him to live in a certain fashion. He knows he has done, say, 50 hours work, but he does not know how many hours accrue to him as wages. He is unconscious of the amount of his surplus labour. It is known how the possessing class consumes this surplus product: apart from the social services, which receive a part of it, it goes back to capitalise expansion, it enables the life of the exploiters, it pays for the cost of the Government including the police and the army.

There are two particular characteristics of the surplus product: first, the fact that the working class has not, or has almost never, the decision on the product of its unpaid work. We receive a wage, full stop. We can do nothing about the production and distribution of social wealth. The class that holds the means of production, the possessing class, is master of the labour process, including surplus labour; it puts us out of work when it deems it necessary to its interests, it bludgeons us with its police or makes us cannon fodder in its wars. The authority of the bourgeoisie rests in the fact that it possesses labour, surplus labour, the surplus product. It is this that makes the working class an impotent class in society; an oppressed class.

It is often said, of course, that there is no more exploitation of the workers in Russia, because private capital has been abolished and the whole of the surplus product is possessed and controlled by the State, which distributes it within society through new social laws and new factories etc.

Let us accept this argument for a moment; leaving aside, therefore, the fact that the dominant class, the bureaucracy, has enriched itself by exorbitant salaries, and is maintaining itself in power by assuring higher education to its children and by the laws of succession that guarantee wealth accumulated "for the family". Let us even suppose that it is not the case that this bureaucracy exploits the population. It is still a fact that the bureaucracy in Russia remains master of the labour process, including surplus labour. It dictates, through the State unions, the conditions of work, just as much as is done in the West.

If the bureaucracy did not exploit the population, it would only be by its "good will"; by its refusal to exploit ; by its generosity in not taking advantage of its position. A society on such lines would no longer be subject to social and economic necessity, but depend on the "good" or "bad" sentiments of the rulers. The conditions of the workers in so far as their relationship to social wealth would be the same, i.e. it would be arbitrarily fixed; and they could not do anything about it, except perhaps to hope that "bad" rulers might become more tolerant and be "good" rulers.

In short, the abolition of the wages system is not the ONLY and necessary condition of the workers receiving the share of the social product which accrues to them and which their labour has created. This share can increase; but a true abolition of wage-exploitation of any nature is something entirely different. Without this true abolition of wage-exploitation, a revolution must degenerate. And the revolution "betrayed" will lead to a totalitarian capitalist state.

One further conclusion is drawn in the Principles. A revolutionary group of workers that wishes radically to end capitalist exploitation must seek the means to establish economically the power won politically. The time is past when all that mattered was to demand the end of private property in the means of production. It is also not enough to call for the abolition of the wage system. This demand in itself is of no consequence whatever, if nobody knows how to run a society without wages. A group that could not clarify this question has nothing to say about building the new society.

THE MEASUREMENT OF LABOUR.

The "Principles of Communist Production and Distribution" starts from the following idea:-

All goods produced by labour are of equal qualitative value, for they all represent a portion of human labour. Only the quantity of different labour which they represent makes them different. The measure of time which each worker individually devotes to labour is the hour of labour. Likewise the measure destined to measure the quantity or time that such and such an object represents must be the hour of average social labour

It is this measure which establishes the sum of wealth that society has, likewise the relationship between the various enterprises, and finally, the share of this wealth per worker. On this basis, the "Principles" develops an analysis and a criticism of the different theories - and also practices - of the different currents which refer to Marxism, Anarchism, or Socialism in general. They contain a more precise exposition of the concise principles of Marx and Engels as laid down in "Capital", "The Critique of the Gotha Programme" and "Anti-Dühring".

Of course, the "Principles" does not only study the unit of calculation under communism; it also analyses the application of this to the production and distribution of the social product, and in the "public services", examining the new rules of social book-keeping, the increase of production and its control by the workers; the disappearance of the Stock Exchange and the application of communism in agriculture through the intermediary of agricultural co-operatives which themselves calculate their harvests in labour time.

Thus the "Principles" show that on the taking of power by the proletariat, the means of production lies in the hands of the functional organisations. It is on the communistic consciousness of the proletariat, born out of its own struggle, that the ultimate fate of these means of production will depend; whether the proletariat keeps them in its own hands or not.

Above all, the proletarian revolution will fix unalterable relationships between production and producer, which can only be done by introducing the calculation of labour-time into production and distribution. This is the highest demand the proletariat can formulate and at the same time it is the

minimum upon which it can insist. The proletariat can keep hold of these enterprises only if it makes sure to keep the autonomous direction and administration of them at factory level. It must apply everywhere the calculation of labour time.

Such is the final message left to the world by the German revolutionary proletariat movement of the first half of the twentieth century.

The above article was first published in Dutch in RADENCOMMISMUS (No.3. 1938) journal of the Council-Communist Group of Holland. It was afterwards translated into French and published in INTERNATIONALISME (No45, 1952) Revised and completed, and with the resume of the "Principles" (written for the Bordiguist journal "BILAN" Nos. 19-21, 1935), it was published by INFORMATIONS CORRESPONDANCE OUVRIERES (No. 42, 1965). It was translated for the first time into English by Coptic Press in 1968.

Appendix I was produced as Appendix B in the Coptic Press edition. We have added Appendix 2 ourselves

APPENDIX. I

There was some international influence of the German Council Communist Movement of the twenties. In particular, the "ultra-

left" ideas of the KAPD spread (they were the first to suggest a "Fourth International", an idea later taken up by the Trotskyists after their break with Moscow). In Russia, the Workers' Opposition (Shliapnikov, Madame Kollontai etc.) kept in contact with the KAPD but finally integrated into the Bolshevik Party. Sympathetic groups existed in the Balkans (Greece, Rumania and Yugoslavia, where one of their leaders was betrayed to the police by the Leninists) but especially in Bulgaria, where a strong tendency existed of direct action and individual terrorism, as against Leninist parliamentarism (insurrection of 1923, dynamiting of bridges, blowing up in 1925 of Sofia Cathedral). There were groups in Belgium and Holland in particular, originally around Gorter, later in the group of International Communists (GIK-H). The last active council-communist grouping existed in Holland. There were others which had a sporadic existence in Czechoslovakia Denmark, France (around Andre Prudhommeaux, who later went over to anarchism); in the United States (around Paul Mattick, and the reviews "International Council Correspondence", "Living Marxism" and "New Essays"). In Australia, the journal "Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils" published the basic work of Anton Pannekoek (Melbourne 1950 - "Workers' Councils").

In England, there were originally an active movement, that included Sylvia Pankhurst and the "Workers' Dreadnought". William Gallacher, later a Communist M.p. and "darling" of the Tory benches as their pet Communist, sided with them as a young man (and was duly reproved by Lenin). Its most Consistent advocate was Guy Aldred, and the movement (under his influence) kept alive in Glasgow for years. He divided the movement by standing for Parliament as an Anti-Parliamentarian, but attracted only a handful of votes. The Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation carried on for many years afterwards. Most of its members went over to anarchism in 1936. But some carried on - in particular, William MacDougall who published "Solidarity" but who moved from council-communism to an "open forum" socialism. Supporters of the movement in Scotland (and Scottish supporters who came to England) would not join trade unions. They derided this as much the same as joining the Labour Party. Under the prevailing conditions, this led to their decline. John Olday attempted to revive a Spartacus-Bund in London in 1945.

APPENDIX 2

A MANIFESTO OF THE GERMAN ANTI- PARLIAMENTARIANS TO THE PROLETARIAT OF THE WORLD

ORIGINS OF THE K.A.P.D.

Comrades, Proletarians! On December 5th, 1920, the Communist Workers Party of Germany was recognised as a sympathising Party of the Third International.

The KAPD (Communist Workers Party) and its programme is in direct opposition to the VKPD (United Communist Party of Germany) which was formed in November, 1920, from the Left USPD and the former SpartacusBund (KPD), and which belongs to the 3rd International as a fully recognised section. The KAPD is also in complete opposition to the tactics of the 3rd International, as laid down in the theses of the 2nd Congress. It sees in these tactics the terrible danger of opportunism pure and simple; the danger of an opportunism which will lead the Revolution into a morass, and will thus prove disastrous to Russia herself.

The KAPD has arisen out of the former opposition in the

SpartakusBund. The Executive of the KPD, with Russia' help, thrives. It is the strongest and largest section of the Party, and the spirit of Parliamentarism has gained in their leaders, Levi, Thalheimer, Kickert, and others, under the influence of Radek and Bronski.

Every means has been used to destroy the KAPD. Nevertheless, it has gained in strength and had to be perforce recognised by the 3rd International as a sympathising Party, with the right of having a permanent Advisory Representative on the Executive.

THE GREATNESS OF THE III INTERNATIONAL

The KAPD, which had always recognised the fundamental greatness of the idea underlying the 3rd International and the necessity for unity with Soviet Russia, is determined to fight opportunism by uniting all the forces of the opposition for a persistent struggle inside the 3rd International, coupled with a thorough revision of the Theses in a Marxist revolutionary sense as its next aim.

Its full view's are laid down in an "Open Letter to Comrade Lenin". (An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin: An Answer To Lenin's Pamphlet: "Infantile Sickness of Leftism In Communism"), published by the KAPD, Berlin.

We must also at this juncture raise the following essential points, which, however cannot be discussed and justified in detail:-

In Western Europe we have, in contradistinction to the overwhelming agrarian East, other production conditions, hence other class conditions, and also a different spiritual structure. Western Europe is dominated by Banking interests and Capital which keep the gigantic proletariat in spiritual and material slavery, and which unite all the bourgeois and Petty-Bourgeois classes. This forces the Proletarian

masses to independent action, which, in the Revolution, can only be achieved by industrial organisation and by the abolition of Parliamentarism.

POINTS OF DIFFERENCE

The 3rd International believes that the Revolution in Western Europe will follow the line of the Russian Revolution.

The KAPD believes that the Revolution in Western Europe will lay down and follow its own laws.

The 3rd International believes that the Revolution in Western Europe will be able to follow a policy of compromise and alliance with petty peasant, petty bourgeois, and even with bourgeois parties.

The KAPD believe this is impossible.

The 3rd International believe in the inevitability (during the Revolution) of splits and dissensions between the Bourgeois, the petty Bourgeois and the petty peasant.

The KAPD believe that the Bourgeois and petty Bourgeois will form a United Front right up to the end of the Revolution.

The 3rd International under-estimates the power of North American and West Capital.

The KAPD formulates its tactics according to those of that Great Power.

The 3rd International does not recognise the power of the Banks and of Big Business, which unites all Bourgeois classes.

The KAPD, on the other hand, build up its tactics on this unifying power of Capital.

Not believing in the capacity of the West European Proletariat to stand alone, the 3rd International neglects the spiritual and intellectual development of this Proletariat, which in every sphere is, after all, still imbued with Bourgeois ideology, and

chooses tactics which allow the slavery and subordination to Bourgeois ideas to be maintained.

The KAPD chooses its tactics with the main object of setting free the spirit of the Proletariat.

Owing to the fact that the 3rd International does not base its tactics on liberation of the spirit, nor in the unity of all the Bourgeois and petty Bourgeois Parties, but on compromises and "splits" it allowed the old trade unions to exist and endeavours to recieve them into the 3rd International.

The KAPD, whose first aim is liberation of the spirit, and which believe in the unity of the Bourgeois, recognises that T.U's must be destroyed, and that the Proletariat requires better weapons than the General Workers' Union in Germany.

For the same reasons the 3rd International allows Parliamentarism to remain. For these very reasons the KAPD abolishes Parliamentarism.

It pulls the evil up by the roots.

Owing to the fact that the 3rd International does not believe that liberation of the spirit is the first essential in Western Europe, and does not believe the Bourgeois has a United Front in the Revolution, it takes within its fold masses without ascertaining whether they are really Communistic, without demanding from them tactics which would prove that they are Communists and not only masses.

The KAPD wishes to form Parties in every country which consists of Communists only, and formulates its tactics accordingly. Through the example of these Parties, small at the beginning, it will turn the majority of the Proletariat viz. the masses into Communists.

Thus the masses of Western Europe are to the 3rd International the means; to the KAPD they are the end.

Through these tactics (which were the right ones in Russia). The 3rd International has adopted a leaders policy.

The KAPD, on the other hand conducts a masses policy.

Comrades, Proletarians. The KAPD holds the belief that all of these are vital questions of the Proletarian Revolution.

In the middle of February there will take place a Party Meeting of the KAPD at which special attention will be paid to the tactics of the 3rd International.

You are cordially invited to take part in it, we beg you to communicate this invitation to your members.

With Communist Greetings,
The Communist Workers' Party of
Germany.

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