

origins of the movement for workers' councils in germany

a 1938 GIK pamphlet, along with a chronology of
the german revolution and a section of the auto-
biography of jan appel

pamphlet no. 5, december 2008, £1

the
commune

contents

- p.3** chronology of the german revolution
- p.5** origins of the movement for workers' councils in
germany
- p.17** autobiography of jan appel

chronology of the german revolution

1914

August 4th: the Social Democrats (SPD), the mass party of the German working class, vote for war credits and support for the German army in World War I. Karl Liebknecht was the only SPD parliamentarian to oppose the war, and together with Rosa Luxemburg, Paul Levi, Leo Jogiches, Franz Mehring, August Thalheimer and others he established the *Internationale* group (later 'Spartakusbund'), an oppositionist faction within the party. Disastrously, all the main European 'socialist' parties except the Russians and Serbs support their own ruling classes.

1916

May 1st: working-class enthusiasm for the war effort having dimmed, the Spartakusbund stages a mass demonstration in Berlin against the government and the war. Liebknecht shouts "Down with the war! The main enemy is at home!" and is promptly arrested. He and Luxemburg are imprisoned for high treason.

1917

early March: strike and lock-out at the Putilov works, St. Petersburg's largest factory complex. Tsar Nicholas II dismisses the parliament (Duma): but it resists, and amid riots and women workers' demonstrations for bread and peace, the Russian monarchy falls.

April 6th: Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) founded by an anti-war section of the SPD including such figures as Karl Kautsky and Hugo Haase. Spartakusbund affiliate but maintain strong autonomy.

August: Sporadic mutinies involving 4,000 revolutionary German sailors.

November 7th: outbreak of working-class revolution in Russia.

December 22th: peace negotiations begin between the German Reich and Soviet Russia.

1918

January 28th: 100,000 march in Berlin demanding an immediate end to the war. Strikes spread to Dusseldorf, Kiel, Cologne and Hamburg, involving as many as four million workers.

January 31st: state of emergency declared. 150 strike "ringleaders" arrested and court-martialled. 50,000 workers forced into the army and sent to the front.

March 3rd: German Reich and Soviet Russia sign the punishing Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, with Germany taking

control of huge swathes of land and resources.

August-September: Central Powers suffer heavy military collapses on all fronts.

October 3rd-4th: Prince Max of Baden appointed Chancellor; SPD joins the government.

October 16th: USPD organises 5,000 strong demonstration in Berlin calling for the overthrow of the government.

October 24th: order given for a futile last stand against the Royal Navy. Sailors in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven mutiny and fight with police over subsequent days. Seven people killed and many more imprisoned.

October 30th-31st: Austro-Hungarian empire cracks: Social Democrat government established in Vienna, and revolutionary insurrection breaks out in Hungary. Republics declared in both states two weeks later.

November 4th: workers' and soldiers' council formed at Kiel. Imprisoned sailors released. 40,000 in revolt in Kiel take charge of public and military institutions, achieving similar success in Wilhelmshaven by the 6th.

November 7th-8th: councils spread across Germany. Bavarian monarchy overthrown and replaced with an SPD, USPD and Peasants' League administration. Disputes in leadership of SPD on how best to avert a working-class revolution, with Friedrich Ebert privately commenting "If the Kaiser abdicates, the social revolution is inevitable. But I do not want it, I hate it like sin".

November 9th-10th: German Republic declared by SPD leader Philipp Scheidemann, against Ebert's wishes but with the aim of pre-empting the declaration of a Free Socialist Republic by the Marxist anti-war agitator Karl Liebknecht. A Council of People's Representatives, composed of three SPD and three USPD ministers, is declared, and Ebert becomes Chancellor. Rosa Luxemburg released from prison.

November 11th: new government signs Armistice with Britain, France, USA and their allies.

November 15th: SPD-aligned trade union leaders and industrialists such as Stinnes and Siemens sign a pact to diffuse the class struggle, and form a "Central Committee for the Maintenance of the Economy".

December 16th-20th: first national congress of workers' and soldiers' councils in Berlin decides to call elections for January 19th to elect a national assembly.

December 23th: 1,000 sailors break into Imperial Chancellery and hold Chancellor Ebert captive, demanding higher pay. Ebert calls via secret phone line for the Army to attack, but many government soldiers refuse to fire on their class brothers, and he is forced to give in. Far right "Freikorps" forces loyal to the government briefly occupy Spartakusbund headquarters.

December 29th: USPD quits the the Council of People's Representatives in protest at SPD actions in the previous week's crisis.

December 30th: Spartakusbund, having broken with the USPD, re-establishes itself as the 'Communist Party of Germany' (KPD). However, the revolutionary shop stewards' movement (Revolutionäre Obleute) remains tied to the USPD.



spartakist forces clash with the army and right-wing freikorps paramilitaries

1919

January 4th: government dismisses Berlin police chief Emil Eichhorn, a member of the USPD. His party, along with the KPD, call a demonstration for the next day.

January 5th: Hundreds of thousands, many of the armed, flock to protests. Rallying at the Berlin police headquarters they elect an "Interim Revolutionary Committee". Rosa Luxemburg and most of the KPD consider this a mistake, but support the rising nonetheless. The committee calls further demonstrations for subsequent days.

January 8th: despite demonstrators trying to win over the troops, the majority of the Army rank-and-file is not won over to the revolution. SPD People's Representative for the Army and Navy Gustav Noske calls on troops under the command of General von Lüttwitz as well as the Freikorps to smash the movement, commenting "'If you like, someone has to be the bloodhound. I won't shy away from the responsibility.'" 156 people are killed.

January 15th: Liebknecht and Luxemburg murdered by the Freikorps.

January 19th: KPD boycott elections, in which the SPD and USPD win almost half of the vote.

February 11th: Friedrich Ebert elected President of the Republic. Two days later Philipp Scheidemann forms a coalition government with the Catholic Centre and the liberal German Democrats.

February 21th: USPD prime minister of Bavaria Kurt Eisner assassinated by a monarchist.

late February-mid March: Noske sends in troops to break up the Bremen Council Republic, and in the ensuing fighting 400 workers are killed. In protest, over the next three weeks strike waves burst forth in the Ruhr, Rhineland and Saxony, culminating in street fighting in Berlin. A state of emergency is declared, and some 1,200 people are killed in the repression of the revolt.

March 2nd-6th: founding congress of the Communist International.

March 21st: Hungarian Communist Party, under leadership of Béla Kun, takes power.

April 7th: Soviet Republic declared in Bavaria's capital Munich.

April 8th-14th: second national congress of workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils convenes and under SPD leadership gives up most of its powers in favour of a bourgeois democratic state.

May 2nd: Freikorps and Army finally smash the Bavarian workers' council, bringing to an end the last Soviet Republic in Germany.

June 28th: Treaty of Versailles signed, with the Allied powers exacting harsh punitive terms on Germany.

August 1st: Hungarian Soviet Republic crushed by Romanian troops.

1920

March 13th-17th: right-wing military leaders Kapp and Lüttwitz attempt a coup, finding short-lived success: Ebert and his ministers flee the capital.

March 24th: Noske resigns.

April: the Communist Workers' Party (KAPD), which is opposed to participation in bourgeois parliaments, splits from the KPD. It plays a leading role in the AAUD union movement.

June 6th: in elections to the Reichstag the SPD vote collapses from 37.9% to 21.6%, but the USPD tally soars from 7.6% to 18%. KPD secures 2%.

July: Second Congress of the Communist International.

October: Halle Congress of the USPD votes to unite with the KPD.

1921

March 27th: in an effort to recapture the initiative advised by Béla Kun, the KPD launches a revolutionary insurrection, 'the March Action', in support of striking miners in the centre of the country. However, it fails to find mass support and is easily broken up by the government. Paul Levi, who openly criticised the action, is expelled from the party.

1923

January 11th: French and Belgian armies occupy the coal-rich Ruhr region after Germany defaults on its reparations payments. German government calls for "passive resistance".

May 26th: fascist Leo Schlageter executed by French troops: KPD leader Karl Radek expresses sympathy for him amid wave of patriotic fervour.

late September: passive resistance ends as German currency collapses amid sustained hyper-inflation. USA intervenes in effort to stabilise the economy.

October 25th: KPD efforts to organise a seizure of power on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution foiled.

November 8th-9th: Adolf Hitler's Nazis make failed coup d'état attempt in Munich's "Beer Hall Putsch".

origins of the movement for workers' councils in germany

1. 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 Soldiers, 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 that during the war 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 HQ. These demands, and the number of grievances, were naturally very high during the War. In the main they concerned intensified work and price in-

creases. But the German unions (like those of other countries) had formed a united front with the Government (the Burgfrieden). They guaranteed social peace in exchange for slight advantages for the workers and in particular participation of the union leaders on various official organisations. Thus the stewards in presenting grievances 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 the 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. 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 important industrial centres were the workers' councils. 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' councils 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 in 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 was of course an essential difference with the Russian position in 1917. In Russia the first revolutionary wave (the February revolution) overthrew the Tsarist 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, gave way to the Republic. But 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 Social Democracy, the bourgeois democratic State was to be the lever for Socialism. They felt it would suffice to have a majority in Parliament, and with Socialist ministers it would be Socialism.



november 9th 1918: karl liebknrecht declares the free socialist republic in berlin

There was also, it is true, a revolutionary current, of which Karl Liebknrecht and Rosa Luxemburg were the best known representatives. Never the less, 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 the 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 exercised by a Party, but would be an 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. The Party even 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 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 consumer Cooperatives 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 the different organisations. The workers were called on to respect and assure the rule of 'Order', proclaiming 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 the Reichstag 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 in the State machine. 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 that the victory of the 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 land owners and the reactionary students.

Political Currents

Four political currents can be roughly distinguished among the workers.

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 state ownership.

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'.

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 Kaiserreich. In 1920, the Anar-

chist unions had about 200,000 members.

The Factory Organisations - 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 conditions, 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 into some hundreds of little groups, uniting some hundreds of 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.

The 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 (for example among the Ruhr miners in 1919). Many tried to unite these organisations and present a united front of factory organisations; the initiative for this coming 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 on the struggle against the trade unions and the legalised workers' councils, and rejected parliamentarism. Each organisation affiliated to the Union had a right to a 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 ever likely to see 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 syndicalists unions (Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands - FAUD) and also some breakaway unions which, a little while later, affiliated to the Moscow controlled Red International of Trade Unions - RILU.

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 FAUD or RILU.

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 (Einheitsorganisation - 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 (KPD)

Before examining the splits in the factory organisation movement, it is necessary to refer to the role of the KPD. 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' (Spartakusbund), there were groups like the 'Internationalists' of Dresden and Frankfurt; the Left Radicals (die Linksradiakalen) 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 December 1918) and formed the Communist Party of Germany. (A translation of the proceedings of this Congress - in French - with other interesting information, will be found in 'Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin' Prudhommeaux, *Cahiers Spartacus*, Oct - Nov 1949)

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 KPD 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 misrepresentation. It

could mean, and the leadership of the KPD most certainly took it to 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 the struggle
- (c) the relationship between 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 KPD supported them; but side by side with support for the new ideas was respect for the old ideological foundation. a Parliamentarism

The KPD 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 take part in the elections or to denounce them. It was debated hotly at the Congress. The majority of the workers wanted to refuse to take part in the 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 to consolidate the power of the bourgeoisie by giving it a 'legalistic' foundation. On the contrary, not only were the proletarian elements of the KPD 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' (Alle Macht an die Arbeiter Räten!).

The leadership of the KPD saw in this anti-parliamentarism, not a revival of revolutionary thought, but a 'regression' to Trade Unionist and even Anarchist ideas, which in their mind belonged to the beginnings 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



december 1918 workers' demonstration tries to win over rank-and-file soldiers. the placard on the right reads "brothers! don't shoot!".

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 KPD differed from that of the factory organisations. This was only to be expected. It aroused fierce discussion after the Congress (by which time both 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!' But the Communist leaders said, 'Stay in the Unions!' The KPD did not think it could capture the Union HQ, but it did think it could capture the leadership of the local branches. It might then, reasoned the KPD, be possible to unite these locals in a new 'revolutionary' trade union movement.

But once again the leadership of the KPD 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 Heidelberg Conference in October 1919, the leadership succeeded in 'democratically' expelling more than half the Party . . . Henceforth the KPD 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 Communist Workers Party of Germany, (KAPD - Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands). The KPD had lost its most militant elements and had henceforth no alternative but to surrender itself unconditionally to the Moscow line in the newly set up Third International. (The Comintern's agent in Germany at this time was Radek).

The Communist Workers' Party (KAPD)

The KAPD entered immediately into a direct relationship with the AAUD. At this time, the KAPD was a force that counted. Its criticisms of trade union and parliamentary action 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 KAPD retained some encumbrances in the form of the old Marxist traditions.

2. 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 :

- the new organisation had to be built up and continue to grow
- its structure must be such that no clique of leaders could establish itself;
- 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 and the second was on the question of 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 with this. In Saxony, Frankfurt and 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 alliances 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. (This was the current analysis accepted in the 20s and 30s)

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 Ruhle, 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 the same time as it is that of the communists, is not socialisation. Through nationalisation of the means of pro-

duction, it is possible to attain a strongly centralised State capitalism, which will have perhaps some superiority to private capitalism, but which will nonetheless be capitalism.'

Communism could only arrive from the action of the workers themselves, struggling actively on their own. For that, new forms of organisation were necessary. But what would such organisations be ? Here opinions divided, 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 interpretations of the future society were.

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 not quantity. Such a party, uniting the most advanced elements of the proletariat, must act as a 'leaven within the masses', that is it must spread propaganda, keep up political discussion etc. Its strategy must be 'class versus 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 shops etc.) which were frequent in the early 20s. 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.

Herman 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 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; H 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 AAUD-E was, as has been said, opposed to a politi-



workers' barricade in berlin, 1919

cal 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 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 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 and trade union partnership.

As a result of the differences between these three trends, 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 direct action, the passionate denunciation of all political and trade union 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 meetings etc.

Disappointment

But it had been believed that the growth of the factory organisations of 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.



a workers' council republic based in munich controlled bavaria from april 7th to may 2nd 1919

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 American financed 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. Notwithstanding 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 the 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 the district, perhaps in a bar where, German fashion, they sang the old workers songs 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 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 (Kommunistische Arbeiter Union Deutschlands) or the Communist Workers Union of Germany. This expressed in its title the idea that the organisation was no longer a 'general organisation' of the 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 KAUD

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, which looked forward to seeing all the workers join their unions, then the working class would be an 'organised class'.

Now however, the KAUD urged workers to organise for themselves their own action 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 class' 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 strengths and weaknesses lay.

Communist Society and the Factory Organisations

This evolution in ideas had to be accompanied by a revision of recognised notions concerning the future communist society. The general ideology in political circles accepted by the masses was State Capitalism. There were many shades of state capitalism, but state capitalist 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 and 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 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 lesser degree of 'federalism' or 'centralism' : the AAUD-E leaned rather more towards federalism, the KAPD - AAUD leaned more towards centralism. In 1923, Karl Schröder (1884 - 1950, Spartacist fighter with a price on his head, then a 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 one of the German Socialist 'martyrs') 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 Bolsheviks, 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 communist society 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 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' (Kuhhandel) politics. After expelling its leader Adam Scharrer for 'making a pact with the enemy' (ie. having a novel published by the German Communist Party publishing house), (Adam Scharrer 1889 -1948 metalworker, Spartacist fighter, afterwards professional leader of the KAPD from which he was expelled in 1930. A novelist like Schröder, he lived in Moscow after 1934. Later moved to what was East Germany where he was regarded as a 'pioneer of proletarian literature'. Needless to say, some features of his past life were not exactly advertised.) - 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 down the Reichstag, he wished by a symbolic gesture to urge the workers to abandon their political apathy and rise against the Nazis. (It should be noted in passing that effective Stalinist propaganda has all but

obscured the heroic role of 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 Thalmann, Communist leaders, in their defence.)

But neither tactic had any results in any case. Germany had gone through an economic crisis of major depth. There was huge army of the unemployed. Unofficial strikes became impossible. While it was true that nobody any longer thought of obeying their trade unions, the latter were collaborating directly with the employers and the 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 trade unions.

3. after hitler

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, on the orders of the GPU (Russian Military Intelligence) when the Red 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 suffered a heavy term of imprisonment.

No trace remained of this movement of workers' councils. The men were liquidated and so were their ideas. Commercial expansion and prosperity directed feelings elsewhere. How has this movement enriched our knowledge of the struggle for workers power ?

The 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 aspiration consists of. In 1930 it published a study (drawn up by the Dutch Council Communist Group) on 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 organisation 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 movement 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 a new basis 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 all social products. The workers are able to run



hitler and his followers mounted a coup attempt in munich in november 1923

production themselves, but only through calculating labour time in different branches of production, and dividing produce by 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 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, Sebastian 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 the members of the commune.'

Sebastian Faure had earlier advocated the 'all this organisation has as 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 with the same with respect to the following quotation from Hilferding, the famous Social Democrat theoretician, for here 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. (Indeed Lenin expresses much the same views in State and Revolution, only in more simple and forceful terms.) 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 had hitherto referred to as the 'People's Government' is supposed to practice 'natural

economics' ie. 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' - in 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 in the means of production without abolishing exploitation;

Secondly, 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 economic 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 ITSELF 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 working class, acting and deliberating through its councils.

Production and Social Wealth

One of the great problems of the revolution is how 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, the wages are only equivalent to 10 hours. In order to gain emancipation the worker must ensure that it is not the value of labour power which decides the pay that is received as a share of social production, but that this share is fixed by that labour itself. Labour equals measure of consumption : that is the principle that must be established.

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 is true for the health services, the care of the sick and old, the administrative services, education 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 a life after and up to a certain fashion. It is known say, that 50 hours work has been done in a time period (a month for example) but it is not known how many hours accrue as wages. The worker is unconscious of the amount of surplus labour. It is known how the possessing class consumes this 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 (not inconsiderable) cost of the Government including the police and the army.

There are two particular characteristics of this surplus product: first, the fact that the working class has not, or has almost never, the decision on the product of this unpaid work. We receive a wage full stop. We can do nothing about the production and distribution of social wealth. The class that hold 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 was often said of course, that there was no more exploitation of the workers in Russia, because private capital had been abolished and the whole of the surplus product was possessed and controlled by the state, which distributed 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 bureauc-

racy, has enriched itself by exorbitant salaries, and maintained (and still maintains) itself in power by assuring higher education to its children and by laws of succession that guarantee wealth accumulated 'for the family'. Let 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 'goodwill': 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 its rulers. The conditions of the workers in so far as their relationship to social wealth was concerned, would be the same, that is 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 become '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 wages 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 - Duhring'.

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 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 its functional organisations. It is on the communistic consciousness of workers themselves, born out of their own struggle, that the ultimate fate of these means of production will depend; whether the working class keeps them in their 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 proletarian movement of the first half of the twentieth century.

autobiography of jan appel

The best-known member of the GIK, Appel was the lead author of The Fundamental Principles Of Communist Production and Distribution. This 1966 autobiography also gives more of an idea of the workers' movement during the 1918-23 revolutionary wave in Germany.

My name is Jan Appel, and I was born in a village in Mecklenburg in 1890. I attended elementary school and learned the shipbuilding trade. Even before my birth my father had been a Socialist. I myself became a member of the Sozial-demokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) on reaching 18 years of age. I saw military service from 1911 to 1913, and thereafter as a soldier in the War. In October 1917 I was demobilised and sent to work in Hamburg as a shipyard worker. In 1918 we called a strike of arma-

ments workers. The strike held out for a whole week at the Vulkan-Werft. Our slogan was: "For Peace !". After one week the strike came to an end, and we had the War Clauses read out, for, according to the law, we were still under military service. At this time I belonged with the Left Radicals in Hamburg. When in November 1918 the sailors rebelled and the Kiel shipyard workers, we heard on the Monday from workers in Kiel what had occurred.

Thereupon a clandestine meeting was held in the shipyard, which was under military occupation. All work ceased, but the workers remained in position in the shipyard. A delegation of 17 volunteers was sent to the Trade Union headquarters, in order to demand the calling of a General Strike. We forced them to hold a meeting. The result however was that well known leaders of the Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (ADGB and the SPD adopted a negative attitude towards the strike. There were sharp exchanges lasting many hours. Meanwhile a spontaneous revolt had broken out during the lunch break at the Blohm und Voss Shipyards, where 17 000 workers were employed. The workers left the factories and the Vulkan shipyards and appeared in front of the Trades Union Building. The leaders had vanished.

The revolution had begun.

In those days I had taken up a position in the forefront of the Left Revolutionary workers' movement in Germany. As a speaker in the factories and at public meetings, as the Chairman of the Revolutionäre Obleute, (Revolutionary Shop Stewards), then only newly formed, and as a member of the Linksradikale Gruppe (Left Radical group), I now turned towards the Spartakusbund (Spartacist League) and later began to play a leading role in the Hamburg District Organisation of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD).

In January 1919 a large meeting of the Revolutionäre Obleute took place in the Trades Union Headquarters Building. This meeting was held after Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had been murdered in Berlin. It was at this meeting that I made the acquaintance of Ernst Thälmann of the Unabhängige Sozial-demokratische Partei (USPD) or the Independent Social Democrats, and during the following night a march was held together with the USPD comrades to the barracks at Barenfeld. The guard and the sleeping soldiers were taken by surprise, and the arming of the workers was set in hand. We had 4000 weapons. After a good week of effort to build up a well-armed fighting force, those with arms began to disperse one after the other and disappeared along with their weapons. It was at this point that we arrived at the conclusion that the unions were quite useless for the purposes of the revolutionary struggle, and at a conference of the Revolutionäre Obleute, the formation of revolutionary factory organisations as the basis for Workers' Councils was decided upon. Moving outwards from Hamburg, propaganda advocating the formation of Factory Organisations (Betriebsorganisationen) was disseminated, and led to the founding of the Allgemeine Arbeiterunion Deutschlands or AAUD (the General Workers Union of Germany).

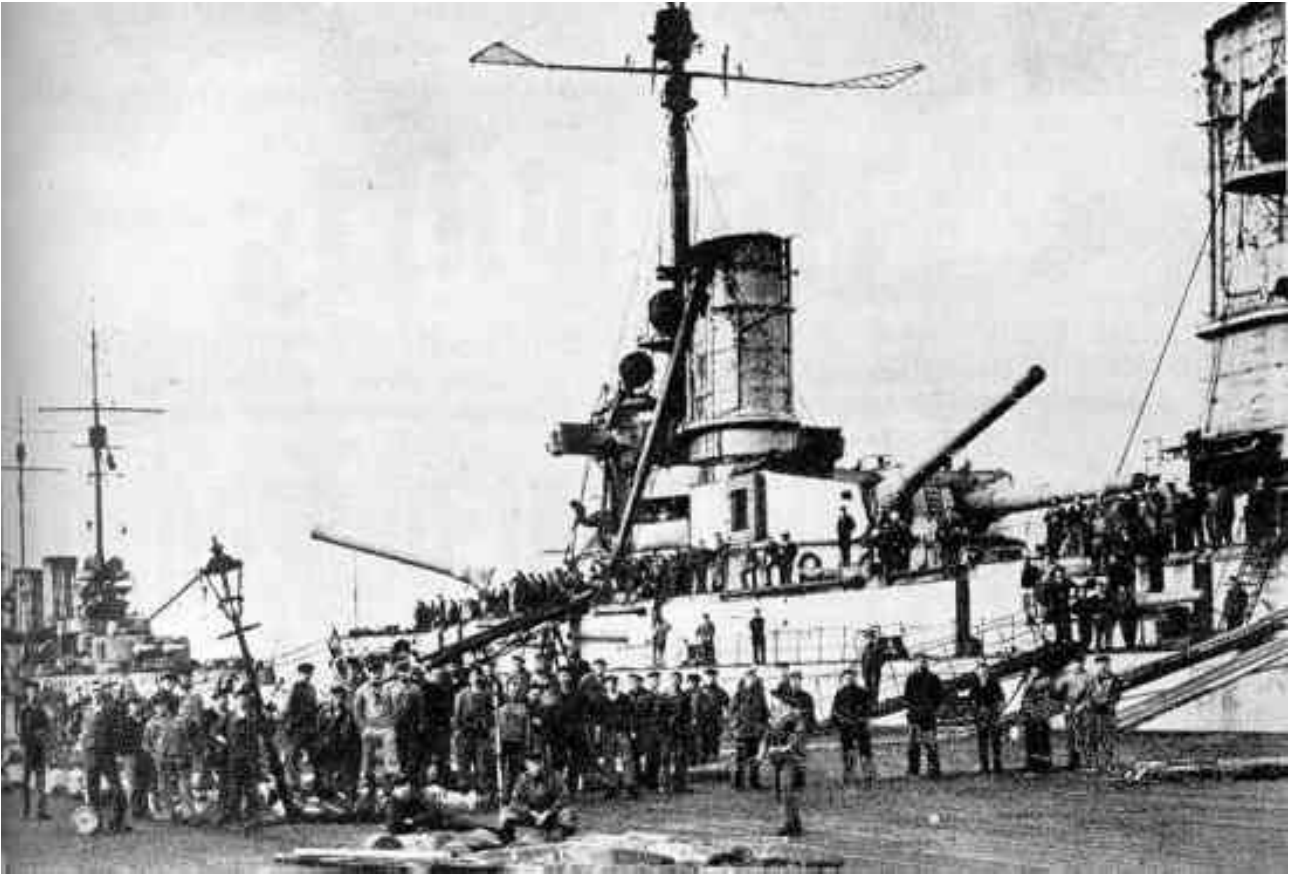
In the course of this development and the accompanying clarification, in which process my main function was as Chairman of the Revolutionäre Obleute, I assumed, partially for organisational reasons, the additional function of Chairman of the Hamburg District of the KPD. It was in this way that I became a delegate to the Heidelberg (Second) Congress of the KPD.

(...)

Now it is 1966, some 47 years after the Heidelberg Congress. There is little point today in examining more closely the discussions and conclusions reached at this Congress. Suffice it to say that at the time it became clear to us that the line and policy of the KPD was designed to turn the main direction and aim of the Party towards participation in the bourgeois Parliament. Since it remained our wish to keep faith with the previously held convictions concerning the policy we were to pursue in relation to the revolutionary workers' movement in Germany, it now became impossible to continue as an organised tendency within the KPD. Shortly after this the Hamburg District of the KPD also came to this decision.

When, in Berlin in April 1920, the group of those in the KPD who held to the same view as the comrades in Hamburg, took steps to form the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD), my participation in the KPD came to an end. Those were the days of the Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch, and I took myself off to the Ruhr. Upon my return to Hamburg, I was informed that, at the Founding Congress of the KAPD, a delegation comprised of Franz Jung and myself had been elected in our absence to make the journey to Russia in order to represent the KAPD at the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), then in session there. It was our task to give a report on the founding of the KAPD, to present its views and policy and to deliver the appropriate charges concerning the traitorous stance adopted by the Zentrale (Central Committee) of the KPD towards the struggle in the Ruhr.

It was impossible for us to make our way overland, and passage through the Baltic Sea was also closed. The sole available route open to us seemed to me to lie through the North Sea and the Atlantic, passing Norway and Cape North and so into the Arctic Ocean, to reach Archangelsk and possibly Murmansk. We were, however uncertain as to whether or not this area had been retaken by the Russians, that is if the Bolsheviks had reoccupied it. A short time previous to this a small news item had appeared in the press to the effect that the American fleet, together with its complement of troops which up till then had occupied the area, had now been withdrawn. In spite of this uncertainty, we decided to risk the journey. A comrade of my acquaintance, Herman Knörfen, was a sailor on board the steamship Senator Schröder. This ship made a regular four-weekly cruise to the fishing grounds around Iceland and, upon its return, stayed for at least a week in Cuxhafen. I made a search for Herman Knörfen. Just at that time he happened to be in Hamburg, and the ship was in dock at Cuxhafen and due to start its outward voyage in three days time. Knörfen was willing, and the ma-



sailors mutiny on der flotte anfang

jority of the crew likewise - indeed, it was not for nothing that we were living in revolutionary times !

Franz Jung and I, with a further revolutionary sailor, embarked as stowaways. As we passed the northern tip of Heligoland, we arrested the captain and his officers at gunpoint and locked them up in the forward cabin. The journey began on the 20th April and ended on 1st May at Alexandrovsk, the seaport of Murmansk. We possessed sea charts only for the area up to Trondheim in Norway, and beyond that all we had to guide us was a small map in a sailing handbook, which offered a view of the globe looking down with the North Pole at its centre. The coasts of Norway, Russia, Siberia and Alaska were to be seen on the edges of this map. This was the sole means of navigation by which our new Master, Kapitän Herman Knörfen had to steer his course! At the northern tip of Tromsø (Hammerfest), we suffered two days of unrelenting storm followed by thick snow, so that any sight of the distant coast was obliterated. We were all extremely tired, since the uncertain situation made a continuous and wary watch imperative. In this way, dog tired, we sailed towards the south, seeking out the coastline or any speck of land where we might find some rest. It was nothing but blind good fortune that made us sail into the fjord of Alexandrovsk, so that we were able to tie up to a buoy left behind by the American fleet. It required several further hours before we could be sure of our whereabouts or that the Americans had taken their leave. Behind the craggy wall of snow appeared a black column of smoke which,

from a considerable distance, gradually approached us as we and our ship rested on the water.

Then, it seemed from out of the very wall of the cliff, a steam tug boat appeared, and finally we saw a large red flag. This was for us a sign that we had arrived in the Land of the Communists. After a while a motor-boat hove into view, filled with armed men. We took hold of a tow rope and sailed between the cliff walls inland in the direction of Murmansk. We were received as Comrades, and thereafter travelled on the railway, built during the war, to Petrograd now Leningrad.

In Leningrad, after we had spoken with Zinoviev, the Chairman of the Communist International, we travelled on to Moscow. There, a few days after our arrival, we delivered our statement to the Executive Committee of the Communist International. Our case was discussed, but as to who spoke and what was said I no longer have any recollection. However, we did not receive an honest reply, except that we were told that we were shortly to be received by Lenin himself. And indeed, this did then occur, after about a week or a little longer.

Lenin, of course, opposed our and the KAPD's standpoint. During the course of a second reception, a little while later, he gave us his answer. This he did by reading to us extracts from his pamphlet *Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder*, selecting those passages which he considered relevant to our case. He held the manuscript of this document which had not yet been printed, in his

hand. The Communist International's reply, delivered initially by Lenin himself, was that the viewpoint of the ECCI was the same as that of the KPD, which we had already left.

After a fairly long return journey via Murmansk and Norway, it became necessary for Jan Appel to disappear from view, and my activities in Germany were continued by Jan Arndt. Working whenever necessary to keep body and soul together, in Seefeld near Spandau and in Ammerndorf near Halle, and speaking in meetings from time to time - this was the tenor of my life. Much the same kind of activity took place in the Rhineland and the Ruhr, where I was also instrumental in organising the regular publication of the AAUD's journal *Der Klassenkampf* (Class Struggle). In 1920 the KAPD had been accepted as a sympathising party into the Third International. This had come about as a result of discussion between the ECCI and certain leading members of the KAPD. The latter consisted of Herman Gorter from Holland, Karl Schröder from Berlin, Otto Rühle the former SPD Reichstag deputy, and Fritz Rasch. At the Third Congress of the Communist International in Moscow, we were afforded every freedom to express our point of view concerning the kind of policy which should guide our work. But we met with no agreement from the delegates from the other countries present. The main content of the decisions which were adopted at this Congress held that we should continue to cooperate with the KPD in the old unions and in the democratic assemblies, and that we should drop our slogan "All Power to the Workers' Councils!"

This was the well known policy as set forth in the "21 Points" which we should follow if we wished to remain an affiliated organisation of the Communist International. We, of course, spoke up against this and declared that a decision on this could only be taken by the relevant organ of the KAPD. This indeed was done upon our return. Then I went back to the Ruhr and to Rhineland-Westphalia to begin activity once again, just as before the Congress. This spell of activity was brought to an end in November 1923 as a result of my arrest. The immediate cause of this was the occupation of the Rhineland and the Ruhr by the French, but since the indictment was one of stealing a ship [ie piracy], this could only be heard in Hamburg. I narrowly succeeded in avoiding extradition (to the non occupied part of Germany) by representing myself as a political prisoner and invoking the assistance of the French occupation authorities. However, since an extradition agreement between Germany and the Allied powers was imminent, I agreed voluntarily to a deportation order to Hamburg. There I was tried and sentenced, and so spent time in prison. This came to an end at Christmas 1925.

In April 1926 I went to Zaandam in Holland to earn my living as a shipyard worker. Immediately upon my arrival I wrote to a comrade, whom I did not know personally but whose address had been given to me. It was Henk Canne-Meijer. Together with Piet Kurman, he looked me up in Zaandam. Both held views identical to those of the KAPD, and they had broken with the Communist Party of

Holland. But they had no contact with the existing KAP group in Holland. They were both good friends of Herman Gorter. We exchanged our views and experiences, and held regular meetings with others of like mind. In this way we gradually crystallised into a group which we called the Group of International Communists (GIK). The publication of our positions and analyses took place through the PSIC (Press Service of International Communists), which is the information organ of the International Communists.

During my time in the remand prison in Düsseldorf, a period of altogether seventeen months, I had found the opportunity to study Volumes I and II of Marx's *Capital*. Coming as I did from years of revolutionary struggle, followed by internal factional strife within the Communist Movement and the recognition of the fact that the Russian Revolution had led to the consolidation of a state economy under the rule of a party apparatus, such that we were compelled to coin the term "state communism" or even finally "state capitalism" in order to describe it, I finally came to reach an overall unified view. The time for considered, consciously evaluated thought had arrived; the time at which one allows all past experience and activity to pass in review before one's inner eye, so as to find the road which we workers must take in order to leave behind the oppression of capitalism and to reach the liberating goal of communism.

As a revolutionary worker, I came through a study of Marx's *Capital* to understand the capitalist world as I had never understood it before. How it is compelled to follow an intrinsic, law governed development; how its basic order unfolds over a long period, overcoming all conditions inherited from the pre-capitalist past in order to consolidate its mode of production, and thus forming the seed bed for new and yet more intense contradictions in its internal order; how it brings about ever and again new changes to its internal social structure, but simultaneously its most basic contradictions are pushed forward to new and ever more glaring levels of antagonism. It first expropriates the working people from the soil and their piece of land; then it appropriates their independent means of life and so creates the conditions in which it can also appropriate the products of their labour. The right of disposal over the fruits of labour, and hence over the producers themselves, falls into ever fewer hands. Furthermore, the truth that the sole achievements of the Russian Revolution were that the Russian Communist Party had been constituted as a totally centralised despotic instrument of power, equipped with all necessary means for exercising state oppression over the still dispossessed and propertyless producers was a fact we were forced to recognise.

But our thoughts went further: the most profound and intense contradiction in human society resides in the fact that, in the last analysis, the right of decision over the conditions of production, over what and how much is produced and in what quantity, is taken away from the producers themselves and placed in the hands of highly centralised organs of power. Today, over forty years after I first came to this awareness as I sat in prison, I see this development unfolding to an ever greater degree in all parts of the world. This basic division in human society

can only be overcome when the producers finally assume their right of control over the conditions of their labour, over what they produce and how they produce it. On this subject I wrote many pages while I was in prison. It was with these thoughts in mind and with the writings relevant to them, that I arrived in Holland to see the Group of International Communists.

(...)

Today, in the year 1966, forty years have passed since we first met together in Amsterdam as the Group of International Communists (GIK), in order to express our new thoughts and to discuss them. The knowledge that the Russian Revolution was leading to the establishment of state communism, or more accurately state capitalism, represented a new school of thought at the time. It also necessitated disillusioning oneself of the view that a Communist form of society, which also implies the liberation of labour from the shackles of wage-slavery, would be the necessary and direct outcome of the Russian Revolution. It was likewise a wholly new conception to concentrate one's attention upon the essence of the process of liberation from wage-slavery, that is to say, upon the exercise of power by the factory organisations, the Workers' Councils, in their assumption of control over the factories and places of work; in order that flowing from this, the unit of the average social hour of labour, as the measure of the production times of all goods and services in both production and distribution, might be introduced.

In this way money and all other forms of value would be abolished and so deprived of their power to manifest themselves as Capital, as the social force which enslaves human beings and exploits them. This knowledge and its fruit, gained over long periods of work in the Group of International Communists in Amsterdam, have been brought together in ordered form in the book *The Fundamental Principles of communist Production and Distribution* (Grundprinzipien kommunistischer Produktion und Verteilung), published by ourselves. It consists of 169 pages of typewritten script. In order to gain a brief insight into what is written there, the following excerpt from the Foreword may be quoted:

The *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* had their origin during a 4 year period of group discussions and controversy within the Group of International Communists of Holland. The first edition appeared in the year 1930 in Germany, published in Berlin by the *Neue Arbeiterverlag* (New Workers' Publishing House), the publishing organ of the AAUD, the revolutionary factory organisation. On account of financial difficulties, a Dutch edition in the desired format and published at the required time proved to be beyond our capabilities. Instead, it was published in serial form as a supplement to the Press Information Service of the Group of International Communists (PSIC). On account of the translation, this edition is not quite identical with the German one, although nothing essential in the content has been altered. The only amendments were in the order in which the material was presented and in the various formulations, in order to attain a clearer presentation. It is hoped

that the *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* will lead to a thorough discussion and so contribute both to greater clarity and to unity of aim within the revolutionary proletariat, and so result in the various tendencies adopting a common course.'

In a new edition it was written:

"This book can only express in economic terms what must first be achieved in the sphere of political action. For this it was necessary to begin, not merely with the abolition of private property in the means of production, but with the elimination of wage labour as such. It is from this basis that all our thoughts proceed. Our analysis therefore led to the inescapable conclusion that, once the workers have won power through their mass organisations, they will be able to hold on to that power only provided that they eliminate wage-labour from all economic life and instead adopt as the nodal point of all economic activity the duration of labour time expended in the production of all use values, as the equivalent measure replacing money values, and around which the whole of economic life would revolve."

The German edition of the year 1930 was later seized and destroyed. A short précis was subsequently published in New York, and also a German version in the journal *Kampfsignal* ('A call to struggle'); whilst in 1955 in Chicago, an English language version appeared in *Council Correspondence*.

I participated personally in the political activity of the GIK in Holland. In April of 1933 it was made known to me that "a friendly Germany" wished to see me once again. I was to be expelled as an "undesirable alien"! However, the helpful Police Commissioner in Amsterdam afforded me the time in which to bring my personal affairs into order. The moment had come once again to go "underground". Jan Appel once more disappeared from the scene. When, later, the Second World War finally broke out, I began to play a part in the resistance movement directed against the régime of the Hitler fascists, who had occupied the country in 1940.

After Sneevliet, the well known leader of the Left in Holland, together with between 13 to 18 other comrades, had been executed by firing squad, we continued to pursue the resistance struggle with the remainder of the comrades. After 1945 we published the weekly journal *Spartacus*. This continued until 1948. As a result of a serious street accident which I suffered at this time, I had to be placed in hospital, and so once again reappeared on the surface of social life. A testament from over 20 bourgeois citizens, good and true, was required in order to protect me from being simply pushed over the border! That I had been active in the resistance movement decided the issue in my favour. Jan Appel made his appearance once again, but it was necessary for him to refrain for a time from all political activity.

This is also the end of this volume of my life history.

Jan Appel, 1966

“The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economic foundation upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule.” - Karl Marx

draft platform of the group of international communists

We are communists: we fight for a new self-managed society based on collective ownership of the means of production and distribution and an economy organised not for value production but for the well-being of humanity and in harmony with our natural environment. Communism will abolish the system of wage-labour so that our ability to work will cease to be a commodity to be sold to an employer; it will be a truly classless society; there will be no state, no managers or organisations superior to those of workers' self-management.

We are internationalists: we seek the greatest possible collaboration with communists in other countries; we build solidarity with workers' movements around the world; we are opposed to all borders and immigration controls; and we unconditionally support the right of nations to self-determination.

We know that communism can only come from below, through the organisations of the workers themselves. This conception of communism has nothing in common with the fake “socialisms” of the Stalinist state planning of the former USSR, of the sweatshops of China, and social-democratic “humane” capitalism. No nation in the world today is communist, nowhere is the economy managed by the workers. These models of “socialism” have all proven to be complete failures, maintaining and in many cases aggravating the working class's lack of self-determination. There is no particular connection between socialism and nationalisation by the state, which merely replaces one set of managers with another; alongside fighting day-to-day battles we advocate a struggle for vestiges of workers' control in the here and now as preparatory steps towards real workers' self-management and collective ownership.

We are the most consistent advocates of social liberation in all its forms. We fight sexual repression, sexism and homophobia and advocate sexual liberation; we champion anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles; we oppose all limits to freedom of speech and free cultural expression. These struggles are not just some adjunct to working-class struggle but are the cornerstone of democracy and human freedom.

We know that it is impossible for the working class to fight for and create a communist society if it is unable to control its own organisations: we support rank and file movements against the bureaucrats who lord it over the unions and parties of the left; we are for openness and democracy in the workers' movement.

We have no gods, not even revolutionary ones. We reject the practice of using the works of this or that socialist of decades past as sacred texts from which “revealed truths” can be read off as gospel. The “traditions” to which the traditional left groups appeal are universally ahistorical and anachronistic, used for the sake of feigning historical legitimacy rather than to critically examine and draw lessons from the past.

We believe that the defeats of the workers' movement in the last three decades; the decay of the left and the absolute poverty of its ideas and slogans; its abandonment of class politics; and the sectarianism of the groups vying for supremacy with their own front campaigns and so-called unity projects; are all evidence of the need for ground-up rethinking of the left's project and the re-composition of the workers' movement.

send correspondence to:

The Commune, 2nd Floor, 145-157 St John Street, London EC1V 4PY

e-mail:

uncaptiveminds@gmail.com

thecommuneco.uk