

# TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN COMMUNIST WORKERS PARTY (KAPD)

## 1 The Motives for the Foundation of the Party and the Period of Revolutionary Action.

The German Communist Workers' Party (KAPD) arose from a period of the fiercest revolutionary struggles: its history is therefore a part of the history of the German Revolution. Its development was influenced by the fact that when the German proletariat was propelled into actively revolutionary mass action for the first time, the bourgeois dictatorship was still using all the methods of the 'state of siege' which had characterised the war years (suppression of speeches, meetings publication etc.). This made the process of political clarification impossible. It was only with difficulty realised that the workers' organisations (which in the years before the war, because they were based upon a Marxist theory of class struggle, of history and their destiny, were supposed to grasp the developing revolutionary situation) had instead made a pact with the power of the old state on the basis of the patriotic 'Burgfrieden' concept. The unavoidable consequence of this pact was that the pre-war leadership had to stop popular opposition to the war and to force through, at all costs, an anti-revolutionary policy in line with the war aims of Ludendorff and they had to abandon any idea that revolutionary action was a factor in the creation of socialism. Through this policy they won legality of operation and an unlimited ability to collect funds and publish their press. The Party and Trades union leadership were assured of the use of their enormous organisational apparatus in the pursuit of their aims. Thus it was shown, as clear as day, that when the downtrodden masses came to struggle for their liberation, they would have to fight not just against the state and its war but also against the leading figures of their own organisations. These complications led to the miscarriage of the most important task of the awakened proletariat, the task of transcending the element of confusion that inevitably exists in every revolution and of moulding the conscious action of the class.

If these considerations are set out here at the beginning of this study it is not in order to polemicise, or to construct a revolutionary critique, but because these connections, inasmuch as they were the starting point for the revolution, were important in the creation of divisions within the proletariat, and therefore for the particular structure of the individual parties whose birth and development can only be understood by a knowledge of these points of departure. From this knowledge comes the understanding that for a long time the negative response to the old workers' movement dominated inside the opposition and that it only tardily moved towards positive standpoints, right from the time when the mood of the proletariat was ready for solidarity action to the time when complete confusion and despair prevailed, and always in opposition to a bourgeoisie which never lost its power to resist.

In this confused situation the **Spartakusbund** split

off at the end of December 1918 from union with the USPD and joined with the IKD to form the KPD(Spartakusbund). Its leaders, Karl Leibknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and soon also Leo Jogisches, were shot down by White Guards, and it was not possible to elect a new 'Zentrale' under the conditions prevailing at that time. The 'Zentrale' was therefore augmented through co-option and fell presently under the leadership of Paul Levi who, under the influence of Karl Radek (the Russian emissary under the pseudonym Bronski), led the Party from activity to passivity. This, at any rate, was the assessment of a gradually growing opposition which was voiced in the Party press, especially in the important Districts of Berlin, Saxony and Hamburg. The 'Zentrale' considered that this opposition was but an erratic and indeterminate movement, that it isolated struggles and squandered their potential, and therefore were blameworthy. This was in contrast to how the opposition saw itself, as using its strength to push the broad masses into activity and thus bringing clarity and concentration to active revolutionary tendencies.

The 'Zentrale' adopted, and remained true to the tactic of turning away from 'revolutionary assault politics' (this was the term used in the opposition press and in the complaints made to Moscow), and shrank back from every struggle where bourgeois society gave the working class an opportunity, and returned instead to political work in Parliament and economic work inside the Trade Unions. The opposition, for its part, felt that parliamentary and trade union activity was incompatible with being a revolutionary.

There were three issues in dispute: on the type of organisation the Party should have, on its orientation towards Parliament and on whether to act within the trade unions or to create new forms of economic struggle. These points of dispute led to the schism within the Party and the foundation of the KAPD. How this schism developed is shown in the following Report of the KAPD to the Executive Committee of the Third International in June 1921:

" The founding Conference of the KPD (Spartakusbund) decided by an overwhelming majority to set itself in opposition to all other parties by adopting a policy of non-participation in the elections for a National Assembly. After the struggles of Spring and Summer 1919, there was a noticeable shift of the Reichzentrale (leadership) towards parliamentarism. The opinion of the membership was opposed to such a shift, so a meeting of functionaries of the Greater Berlin region in August 1919 delivered an ultimatum to comrade Klara Zetkin to lay down her parliamentary mandate or leave the Party. (She was at this time still sitting as an 'Independent' member in the State Parliament of Wurtemberg.) Comrade Zetkin made no move and the Party leadership (of which she was a member) supported her. In fact they went further, and attacked those groups which held fast to the decisions of the Party Congress, sabotaging their agitational work through the cutting off of funds etc.

The development of the opposition on the question of the Trades Unions took roughly the following course. The proletariat had learned the lessons of the struggles of 1919, that the Trades Unions were not only completely unnecessary for waging great struggles and mass actions, but also acted as the strongest fetters on the revolution. Everywhere workers moved spontaneously to setting up their own proletarian organisations of struggle, built on the basis of the factory, not of craft, so as not to divide the working class and stimulate inter-class disputes, but instead to unite the revolutionary class where they were naturally one, in the factory. These '**Betrieb Organisations**' (BOs) arose spontaneously in the Ruhr, Upper Silesia, in central Germany, Berlin, in the Wasserkante, in short, in every industrial region of Germany. When the KPD leadership saw the rise and growth of this mass movement they tried at first by all means to promote these organisations.

At that point leaders such as Levi, Korting and Frollich put out the line of abandoning the trade unions and building BOs. With the change in direction of the leadership in the late summer of 1919, these same people, led by Paul Lange, called for the fiercest struggle against the BOs and demanded the entry of communists into the trade unions and for them to work there. From that point on those members of the leadership who had helped build up the BOs became their most determined opponents. The mass of the party membership however, supported the BOs which had come together in the **Allemagne Arbeiterunion(AAU)**; and the gulf between the Party leadership and the great mass of the membership, especially in the industrial heartlands, grew daily.

Then a Party Conference was called on 20-24th October 1919 in Heidelberg. There the Party leadership surprised the Party delegates with the famous, so-called, 'Heidelberg Theses'. These had not been discussed beforehand by the membership and were completely new to the delegates. The eighteen delegates who spoke out against all this were excluded from the Conference, after which a majority of votes were secured by various means for the leadership. The opposition areas did not at once try to found a new Party, but wanted to convene a new Party Conference where all these questions would be voted on after the membership had voiced their opinions. In order not to lose contact with each other they chose the North-West Region (Bremen) to operate as Information Bureau for the opposition. The following months were full of internal conflict - resolutions etc waged in the sharpest manner by the leadership. They called open meetings in Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg and other cities opposed to the resident groups of the Party. In February 1920 the Districts of Greater Berlin, North, NW and E Saxony were expelled from the Party by the leadership, which then attempted to found new organisations in those places. An example of how few adherents the 'Zentrale' had in these areas is shown by the District of Greater Berlin. Out of 8,000 members about 500 left and founded a new party organisation acceptable to the leadership."

For the moment the Districts which had been expelled did not want to form a new, independent party: they held back from that step for two reasons. It was hoped that as a consequence of the growing numerical strength of the opposition, it

would be possible to win a majority for their views and preserve the unity of the Party. In addition it was thought worthwhile to remain in the Third International where we could explain the theories of the opposition: this was also because of the fact that the members of the Amsterdam Bureau of the Communist International, Herman Gorter and Anton Pannekoek, who were held in the highest regard by the Russians, adhered to the theory of anti-Parliamentarism and were for the building of BOs. This expectation, however, was deceptive: Karl Radek, who had just come out of prison, took a robust stand against the opposition and also enforced the dissolution of the Amsterdam Bureau. Radek, who held conferences with industrialists like Rathenau and Deutsch, and with politicians of all tendencies, took the leadership of the German Revolution in hand and was the mentor of the 'Zentrale'. The decisive impulse for the constitution of the opposition as a new party was a result of the conduct of the leadership during the Kapp Putsch. At a moment when the opposition was in a condition of the greatest readiness, the revolution was thrown into confusion by the leaflet of the 'Zentrale', composed by Bronski (Radek) and at all later times defended by him: - 'Against the General Strike! Lay Down your Arms!' The next day however revealed that the leadership were completely isolated so they disowned their own leaflet. The Comintern too energetically disavowed them. These events had their well known aftermath. The KPD had two members in the discussions on the so-called 'Bielefelder Agreements' and sanctioned them. The opposition sought with every means to rouse the masses in opposition to these agreements, stating that once the military had succeeded in disarming the workers they would resort to their usual well worn methods. Now let us continue to quote from the aforementioned Report on the events which followed and which led to the founding of the KAPD.

" The Kapp Putsch had shown that the leadership of the official party was in agreement with the abandonment of revolutionary struggle and was slipping onto an opportunist road. It showed that two different parties had been created whose combination was as impossible as the mixing of fire and water. The Berlin organisation therefore called a conference of the opposition for the 3rd April 1920 to formalise their constitution as the **German Communist Workers Party**. About 30,000 members joined from the old KPD although some individual Regions only joined after the founding Conference. The tasks and activity of the new Party were clearly set out. In abandoning Parliamentarism it had to weigh up the national and international political situation in order to take up the struggle against the bourgeois state and, above all, to prevent the state strengthening itself, so that in the extraordinarily complex political and economic situation existing, the proletariat remained prepared and able to seize power.

An example of the activity of the KAPD in this direction can be seen during the Russo-Polish War in the summer of 1920. The KAPD called on workers in the munitions factories to stop work and to sabotage munitions which were destined for Poland. The KPD called this revolutionary romanticism until the Comintern's Executive Committee in Moscow made a similar Appeal. The KAPD urged workers to the highest pitch of activity, towards the election of political councils and for a programme of revolutionary action, for a united front with their Russian brothers as the Red Army neared East Prussia, for the building of a united front between Soviet Russia and Soviet Germany. We wanted an

uprising to come while the KPD merely gave out the useless slogan "Neutrality towards Russia". From verbal passivity they then passed over into action - not against the bourgeoisie and their state, but against the KAPD which was propagandising and preparing for an uprising. In 'Rote Fahne' and 'Freiheit' of 19th and 20th August, and in their provincial papers there appeared warning calls against the slogans of the KAPD. The working class, ready in many ways for a struggle, was confused and the movement died away at an embryonic stage. This is a typical example of how the leadership of the KPD produced confusion in the working class. With regard to the 'March Action' (about which we will have cause to speak later), and which was unleashed by the KPD itself, we will see the same dynamic in action, that of a movement that had the appearance of a putsch. We constantly sought to widen economic struggles into political struggles for the seizure of power. The greatest struggle of this sort was the electricians' strike of November 1920 in Berlin which finally collapsed as a result of the conduct of the KPD 'Zentrale' in refusing to call for a General Strike."

Co-operation between the two Communist Parties took place during the struggle in Central Germany in Easter 1921, in the events known as the 'March Action'. This movement was unleashed by the entrance of troops into the Central German industrial region, in order to occupy the factories, in particular the Leuenawerke. The struggle was conducted by a joint district commission of the KAPD and the VKPD (these events occurred shortly after the regroupment of the left of the USPD into the KPD at the Halle Conference), and the organisation of the fighting was in the hands of Max Holz who belonged to the KAPD. The result of the struggle is well known. The KAPD argued in its press and through its member on the Executive Committee of the Third International, that an essential factor which contributed to the wrecking of the Action was that the VKPD introduced confusion into the ranks of their unprepared members by, without any ideological or organisational preparation, completing reversing their tactics from those previously adhered to. When, month after month, you propound a parliamentary-trade union tactic, it is obvious that headquarters will not take the broad mass of the membership with them if these tactics are suddenly reversed. Great masses of workers don't react to a sudden change of command like a company of soldiers in the Wilhelmitic army. Instead of the dialectical play of forces involved in an upsurge of proletarian activity, the KPD 'Zentrale' had set up a putsch. The KAPD fought against the declared policy of the Third International that more than anything it was necessary to draw the broad mass of workers into a unified party and then revolutionise them by means of that party. It argued that this was a non-marxist view of the laws of mass psychology. The transformation of proletarian ideology into class consciousness cannot come by such a means.

The leadership of the KPD at that time excused every failure by this rationalisation: The time available to revolutionise the masses who came from the USPD was too short. But the passage of time showed that the reverse was the case: the dead weight of the broad mass who joined the party out of sympathy with Soviet Russia, but without a clear and firm insight into the politics of revolutionary class struggle were not revolutionised by the VKPD. on the contrary the VKPD was de-revolutionised by

those masses. This consequence was also made manifest by the struggle within the trades unions.

The March Action was to be the last attempt to unleash the latent revolutionary element of class consciousness on the widest basis in a struggle for the seizure of power. All these attempts failed for two reasons: the fundamental opposition of both Social Democracy and Trades Unions to any active revolutionary orientation of class struggle, and because of the behaviour of the KPD which wanted a dictatorship of leaders instead of a class dictatorship. In addition to this, this leadership, because of its vacillating and contradictory conception of revolutionary politics, repeatedly changed its positions and because of this introduced confusion into the working class and hindered the development of class consciousness among the broad masses. Further to these two factors, the failure of the revolution in Germany was the result of the opposition of the bourgeoisie only insofar as this itself was dependant on the forgoing factors. In the first few years after the war the bourgeoisie was completely split between the monarchical circle and the rising 'democratic' faction, both politically and economically, over the question of inflation and the economy. The concentration of and unity of the bourgeoisie is characteristic only of the present phase of development. This section does not concern itself with the influence of the Russians on the German Revolution. This comes under the heading of the separation of the KAPD from the Third International. We will now return to the inner development of the party after its foundation.



The German Revolution

## 2. Internal Factional Struggles.

It has already been shown how this party arose out of the opposition of the membership of the KPD to the party leadership. The party therefore gathered up almost all the groups which stood in opposition to the domineering conduct of the 'Zentrale', without any predetermined surety that this opposition was homogeneous or that it had become homogeneous in its conception and political tasks. The struggle against the old party was accompanied by a process of internal clarification which, above all, was directed against two tendencies: against the "national bolshevik" programme of the Hamburg opposition (Fritz Wolfheim and Heinrich Laufenberg)

and against the adherents of the so-called 'Unitary Organisation' and deniers of the need for a party (Otto Ruhle - Dresden).

Wolfheim and Laufenberg supported a programme calling for a revolutionary alliance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in favour of a generalised popular uprising against Entente imperialism, and regarded the call to desert issued by the Spartakusbund in the last months of the war as treachery.

Shortly after the foundation of the party the Northern Regional Conference, in a leaflet on 1st May 1920, came out with an open call in the spirit of this theory, signed by Wolfheim and Laufenberg. The Party Conference of August 1920 in Berlin - Weisensee took a firm stand against the theory of the national bolshevik group: The region was expelled and rebuilt anew in the course of time. Wolfheim and Laufenberg soon lost all influence in the proletariat and together with officers and businessmen founded a "Society for the Study of German Communism".

While with the national bolsheviks it was only a question of a small group which had only a small following of propagandisers and did not extend beyond one region, the controversy with the Unifiers under the leadership of Ruhle was with an outspokenly anarcho-sindicalist tendency which had a wide following throughout the proletariat. It was shot through with petit bourgeois ideology that above all denied the need for a party as an organ of the proletariat and merely called for a coming together of the economic organisations on a federalist basis with full autonomy for each region. This struggle was fought inside the AAU from which this group split off to form the AAUE. The adherents of this 'Emheits-tendency', who based themselves on the American IWW and their ideas of the "One Big Union", left the party. The KAPD well understood that in their ranks were many good and authentic revolutionaries who had fallen into the extreme position of opposing all parties because of the treachery of those mass parties built on leadership principles. But for the preparation of the revolution such an organisation is a prerequisite that can only be superseded in a classless society. The position of the KAPD on the question of the Party was laid out in the **Theses on the Role of the Party in the Proletarian Revolution** of July 1921. Because the meaning of this question is of the greatest importance, they are reprinted below:

#### **Theses on the Role of the Party in the Proletarian Revolution.**

1. It is the historical task of the proletarian revolution to bring the disposal of the wealth of the earth into the hands of the working masses, to put an end to the private ownership of the means of production, thus rendering impossible the existence of a separate, exploiting ruling class. This task involves freeing the economy of society from all fetters of political power and is, of course, posed on a world scale.

2. The ending of the capitalist mode of production, the taking over of this production, and putting it in the hands of the working class, the ending of all class divisions and the withering away of political institutions and the building of a communist economy is a historic process whose individual moments cannot be predicted exactly. Nevertheless, with regard to this question, on some points the role which political power will play in this process is settled.

3. The proletarian revolution is at one and the same time a political and an economic process. Neither process can be solved at a sole national level; the creation of communism on a world scale is an absolute necessity for its survival. Therefore it follows that until the final destruction of the power of capital on a world scale, the victorious sections of the revolutionary proletariat still needs political power to defend itself against, and if possible attack, the external political power of the counterrevolution.

4. In addition to these reasons which make political power necessary for the victorious sections of the proletariat, there are additional reasons relating to the internal development of the revolution. The revolution - viewed as a political process - has indeed one decisive moment, the taking of political power. The revolution - taken as an economic process - has no such decisive moment. Long work will be necessary to take over the direction of the economy on the part of the proletariat, to eradicate the profit motive and to replace it with an economy based upon need. It is self evident that during this period, the bourgeoisie will not remain idle, but will try to regain power for the purpose of defending their profits. It follows that in the countries with a developed democratic ideology - that is, in the advanced industrial countries - they will seek to mislead the workers with democratic slogans. It is thus essential that the workers possess a strong, unwavering political power until they have taken over, in concrete terms, control of the economy and broken the grip of the bourgeoisie. This period is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

5. The need for the proletariat to hold political power after the political victory of the revolution confirms, as a consequence, the necessity for a political organisation of the proletariat just as much after as before the seizure of power.

6. The political workers' councils (Soviets) are the historically determined, all-embracing form of proletarian power and administration: at all times they supersede the individual points of the class struggle and pose the question of complete power.

7. The historically determined form of organisation, which groups together the most conscious and prepared proletarian fighters, is the party. Since the historical task of the proletarian revolution is communism, this party, in its programme and its theory, can only be a communist party. The Communist party must have a thorough and worked out programmatic basis and must be organised and disciplined in its entirety from below, as a unified will. It must be the head and the hand of the revolution.

8. The main task of the Communist party, just as much after as before the seizure of power is, in the confusion and fluctuations of the proletarian revolution, to be the one clear and unflinching compass towards communism. The Communist party must show the masses the way forward in all situations, not only in words, but also in deeds. In all the issues of the political struggle before the seizure of power, it must bring out, in the clearest manner, the difference between reform and revolution, must brand every deviation towards reformism as a betrayal of the revolution, and of the working class, as giving a new lease of life to the old system of profit. Just as there can be no community of interest between exploiter and exploited, so there can be no unity between reform and revolution. Social Democratic reformism -

whatever mask it might choose to wear - is today the greatest obstacle to the revolution, and the last hope of the ruling class.

9. The Communist party must therefore unflinchingly oppose every manifestation of reformism and opportunism with equal determination in its programme, its press, its tactics and activities. Especially, it should never allow its membership to expand faster than the existing communist kernel can absorb.

10. Not only seen as a whole but in its individual moments the revolution is a dialectical process; in the course of the revolution the masses make inevitable vacillations. The Communist party, as the organisation of the most conscious elements, must itself strive not to succumb to these vacillations, but to put them right. Through the clarity and principled nature of their slogans, their unity of words and deeds, their involvement in the struggle, the correctness of their predictions, they must help the proletariat to quickly and completely overcome each vacillation. Throughout its activity the Communist party must develop the class consciousness of the proletariat, even at the cost of being momentarily apparently in opposition to the masses. Only thus will the party, in the course of the revolutionary struggle, win the trust of the masses and accomplish a revolutionary education of the widest numbers.



### All Power to the Workers Councils!

11. The Communist party naturally must not lose contact with the masses. This means, aside from the obvious duty of indefatigable propaganda, that it must also intervene in any movement of the workers caused by economic needs and attempt to clarify such movements and develop them by encouraging appeals for active solidarity so that the struggles are extended, and where possible, take on revolutionary and political forms. But the Communist party cannot strengthen the spirit of opportunism by raising partial reformist demands in the name of the party.

12. The most important practical activity of the communists in the economic struggle of the workers lies in the organisation of those means of struggle which, in the revolutionary epoch, in all the highly developed countries, are the only weapons suitable for the struggle. This means that the communists must therefore seek to unite the revolutionary workers, (not merely the members of the Communist party), to help them come together in the factories and to build up the factory

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organisations (BOs) which will unite into Workers Unions ('Unionen') and which will prepare for the taking over of production by the working class.

13. The revolutionary factory organisations are the foundations for the outbreak of struggle and action, the nuclei of fighting workers, the forerunners and building blocks of the revolutionary workers councils.

14. In creating these class wide organisations of the revolutionary proletariat, the communists prove the strength of a unified, united body. And in the 'Unionen' they show an example of communist theory in practice, seeking the victory of the proletarian revolution and as a consequence, the achievement of a communist economy.

15. The role of the party after the political victory is dependent on the international situation and on the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. While the dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary, the communist party must do all it can to push events in a communist direction. To this end, in all the industrialised countries it is absolutely essential that the widest possible number of revolutionary workers, under the influence of the spirit of the party, are actively involved in the taking over and transforming of the economy. Being organised in factories and 'Unionen', schooled in individual

conflicts, forming committees of action, are the necessary preparation which will be undertaken by the vanguard of the working class itself and will prepare them for the development of the revolutionary struggle.

16. Inasmuch as the masses, after the political victory of the revolution, are strong and ready in the 'Unionen' as their class organisation, to introduce the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat into the system of councils, they will increase in importance in relation to the party. Inasmuch as the masses deepen the roots of their proletarian dictatorship in the consciousness of the broad masses, the party loses its importance vis a vis the workers councils. Finally, to the extent that the safeguarding of the revolution by political violence becomes unnecessary, inasmuch as the masses finally transform their dictatorship into a communist economy, the party ceases to exist." (from 'Proletarian' July 1921.)

All these faction struggles, which were waged with

great fierceness, as was general in that period, had been resolved by the end of 1920, and had led to a unified political line.

Now controversy also raged over the question of what position to take towards Soviet Russia and the Third International.

### 3. The KAPD and the Third International. Parliamentarism and the Trades Union Question.

Immediately on its foundation the party had applied for affiliation to the Comintern in the full knowledge that on the essential questions of revolutionary class struggle the German members of the Comintern, and the Executive of the Communist International (ECCI) informed by them, took a stand in opposition to us. But there was a belief in the possibility of a change in that. The proletariat saw in Soviet Russia the front line of the world revolution, with which it expressed solidarity and from which it expected that revolution would materialise among the masses of the western European industrial proletariat. For the KAPD the struggle within the Third International, which quickly developed into a tool of the Russian State for making agreements with the international bourgeoisie, became the struggle against the Third International.

Soon after the first Party Conference the KAPD sent Jung and Appel to Moscow, following an invitation from the ECCI which had proposed such a meeting: the outcome of this was entirely negative since their expert on German affairs was Karl Radek, and thus it was obviously impossible to come to a clear definition of positions. The leitmotif of Soviet Russia was to influence broad masses of workers in the defence of Russia, since they despaired of them unleashing a struggle on their own.

The KAPD thought that while this might be appropriate for Russia, for the western European proletariat the first consideration of a Communist party was to have principles of the utmost clarity and to avoid every tendency towards compromise: to rely solely on increasing the mass of the membership was a mistake, since such a membership's understanding would still be rooted in the pre-revolutionary forms of parliamentarism and trades unions, and, in the exceptional conditions of a revolutionary situation, must go astray.

Russia denied the validity of this viewpoint, seeking to make contact as quickly as possible with the working class, its existing large organisations and their members who, if not adhering programmatically to communism, at least were strong enough as a political force for the influencing of their own governments in a pro-Russian manner, or at least so as to paralyse any tendency against Soviet Russia.

The KAPD criticised this attitude from the standpoint of the need to take power. They felt that all this had nothing to do with the creation of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe, that the Bolsheviks were trying to generalise on the revolutionary experiment out of their own experience. They themselves had led a tactic and a struggle that could truly be called one of the greatest experiments in history. But from a dialectical viewpoint the taking of power necessitates a period of struggle. The proletariat can only develop its own consciousness through this struggle - creating its own vanguard from within itself in these struggles.

After a few weeks the delegation returned accompanied by a series of admonitions to review our party's conceptions on the questions of parliament and the trades unions and to organise a provisional information bureau together with the KPD and to send delegates to the impending Second Congress in July 1920. In spite of a widely distributed "Open Letter to the KAPD" the attitude of Moscow had no influence on our party membership. Ruhle (who was still in the party at that time) and Merges were delegated to attend the Second Congress in Moscow, but they left after a few days without even making an attempt to put the viewpoint of the KAPD before the wide audience of the assembled foreign comrades. The Second Congress climaxed in the well-known '21 Theses' in which the KAPD saw only the strengthening of the development of reformism. They decided to wait until the next Congress to see whether these requirements would be retained.

At the Gotha Congress of the KAPD where this decision was ratified the KAPD asserted once more its position as a 'sympathising' party against a minority led by Pfemfert and Broh who already proposed breaking off all discussions with the ECCI. But the party wanted one more opportunity to present its opinions in Moscow and to the other parties of the Third International: so it sent a new delegation consisting of Gorter, Rasch and Schroder to Moscow to take part in another meeting. The extended debates in Moscow and Leningrad found their outcome in Gorter's book "Reply to Lenin" (a reply to Lenin's 'Left Wing Communism'), Anton Pannekoek's "World Revolution and Communist Tactics", and in numerous articles in the party press, resolutions of Regional Organisations, all of which took their stand unanimously on the KAPD programme. Down with Parliamentarism! Smash the Trade Unions! Build up the BOs! Since these two questions lay at the basis of the KAPD programme the fundamental elements are given here from party literature.

#### (a) On The Question of Participation in Parliament.

"Such power as the bourgeoisie still possesses in this period resides in the proletariat's lack of autonomy and independence of spirit. The process of revolutionary development consists in the proletariat emancipating themselves from this dependence, from the traditions of the past - and this is only possible through its own experience of struggle. . . parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. . . Parliamentarism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution. . . Revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action. . . so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf - leading agitation from a high platform, taking decisions, giving signals for action, making laws - the old habits of thought and the old weaknesses will make it hesitate and remain passive" (from Pannekoek's *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*.)

#### (b) On the Question of the Unions

" The Trades Unions arose in the period of ascendant capitalism and gave expression to the tasks possible in that era as an organ of struggle for better conditions of wages and work inside the capitalist system. Their propaganda admittedly pointed to the development of capitalism into socialism, but their real character developed in their reformist struggles against the excesses and abuses of the capitalist system. In accordance with this function the trades unions assumed, as time passed, an even more capitalist character in their organisational structure. A dominating bureaucracy arose which had control over all the reins of the organisation, without itself having any roots in the productive process. Bound up with the existence of this organisation for better or worse the bureaucracy, of necessity, had to fall victim to a system of operation which avoided serious disturbances thrown up by sharpening class struggle, and served the interests of confusion and compromise.

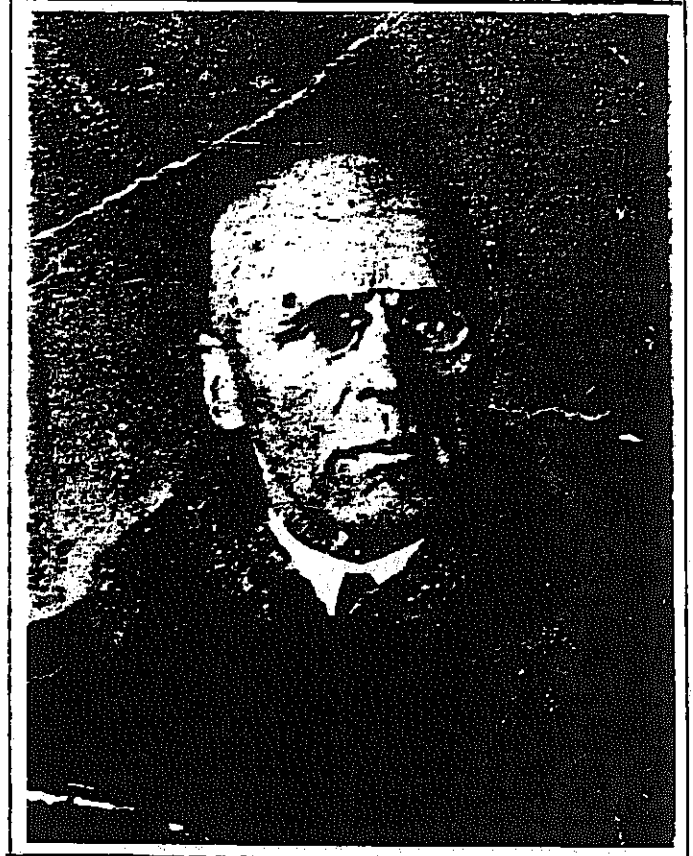
The membership of the trades unions are divided up according to occupation: the unions only had a class struggle perspective at that time, when Capitalism consisted mainly of small and medium scale factories, with a particular hierarchy of skills. But the arrangement of jobs in modern large scale capitalism, in giant enterprises, in horizontal and vertical trusts united at a national level, in a productive milieu of advanced technology and interchangeable categories, changes all this". (from the KAPD pamphlet *Trades Unions to the Rescue of Capitalism*)

(c) The General Workers' Union (AAU) and Factory Organisation (BO)

" The AAU is the first foundation stone in the building of the council organisation. It must thus build itself up in the factories as cells of production. In the factories the proletariat stands next to one another as class comrades. Here the masses stand amongst the machinery of production and the reproduction of society. Here the revolutionising of consciousness can be brought about solely on the basis of class interests, not of capitalist ones: the craft interests of the worker are submerged in his belonging to a mass and this awareness flows in an inexhaustible stream from man to man. The factory organisation is the predetermined cell of the 'Unionen': the 'Unionen' is the organisational unity of these cells. the individual BO - to which the unemployed also belong - are grouped according to geographical and economic areas, these economic areas conforming as far as possible to definite economically interdependent areas." (from the KAPD pamphlet *The General Workers Union*. Berlin 1923.)

As a result of the above mentioned negotiations the KAPD was, in the Autumn of 1920, given a fixed place on the Executive Committee of the Third International. The party also sent its delegates but no kind of practical consequence was attained, even though Bukharin, Radek and others shared, on many points, the criticisms of the conduct of the leaders of the KPD that the KAPD had. But they still promoted the entry of the KAPD membership into the KPD and, above all, activity in Parliament and the trades unions. They thus held the opinion that all that was necessary in order to turn these counterrevolutionary organisations in a revolutionary direction was the activity of real revolutionaries inside them.

They denied the validity of the opposing viewpoint, that from the viewpoint of the development of class struggle these historically bypassed organs could not be revolutionised, but rather this effort would absorb revolutionary energies needed elsewhere: a viewpoint which the KAPD believed it had demonstrated from its daily practice. The remaining six months close contact with Moscow circles allowed us deep insights into the structure of the Russian reconstruction, an understanding of the mentality of the leading as well as the most varied layers of the proletariat. For our delegates were given unlimited freedom of movement.



Herman Gorter

A deep impression was made on the KAPD delegates by the passionate interest which the Russian proletariat took at mass meetings in the events in Germany, all the more so since the Russian proletariat had been greatly confused by Paul Levi's pamphlet against the KPD leadership in the March Action and on the bases of dissent within the leadership between Klara Zetkin and the radical wing led by Reuter Frieslands. In personal discussions with Lenin, it transpired that though he resolutely condemned the general line of Levi, in relation to the March Action he thought him correct. The close touch kept with the non-Russian members of the ECCI showed clearly that though many sections adhered to the Third International out of genuine proletarian enthusiasm, this enthusiasm was not based on a clear Marxist understanding. This was especially clear with regard to the delegates of the English party.

In the summer of 1921 the Third Congress took place and at it the KAPD members Bergman, Hempel, Sachs and Seeman once more took part in the discussions, basing their contributions on the positions of the party, so far as this was possible in the shortened time allowed for speeches, and by the rejection of their proposals.

Apart from these discussions, in one particular case the KAPD were the only foreign delegation which supported the 'Workers Opposition' led by Alexandra Kollontai within the RKP on the question of internal Russian policies. The demand placed on the KAPD at the end of the Congress to merge with the KPD and accept the '21 Theses' was rejected by it. Since the delegation unanimously expressed this position, it was not allowed to say so in open session and at a closed meeting of the ECCI the following statement was read out:

" The KAPD delegates were given a renewed order by the concluding session of the Congress to merge the KAPD with the KPD and also regarding its relationship with the Third International. Fully aware of the seriousness of our responsibility the delegation has come to the following decision unanimously.

The tactical struggle of this Congress against the KAPD has taken the form of a struggle against a political opponent whose arguments were portrayed as useless and whose existence as a political factor was typified as irrelevant. Thus we see:

1) For several weeks the delegates to the Congress received a caricature of the KAPD through distorted articles in the Russian Press, in "Communist International" and in the newspapers of the Congress while our corrections and explanations are not even printed.

2) During the Congress the curtailment of free expression of our opinions was put into operation. The intention of this tactic was made clear at the end when during the discussions of the affairs of the KAPD, we were allowed only half an hour's time to speak. Thus we were forced to refuse in order not to become willing participants in a farce.

This formal behaviour is intimately connected with the political orientation which the Communist International, under the influence of the Russian comrades, is taking. The events of the Congress has shown that the political viewpoint of Paul Levi has triumphed. Formal adherence to the March Action is thus reduced to a revolutionary game. Without any guarantees the Czech party, under the opportunist leadership of Smeral, has become a full section of the International on the basis of completely empty promises. We have already spoken of the Italian Socialist party, which has just concluded a deal with the Fascists. The principle of participation in bourgeois parliaments has been reaffirmed, despite the sad experience of this tactic in Germany, Austria, France etc., in spite of the caricature of 'revolutionary parliamentarism'. The doomed politics of work inside the old trades unions has been endorsed. This means, in spite of all the phraseology, a capitulation to the Amsterdam International, and has underlined the swindle of economic parliamentarism. The Congress even toyed with the notion of revolutionising the co-operative movement.

This, as is becoming clear to everyone, is a continuation of the path chosen at the Second Congress, the path of error, of abandonment of the revolutionary road for that of reformism, from the path of struggle to the tactics of negotiation and diplomacy, of the glossing over of differences. The protest registered by us to

the protocol on the adoption of the Theses on Tactics gives ample confirmation of this.

These are the considerations around which one must consider the demand for us to merge with the KPD in order to understand that, for the KAPD, such a demand is quite impossible. This merger would mean our submission to a party in the process of disintegrating, and in which, due to the influence of this Congress, reformism is now dominant. Our silencing by use of an organisation hostile to us (using press, finance, leadership cliques) gives no possibility of any kind of healthy entry into such a party on any kind of real basis. From these considerations, and without any other mandate from our party, the opinion of our delegation is that with one voice we refuse to merge with the KPD. In spite of our mandate our exit from the Third International is not the last word: our members will speak for themselves. They themselves will reply to this path of reformism and opportunism. The International proletariat will hear our reply.

We are quite clear about our responsibility to the German working class, towards Soviet Russia, towards the world revolution and they will not let us be bound by the Congress' resolutions. IT lives and goes on its way and we are going with it, 'in the service'."

When the outcome of this Congress was published the KAPD's membership answered with an unequivocal agreement with their delegates. The party formalised its departure from the Comintern on the basis of an almost unanimous agreement of all the individual economic regions.

Together with opposition groups from the Dutch and Bulgarian parties, who had likewise seceded from sections adhering to the Comintern, the Communist Workers International was founded in April 1922 which functioned as an organisation Bureau whose task was the keeping of contact between fraternal parties. The further development of the party will be only briefly mentioned here.

Considering the enormous havoc wreaked by bourgeois class justice in our ranks, the continued existence of the party through the decline of the revolutionary wave is itself a considerable achievement. At this time of defeat the party still regards its main task to be to propagandise among the proletariat and recreate an understanding of the character of the organisations necessary for the revolutionary class struggle and to hold on to the theory that in the next wave of revolution and deepening of proletarian consciousness, the class can only succeed in its tasks by completely breaking with pre-revolutionary methods of pursuing its interests.

**Note.** Many of the materials mentioned and quoted by Reichenbach are available in English. Some appeared in Pannekoek and Gorter's *Marxism* edited by D.A. Smart, or in Pannekoek and the *Workers Councils* edited by Serge Brichaner, others have been published by such as the CWO and CBG in issues of their publications. Recently a complete text of Gorter's *Open Letter to Lenin* was published by Wildcat and the CBG has many other KAPD materials translated or in French and German awaiting translation including further pamphlets by Gorter and the complete transcripts of the first three Congresses of the KAPD in German. Aid with translation and publishing would be welcomed from interested readers.