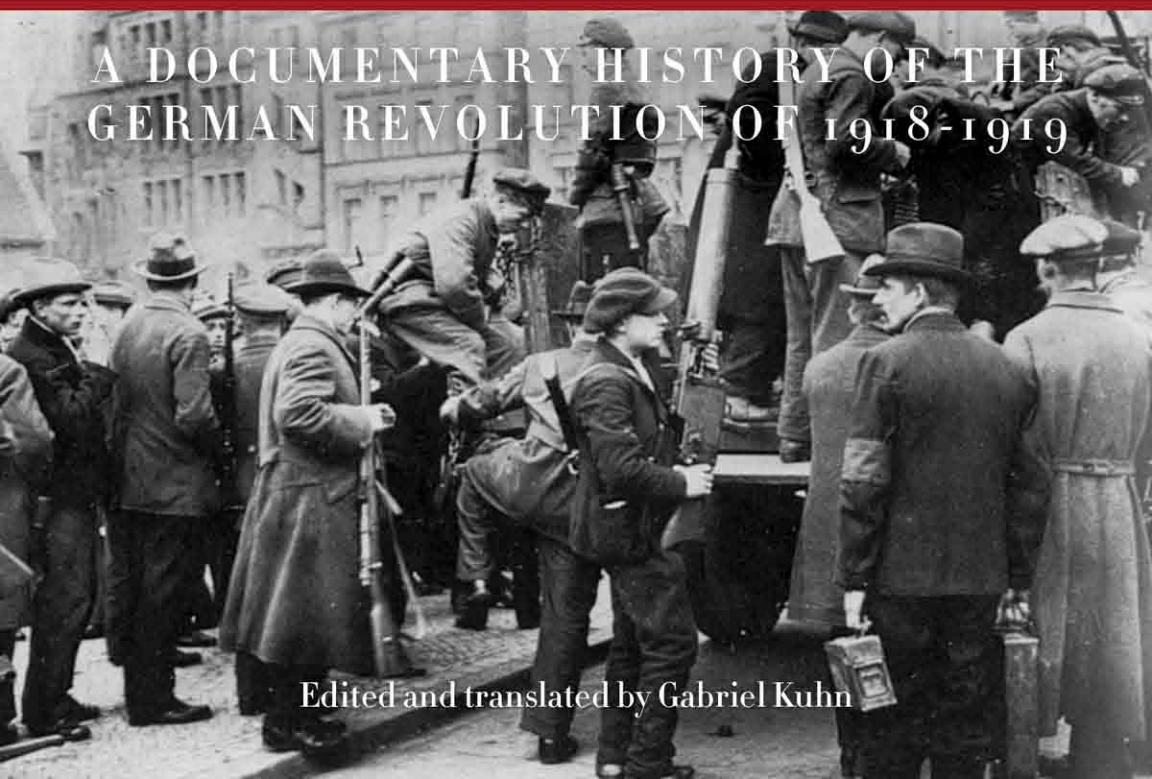




ALL POWER TO THE COUNCILS!

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE
GERMAN REVOLUTION OF 1918-1919



Edited and translated by Gabriel Kuhn

PRAISE FOR
All Power to the Councils!
A Documentary History of the
German Revolution of 1918-1919

Gabriel Kuhn's excellent volume illuminates a profound global revolutionary moment, in which brilliant ideas and debates lit the sky, and from which emerged the likes of Ret Marut, a.k.a. B. Traven, perhaps history's greatest proletarian novelist. Herein lie the roots of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and much else besides.

—Marcus Rediker, author of *Villains of all Nations* and *The Slave Ship*

This remarkable collection, skillfully edited by Gabriel Kuhn, brings to life that most pivotal of revolutions, crackling with the acrid odor of street fighting, insurgent hopes, and ultimately defeat. Had it triumphed, millions would have been spared the inferno of fascism; its failure ushered in counter-revolution far beyond its borders. In an era brimming with anticapitalist aspirations, these pages ring with that still unmet revolutionary promise: I was, I am, I shall be.

—Sasha Lilley, author of *Capital and Its Discontents* and co-author of *Catastrophism*

Drawing on newly uncovered material through pioneering archival historical research, Gabriel Kuhn's powerful book on the German workers' councils movement is essential reading to understanding the way forward for democratic worker control today. *All Power to the Councils! A Documentary History of the German Revolution of 1918-1919* confers important lessons that will avert the setbacks of the past while providing penetrating and invaluable historical documentation crucial for

anticipating the inevitable dangers in the struggle for building working class democracy.

—Immanuel Ness, Graduate Center for Worker Education,
Brooklyn College

An indispensable resource on a world-historic event. Gabriel Kuhn's remarkable, richly annotated documentary collection gathers eyewitness accounts and revolutionary voices from Germany's 1918–1919 worker-soldier-council revolution. Whereas the Independent SPD and the Spartakusbund/KPD dominate most accounts, up to the point of exaggeration, Kuhn's balanced work at last recovers the vital, central contributions and alternative perspectives of other mass proletarian currents: the anarchists and syndicalists of Bavaria, the Ruhr, and elsewhere, including Landauer and Mühsam, the Revolutionary Stewards, mutineers at Wilhelmshaven and Kiel, and the Ruhr Red Army.

—Lucien van der Walt, Rhodes University, South Africa

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction <i>Gabriel Kuhn</i>	xi
Glossary	xvi
Timeline	xxiv

Wilhelmshaven and Kiel 1

The Wilhelmshaven Revolt: A Chapter of the Revolutionary Movement in the German Navy, 1918–1919 <i>Icarus</i>	5
With the Red Flag to Vice-Admiral Souchon <i>Karl Artelt</i>	19

Berlin 25

The Revolutionary Stewards

Report by the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin <i>Richard Müller</i>	31
The National Assembly Means the Councils' Death <i>Ernst Däumig</i>	40
The Council Idea and Its Realization <i>Ernst Däumig</i>	51
Democracy or Dictatorship <i>Richard Müller</i>	59
"Revolutionary Gymnastics" <i>Richard Müller</i>	76

Spartacus

The Next Objectives of the Struggle <i>Gruppe Internationale (Spartakusgruppe)</i>	79
The Beginning <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	81
The Usual Game <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	84
The New Burgfrieden <i>Karl Liebknecht</i>	87
The National Assembly <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	90
That Which Is <i>Karl Liebknecht</i>	93
On the Executive Council <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	96
What Does the Spartacus League Want? <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	99
Confront the Counterrevolution! <i>Karl Liebknecht</i>	107
To the Entrenchments <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	109
National Assembly or Council Government? <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	113
A Pyrrhic Victory <i>Rosa Luxemburg</i>	116
About the Negotiations with the Revolutionary Stewards <i>Karl Liebknecht</i>	119
Despite It All! <i>Karl Liebknecht</i>	122
Noske and the Beginning of the Comrades' Murders <i>Karl Retzlaw</i>	126

Brunswick	143
The Revolution Has Come <i>Volksfreund</i>	147
Bremen	149
We Fought in Bremen for the Council Republic <i>Karl Jannack</i>	152
Shame! Bloodshed by the Government Troops <i>Der Kommunist</i>	161
The Council Idea in Germany <i>Karl Plättner</i>	164
Bavaria	167
Letters from Bavaria <i>Gustav Landauer</i>	171
The United Republics of Germany and Their Constitution <i>Gustav Landauer</i>	199
From Eisner to Leviné: The Emergence of the Bavarian Council Republic <i>Erich Mühsam</i>	205
Appendix 1: Ruhr Valley	265
Documents from the Red Ruhr Army	268
Dortmund after the Bielefeld Resolution <i>Anton Kalt</i>	273
What Has Been Really Bothering Me All Those Years... <i>Johannes Grohnke</i>	275
Appendix 2: Vogtland	277
From the “White Cross” to the Red Flag: Youth, Struggle, and Prison Experiences (Excerpts) <i>Max Hoelz</i>	280
Bibliography	305
Index	315

GERMANY



ALL POWER TO THE COUNCILS!

INTRODUCTION

GABRIEL KUHN

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION OF 1918–1919 IS A CURIOUS phenomenon, not least because the jury is still out on whether it really was a revolution, or, more precisely, whether the revolution was brought to its end. To this day, social democrats celebrate the end of World War I as Germany's transition from Kaiserreich to republic. Radical socialists, on the other hand, bemoan the betrayal of the revolution's proletarian ideals and of the communists, radical labor organizers, and anarchists who fell victim to the social democrats' collaboration with reactionary military forces that paved the way to the Weimar Republic.

The Weimar Republic, named after the eastern German town where Germany's republican constitution was drafted, was an attempt in democratic parliamentarism that never functioned, instead causing the rise of fascist organizations in the 1920s, among which the National Socialists emerged as the strongest force, eventually seizing power in 1933. This propelled Germany, and soon the rest of the world, into a disaster of unspeakable dimensions.

One of the most compelling questions with respect to the German Revolution is, "What would have happened if?" Would the world have been spared National Socialism if a socialist republic had been established? Would socialist republics in both Russia and Germany have triggered many more socialist revolutions, at least in Europe? Or would two competing socialist systems have been established? Could the entire history of socialism have been different? Could the anarchist influence have created a less bureaucratic and centralist socialist model?

On the one hand, there is little point in pondering these questions. History cannot be undone. On the other hand, there is a lot to learn from history's course and from the consequences of what was, and was not, done. It helps strategizing for the future. This is one of the hopes connected to this publication.

All Power to the Councils! is the first English-language history of the German Revolution based on original documents by active participants representing all of the radical factions involved. There exist a few general histories of the German Revolution in English, some of which are very good and highly recommended—see the Bibliography for details. However, most of these histories are written from a strongly communist perspective and focus almost exclusively on the role of Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and the Spartacus League. While the Spartacists played an important role in the events, their politics were not uncontested in the radical left, and in some sections of the proletariat as well as in certain regions, unionist, syndicalist, and anarchist influences were equally important. Furthermore, while historians have so far summarized their research in monographs, which make for very useful introductions and overviews, most of the eyewitness reports of the German revolutionaries have remained untranslated. In this sense, the volume presented here hopes to contribute to the ongoing study of the German Revolution by providing firsthand accounts of active revolutionaries, compiled in a way that chronologically traces the revolutionary developments. Using the introductory glossary and timeline, the background information to the individual chapters and texts, and the annotations, even the reader unfamiliar with the broad strokes of the German Revolution's history should not lose sight of the revolution's narrative, being able to also read this book as a general history of the events. At the same time, the English readers already familiar with the history shall find new texts and therefore perspectives and analyses that should deepen their understanding of the events and inspire their own perspectives and analyses.

The main radical factions during the revolution were:

1. The communists, first organized in the *Spartakusbund* [Spartacus League] and the *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands* [International Communists of Germany] (IKD), then in the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* [Communist Party of Germany] (KPD), founded by the Spartacus League and the IKD on January 1, 1919.
2. The *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* [Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany] (USPD), founded in 1917, when the left wing of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* [Social Democratic Party of Germany] (SPD) split from the mother party in protest against the SPD's continued support of the war. All Spartacus League members were part of the USPD before the founding of the KPD.
3. Radical labor organizers, most notably the *Revolutionäre Obleute* [Revolutionary Stewards], who were predominantly factory workers with long experience in union struggles and strong trust among the radical proletariat.
4. The *anarchists*, most notably Gustav Landauer and Erich Mühsam.

The differences between these factions will become apparent. The Spartacists, while critical of what they saw as authoritarian tendencies in Bolshevism—most

clearly expressed in the writings of Rosa Luxemburg—regarded a strong communist party as a necessary requirement to protect the revolution and to establish a proletarian council system. Most USPD members were open to certain parliamentary concessions, mainly to avoid armed conflict. The Revolutionary Stewards championed the direct involvement of workers in the administrative apparatus, drawing on their experience as labor organizers. They criticized the Spartacists for their alienation from the working masses and for their insurrectionist tendencies. At the same time, both the communists and the Revolutionary Stewards perceived the anarchists as politically inexperienced utopians. The anarchists, for their part, were champions of federalism and formulated a strong critique of what they saw as the centralist tendencies of the Spartacists and of the Revolutionary Stewards' focus on the factory workers of the big cities. Despite these tensions, however, the different radical factions never hesitated in defending and honoring each other in the face of social democratic and bourgeois attacks. Landauer, for example, gave the Munich eulogy to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg after they were murdered in January 1919. Mühsam called Luxemburg "the flame of the revolution" in an obituary published in his journal *Kain*.¹ All of the radical factions were also united in their commitment to a council system and in their opposition to bourgeois parliamentarism.

Although it captured the hopes of many revolutionaries and wide sections of the proletariat, the council idea was not very developed in Germany at the time. Inspiration came from the example of the Russian Revolution, experiences in workplace organizing, and a few texts by Antonie Pannekoek. Only after the revolution was the council system explored in more theoretical depth by authors like Otto Rühle, Karl Plättner, and Erich Mühsam. Nonetheless, *Alle Macht den Räten!* [All Power to the Councils] was the common rallying cry of the radicals during the revolutionary period.

The defeat of the revolution had various causes: the vagueness of the council idea, the lack of common organization and strategy, the lack of revolutionary experience, the counterrevolutionary tendencies within the SPD, the remaining strength of reactionary forces in Germany, especially within the military, the exhaustion of the workers and soldiers after years of war, the propaganda of the press, the prevailing conservatism of many sections of the population, the lack of deeply rooted internationalism, etc. Reading the texts compiled in this volume, one cannot help but feel that the belief in a German council republic was often naïve, that actions were hastily conceived, and that enormous tactical errors were made. At the same time, the commitment of the revolutionaries is inspiring, many of their observations and insights are extremely valuable for revolutionary theory, regardless of place and time, and there is plenty to be learned from their mistakes. All this, I believe, lifts the texts far above mere historical interest.

In this context, it was extremely interesting to work on this volume as the so-called Arab Spring, the 2011 revolutions and uprisings in the Middle East, unfolded. It was

so apparent that many of the Arab revolutionaries faced questions that were essentially the same that the German revolutionaries had faced almost a hundred years earlier—or, for that matter, pretty much all revolutionaries throughout history: What do we do once the tyrant is gone? How do we facilitate a true transition of power? How do we establish political and economic institutions that really alter the forms of government and production? What is the role of the military and the police? What are the actual demands, needs, and interests of the people? How do we secure democratic and social progress? How do we defend the revolution? How do we prevent reactionary forces from using the situation for their own ends? How do we go from mass rebellion to a mass effort of building a new society? How do we turn a radical moment into long-lasting radicalism? The list of questions is long. This book does not contain any answers, but many reports and reflections that shall help us find some in the long run.

* * *

The vast majority of the texts included in this book appear in English for the first time. The “Icarus Paper” on the revolt in Wilhelmshaven, originally written in English, and the texts by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg are the exceptions. The latter appear in new translations, mainly to have consistent terminology throughout the volume. All translations are by Gabriel Kuhn.

All of the included texts have been written by eyewitnesses and active participants in the revolution. Some were written during the events, some afterward; some are descriptive, some analytical. What ties them all together is their authors’ direct involvement.

The structure of the book follows the most important sites of the revolution in chronological order: *Wilhelmshaven and Kiel*, where the sailors’ revolt in late October 1918 triggered the revolution; *Berlin*, the capital and therefore a natural center of activity; *Brunswick*, a stronghold of the federalist visions prevalent outside of Berlin and Prussia; *Bremen*, where the first council republic was established; *Bavaria*, where the best-known council republic was proclaimed; the *Ruhr Valley*, where workers turned the resistance against the reactionary Kapp Putsch of March 1920 into one of the last proletarian attempts to establish a council system; and the *Vogtland* in eastern Germany, where “communist bandits” led courageous campaigns against the bourgeois order until 1921. With the arrest of the most charismatic leader of the Vogtland rebels, Max Hoelz, in 1921, the persistent effort to give the German Revolution a clearly proletarian character despite all obstacles finally found its end. Radical workers’ rebellions flared up in Germany until 1923, but these were isolated incidents no longer carried by the mass movement of 1918.

Each chapter and each text are briefly introduced. A timeline and a glossary of key organizations, personalities, journals, and terms are included for easier orienta-

tion. Other explanations have been added in notes. Information on individuals mentioned in the texts has been added whenever it was available, and information on geographical places whenever this seemed necessary to understand the narrative. All notes are by Gabriel Kuhn unless specified.

As many terms as possible were translated into English. When an English translation might have been misleading, the German term has been retained and explained in a note. Sometimes a very specific German term follows the English translation in parentheses. English translations of German names and book titles follow the original in square brackets.

Some key terms of the history of the German Revolution have been translated differently by English translators. *Rat* has been rendered both as “council” and “soviet,” *Volksbeauftragte* both as “people’s delegates” and “people’s commissars,” and so forth. In general, I have avoided English terms that evoke the Soviet Union’s political order—such as “soviets” and “people’s commissars”—as the situation and the debates in Germany were quite different. At times, it also seemed important to differentiate. For example, there existed *Staatskommissare* and *Volkskommissare* next to *Volksbeauftragte* during the revolution, which makes a terminological distinction between, in this case, *state/people’s commissioners* and *people’s delegates* useful.

The language of German writers at the time, both male and female, was marked by an inclusive use of male terms. Given the many problematic implications of a modern cleansing of historical texts, the original patterns have been reproduced.

Readability has been a priority in the translation work in order to make the texts included in this book relevant for a contemporary English audience. When this demanded a liberal rather than a literal translation, I opted for the liberal one. Needless to say, no liberties were taken that, in my judgment, would have jeopardized the intentions or contents of the original.

As always, many people deserve thanks for having made this publication possible. Apart from the folks at PM Press, these include the wonderful staff at Stockholm’s *Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek* [Workers’ History Archive and Library], Wolfgang Eckhardt, Teo Panther, Mark Haarfeldt, Chris Hirte, Ralph Klein, Regina Wamper, and Siegbert Wolf.



1. *Kain*, January 1919. A translation of the obituary entitled “Karl Liebknecht—Rosa Luxemburg” is included in Erich Mühsam, *Liberating Society from the State and Other Writings: A Political Reader* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), 117–119.

GLOSSARY

Organizations

Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands [International Communists of Germany] (**IKD**): founded in late 1918 by the Bremen group *Linksradikale* [Left-Wing Radicals] and other radical socialists; formed the KPD with members of the Spartacus League in 1919.

Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands [Communist Workers' Party of Germany] (**KAPD**): founded in 1920 by a revolutionary faction expelled at the October 1919 KPD party congress; split into various groups in the mid-1920s.

Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands [Communist Party of Germany] (**KPD**): founded in 1919 by members of the Spartacus League and the IKD; after the left majority of the USPD had joined, the party officially carried the name *Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (VKPD) from 1920 to 1922; after the Nazi regime, the party was revived in West Germany but had no big influence—in East Germany, it became a part of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* [Socialist Unity Party] (SED) in 1949.

Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party of Germany] (**SPD**): founded in 1890 as a successor of the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* [Socialist Workers' Party of Germany] (SAP); one of Germany's main parties to this day; also called *Mehrheitssozialisten* [Majority Socialists] or *Rechtssozialisten* [Right Socialists] to distinguish them from the USPD.

Spartakusbund [Spartacus League]: a group of internationalist, anti-war SPD members that emerged from the *Gruppe Internationale* [Group International], founded in 1914; in 1917, the Spartacus members formed the left wing of the newly founded USPD; the name *Spartakusbund* [Spartacus League] was officially adopted in November 1918, although the group had already been known as the *Spartakusgruppe* [Spartacus Group] since the first "Spartakusbrieфе"

[Spartacus Letters] published in 1916; the Spartacus League was the main group behind the foundation of the KPD in 1919; its most prominent members were Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

Revolutionäre Obleute [Revolutionary Stewards]: radical anti-war labor organizers who played a major role in the German Revolution's council movement; the most prominent figures were Richard Müller and Ernst Däumig.

Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany] (**USPD**): founded in 1917 by an anti-war faction that split from the SPD; in 1920, a large faction joined the KPD, in 1922 the majority of the remaining members rejoined the SPD, which rendered the USPD politically insignificant; it officially disbanded in the early 1930s.

Personalities

Artelt, Karl (1890–1981): joined the SPD in 1908, later the USPD and the KPD and, in 1946, the newly founded *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* [Socialist Unity Party of Germany] (SED) in East Germany.

Auer, Erhard (1874–1945): prominent Bavarian SPD politician, chairman of the Bavarian SPD during the revolution.

Baden, Max von (1867–1929): last chancellor of the Kaiserreich; handed his office to Friedrich Ebert (SPD) on November 9, 1918.

Barth, Emil (1879–1941): trade unionist, SPD member, and opponent of the war; joined the USPD in 1917 and was a member of the Council of People's Delegates; rejoined the SPD in 1922.

Brandler, Heinrich (1881–1967): expelled from the SPD in 1915 because of his opposition to the war; founding member of the Spartacus League and the KPD; chairman of the KPD together with August Thalheimer in the early 1920s; Brandler and Thalheimer became increasingly critical of the KPD party line and co-founded a splinter group in 1929, the *Kommunistische Partei-Opposition* [Communist Party-Opposition] (KPD-O).

Clemenceau, Georges (1841–1929): prime minister of France from 1917 to 1920.

Däumig, Ernst (1866–1922): SPD member and one of the *Vorwärts* editors until 1916 when he was removed from his post for opposing the war; joined the USPD in 1917 and became a member of the Council of People's Delegates; changed affiliation between socialist and communist parties several times after resigning in December 1918.

Dittmann, Wilhelm (1874–1954): SPD and USPD politician; member of the Council of People's Delegates for the USPD.

Ebert, Friedrich (1871–1925): SPD chairman 1913–1919, member of the Council of People's Delegates, and the first president of the Weimar Republic, 1919–1925.

Eisner, Kurt (1867–1919): key figure of the USPD in Munich; proclaimed the Bavarian Republic on November 7, 1918, and served as its first minister president; assassinated by Anton Graf von Arco, a young aristocratic soldier, on February 21, 1919.

Erzberger, Matthias (1875–1921): prominent politician of the Catholic *Deutsche Zentrumspartei* [German Center Party]; signed the armistice of 1918 for the German government; murdered by the reactionary *Organisation Consul* in 1921.

Frölich, Paul (1884–1953): lifelong communist activist; expelled from the KPD in 1928 because he supported the dissident faction around Heinrich Brandler und August Thalheimer; published a standard biography of Rosa Luxemburg (see the Bibliography) and was the author of *Die Bayrische Räterepublik. Tatsachen und Kritik* [The Bavarian Council Republic: Facts and Critique] under the pseudonym P. Werner—the publication inspired Mühsam to write *Von Eisner bis Leviné* [From Eisner to Leviné].

Haase, Hugo (1863–1919): chairman of the USPD after its foundation in 1917; first vice-chancellor after the revolution and a member of the Council of People's Delegates until the three USPD members resigned in December 1918; severely injured by an assassin in October 1919, he died one month later.

Hindenburg, Paul von (1847–1932): appointed chief of the general staff in 1916, Hindenburg wielded strong influence during the last years of the Kaiserreich; served as the president of Germany from 1925 to 1934, paving the way for the Nazi takeover of the country.

Hoelz, Max (1889–1933): the son of a rural laborer, Hoelz was radicalized as a soldier during World War I, joined the USPD, then the KPD, then the KAPD; he led several workers' rebellions in eastern Germany in 1920–1921; sentenced to life in prison in 1921, released by an amnesty in 1928; emigrated to the Soviet Union in 1929 upon Stalin's invitation; drowned under mysterious circumstances in the Oka near Gorki in September 1933.

Hoffmann, Johannes (1867–1930): SPD politician, Bavarian minister president 1919–1920.

Jannack, Karl (1891–1968): soldier and SPD member during the war; joined the KPD in 1919 and remained a leading party figure until 1933; incarcerated by the Nazis, he survived the war and became an SED parliamentarian in Saxony.

Jogiches, Leo (1867–1919): Co-founder of the Spartacus League and KPD member; KPD chairman after the murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg; arrested and executed by reactionary soldiers in March 1919.

Kautsky, Karl (1854–1938): one of the main SPD theorists; co-founded the USPD in 1917; returned to the SPD in 1922.

Landauer, Gustav (1870–1919): one of Germany's most influential anarchists; editor of the journal *Der Sozialist* and founder of *Sozialistischer Bund* [Socialist League]; key figure in the Bavarian Council Republic; murdered by reactionary soldiers after the council republic's overthrow on May 2, 1919.

Landsberg, Otto (1869–1957): jurist and SPD politician; member of the Council of People's Delegates.

Lassalle, Ferdinand (1825–1864): highly influential early German socialist.

Ledebour, Georg (1850–1947): SPD and later USPD politician, close to the Revolutionary Stewards; resisted the early-1920s USPD defections to the SPD and KPD and remained USPD chairman until 1923; active in various socialist organizations before leaving Germany following the Nazi takeover in 1933.

Levi, Paul (1883–1930): co-founder of the KPD and party chairman from 1919 to 1921; after strong criticism for his reformist orientation, he returned to the SPD in 1922.

Levien, Max (1885–1937): German-Russian Spartacus League and KPD member in Bavaria; kept close contact with the anarchists around Erich Mühsam; escaped to Austria after the crushing of the council republic; moved to the Soviet Union in 1921; victim of Stalinist purges in 1937.

Leviné, Eugen (1883–1919): German-Russian KPD member, leader of the Munich KPD during the Bavarian Council Republic; executed for his involvement in the council republic.

Liebkecht, Karl (1871–1919): son of the prominent SPD co-founder Wilhelm Liebknecht; the first SPD parliamentarian to oppose the war; founded the Group International, later Spartacus League, with Rosa Luxemburg in 1915; after an anti-war rally on May 1, 1916, sentenced to four years in prison for high treason; released by an amnesty on October 23, 1918; murdered by right-wing soldiers on January 15, 1919, in Berlin.

Lloyd George, David (1863–1945): prime minister of the UK and head of the wartime coalition from 1916 to 1922.

Ludendorff, Erich (1865–1937): German general; appointed as Paul von Hindenburg's deputy in 1916, he wielded significant political influence during the last years of the Kaiserreich; involved in both the Kapp Putsch of 1920 and the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.

Luxemburg, Rosa (1871–1919): active in the social democrat movement in Poland and Germany and an opponent to World War I, Luxemburg co-founded the Group International, later Spartacus League, in 1915; murdered by reactionary soldiers on January 15, 1919, in Berlin.

Mehring, Franz (1846–1919): publicist, historian, and founding member of the Spartacus League and the KPD.

Mühsam, Erich (1878–1934): one of Germany's most influential anarchists; editor of the journals *Kain* [Cain] and *Fanal* [Signal]; key figure in the Bavarian Council Republic, sentenced to fifteen years of confinement in a fortress for his involvement, freed by an amnesty in December 1924.

Müller, Richard (1880–1943): radical labor organizer, leading figure of the Revolutionary Stewards; USPD member, and chairman of the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin during the revolution; KPD member from 1920 to 1922.

Noske, Gustav (1868–1946): SPD politician, first minister of the Reichswehr after the revolution; mainly responsible for the military crushing of workers' uprisings in Germany from 1918 to 1920.

Pannekoek, Antonie (1873–1960): prominent Dutch theorist of council communism.

Pieck, Wilhelm (1876–1960): KPD member; president of East Germany 1949–1960.

Plättner, Karl (1893–1945): left the SPD in 1914 as an opponent of the war; joined the KPD in 1919 and belonged to the founders of the KAPD in 1920; leader of several workers' uprisings and direct action campaigns from 1920 to 1922; arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison in 1922, released in 1928; received great attention with the 1929 publication of *Eros im Zuchthaus. Eine Beleuchtung der Geschlechtsnot der Gefangenen* [Eros in Prison: On the Sexual Needs of Prisoners]; imprisoned by the Nazis, Plättner survived the Third Reich but died soon after his liberation from the Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

Radek, Karl (1885–1939): Polish-German socialist; close to the Spartacus circle during the German Revolution as Lenin's agent; sentenced to ten years of hard labor by the Stalinist regime, he disappeared after sentencing; officially killed by another labor camp inmate in 1939.

Retzlaw, Karl (1896–1979, born Karl Gröhl): SPD, USPD, and KPD member; involved in the Spartacus Uprising and in the Bavarian Council Republic; underground KPD activist for years and active in various anti-Nazi resistance groups in exile.

Rühle, Otto (1874–1943): SPD, USPD, KPD, and KAPD member, Rühle joined the *Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union* [General Workers' Union] (AAU) in 1921 and became Germany's most prominent theorist of council communism; emigrated to Mexico after the Nazis' rise to power.

Scheidemann, Philipp (1865–1939): leading SPD politician; proclaimed the German Republic on November 9, 1918, and became its first minister president.

Schneppenhorst, Ernst (1881–1945): Bavarian SPD member and Bavarian minister of military affairs in 1919.

Severing, Carl (1875–1952): prominent SPD politician from North Rhine–Westphalia; belonged to the party's right wing.

Solf, Wilhelm (1862–1936): conservative diplomat and the last foreign minister of the Kaiserreich.

Stampfer, Friedrich (1874–1957): influential journalist and SPD politician; editor-in-chief of the *Vorwärts* from 1916 to 1933 (except 1919–1920).

Thalheimer, August (1884–1948): SPD, Spartacus League, and KPD member; chairman of the KPD together with Heinrich Brandler in the early 1920s; Thalheimer and Brandler became increasingly critical of the KPD party line and co-founded a splinter group in 1929, the *Kommunistische Partei-Opposition* [Communist Party-Opposition] (KPD-O).

Wilhelm II, Kaiser (1859–1941): Germany's last Kaiser; ousted on November 9, abdicated on November 28, 1918.

Wilson, Woodrow (1856–1924): U.S. president from 1913 to 1921.

Journals

Berliner Tageblatt [Berlin Daily]: widely read liberal daily, 1872–1939.

Berliner Zeitung (BZ) am Mittag [Berlin Journal at Noon]: popular daily tabloid, 1904–1943.

Deutsche Tageszeitung [German Daily Paper]: conservative daily, 1893–1934.

Die Rote Fahne [The Red Flag]: irregularly published organ of the Spartacus League, later the KPD, 1918–1945.

Freiheit [Freedom]: daily of the USPD, 1918–1922.

Vorwärts [Forward]: main publishing organ of the SPD since 1876.

Vossische Zeitung [Voss's Journal]: popular liberal journal published in Berlin under different names from 1617 to 1934; the name *Vossische Zeitung* refers to the eighteenth-century editor-in-chief Christian Friedrich Voß (1724–1795).

Terms

Black-white-and-red: the colors of the German Kaiserreich.

Circus Busch: the theatre house of the popular Circus Busch enterprise and one of Berlin's biggest meeting halls; built in 1895 and demolished in 1937.

Council of People's Delegates (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*): installed as the provisional government of Germany after the revolution; Councils of People's Delegates were also formed in some federal states.

Entente: the name given to the alliance of Great Britain, France, and Russia during World War I; first used following the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.

Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin (*Vollzugsrat der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte Großberlin*), often abbreviated as **Executive Council**: provisional government chamber after the proclamation of the German Republic on November 9, 1918; lost all practical relevance with the elections for the national assembly in January 1919.

Free Corps (*Freikorps*): reactionary military units formed by soldiers returning from World War I; used by the SPD to quell radical uprisings; dissolved in 1923.

Great Berlin: the area including the city of Berlin and adjunct municipalities.

Hohenzollern: the House of Hohenzollern was the royal German dynasty of the Kaiserreich, 1871–1918.

Junker: antiquated term for aristocrats and big landowners in Prussia and Mecklenburg.

Kapp Putsch: reactionary coup attempt in March 1920, led by the civil servant Wolfgang Kapp (1858–1922) and General Walther von Lüttwitz (1859–1942), therefore also known as the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch; a general strike and a lack of obedience among civil servants made the coup fail.

Landtag: provincial parliament.

November Revolution: Since the proclamation of the German Republic occurred in November 1918, the German Revolution of 1918–1919 is commonly referred to as *Novemberrevolution* in German. The term is not commonly used in English and has therefore been avoided here, except for translations of German book titles.

Philistine (*Philister*): here, a person bereft of soul and spirit, not a term indicating a lack of education, culture, or taste.

“Quiet and order”: *Ruhe und Ordnung*; common German phrase referring to law-abiding behavior, order, and tidiness.

Rathaus: town hall.

Red Guards: originally used in the Russian Revolution of 1917 for revolutionary militias and military units, the term described armed groups of revolutionary workers, sailors, and soldiers in the German Revolution of 1918–1919. See also “White Guards.”

Reich: the term *Deutsches Reich* [German Reich], usually abbreviated to *Reich*, was commonly used as a substitute for *Deutschland* [Germany] from 1871 to 1945.

Reichstag: national German parliament.

Glossary

Reichswehr: official name for the German Army from 1919 to 1935.

Vendée: a department in western France where strong resistance was organized against the revolutionary government from 1793 to 1796.

Volksmarinedivision: revolutionary unit of sailors in 1918–1919.

War bonds: bonds were the main means of financing World War I in Germany.

White Guards: originally used for a loose alliance of anti-communist and pro-tsarist military forces during the civil war that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917, the term described reactionary militias and military units in the German Revolution of 1918–1919. See also “Red Guards.”

TIMELINE

1870: Otto von Bismarck unites the German states and fiefdoms, establishing the German Reich as a constitutional monarchy; federal states keep a fair degree of autonomy and, in many cases, their own royal dynasties.

1875: the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* [Socialist Workers' Party of Germany] (SAP) is founded.

1879–1890: the so-called *Sozialistengesetze* [Socialist Laws] are in place, prohibiting all socialist organizations, including the SAP.

1890: after the abolition of the *Sozialistengesetze*, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) is founded as a successor of the SAP.

August 1, 1914: Germany enters World War I on the side of Austria-Hungary.

August 4, 1914: the SPD declares its support of the war.

August 5, 1914: Rosa Luxemburg and six other SPD members opposing the war found the *Gruppe Internationale* [Group International].

December 2, 1914: Karl Liebknecht is the only SPD parliamentarian who votes against the war bonds.

January 1, 1916: the *Gruppe Internationale* starts publishing the “Spartakusbriefe” [Spartacus Letters] and becomes known as the *Spartakusgruppe* [Spartacus Group].

June 28, 1916: the Revolutionary Stewards organize massive strikes around Germany in protest against Karl Liebknecht's arrest for high treason after a speech at an anti-war rally.

August 23, 1916: Karl Liebknecht is sentenced to four years and one month in prison.

March–April 1917: strikes across Germany organized by the Revolutionary Stewards, mainly in the armament industry.

April 8, 1917: the USPD is founded by SPD opponents of the war.

July–August 1917: sailors' revolt along the North Sea Coast against the Imperial Naval Command; crushed by the authorities; the alleged leaders, Max Reichpietsch (1894–1917) and Albin Köbis (1892–1917) are sentenced to death and executed on September 17, 1917.

January 1918: strike wave against the war organized by the Revolutionary Stewards.

January 31, 1918: Kurt Eisner arrested and sentenced to nine months in prison for instigating an ammunition workers' strike.

April 24, 1918: Erich Mühsam detained in Traunstein, about one hundred kilometers east of Munich, for anti-war agitation.

October 3, 1918: Max von Baden appointed chancellor; his cabinet includes the SPD member Philipp Scheidemann.

October 29–30, 1918: sailors' revolt in Wilhelmshaven.

November 2, 1918: mass demonstrations in Kiel in support of the Wilhelmshaven revolt; seven protestors killed and twenty-nine wounded by police.

November 4, 1918: armed mutineer soldiers and workers take charge of Kiel.

November 6, 1918: Wilhelmshaven in the hand of the rebels.

November 7, 1918: mass demonstrations and armed uprisings spread to several German cities, including Hanover, Brunswick, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and Munich.

November 7, 1918: in Bavaria, King Ludwig III abdicates; Kurt Eisner (USPD) proclaims Bavaria a republic.

November 9, 1918: in Berlin, Philipp Scheidemann (SPD) proclaims Germany a republic while Kaiser Wilhelm II is in Belgium; Karl Liebknecht proclaims Germany a socialist republic on the same day; Chancellor Max van Baden hands his post to Friedrich Ebert (SPD).

November 10, 1918: in Berlin, a provisional government is formed consisting of two bodies: the Council of People's Delegates with the members Friedrich Ebert, Otto Landsberg, Philipp Scheidemann (SPD), and Emil Barth, Hugo Haase, Wilhelm Dittmann (USPD), and a twenty-four-member Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin with members equally divided between the SPD and the USPD.

November 10, 1918: Brunswick is proclaimed a socialist republic.

November 11, 1918: armistice signed between Germany and the Western Allies in a railway carriage in the Compiègne Forest in France; six months of peace negotiations begin.

November 11, 1918: the *Spartakusgruppe* turns into the *Spartakusbund* [Spartacus League], now a nationwide organization.

November 14, 1918: Kurt Eisner calls Gustav Landauer to Munich in order to “advance the transformation of souls as a speaker.”

November 1–15, 1918: workers’ and soldiers’ councils take charge of various German cities, including Leipzig, Hamburg, Bremen, Chemnitz, Brunswick, Düsseldorf, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Kiel, Lübeck, Flensburg, Oldenburg, Cuxhaven, and Hanover.

November 15, 1918: in Berlin, the SPD trade union leader Carl Legien signs a co-operation agreement with industry leaders that, among other things, pledges the suppression of radical socialist forces within the SPD-dominated trade unions and leads to the *Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft der industriellen und gewerblichen Arbeitgeber und Arbeitnehmer* [Central Partnership of Industrial and Commercial Employers and Employees].

November 23, 1918: the organization *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands* (IKD) is founded.

December 6, 1918: counterrevolutionary army units under the auspices of the SPD attack an unarmed demonstration of radical soldiers in Berlin, killing sixteen.

December 10, 1918: in an incident of high symbolic relevance, armed former royal guards enter Berlin and pledge alliance to the Council of People’s Delegates, but not the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Great Berlin.

December 16–21, 1918: General Congress of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Germany in Berlin; the congress delegates vote for a national assembly and against the council system.

December 24, 1918: violent clashes between the radical Volksmarine division and regular army units in Berlin; around seventy people die; known as *Weihnachtskämpfe* [Christmas Clashes].

December 29, 1918: the USPD members resign from the Council of People’s Delegates over the SPD members’ disregard of the Council Congress’s resolutions and its alliance with counterrevolutionary forces during the December 24 clashes; the SPD replaces the USPD members with two new SPD members, Gustav Noske and Rudolf Wissell (1869–1962); Noske is appointed minister of the Reichswehr.

January 1, 1919: the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) is founded by members of the Spartacus League and the IKD.

January 4, 1919: Berlin chief of police Emil Eichhorn (USPD), who had refused to attack demonstrators during the December 24 clashes, is dismissed by the government.

January 5, 1919: in protest against Eichhorn’s dismissal, thousands of workers, many armed, demonstrate in the center of Berlin, eventually occupying various newspaper offices, including that of the SPD journal *Vorwärts*, and forming a Provisional Revolutionary

Committee (*Provisorischer Revolutionsausschuss*); although the uprising is known as the Spartacus Uprising, Spartacists had neither planned nor organized the events.

January 9, 1919: the army, now under the command of Gustav Noske, begins its attack on the protestors.

January 10, 1919: Bremen Council Republic proclaimed.

January 12, 1919: Free Corps units arrive in Berlin and help end the last occupations, including that of the *Vorwärts*; 156 people die in the fighting.

January 12, 1919: the Landtag elections in Bavaria, boycotted by the KPD and the anarchists, end with a victory for the bourgeois parties and a devastating defeat for the USPD.

January 15, 1919: Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg are arrested, tortured, and killed by reactionary soldiers.

January 19, 1919: elections for the national assembly, boycotted by the KPD; the SPD is the single biggest party with 37.9 percent, but the overall majority goes to the bourgeois parties—the USPD only gathers 7.5 percent of the vote; a coalition government is formed with Friedrich Ebert (SPD) as president and Philipp Scheidemann (SPD) as chancellor.

February 3–10, 1919: Kurt Eisner travels to the International Socialist Congress in Bern where Europe's socialist leaders meet for the first time after the war.

February 4, 1919: Bremen Council Republic crushed by government troops and Free Corps units.

February 21, 1919: Kurt Eisner assassinated in Munich by a reactionary soldier.

March 3–16, 1919: a strike wave under the leadership of Richard Müller and other Revolutionary Stewards leads to armed confrontations on March 4; from March 9 to 16, a state of emergency is declared and government troops and Free Corps units bring the workers' uprising under control; about 2,000 people are killed, 1,600 arrested; KPD chairman Leo Jogiches is killed on March 10.

March–April 1919: widespread unrest in Upper Silesia, the Ruhr Valley, Württemberg, Magdeburg, Leipzig, and other regions and towns; brought under control by the military in late April.

April 7, 1919: Bavarian Council Republic proclaimed without the support of the KPD.

April, 8–14, 1919: Second General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany in Berlin; of little significance.

April 13, 1919: first military attack on the Bavarian Council Republic; repelled by the KPD's Red Guards; some key figures, including Erich Mühsam, are arrested and imprisoned; the KPD takes over the council republic's administration, which now becomes known as the "Second Council Republic," the "First Council Republic" having lasted only one week.

All Power to the Councils!

April 17, 1919: government troops and Free Corps units march into Brunswick and end the socialist republic.

May 1, 1919: government troops and Free Corps units march into Munich and crush the council republic; Gustav Landauer arrested and murdered on May 2.

June 28, 1919: Peace Treaty of Versailles signed; Germany punished with territorial losses, demilitarization, and reparation payments.

July 5, 1919: Eugen Leviné, leader of the Munich KPD, executed for his role in the Bavarian Council Republic.

July 12, 1919: Erich Mühsam sentenced to fifteen years of confinement in a fortress for his role in the Bavarian Council Republic.

August 14, 1919: the Weimar Constitution is implemented, making Germany a federative republic with a presidential and parliamentary system.

October 20–23, 1919: at the KPD congress, Paul Levi and the reformist wing take over, decide on parliamentary and trade union participation, and expel the radical wing.

January 13, 1920: forty-two people killed during protests against the new shop council law, rendering the councils politically insignificant.

March 13, 1920: Kapp Putsch; the coup fails due to workers' strikes and uprisings across the country.

March 1920: in some parts of Germany, most notably the Ruhr Valley and the Vogtland, the workers' resistance against the Kapp Putsch turns into widespread rebellion, eventually crushed by government troops and Free Corps units.

April 3, 1920: the *Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (KAPD) is founded by the KPD faction expelled in October 1919.

March–April 1921: the *Mitteldeutsche Aufstand* [Central German Uprising] shakes the industrial regions of Saxony-Anhalt; Max Hoelz, Karl Plättner, and others organize the workers' resistance against central government forces trying to finally bring the region under control after ongoing workers' rebellions; the fighting ends with the government troops' victory; close to two hundred people are killed and six thousand workers arrested.

April 15, 1921: Max Hoelz arrested and sentenced to life in prison.

February 3, 1922: Karl Plättner arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison.

December 20, 1924: Erich Mühsam released as part of an amnesty.

July 1928: Max Hoelz and Karl Plättner released as part of an amnesty.

WILHELMSHAVEN AND KIEL

THE BEGINNING OF THE GERMAN REVOLUTION LIES AT THE NORTH Sea Coast. As often in history, it was sailors who first openly rebelled against the authorities. There was already a North Sea Coast revolt by sailors of the German Fleet in the summer of 1917. It was crushed and its instigators, Max Reichpietsch and Albin Köbis, executed.

The trigger for the October 1918 revolt was the order by the navy command to embark on one more battle against approaching British warships although Germany's loss in the war already seemed certain. On October 29, hundreds of sailors in Wilhelmshaven refused to follow the navy command's orders. They were arrested and transferred to the prison in Kiel, where a broad solidarity movement with the rebellious sailors emerged, including both soldiers and workers. Some people even traveled from afar to join a huge demonstration in Kiel on November 3 to demand the sailors' release. The authorities responded with violence, killing seven and severely wounding twenty-nine protesters. This only increased the anger among the population and made the rebels more determined.

On November 4, SPD politician Gustav Noske arrived in Kiel and was elected chairman of the newly formed Kiel Soldiers' Council. It was the first act of SPD infiltration of the revolutionaries' ranks—a theme that would mark the coming weeks and months.

Meanwhile, unrest was spreading from the soldiers and workers in Wilhelmshaven and Kiel to other parts of the country. In Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, and many other cities around Germany, soldiers refused to obey orders, workers went on strike, and broad sections of the population demanded the authorities to step down. The stage for the German Revolution was set.

The texts in this chapter are eyewitness reports from Wilhelmshaven and Kiel.

The so-called "Icarus Paper" is an account about the Wilhelmshaven events written by Ernst Schneider, a communist union organizer who was active in various organizations, including the IKD, KPD, and KAPD, before escaping Nazi Germany in 1939. Schneider was nicknamed "Icarus" after a spectacular prison escape in 1920. He wrote his report in British exile in 1943. It covers the period from the sailors' rebellion at the end of October to the final attempt of radical Wilhelmshaven workers and soldiers to protect their councils against the increasing power of the SPD and its bourgeois allies in late January.

The second text is an abbreviated version of Karl Artelt's report on the sailors' revolt in Kiel. Artelt was a radical soldier and a USPD member who played

All Power to the Councils!

a leading role in the revolt. Although Kiel became the center of the sailors' revolt after the arrival of the sailors arrested in Wilhelmshaven, the radical resistance to the SPD waned quicker—not least because prominent SPD politicians arrived in the town early on and many of the most radical sailors moved on to other places.

THE WILHELMSHAVEN REVOLT

A CHAPTER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN THE GERMAN NAVY, 1918–1919

ICARUS

Written in English and self-published as a pamphlet in England in 1943. While the original British spelling has been retained, some orthographical details have been adjusted to this volume's format. The version reprinted here is also slightly abbreviated, focusing on the actual description of events in Wilhelmshaven, leaving out some general political reflections and historical references, not least because the latter are often hard to verify. Omissions in the text are marked. All footnotes have been added by the editor/translator unless specified.

The original pamphlet includes an "Introduction" whose author remains unidentified. The following observation might be the most important, especially since Germany had seen its share of sailors' and dockworkers' strikes and rebellions since at least the mid-nineteenth century: "It is essential to note that service in the Imperial Navy was compulsory for every German seaman. The crews of the merchant fleet were almost identical with the sailors on board the warships. The rest of the men of the war fleet were recruited from other sections of the industrial proletariat. Thus, they had not only the same interest, but also the same insubordinate spirit."

Author's Note

THE HISTORY OF THE TOILERS OF THE SEA HAS YET TO BE WRITTEN, but when it is, it will form part of the history of the forward storming vanguard of the proletariat.

I, who had a full and active share in those events, consider it my duty, in the interests of the working class, to record the following account, even at the risk of not avoiding inaccuracies, so that whosoever wishes, may understand.

Until the year 1935, I had in my possession the complete archive, but it had to be burned for reasons of safety for my comrades and myself. Those documents are, of course, lost, but it is better to lose documents than to lose one's life.

After all, I have kept my head, I am, therefore, able to make further use of it.

—London, 1943

THE WAR CLOUDS GATHERED OVER GERMANY. THE RANK AND FILE OF THE German labour movement, at that time, in numbers, the mightiest movement in the Second International, urged for measures against the approaching war. Crowded mass meetings were held, and the slogan was given: *Mass action against the war*.

But words, mere words. The mass of the workers under the influence of their organisations, strongly organised and disciplined in Party and Trade Unions were waiting for the call to action from their trusted leaders, but the call never came! Instead of action came complete political collapse.

In contradiction to their previous teaching, the spokesman of the Social Democratic Party in the German Parliament on August 4, 1914, declared: "In the hour of danger we shall stand by our fatherland." The majority of the SPD leaders had found their fatherland. The workers were still without one!

The problem of masses and leaders remained practically unsolved, despite the prolonged struggle of revolutionary socialists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Antonie Pannekoek, Heinrich Laufenberg, Johann Knief and others,¹ whose devotion to the cause was unquestioned, against the then already flourishing policy of class betrayal. The overwhelming majority of the SPD leaders rejected the idea of self-determination of the working class, and worked secretly through their revisionist apparatus *Verein Arbeiterpresse*² for the subordination of the proletariat to the bureaucratic organisations. The catastrophe was unavoidable. Many workers felt that their sacrifices had been in vain. They had not understood the dynamics of their own organisation, so they felt betrayed, and they were. That brought disillusionment on the one hand, irritated nerves and indifference on the other. But still things went on. [...]

The Secret Committee of the North Sea Fleet and the Naval Base of Wilhelmshaven

Liebknicht's call ["Down with the War! The principal enemy is in your own country!"] was not in vain. It encouraged the opposition forces against the war. On board the cruisers, destroyers, torpedo boats and other small fighting units, a whispering campaign went on among the sailors, and now and then acclamations, "*Es lebe Liebknicht!*"³ Meanwhile, signals were given by a secret committee, later known as the Revolutionary Committee, or for short, RC. The Committee issued definite instructions, warnings, information and slogans, and these signals were promptly transferred from mouth to mouth within a certain alliance. No member knew more than two comrades, one to the right, and one to the left like the links of a chain. The first link was known by only one comrade—the Committee.

Under the cover of seamen's yarns in the lower decks, in the lockers, the munition rooms, crow's nests of the fighting masts, even in the lavatories, an

underground organisation was built up which did its share towards stopping the imperialist war, and sweeping away the semi-feudal monarchy. The examples set by this underground organisation are of historical importance.

Besides the organisation of the RC, there appeared some instances of individual peace propagandists who were almost wiped out with the execution of two harmless conscientious objectors, the sailors Reichpietsch and Köbes.⁴ Whatever their motives, their struggle formed part of our own struggle, and therefore they died for us and our cause.

In this connection, it is a fact that a representative of one of these unfortunate sailors who consulted some prominent SPD members of parliament, was shown the door. The SPD members of parliament were not interested.

Meanwhile, the unrest grew among the seamen in the fleet. A purge of the crews of certain ships was ordered by commanders of the fleet, but the growth of the movement was far ahead of the measures taken by the naval authorities, and the purging was, no doubt, more of a nuisance than a wholesome cure! Suspects—always the wrong ones, of course—were promptly ordered off to their company's naval barracks. From there, thousands of seamen were ordered off to the Marine Division on the coast of Flanders.

In March 1917, leaflets written in block letters, signed by the Committee, were distributed by the sailors of the Third Sailors Regiment. Later on, meetings of the seamen were held at the East End Park.⁵ These meetings were, of course, illegal, but they were well protected. Without doubt, the underground movement in the navy did not stop on the gangways and accommodation ladders of the warships!

A left radical⁶ member of the movement whilst on leave in Hamburg in April 1917, was one of the eighteen participants of a secret meeting arranged by a Hamburg woman comrade held in the woods near Groß Borstel, [in the inn] *Zum grünen Jäger*. The result of the meeting was a broadsheet addressed to the women workers in the war industries, and to the soldiers.

Two days later, after five thousand of the leaflets had been spread among the people and placarded on walls and buildings, spontaneous strikes in the war industries followed. Dozens of strikes and leaflet distributors were arrested and imprisoned. It must be noted that our active friends in Hamburg were all women war workers, shorthand typists, etc., who placarded the broadsheets. Many of these heroines and comrades, as well as the printer, a businessman who was not a member of the movement, were sentenced to penal servitude. Our sacrifices were heavy. To mention one's own personal sacrifices would be invidious. A fighter is bound to fight and suffer. To do so in the cause is comparatively light. "True enough we must fight for the peace, if not, then it is the peace of the graveyard, the peace that will press down Europe and other parts of the world in a new era of darkest reaction." (Rosa Luxemburg)

Our task could only be to double our activities in the movement on board the warships, and on shore.

In July 1917, an example was given by the seamen of a squadron headed by the battle cruiser *Prinzregent* which lay anchored in the lower Elbe. At the order, "weigh anchor, all hands to action stations," some signs and gestures were made by the seamen, but no move was made to obey the order. Their own order "fires out" proved mightier than the orders of the chiefs of the fleet. Hundreds of sailors were sentenced to penal servitude from one to fifteen years. This event, and the attitude of the Admiralty showed the situation in general, clearly: flurry and excitement among the authorities, but a staunch determination in the lower ranks.

Again the seamen had shown that they did not shrink from armed resistance. They knew that they could only succeed by concerted action by the seamen of the fleet as a whole in close collaboration with their comrades in the army and in the industries. Theoreticians who exaggerate the difference between theory and the living reality may go astray, but seldom the practical fighters. The outlook of the latter was right. In January 1918 occurred the spontaneous strikes in the armament industries, followed by plundering of bakeries in the Reich. Then followed months of remarkable silence. It was the silence before the storm.

Towards summer, a meeting was held in the *Edelweiss*, the biggest dance hall in Wilhelmshaven. The meeting was protected by columns of the underground movement of the fleet. It was late in the evening. The dance hall was filled with sailors, girls and a few civilians. The orchestra had left the stage during the interval when, suddenly, the great curtain of the stage fell, and shouts were heard: "Stay where you are, do not move!" Then, from behind the curtain was heard a loud voice, impressive and convincing: "We are on the eve of decisive occurrences. There will be, at last, no more war, no more oppression of the toiling and bleeding masses—but we must fight on, hard, long, and bitterly. For the sake of the cause, no imprudence. Our day is coming."

It came.

In September, a secret conference of the various groups of the workers opposition took place in Berlin. Representatives of a number of industrial workshops, from northern, eastern, central, and western Germany were assembled.

Summarising the reports of the assemblies that the independent worker activities were constantly increasing all over the Reich, it was urged that the revolutionary class must violently explain its programme to the broad masses, regardless of expense, and that this was to be carried out without delay. Instead of the term "socialism," the term "communism," i.e., the association of free and equal producers into free communes, was adopted.

A manifesto—written by the late Comrade Frenken in order to enlighten the social democratic duped masses, to untie them from their careerist leadership—was

issued in many thousands of copies, and some days later on distributed within reach.

The Socialist Republic, Wilhelmshaven

At the end of October 1918, there was a spate of cases of insubordination and disobedience among the sailors at the base of the North Sea Fleet, and an outburst appeared inevitable.

Warships of all classes and types were alongside the docks and quays of Wilhelmshaven. Major ships, including the battleship *Baden* and the battle cruiser *Hindenburg*, were ready for action and awaiting orders from the chief of the fleet. Ships anchored outside the docks and in the Jade River—the cruiser squadron, torpedo boat and destroyer flotillas—were also ready for action.

Rumours circulated to the effect that it had been decided to engage the enemy in a final encounter, in which the German Fleet would triumph or die for the “glory of the Kaiser and the fatherland.”

The sailors of the fleet had their own views on the “glory of the fatherland.” When they met, they saluted one another with a “Long live Liebknecht.” The crews of the ships moored at the quayside were to be found, most of the time, not on board, but in the workshops and large lavatories ashore. Officers, contrary to custom, carried revolvers, and ordered the men to return to their ships. The men obeyed, but meanwhile others had left their ships and swelled the number ashore. The situation was favourable, the Committee passed the message: “Guarded meeting after dark at the New Soldiers’ Cemetery. Send delegate from every unit.”

According to the rules of the secret organisation, delegates had to proceed to the meeting alone or at most in pairs, and at suitable distances so as not to attract attention. The meeting took place and showed how general was the response to the call of the Committee. The meeting place was guarded by sailors. Those present stood, knelt, or sat between the graves. There was no time for discussion or speeches. The names of the ships moored in the harbour and river were called, and out of the dark the almost invisible delegates just answered, “Here.” One comrade spoke, briefly but firmly: “The time has come. It is now or never. Act carefully but resolutely. Seize officers and occupants. Occupy the signalling stations first. When control has been gained, hoist the red flag in the maintop or gaff. Up for the red dawn of a new day!”

In accordance with the rules of the organisation, all had to stay in their places for ten minutes after the speaker had left.

Fortunately, it was a dark night. On their return to their ships and barracks some of the comrades heard the heavy tramp of marching troops. Shots were fired, and the cry went up, “Down with the war!” The sound of marching came from

sailors—some three hundred in number—under arrest who were being taken under escort to the train to the Oslebshausen Prison near Bremen. They were warmly cheered by the passing sailors. When a dozen or so sailors were passing the building of the Admiralty, they noticed that the guard house was occupied by soldiers from a town, Marksen, in East Friesland. It was a machine-gun detachment. The sailors without hesitation carried out an attack, and in a moment had captured fifteen machine guns. The commander of the detachment, an old sergeant major, after a short palaver, declared himself in solidarity with the sailors. The sailors then marched to Door A of the Imperial Shipyard,⁷ and upon reaching the watch, found it already in the hands of the revolutionaries. Continuing towards the battleship *Baden*, it was seen that the small units had also been taken over by the revolutionary sailors. On board the *Baden* they elected a new commander. He was a member of the Committee.

By this time the dawn had come. Shots were heard on board a small light cruiser lying in dry dock, and the white ensign was seen to be still flying in the maintop. After a struggle of about an hour, every ship except the *Hindenburg* was in the hands of the revolutionaries. From the *Hindenburg* the white ensign still flew. The commander of the *Baden* signalled, "Surrender or we shoot." A struggle was observed on board the *Hindenburg*, and a detachment of stokers and firemen of the *Baden* prepared to board the *Hindenburg* and give a hand. But before they reached their destination, the white eagle ensign was hauled down and the red flag hoisted. At the same time, a signal was received from the cruiser squadron that, there too, the revolutionaries had gained the upper hand.

At the orders of the Committee, a mass meeting was held outside the building of the Admiralty. A great crowd of twenty thousand attended and later marched round the naval base, headed by the Fifteenth Torpedo Half-Flotilla. A comrade announced that all the commanders and admirals of the North Sea Fleet had been deposed, and as long as they kept to their quarters, they would suffer no harm, but if they moved, they would be dealt with.

Three of four commanders entered the Admiralty building and informed the Admiral what had happened. His Excellency answered regretfully, that he could not do anything for the moment. He was informed that for the moment nothing would happen to him if he remained quiet and stayed at home.

By this time, the crowds of war workers were streaming into the streets. It is regretted to have to state the fact that sections of the workers were still waiting for a call from their anti-revolutionary leaders, and had to be forced to be free. Their behaviour, as also was their leaders' and the bulk of "the white collar proletarians," was consciously—or unconsciously—reactionary during this period.

Events moved quickly. Big demonstrations took place and processions converged at the training ground. After speeches and reports on the events, elections

of workers' and sailors' councils were held. Every ship had its council and delegate. The same was done for each factory and town district.

That evening a meeting of the delegates took place, which constituted itself as the Revolutionary Government. A council of twenty-one sailors was elected, which was, so to speak, the administrative government. This, in its turn, elected a body of five members with executive powers. But when the first meeting of this Council of Five took place, it transpired that four of the members were not revolutionary socialists. The fifth member told the others that the revolution could not be made by namby-pamby revolutionaries, and that he could not successfully work with them. Circumstances, however, allowed them to carry on for some time. In fact, there were from the beginning two governments in Wilhelmshaven: the Council of Five, with its headquarters in the Officers Casino, and the Revolutionary Committee, backed by the revolutionary socialist seamen with headquarters on board the *Baden* and in the Thousand Man Barracks.⁸ [...]

The Critical Point

By this time, power was practically in the hands of the workers', soldiers', and sailors' councils; if not all over the Reich, at least in Wilhelmshaven, Bremen, and Brunswick. The revolutionary proletariat pressed for a clear decision. Street and barricade fighting in towns and villages was the order of the day. Shock columns of revolutionary sailors were sent to all parts of Germany. For the purpose of ensuring permanent communications with Kronstadt,⁹ several hundred fully armed sailors were sent by the Revolutionary Committee to occupy the wireless station at Nauen, near Berlin, at that time still in the hands of the Ebert government.

They never returned. After fruitless attempts to capture the station, many of them went on to Berlin, and formed, under the leadership of an imperial army officer, the revolutionary socialist, Lieutenant Dorrenbach¹⁰—a friend of Karl Liebknecht—the Volksmarinedivision. Our own attempts to get in touch with revolutionaries in Kronstadt from the Wilhelmshaven wireless station were unsuccessful, our messages were jammed, first by a station somewhere in Finland, and later by Nauen.

In this situation—by now it was November 18—the leaders of the trade unions joined the big industrialists in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*.¹¹ Regarding this, Hugo Stinnes writes in his memoirs¹² (I quote from memory): "We were completely beaten. In this hopeless situation there came the great man Legien, Chairman of the General Committee of Trade Unions in Germany, as our saviour.¹³ He did, in fact, save us; and this shall not be forgotten."

Stinnes did not forget. A millionaire industrialist and one of the biggest shipowners in Germany, he named one of his biggest ships *Carl Legien*. If ever a

working class in any country in the world was treacherously betrayed, it was the German working class. [...]

Let us lift the curtain! It was K. Radek—the then Russian plenipotentiary in Germany—who declared openly “a victorious workers’ revolution in Germany now, means a lost revolution in Russia.”

Stalin, discussing the situation in Germany in 1923, urged, “In my estimation, the German workers must be restrained, not spurred on.”

Indeed, as time has shown, the Comintern has not only bloodily liquidated the genuine revolutionaries in Kronstadt and in the Ukraine, but also has purposely prevented the workers’ revolution in Germany.

The seamen supporting the Revolutionary Committee felt that it was their duty to carry forward their activities and assist their class comrades at all costs. To do so, they were determined even to make use, in case of necessity, of the units of the battle fleet, which though bound by the clauses of the armistice were still armed and fit for use.

But there were other difficulties to be faced. Hundreds of thousands of workers were still held in the bonds of obsolete systems of organisation, dominated by conservative leaders. This was glaringly illustrated on the occasion of the first General Congress of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Germany in Berlin, December 1918.¹⁴ It sounds unbelievable, but out of this “revolutionary” parliament it was found necessary to form a revolutionary group! And when Karl Liebknecht, as the chief speaker, very rightly pointed out, “The counterrevolution is in the midst of us,” some of the delegates raised their rifles against him. [...]

In the meantime, the Berlin Government had printed large posters which were plastered on the walls and buildings of towns throughout the Reich—though not in Wilhelmshaven, Brunswick and other places where the revolutionaries were in control—with the inscriptions in big reading: “Socialism all over Germany,” “Socialism is marching on,” etc. What in fact marched on, however, were the old reactionary forces led by the people “emancipating social democracy.” Their chief newspaper, *Vorwärts*—twice captured and run by the revolutionary workers in Berlin, but later recaptured by the social democrats—published, at a time when hundreds of workers were being killed in street fighting in Berlin, the following incitement: “*Viel Hundert Tote in einer Reih, Rosa und Karl sind nicht dabei.*”¹⁵

To the social democratic propaganda in favour of a national assembly¹⁶ the revolutionary communists replied with: “No national assembly! Arm the workers in the factories! Establish revolutionary tribunals to try the war criminals and counterrevolutionaries!”

At this time, the civil war was far from its climax. The decisive battles came later. New formations of the industrial workers were just marching up to the

front line. They fought their battles, not as party men or trade unionists, but as independent revolutionary factory units.

In this very critical atmosphere, December 28, 1918, a party was born, which after long and vehement discussion was called the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund)*. [...]

In January 1919, I was commissioned by the Conference of the IKD of Northwestern Germany to negotiate with Karl Radek—the then general Bolshevik plenipotentiary in Berlin—and discuss with him ways and means for establishing wireless communications between Wilhelmshaven and Kronstadt.

I rushed by a special loco-engine to Berlin to conduct my mission immediately. Searching for Radek in vain throughout that day, I accidentally met Karl Liebknecht at midnight, who told me that Radek was hiding in the suburbs in a certain flat of the Workers Cooperative Society.¹⁷

Mass strikes raged in the City and its surrounding districts. No buses or streetcars were running. When I, after a strenuous journey, arrived at Radek's "secret" flat, the latter was occupied with some exciting lady visitors.

At last, a political debate took place and it became clear to me that the Bolshevik party dictatorship did not concern itself with the task of developing the world revolution.

Prospects and Possibilities

Early in January 1919, the situation in general was fully understood by the class-conscious seamen in Wilhelmshaven, who were mostly quartered in the Thousand Man Barracks, on the submarine training ship *Deutschland*, and in smaller vessels such as destroyers and torpedo boats. To make sure that nothing should go amiss, the seamen set about educating and training themselves. Lectures were given on Marxian socialism, communism and strategy, on board ships and ashore. Instead of the discredited—as a result of social democracy—term "socialism," the term "communism" was adopted. In close cooperation with the revolutionary socialist workers' groups in northwestern Germany and the industrial centres of Westphalia (Ruhr District), a strategic plan was drawn up to drive the reactionary forces from the waterside and southwestern Germany towards Berlin. Such a plan, it was thought, was better than to allow the reactionaries to fight on ground of their own choice. It was hoped also to relieve the revolutionary forces locally, and conquer Berlin for the oppressed class.

The revolutionary seamen of the North Sea Station were determined to fight, to win or die, for the cause. They swore that the old class society should be ended, never to arise again, that there should be no more slavery, no more capitalist war—they had had enough. To describe in words the spirit of these seamen is

impossible. In their minds they saw a new worldwide society of workers, free, without fear or want, a society based on worker democracy developing into a single unit of mankind. [...]

On January 15, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered in Berlin by officers of Ebert's soldiery. In Wilhelmshaven a general strike was proclaimed by the IKD, which had at that time, apart from several hundreds of industrial workers, more than five hundred members of the seamen of the fleet. Mass meetings and armed demonstrations were held. On the flagstuffs of the warships and the flagmast of the Thousand Man Barracks, the red flags fluttered in the wind at half mast. The proletarians of the sea were mourning two beloved comrades, while the murder-provoking writer of *Vorwärts* had his bloody prize. [...]

Nothing could better illustrate the spirit of the seamen than the fact that when on the following day, January 16, an attempt was made by the reactionary *Bund der Deckoffiziere*¹⁸ "to free Wilhelmshaven from Spartacist domination," the revolutionaries taught them a lesson in fighting that few of the White Guards could have expected. After six hours of street fighting, during which several persons were killed, the *Bund der Deckoffiziere* surrendered unconditionally. The street leading to the Jachmann Bridge was littered with abandoned rifles and machine guns. Some of the officers gave a promise not to take up arms again against socialist revolutionaries, and it was later proved that they had kept their word. Whether or not this rising was inspired by the Ebert government, the result was a defeat for the old militarist forces. The seamen supporting the Committee fought their opponents openly, and smashed them several times, but none of the officers were executed. [...]

Towards the end of January, the tension grew among the seamen. Berlin fell, Kiel also, Bremen was attacked from the rear by a large army. Although a system of sailors' and workers' guard posts had been organised in Wilhelmshaven and the surrounding districts, and an emergency tribunal was sitting to deal with counterrevolutionaries, this was far from being enough. What Wilhelmshaven needed—and still needs, and not Wilhelmshaven alone!—was a full scale revolution from the ground up.

It was clear that this would not be achieved in collaboration with the old personnel of the sailors' and workers' councils, but only by bringing in fresh blood from among the ranks of the socialist revolutionaries of the Committee and its active fighting units on land and sea.

In the economic sphere, the Committee envisaged an association of free and equal producers, based on a system of workers democracy, utilising—since they would probably be isolated—the gold of the Reichsbank as a means of exchange with capitalist countries, and of course, that meant the gold could not be used against the revolutionary workers.

The great hope seemed to be Russia. In any case, there was no time for talking; the final moment had arrived for acting—if unsuccessfully, then as an example.

The Revolutionary Wilhelmshaven Commune

The struggle along the whole waterfront in northwestern Germany increased in ferocity, and the revolutionary groups, fighting under extremely difficult conditions around Bremen,¹⁹ were wiped out after a stubborn resistance.

In this situation, the Revolutionary Committee in Wilhelmshaven ordered ashore all available sailors of the fleet, supported by some torpedo boats that were at anchor, but ready for action in the Jade Bight,²⁰ to fight the approaching White Army. The advanced squads of sailors marched fifteen to twenty kilometres from Wilhelmshaven to the front line, taking up their positions in trenches dug long before. These squads, each from ten to thirty sailors, with an elected steward,²¹ or confidential man, undertook to hold their ground against the advancing army of Ebert's troops. The seamen fully understood that their three thousand men, with little experience of fighting ashore, would hardly be a match for an army of forty thousand experienced officers, but they also understood that the fight had to go on at all costs, and that in the interests of themselves and the cause, there must be discipline—voluntary discipline based on affection and trust. They treated their own delegates, as well as the comrades in command, with brotherly love and respect.

Meanwhile, the Thousand Man Barracks was put into a state of defence. Machine guns, rifles, ammunition and hand grenades were distributed and stored on all floors, machine guns were mounted on the roof of this mighty and massive building.

On January 26, at 12 p.m., the RC proclaimed a state of siege throughout Wilhelmshaven. The old soldiers' and workers' councils were removed from office. At the same time, the Reichsbank with twenty-one millions in gold was seized, and the bank building guarded by a special troop of fifty sailors and fifteen machine guns. Besides the Reichsbank, all other financial institutions were seized and occupied by armed sailors; further, all statistical bureaux, postal telegraph, and telephone offices, water and electricity works, all means of transport and traffic, railway stations, food and raw materials depots, printing shops, and all government buildings.

Trains were stopped, they could come in, but not go out. In five different broadsheets printed in huge letters, placarded all over the town, were given the essentials of the things to come.

Workers, old age pensioners, all toilers in distress, particularly those who lived in huts and wooden barracks, were told to seize the almost empty houses of the rich and occupy them immediately; this was done without delay. There were

also many previous prisoners of war, who were freed without any discussion of "different races" and nationalities. Class consciousness had solved these "problems" on the spot, "it is the social existence of man that determines his consciousness."²²

On January 27, in the forenoon, one of the stockhouses which was crammed full with provisions of the navy was opened by order of the RC and many thousands kilogrammes of salt meat, salt pork, bacon, peas, rice and tinned foods were distributed gratis amongst the Wilhelmshaven inhabitants. Those in need received according to their necessities.

Meanwhile, information was received from the observers, who were watching the movements of the approaching army, that Wilhelmshaven was cut off on all sides except the waterfront, and that some of the sailor units, supported by a small boat gun, had already opened the battle with the advancing Ebert troops. In fact, these comrades were in touch with the officer troops, who rushed at them and lost ground. [...]

By this time, fighting was going on in the streets and at the barricades throughout Wilhelmshaven. Heavy losses were inflicted on the reactionaries, who fought in close column. A hail of hand grenades descended upon them from the roofs and windows of the houses, and their shouts of "Ebert! Scheidemann!" were drowned by those of the revolutionaries, "Liebknecht! Luxemburg!" Again and again, the followers of Ebert were driven back, but ever again new officer columns appeared, mostly to suffer the same fate. Sometimes the firing died down, and only single explosions were heard; but then it would break out again, a roaring hurricane in a sea of splinters and wreckage.

In these circumstances, thirty-four fatally wounded comrades, amongst them comrade A, were moved to a torpedo boat, which shipped them to a small town on the lower Elbe.

Meanwhile, as the night drew on, the fourteen-hour battle for the Thousand Man Barracks began. Among the 588 defenders, mostly sailors from the battle fleet, were a dozen or so workers, some of them women, and, dressed in a sailor's uniform, an eighteen-year-old girl, the daughter of a naval officer of high rank.

In a very short time, a shell of medium calibre crashed into the gymnasium, followed by others which fell around the barracks. A disagreeable odour, something like gas, filled the air. Then shells began to burst at short intervals, in the western part of the building. But the sailors had their turn too. Volunteers were called for. Comrade C took the lead, and within half an hour, he had smashed up a column of officers, taken three prisoners, and captured two heavy machine guns and a 5.3 cm gun.

The battle went on throughout the night, reaching its climax in the early hours of the morning, when mine after mine was hurled into the barracks. Fire-balls and star-shells were let off, and the darkness changed to fire and light. But there was

no thought of surrender. Several attempts were made to storm the barracks, but each time the White Guards were repulsed by the machine-gun and rifle fire of the defenders. While the fighting was in progress, two meetings were held in the basement dining room of the barracks, and at both meetings it was resolved to fight on to the last, and in no circumstances to give in.

But while it is true that the Ebert soldiery had suffered terrible casualties, so too had the revolutionary sailors and workers. There is no purpose in describing the harrowing scenes witnessed during the struggle, only one shall be mentioned here. Comrade H, mortally wounded, breathed, "Communism or death!" as he clasped the hand of the man next to him, and his fellow combatant knelt down and kissed the forehead of a brother-in-arms he had never known before.

It was daybreak, two comrades were still firing the only machine gun left undamaged... And from the masthead of the Thousand Man Barracks was torn down the tattered red flag of the Wilhelmshaven Commune, riddled with gunfire.

Here ends a chapter—but a chapter only—of the history of the revolutionary proletariat of the sea.



1. Heinrich Laufenberg (1872–1932) was a Hamburg-based socialist who went from the SPD via the USPD and KPD to the KAPD. In 1920, he was expelled by the KAPD for "national bolshevist" tendencies. Johann Knief (1880–1919) was a leading member of the *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands* [International Communists of Germany] (IKD) in Bremen.
2. A kind of social democratic writers' union.
3. "Long live Liebknecht!"
4. Max Reichpietsch (1894–1917) and Albin Köbis (1892–1917) were executed on September 17, 1917, as the alleged instigators of the 1917 sailors' revolt on the North Sea Coast.
5. I am not certain which location Icarus is referring to.
6. A common shorthand for activists close to the IKD.
7. *Kaiserliche Werft*; *Kaiserliche Werften* were government-run shipyards in Wilhelmshaven, Kiel, and Gdańsk responsible for the construction and maintenance of the warships of the Kaiserreich.
8. The *Tausend-Mann-Kaserne* was a big barracks in Wilhelmshaven. Icarus uses the English translation in the original.
9. Kronstadt was the nearest radio station to Wilhelmshaven being in the hands of the Soviet government.
10. Heinrich Dorrenbach, discharged by the German Military in the spring of 1918 for desertion.
11. Officially, the *Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft der industriellen und gewerblichen Arbeitgeber und Arbeitnehmer* [Central Partnership of Industrial and Commercial Employers and Employees]; see "November 15, 1918" in the Timeline. In the pamphlet "The Revolutionary Crisis of 1918–1921 in Germany, England, Italy and France" (Chicago: The Trade Union Educational League, 1921), the radical U.S. labor organizer and communist William Z. Foster rightfully points out that the significance of the agreement for the failure of the revolution is often underestimated in literature on the German Revolution (12–15).

All Power to the Councils!

12. Hugo Stinnes (1870–1924), was a German industrialist who signed the agreement leading to the *Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft* on behalf of the employers. Stinnes never published any memoirs, and it is not clear where Icarus is quoting from.
13. Carl Legien (1860–1920), SPD trade unionist who signed the agreement leading to the *Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft* on behalf of the employees.
14. “All Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council Convention” in the original; adapted to the translation used in this volume.
15. “Hundreds are lined up dead, but Rosa and Karl are not among them.” The quote is not entirely accurate. For details, see Karl Retzlau’s text “Noske and the Beginning of the Comrades’ Murders” in this volume.
16. “National convention” in the original; adapted to the translation used in this volume.
17. It is not clear which organization Icarus is referring to.
18. “Union of Navy Officers.”
19. See the chapter on “Bremen” in this volume.
20. Icarus uses the German term *Jadebusen* in the original.
21. Icarus uses the German term *Obmann* in the original.
22. Presumably a reference to the Marx quote, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859).

WITH THE RED FLAG TO VICE-ADMIRAL SOUCHON

KARL ARTELT

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IN LATE OCTOBER, WE WERE TOLD THAT THE GERMAN FLEET should depart for one last desperate battle. In response, the reactivated ombudsmen [of the sailors] declared that no more blood was to be spilled and that the sailing of the fleet had to be prevented under all circumstances. If necessary, the firemen were encouraged to sabotage the boilers.

When the reactionary forces got wind of this, they arrested most of the ombudsmen. However, such measures could no longer intimidate us and we led a successful campaign. The firemen and soldiers prevented the intended slaughter. On October 31, late at night, the Third Navy Squadron arrived at Kiel Harbor. They brought two hundred of the arrested soldiers.¹ This only fueled our revolutionary commitment. We were determined to free the sailors.

On November 1, the ombudsmen who had escaped arrest met at the union hall in Kiel. They issued a declaration demanding the immediate release of their arrested comrades. It was decided to hold another meeting at the union hall the next day. We announced a magician’s show to mislead the authorities. However, the navy leadership must have been informed about our plans: when we arrived at the building, the gates were guarded by security forces prohibiting all soldiers from entering. Before the start of the show, an army officer appeared on stage and ordered all military personnel to leave the hall and return to their troops instantly.

We left the hall, but instead of returning to our troops, we gathered on the drill grounds in the forest and agreed to call a people's and soldiers' meeting there on Sunday, November 3.

The following evening, the USPD office printed leaflets to announce the meeting. The ombudsmen encouraged the navy crews to leave their ships and barracks early Sunday morning. After the USPD had acted in solidarity with us, I went to the local SPD chapter for support. However, the SPD officials only laughed and asked whether the suppression of the 1917 sailors' revolt had not taught us any lesson.² I stood my ground, though, and demanded them to join the meeting.

On Sunday morning, thousands of sailors left their ships and troops. The soldiers' and workers' bitterness was enormous and it only needed a small spark for an explosion.

The commander's office seemed prepared. Hornists and alarm patrols marched through the streets of Kiel and demanded all sailors to return to their troops. No one did. We even used the messengers of the commander's office for our own purposes by following right after them, encouraging the soldiers to join us at the meeting. Many came, along with a big number of ordinary citizens. The drill ground was full of people.

I opened the meeting with a speech. I addressed the current situation and demanded the people to act with determination. It seemed that my words reached the audience. The following day, a bourgeois paper in Kiel wrote, "The man with the lion's voice spoke so loud that everyone could hear." Apart from me, the SPD trade union leader Gustav Garbe³ and the ombudsman of the sailors, Kirchhöfer, spoke. The crowd came to the unanimous decision to hold a demonstration in Kiel in solidarity with the arrested sailors—the day before the meeting, many more arrests had been made. There were even rumors that some sailors were to be executed by a firing squad.

Patrols soon tried to block the demonstration's way. But we could not be stopped. We disarmed the patrols without much problem. The demonstration grew by the minute. Many people joined spontaneously. In front of the Café Kaiser we suddenly heard machine-gun fire. We stopped and made sure that no one had been hit. Then we proceeded. Now, however, the shooters fired directly into the crowd. Forty to fifty people, including women and children, collapsed. Eight of them died and twenty-nine were badly wounded.

The masses were outraged. When the murderers, who were under the command of lieutenant Steinhäuser, were not willing to stop shooting even after this bloodbath, a sailor who was at the head of the demonstration leapt forward and hit Steinhäuser with his rifle. The murderer had received his punishment. This was the signal for attack. Young sailors and workers stormed toward the machine gunners and caused them to flee. We carried our shot brothers and sisters to the Café Kaiser

where we put the wounded on couches and the dead on the floor. We held hands and pledged to act with unrelenting determination against the perpetrators of this heinous crime, and against the warmongers in general. We would not rest until they were forced to stop their dirty work. The hour for a decisive confrontation had come. We had witnessed the spark that made the powder keg explode.

The next morning, all of our troops had to report for duty. The navy command knew that many units had formed revolutionary soldiers' councils the night before. Our torpedo division had received the order to come without arms. After the usual routine, the commander of the division, Captain Bartels, climbed on a table and gave a speech. He mentioned the demonstration and said that there was a lot of tension in town. He emphasized that a soldier had not concern himself with politics since he didn't know anything about politics. He closed his speech with the words, "A soldier *must* obey and a soldier *will* obey."

After he had stepped from his table, I felt magically drawn toward it. On the spur of the moment, I jumped on it and gave a speech myself, encouraging the soldiers to elect soldiers' councils. The officers who tried to pull me down were instantly disarmed by angry soldiers. Afterward, we stormed our armories and elected soldiers' councils for all companies. I was elected chairman.

We held our first meeting in the dining hall of the torpedo division. During the meeting, a sergeant appeared, telling us that we should present our requests to the commander of the division. We explained to him that we had no requests, only demands. If the commander wanted to talk to us, he knew where to find us.

Aware of our determination, the commander deemed it wiser to come. We presented our demands:

1. The immediate end of the war.
2. The abdication of the Hohenzollern.
3. The end of the siege.⁴
4. The release of the arrested sailors of the Third Squadron.
5. The release of all the sailors imprisoned in Celle due to their involvement in the revolt of 1917.
6. The release of all political prisoners.
7. The implementation of general, equal, and secret suffrage for men and women.

Astonished, the commander of the division said, "But, gentlemen, these are all political demands!" I gave him the appropriate answer: he had told us on the barrack yard that we shouldn't concern ourselves with politics—that's why we put our political demands first.

After a short while, I was told that the governor wanted to see me right away. We got a car, fetched a red flag from the torpedo boat (the flag was bigger than the car), and prepared our departure. Before we left, I gathered the soldiers on the

Kiel-Wik drill ground⁵ and told them that they should launch an all-out attack if I was not back within two hours, disregarding any possible objections by the SPD.

When we arrived at the governor's house, we were met by officers armed to the teeth. They rushed toward our car, demanding furiously how we could stop in front of the governor's house in such appearance. I explained to them that they need not worry because we were invited. Right at that moment, a secretary of the governor appeared, telling the officers to lead Artelt of the First Torpedo Division to the governor, Vice-Admiral Souchon.⁶ I and my comrades were allowed in without further ado.

It was obvious how hard it was for Souchon to negotiate with us. This diehard militarist was not used to negotiating with simple soldiers. He expected them to obey orders, even if that meant killing father, mother, and brother. He welcomed us by saying, "Thank you for your courage to come here."

Before the negotiations began, I asked him whether he acknowledged the elected representatives of the soldiers and whether he was willing to negotiate with us on equal terms. Forced by the circumstances, he said yes. Then I told him that we first had to address the issues that he was actually allowed to decide on. I also told him that it would be a mistake to send land troops against the revolutionary sailors. If this happened, the Second Squadron had orders to attack the officers' homes in the neighborhood of Düsternbrook and to burn all the luxury houses to the ground. The governor asked, "But gentlemen, can you take responsibility for attacking women and children?" I told him that it was in his hands to prevent a bloodbath: if he deemed it appropriate to order infantrymen to shoot at sailors, we deemed it appropriate to respond in any manner we saw fit. Given our unrelenting position, the governor gave us his word not to call in outside troops and to return the units that were already on their way. Furthermore, he informed us that the representative Noske and the state secretary Haußmann⁷ were coming to Kiel to negotiate with us.

In the evening, we heard that despite the governor's promise four infantry units were approaching. We jumped in our car and drove toward them. We reached them at the post office, talked to them, and explained the situation. Then I ordered them not to shoot at the sailors and to either surrender their weapons or to join the revolution. The infantrymen—like all of us simple workers and peasants forced into a soldiers' uniform without any actual relation to the war—joined our revolutionary movement. The officers were disarmed.

Our comrades had been very effective during our absence. They had won over the shipyard division that was stationed at our barracks. This division largely consisted of organized, class-conscious workers.

Now we had about thirty thousand men. This was a strong revolutionary force. Unfortunately, we did not have a revolutionary working-class party at the

time, which would have been necessary to give the revolutionary movement a clear objective and organizational stability. We more or less depended on ourselves and had no connection to the movement in the rest of Germany. We had to operate in isolation.

Our next task was the liberation of the arrested sailors. We summoned our military band and all the revolutionary seamen. We marched to the detention center in Kiel to demand the release of all political prisoners. Accompanied by the chief of Kiel's court of justice, I inspected the inmates' list to see who was imprisoned for political or disciplinary reasons. We demanded these prisoners be freed immediately. Once I knew who they were, I went with the wardens through the entire detention center, ordered the relevant cells to be opened, and informed each comrade personally about the end of his detention.

The joy of the freed soldiers cannot be described. They all gathered in the prison's entry hall. Meanwhile, I went outside and told the gathered soldiers that the times of saluting pompous officers was over—now we ought to salute political prisoners! Everyone agreed enthusiastically. Then, upon my command, the prisoners left the detention center and were received with all honors to the tunes of the "Socialist March"⁸ and the "Internationale."

The same day, we drove to the train station to receive Noske. We had planned a big demonstration on Wilhelmsplatz, at which Noske and I should speak. After Noske's arrival, I told him clearly that he should not try to merely pursue the interests of the SPD, thereby dividing the movement in Kiel. Hypocritically, he told me that his intention was to collaborate in order to "bring the movement further." Then we drove to Wilhelmsplatz, where Noske and I spoke to the crowd.

Afterward, there was a conference of the administrators of all navy units in the big hall of the union building. On this occasion, Noske already dropped his mask. The promises he had given me at the train station seemed forgotten. His first words were, "The government has sent me to guarantee amnesty for all rebel leaders, soldiers, and workers involved in the movement if the protests in Kiel are stopped immediately."

His words caused outrage. I interrupted him, stating that an end to the protests was out of the question. When Noske noticed that his tactics did not work, he tried different ones and said that what we needed more than anything right now was peace, rest, work, and bread. After long discussions, the Central Soldiers' Council for all navy units of the Baltic Sea region was elected. Noske had proposed himself as a candidate, although he wasn't a soldier. In response, we also proposed a non-soldier, namely Lothar Popp, the chairman of the local USPD chapter, as a candidate.⁹ I was elected chairman.

Noske tried to take control of the revolutionary movement in order to suffocate it. After we had removed the Kaiser's governor, Vice-Admiral Souchon, from office,

Noske proposed himself as governor of Kiel. He was appointed, but his powers were not to exceed mine as the chairman of the Central Soldier's Council. Noske was not supposed to issue any orders without my signature.

As soon as Noske realized that the revolutionary fervor of Kiel was not spreading to other regions in the same way, he focused on dividing the soldiers in town and to sabotage the work of the Central Soldiers' Council. His goal was to win time, allowing the counterrevolution to organize a crushing blow against the revolutionary movement.



1. After the Wilhelmshaven revolt on October 30, over one thousand soldiers were arrested. The two hundred men brought to Kiel on October 31 had been among them.
2. See "July–August 1917" in the Timeline.
3. Gustav Garbe (1865–1935), SPD trade unionist and chairman of the Kiel Workers' Council.
4. Kiel was surrounded by military forces.
5. Wik is a northern suburb of Kiel.
6. Wilhelm Souchon (1864–1946), highly decorated German admiral who played a crucial role in the Ottoman Empire siding with Germany in World War I.
7. Conrad Haußmann (1857–1922), member of the left-liberal *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* [Progressive People's Party].
8. *Sozialistenmarsch*. Written in 1891 by the social democratic journalist and collector of folk songs, Max Kegel. A popular tune among various socialist factions in Germany.
9. Lothar Popp (1887–1980), an anti-war activist who had been dismissed from the German Army, was a metalworker at the Kiel shipyard.

BERLIN

THE WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS' UPRISINGS REACHED THE CAPITAL Berlin some days after the Wilhelmshaven and Kiel revolts. By November 9, it had become clear that the Kaiserreich was not to survive. Not everyone in the SPD was excited about this. Some of the most prominent SPD members, chairman Friedrich Ebert included, feared a radical transformation of German society. They were hoping for a constitutional monarchy that would strengthen the powers of the parliament. However, when tens of thousands of workers and soldiers marched on the Reichstag on November 9, it was obvious that more drastic measures were expected. Fearing that radicals, mainly Karl Liebknecht and the Spartacus League, would benefit from the revolutionary situation, cabinet member Philipp Scheidemann stepped out on the balcony of the Reichstag and, against Ebert's explicit wishes, proclaimed Germany a republic. Kaiser Wilhelm II, away in Belgium, was notified after the act and officially abdicated his throne on November 28.

The situation in Berlin was confusing. Only hours after Scheidemann had proclaimed Germany a republic, Karl Liebknecht proclaimed Germany a "socialist republic" at the *Stadtschloss* [City Palace], the Berlin residence of the royal family. The Revolutionary Stewards, fearless anti-war organizers in the factories during the war, took on the role of mediators and called for a big meeting of workers' and soldiers' councils at the Circus Busch on the evening of November 10. At the meeting, it was agreed that an Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin and a six-member Council of People's Delegates should serve as a provisional government. Both bodies should be equally divided between SPD and USPD members (at the time, the Spartacus League members still belonged to the USPD). The People's Delegates were Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann, and Otto Landsberg for the SPD, and Hugo Haase, Wilhelm Dittmann, and Emil Barth for the USPD. According to the agreements at the Circus Busch meeting, the people's delegates were to act as little else but the administrative arm of the Executive Council. That this never translated into reality, with the people's delegates soon assuming many independent powers, became one of the main points of contention during the following weeks.

It soon became very clear that the SPD's ideas of the new Germany differed significantly from those of the USPD, especially the Spartacists, and also from those of the Revolutionary Stewards (many of whom were USPD members). The crucial question became the convocation of a national assembly. The SPD wanted to have a national assembly elected as soon as possible. For

many USPD members, the Spartacus League, and the Revolutionary Stewards this meant a betrayal of the soldiers and workers and of the chance to build a political and economic system resting on the power of their councils. Although the political vision of the radicals was not uniform (some USPD members were far more willing to make compromises with parliamentarism than, for example, the Spartacists), they all agreed that the revolution had to be secured before any steps toward parliamentarism could be taken. That meant that they wanted to disarm the bourgeoisie, to break the power of the military, to democratize the press, to redistribute wealth, to socialize the biggest industries, to stabilize international relations, etc. If these measures were not taken, parliamentarism meant nothing but bourgeois capitalist rule.

When the so-called Christmas Clashes of 1918 made it clear that the SPD did not hesitate to collaborate with the bourgeoisie and reactionary military forces to suppress radical workers' uprisings, the USPD people's delegates resigned and two more SPD members entered the Council of People's Delegates, one of them being Gustav Noske who was appointed minister of the Reichswehr. Upon his appointment, Noske allegedly said, "One has to be the bloodhound—I am ready." In the following two years, he earned notoriety for ruthlessly employing reactionary security forces to quell radical workers' rebellions and uprisings across Germany.

In January 1919, the so-called Spartacus Uprising took place. It was a rather spontaneous revolt by frustrated workers, peaking on January 5 in the occupation of many newspaper offices, including the social democratic *Vorwärts*. Six days later, the occupations were ended by army and reactionary Free Corps units sent by Noske. Over 150 workers died in the clashes. The term "Spartacus Uprising" is misleading. Neither was the uprising planned by the Spartacists nor were their leaders actively involved. Nonetheless, the uprising was used as an excuse by the SPD to clamp down on the communist rivals. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were lynched on January 15 by reactionary soldiers. This was a crucial moment for the defeat of the radical forces in the revolution. In Berlin, there was one more battle between radicals and the SPD and its allies in March 1919, in which about two thousand people were killed and in which the SPD government prevailed. After that, social democratic, that was, in the eyes of the radicals, bourgeois rule was secured in the capital.

This chapter is divided into two parts gathering texts by the most prominent representatives of the two main radical factions active in Berlin.

Richard Müller and Ernst Däumig were leading figures among the Revolutionary Stewards, radical labor organizers who had earned deep trust among the proletariat by organizing various strikes during the war. Müller had been imprisoned several times. In his book *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik* [From

the Kaiserreich to the Republic], he writes the following about the Revolutionary Stewards' history:

You can find many misleading reports about the group of revolutionary men that united under the name "Revolutionary Stewards." [...] The Revolutionary Stewards, as they existed on the eve of the revolution, were not the product of a clever leader's mind but had developed from the social, political, and military conditions in Germany during the war. Its organizational foundation was based on the development of the German workers' movement.

It all began, right after the outbreak of the war, with a meeting of trade union organizers who still took the original social democratic teachings seriously and saw it as their duty to educate the workers and to end the war as soon as possible. In the beginning, this circle was limited to a few people organizing Berlin's iron and metal workers. However, they soon organized concrete actions in support of their goals.

It took less than a year for the circle to widen and to extend to other sectors of the war industry. It also spread from Berlin to other parts of the country. The trade unions and the emerging USPD were used as organizational platforms, while ideological affinity existed not only with the USPD but also with the SPD's left wing and the Spartacus League. The Revolutionary Stewards were no mass organization in which everyone could partake, but a selected circle of men educated and experienced in daily politics and workplace struggles; men with an influence in the workplace. They were a 'vanguard' of the proletariat in the true meaning of the word.¹

The Revolutionary Stewards have perhaps been the most overlooked faction in the German Revolution. The work they did in the shops and factories was enormously important for the radicalization of wide sections of the proletariat. A recent book dedicated to Richard Müller carries the subtitle "The Man Behind the November Revolution."² This is certainly a bold claim, but it is not entirely unjustified. The texts by Müller and Däumig reflect on the development of the revolution, the role of the workers' and soldiers' councils, and the potential of the council system.

The second part of the chapter is mainly dedicated to articles written by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg³ in *Die Rote Fahne*, covering the period from the beginning of the revolution to their death. The articles constitute a kind of Spartacus diary about the revolution's development. They are supplemented by the memories of Spartacus member Karl Retzlaw.

In comparison to the Revolutionary Stewards, the Spartacists are well known internationally, not least due to the popularity of Rosa Luxemburg's writings. At

times, this leads to exaggerating the Spartacists' role in the German Revolution. However, that they were a crucial force is without doubt.



1. Richard Müller, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der revolutionären Arbeiterbewegung während des Weltkriegs* [From the Kaiserreich to the Republic: A Contribution to the History of the Revolutionary Workers' Movement During the World War] (Vienna: Malik, 1924), 125–126.
2. Ralf Hoffrogge, *Richard Müller—Der Mann hinter der Novemberrevolution* (2008). See the Bibliography for details.
3. Some of the texts by Rosa Luxemburg published in *Die Rote Fahne* were not signed but can be attributed to her with near certainty. In this volume, this concerns the articles “On the Executive Council,” “To the Entrenchments,” “National Assembly or Council Government?” and “A Pyrrhic Victory.”

THE REVOLUTIONARY STEWARDS

REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS' COUNCILS OF GREAT BERLIN

RICHARD MÜLLER

Speech given by Müller at the first General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany, December 16, 1918. Translated from the official congress reader *Allgemeiner Kongreß der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte Deutschlands* [General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany], self-published in Berlin in 1918. Slightly abbreviated.

THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF BERLIN HAS BEEN STRONGLY criticized across the country. The most incredible rumors and many alleged "facts" have been spread. For weeks, the bourgeois press has been mobilizing against us in unscrupulous ways. Unfortunately, some socialist journals were not only involved in this (I will prove this later on) but were among the driving forces.

The first accusation was that the Executive Council of Berlin was aiming to establish a dictatorship and that it wanted to bring the entire country under its control. When these allegations, and others that were similarly ludicrous, could no longer be defended, a general defamation campaign began. [...]

Comrades, let us investigate the causes for the defamation of the Executive Council. First, we have to look at its origins. In fact, we have to go back even further and look at the events preceding the revolution. Only very few know exactly what happened, and it is not our intention to present it all in detail here. I can tell you, however, that the preparations for the revolution already started in July 1916.¹

At the time, neither the exact goal nor the time was clear, but it was evident to all the individuals involved that Germany's political and

economic development during the war would bring about a revolution. These individuals have for the most part become members of the Executive Council. This was the first reason why the bourgeoisie, never keen on radical social transformations and angry at losing its power to the workers and soldiers, turned against it. Many of the attacks were directed at individual Executive Council members, particularly me. I do not consider myself overly sensitive, but what a bourgeois paper wrote just yesterday really went too far—I will address this later in my speech.

The second reason for the attacks on the Executive Council lies deeper. It concerns the fact that the Executive Council and the workers' and soldiers' councils it represents are, in fact, the only tangible results of the revolution. The revolution overthrew the old governmental system, and the power of the state is now contained in the workers' and soldiers' councils that took its place. The domination of the imperialists and the bourgeoisie has been undermined. The new order rests on the shoulders of the workers' and soldiers' councils and it is their task to ensure social and political developments living up to socialist ideas and principles. The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin was implemented as the provisional central organ of the German workers' and soldiers' councils and it was recognized as such. It became the revolution's visible expression.

Otherwise, everything remained the same. The entire political and economic life is the same, only that the workers' and soldiers' councils, embodied in the Executive Council, represent the sovereignty of the state. Therefore it is not surprising that the ones who have lost power, that is, the bourgeois parties and their press, are focusing their anger on the workers' and soldiers' councils and on the Executive Council in particular.

Right after the revolution, this was not so obvious. The press was intimidated. It probably feared the power of the workers' and soldiers' councils. But when it became clear that the danger was not that big and that the councils demonstrated sheepish patience, the defamations began and became worse by the day. This is a natural phenomenon. Those who want to reestablish the old order must remove the workers' and soldiers' councils, and therefore they must fight them with tooth and nail.

It is crystal-clear that the workers' and soldiers' councils are the only real achievement of the revolution. If they fall, not much remains of it. Those who fight the workers' and soldiers' councils want—consciously or unconsciously—to reestablish the old order and to take the political power from the workers and soldiers. The fight against the workers' and soldiers' councils is a logical consequence of the present conditions.

We, the members of the Executive Council, have contributed to the escalation of the fight. By revolutionary force, we declared ourselves the highest political authority in Germany on November 11. We demanded that all communal, regional,

national, and military boards worked under the control and the orders of the Executive Council. At the time, no one objected, and we proceeded to formulate our political guidelines on November 17. These guidelines must have frightened the reactionary forces. We declared:

Workers and soldiers have removed the old governmental system. In the revolutionary organization of the workers' and soldiers' councils the new state power is taking shape. This power must be secured and expanded so that the achievements of the revolution will benefit the entire working class. This cannot happen by transforming the German state into a bourgeois democratic republic. The German state has to become a proletarian republic on the grounds of a socialist economy. The wish of the bourgeoisie to elect and install a national assembly as soon as possible is destined to rob the workers of the fruits of the revolution.

The resolution of November 17 said with all clarity that we wanted to maintain and secure the achievements of the revolution, that we would not allow anyone to take them away, and that the political power had to remain in the hands of the manual and intellectual workers and, of course, the soldiers—even if the soldiers' councils are only a temporary phenomenon, as they will soon vanish.

We also spoke out very clearly against the national assembly. However, I do not want to say much about this now; we will discuss this later, according to the congress schedule.² In any case, it was inevitable that our stance would provoke the enemies of the revolution to come out and fight. [...]

Comrades, before I will report more on the activities of the Executive Council and on the activities—and the identity—of its adversaries, I would like to quickly recall its origins.

The revolution took its first steps outside of Berlin, especially at the North Sea Coast. Ironically, we who had prepared for the revolution had already determined our first move when the news from revolutionary uprisings in other parts of Germany reached us. The insane plan of the old rulers to send our entire navy fleet with tens of thousands of our best sons into a last desperate battle against England under the motto, "To win or to perish with dignity," was revealed at the right time and prevented. It led to the outbreak of the revolution before we in Berlin could even conceive it.

On November 9, the revolution reached Berlin itself. The day before, masses of soldiers arrived in the city. It seemed that the imminent uprising was to be suppressed by arms. The bourgeois press, including the *Vorwärts*, did everything to prevent open rebellion. In its morning edition of November 9, the *Vorwärts* urged Berlin's workers not to go on strike before all means of negotiation were exhausted.³ But the revolutionary sentiments had already become too strong. The

old rulers did not have the courage to fight for their chartered rights. As it had to be expected, November 9 was a very chaotic day. We had not foreseen that the old rulers would leave their posts so quickly. In the midst of the chaos, those who had prepared for the revolution tried to uphold some kind of order, and it was them who, on November 10, called for a meeting of the delegates of Berlin's workers' and soldiers' councils in the Circus Busch.⁴

In the meantime, the two social democratic parties collaborated in forming a government, the Council of People's Delegates, which was composed, in equal parts, of members of the SPD and the USPD. This council was approved as the provisional government in the Circus Busch. At the same time, however, the Executive Council was elected. [...]

Born from the revolution, the workers' and soldiers' councils that formed all across the country were the carriers of the revolution, and we as the Executive Council of Great Berlin saw ourselves as the Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' councils of all of Germany. We were convinced that it was necessary to form a central council for Germany. The German socialist republic needed a central political organ, a defender of the sovereignty of the working masses. On this basis, we published the declaration that I cited above, putting all regional, national, military, etc. boards under our control and asserting our central role in administering the country.

Given the rapid developments, it was always clear that our measures could only be provisional. We never said anything else. We always emphasized that our power was provisional and that a different body, appointed by a broader electorate, should take our place as soon as possible. Given the role that the Executive Council played, I understand that it might have appeared as if we wanted to establish a dictatorship over the entire country. Unfortunately, our opponents exploited this fear. They convinced many Germans that this was indeed our intention. However, we never had any such intention and we never proclaimed anything of that kind either. It is discouraging that even socialist journals spread this lie nonetheless, undermining the trust of the workers' and soldiers' councils across Germany in the Executive Council of Great Berlin. [...]

If you, honored comrades, look at the documents that have been handed to you,⁵ you also find the membership list of the Executive Council. This list proves that the Executive Council was widened as far as possible. Today, there are no longer twenty-eight but forty-five members.⁶ This, I believe, is clear proof that the members of the original Executive Council never intended to concentrate the power of the state in their own hands. The Executive Council of Great Berlin constituted itself as the highest authority in the country at a time when the entire political system had been uprooted and the economy came to a halt (or at least when such a halt seemed imminent); in other words, at a time when public peace

and security were endangered and when counterrevolutionary coups had to be expected any day.

Comrades, you may criticize us as much as you want. You may tell us that we could have done many things better. We know this. However, no one can accuse us of not having tried, and no one can question our goodwill. The difficulties we were facing were enormous. Whenever we did not make the changes we should have made, we simply weren't strong enough. Comrades, consider one thing: during this time, we received hundreds of telegrams and letters from all over Germany every day. We were virtually besieged by people who were looking for our advice and our help. In addition, we had no technological infrastructure and no public servants who were trained and experienced. It should not come as a surprise that under these circumstances several Executive Council members collapsed under the amount of work and responsibility.

You must also remember that the situation in Berlin was very different from the one in most parts of the country. The seat of the national government was here, the seat of the Prussian government, the seat of the ministry of war, of the general staff, of all of the military authorities, of the ministry of foreign affairs, and of basically all governmental offices. Furthermore, the headquarters of the highly influential companies profiting from the war were here. Everyone approached us and demanded our attention after we had become the highest authority in the country overnight. In addition, we had to keep an eye on the soldiers and workers in order to guarantee peace and order among them. If you consider all this, you must admit the impossibility for everything to go smoothly. It should therefore be understandable if certain things happened that could normally not be excused.

In addition, the soldiers who became part of the Executive Council had not been selected as carefully as they should have been. There were people among them who should have never belonged to the Executive Council. Unfortunately, the entire Executive Council had to take responsibility for their mistakes. [...]

Let me say a bit more about the relationship between the Council of People's Delegates and the Executive Council. I state openly: eventually, this relationship became unbearable. I only want to point out one thing: it appears as if the Council of People's Delegates no longer wants to accept the power of the workers' and soldiers' councils at all. During the counterrevolutionary coup of December 6,⁷ the message was clear: the government Ebert-Haase was acceptable, but not the Executive Council! The coup was directed against the achievements of the revolution. If the Executive Council falls, the workers' and soldiers' councils will fall too.

I was also astonished to see troops pledging allegiance to the Council of People's Delegates but not the Executive Council or the workers' and soldiers' councils in general.⁸ The words used were the following: "We pledge, in the name of

the units we represent, to defend and protect the united German Republic and its provisional government, the Council of People's Delegates." However, it is clear that the sovereignty of the people is represented in the workers' and soldiers' councils! These are the bodies that soldiers should pledge allegiance to! Instead, they pledged allegiance to the "German Republic." Note that it was not the "German Socialist Republic"! There is a difference! Some might think that there is none. I don't! Comrades, I have already pointed out that in our declaration of November 11, the workers' and soldiers' councils and their highest organ, the Executive Council, were recognized as the carriers of political sovereignty in Germany. The troops must pledge allegiance to the highest power of the state. If they don't, it only proves that some are trying to dismantle the revolution's achievements. [...]

We deemed a thorough reform of the entire reactionary government apparatus our first duty. But the Council of People's Delegates did not support us. To the contrary: we have had nothing but problems with the Council of People's Delegates. Right after the revolution, we negotiated the division of powers and duties. The negotiations weren't easy. It was not the fault of the Executive Council that it needed five days to come to an agreement. You find the result in the documents presented to you under no. 25. There, the constitutional duties of the workers' and soldiers' councils and the people's delegates are laid out in five points:

1. The political power lies in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils in the German Socialist Republic. It is their duty to maintain and to expand the achievements of the revolution and to suppress the counterrevolution.
2. Until an assembly of delegates of all workers' and soldiers' councils has elected an Executive Council of the German Socialist Republic, the Executive Council of Great Berlin fulfills this role.
3. The Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Great Berlin appoints a cabinet and transfers certain powers to it.
4. The right to appoint and dismiss cabinet members lies with the Executive Council, which also monitors the work of the cabinet. This also applies to the government of Prussia until the relationship between the German Socialist Republic and Prussia will be clarified.
5. If the cabinet wants to appoint special ministers, they have to be approved by the Executive Council.

In the negotiations, we stated clearly—and rightfully, I would like to emphasize—that the Executive Council had to retain the right to act on its own in case of imminent counterrevolutionary danger. In fact, this did not only apply to the Executive Council but also to all local workers' and soldiers' councils.

While we had transferred governing powers to the cabinet, we insisted on maintaining control over them. I still believe that this was the only option we had. Let me ask you clearly: when the cabinet disregarded all of our resolutions, what were we supposed to do? We could have only removed it by a motion of no confidence. To be honest, our influence on the government has all but disappeared since those days. The cabinet has simply ignored all of the Executive Council's resolutions and proposals. Increasingly, the relationship is turning into one of competition rather than collaboration. [...]

Comrades, what are we supposed to do when we are told that soldiers, returning from the front and still strongly influenced by officers we cannot trust, are equipped with arms and ammunition at the gates of Berlin? We must demand from the Council of People's Delegates to stop this and to ensure that the ammunition is returned.

Comrades, these are only some of the obstacles we have met when trying to push the revolution further or at least securing its revolutionary achievements. The people's delegates have regularly turned against us. If you consider the speeches given by Ebert and Scheidemann yesterday, it is obvious that the Council of People's Delegates never felt comfortable with the role of the Executive Council and that it has always attempted to act on its own. If you support this, you contribute to the undermining of the revolutionary authority, that is, the Executive Council as the Central Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, and therefore also to the undermining of the revolutions' achievements.

There is no point in closing our eyes. We have to describe the situation honestly. Comrades, the government of the people's delegates is fully supported by the bourgeois press. There is no doubt. The Executive Council has been defamed in the worst ways. Leaflets have been distributed in which the Executive Council is held responsible for everything, even the mistakes of the rotten, fallen regime. Everyone points at the Executive Council saying, "Soldiers, you who have defended the fatherland for four years against a superior enemy, free the German people from this abscess!" [...]

It is clear that campaigns like these have effects. While we are defamed, the counterrevolution organizes and mobilizes—this led to the coup of December 6. We have had heated discussions about this in the Executive Council and with the Council of People's Delegates. I will not go into the details, but I want to say one thing, convinced that I have most of the Executive Council members on my side: I was very alienated by the behavior of the people's delegates during the coup.

The coup came from the right. The coup from the left is not as bad as some here might imagine. We know all the instigators of the coup and we have proof. All of these counterrevolutionary leaders are free men today. They can do the same thing again. The main conspirator, Captain Lorenz from the ministry of war,

has been released upon orders from his superior, the minister. Comrade Barth has told me on the telephone that the ministry of war insists on conducting the investigation against Captain Lorenz itself. If comrade Barth now tells me that a special commission has been formed to handle the case, then I ask why this commission did not exist when Captain Lorenz was released. This was the reason why the entire cabinet was put into question, because no one could understand how a person with so much evidence against him could be set free. Now, Lorenz can continue to organize the White Guards that might remove the last of the revolution's achievements.

I could continue with examples illustrating the relationship between the Council of People's Delegates and the Executive Council. But I won't. I think I have already illustrated sufficiently how difficult it is for the Executive Council to do its work, how it meets new challenges every day, and how it has to struggle against both natural and unnatural enemies.

The Executive Council and all the workers' and soldiers' councils are children of the revolution. No child grows up without teething troubles. The Executive Council and all of the workers' and soldiers' councils had to experience the same. But how do these problems compare to the horror of the old regime? We have been accused of wasting national assets. In six weeks, the Executive Council has spent 500,000 marks, almost exclusively for urgent matters that needed to be taken care of. Compare this to the old regime that has wasted two thirds of Germany's national wealth!

Those who accuse us of wasting national assets have unscrupulously approved and sacrificed billions and billions of marks for the slaughtering of human beings. They have no right at all to complain about the alleged waste of money by the workers' and soldiers' councils! We have clean hands. These lies and defamations will have no effect on the activities of the councils.

At the same time, comrades, the attacks on the Executive Council, and on the workers' and soldiers' councils in general, have harmed us greatly. They have had consequences not only in Germany but also beyond. Abroad, people believe that anarchy reigns in Germany since the workers' and soldiers' councils have taken over. The workers' and soldiers' councils are the target of the counterrevolution. If they crumble, then the last achievement of the revolution crumbles as well. This will not least be the fault of those who have used the inevitable mistakes that the workers' and soldiers' councils have made to discredit them.

This congress may give the right answer. We, the members of the Executive Council have tried to secure the achievements of the revolution. We failed. Today, these achievements are in great danger!

I admit that the Executive Council was composed in an unfortunate manner. Things have changed, though, which pleases me. My friends and I have tried to

secure the revolution. The problem was never a lack of will. Unfortunately, the circumstances were sometimes stronger than us. Even today—and I ask you to consider this, as I have had to consider it ever since the outbreak of the revolution—all political questions remain, in the end, questions of power.

Comrades, you have to make a decision. Don't look back, look forward! We have hard times behind us, we have had unpleasant experiences, and we look to the future with worries. Now, however, the fate of the revolution is in your hands, and we hope and wish that you can secure its achievements and expand it even further!



1. The Revolutionary Stewards organized a one-day mass strike in the summer of 1916, protesting the arrest of Karl Liebknecht. This laid the foundation for an ongoing underground collaboration between the Revolutionary Stewards and Spartacists.
2. The congress schedule included a special session on the "National Assembly or Council System" question.
3. The SPD was negotiating the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and a transfer of power to the SPD with chancellor Max von Baden.
4. Reference to the Revolutionary Stewards.
5. All congress delegates received a file of documents in preparation for the scheduled debates.
6. The original twenty-six council members all came from Berlin. Nineteen members were later added, representing different German regions, federal states, and army units.
7. See "December 6, 1918" in the Timeline.
8. See "December 10, 1918" in the Timeline.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEANS THE COUNCILS' DEATH

ERNST DÄUMIG

Speech given by Däumig at the first General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany in Berlin on December 19, 1918. Translated from the version published as "Die Nationalversammlung ist das Todesurteil für die Räte" in Teo Panther, ed., *Alle Macht den Räten! Texte zur Rätebewegung in Deutschland 1918/19* [All Power to the Councils! Texts from the German Council Movement of 1918–1919], 2 vols. (Münster: Unrast, 2007).

COMRADES, SOLDIERS, *MEINE HERREN!* "WE ARE THE POWER. We hammer life into the state, this old, rotten thing. We are of God's wrath—until now, the proletariat!"¹

With these words, the people's delegate Dittmann closed his speech yesterday. Today, I want to open mine with them, because what this revolutionary prophet expressed seventy years ago, namely that the proletariat was chosen to destroy the old order and to build a new one, has now become our task and our duty—in his time, the world was not ready yet.

Of course, this "rotten thing," the state, will not be destroyed by well-tempered parliamentarians such as Mister Landsberg and the people's delegate Dittmann. It will not be destroyed by clever party secretaries whose schemes characterize even this congress, as we have seen over the last few days. It will not be destroyed by obedient union employees who hide behind membership lists and accounting books and who are interested in but one kind of movement: that of wages. The new world can only be built by the political, economic, and cultural activities of the entire German people. The entire German proletariat, the German workers, whether they work with their hands or with their heads, must get involved and understand that a new world can only emerge from a sea of blood and tears.

This congress is the very first revolutionary parliament of Germany. This is where I put my hope. For the first time since April 1848, the voice of the people can truly be heard.²

Of course, today is not 1848, and there is something unique about the first phase of the German Revolution and its revolutionary parliament. The euphoria of the first revolutionary days passed quickly. The hesitation, the backwardness, the attachment to the old ideologies is still very strong. That is why it is important to push the revolution forward not only for economic but also for cultural reasons. It is mandatory to make it a true people's movement that includes the bottom of society. This seems clear, but it is not clear enough for everyone to understand. *Meine Herren*, not a single revolutionary parliament in history has had such a sober, dowdy, let me say, philistine spirit as the one assembled here.

Where is the grand transformation of the people's souls, of their ideas, that characterized the national convent in France? Where is the youthful passion of March 1848? Where is the anthem emerging from the German people's passion for liberty? We can feel nothing of it. It is very telling that the colors and the insignias of the old regime still adorn the government buildings—above them flutters a pitiful red ribbon. This is what the revolution looks like! Yes, I am talking about exterior things—but they express the situation we are in.

However, in one aspect, this revolutionary parliament resembles all revolutionary parliaments: in the blindness and self-delusion about how far one has come. One refuses to accept the iron laws of history that determine the course of revolutions. Some of you might have laughed and joked when our workers and soldiers arrived at the congress. But theirs are the voices from the bottom of society, and I can tell you: don't expect these voices to fall silent. They will become louder and clearer! When the history of the revolutionary weeks in Germany will be written, people will ask themselves: were those folks really too blind to see how they put a rope around their own necks? After all, it should be obvious to anyone able to think clearly that the wonderful decision to elect a national assembly means nothing but the death sentence for the current system, that is, the council system. If you have the desire to form a political suicide club, I leave you to it—me, I want no part of it!

Comrades, soldiers! I assume I will not offend anyone in this room if I state that only very few of us have ever really pondered the council system. How did you become members of the workers' and soldiers' councils? Basically, you were carried by a colossal event, but you did not necessarily grasp the deep meaning of these institutions.

Where did the council idea come from? It emerged in 1905, when the Russian proletariat led its first heroic fight against the dreadful tsarist regime. Spontaneously, without much preparation at all, workers' councils arose from the nucleus of the new world, the big factory. In 1905, these councils led the struggle. In 1906–1907, the council members who had to pay for their heroic courage, either in the drumhead courts-martial or in the Siberian ice. The idea of the council system, however, remained alive. It reemerged like a flame in March 1917 when the Great Russian Revolution started. We are familiar with this history.

But how could the council system play such a pivotal role during the events of November 1918 in Germany? The answer is this: because the council system is, and *has to be*, the organizational structure of modern revolutions. Of course I know—and this concerns especially the comrades in uniform—that the system smells of Bolshevism. But neither I nor anyone with a clear vision will be detracted by this. Any revolution will be vilified. The sans-culottes, the patriots, the demagogues, the communards of 1971, they were all vilified, defamed, and attacked. In other words, we simply have to accept being called “Bolsheviks.” However, comrades, this is no big deal. What is *not* Bolshevism today? To some people, every one of you, as you sit here, is a “Bolshevik.” The Bolshevik bogeyman is so deeply entrenched in the so-called soldiers’ councils that I have to tell you a short anecdote about this.

When we realized that many soldiers returning from the front, as a result of poor and biased information, expected murder, manslaughter, and a gang of depraved revolutionaries in Berlin, we saw it as our duty in the Executive Council to enlighten them. We produced a leaflet with *Kameraden!* as a headline.³ Among others, all of the SPD comrades and all of the soldiers in the Executive Council approved the text. Couriers brought huge numbers of the leaflet to the troops both in the East and the West. When it arrived in Vilnius at the soldiers’ council of the Tenth Army, the council members told our courier that they would never distribute such a Bolshevik rant among their soldiers. They simply destroyed the entire delivery. This kind of reaction is very characteristic. It is not enough for officers who are voted into soldiers’ councils to have the trust of their soldiers. Especially in times of revolution, their conviction matters!

How did the workers’ councils emerge in Germany? They emerged from the big strike movements of the last years, in which we—who have always been strong opponents of the war and who have lived with tortured souls for four years given the pressure and the lies the German people were exposed to—were the driving political force. We convinced the people in the big factories who shared our ideas to act as workers’ councils; they did so under enormous danger. During the last weeks before the revolution, we engaged in dedicated and very dangerous agitation in the Berlin barracks. We managed to find a number of soldiers who were willing to join us in our plans to overthrow the bloodstained regime. We formed, of course illegally, a Provisional Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council. Every declaration and leaflet distributed by us in the barracks, demanding the soldiers not to shoot at their brothers and mothers, were signed by it.

What were the consequences? Not only did the political police chase us, not only did the high command in Berlin-Brandenburg, this reactionary institution of 1848, mobilize all of its forces against us, no: we were attacked, cursed, and defamed by comrades from our own class! On November 6, the SPD released a response to our leaflets: “Beware of divisions, of war among proletarian brothers, of irresponsible

elements trying to instigate careless attacks that are not in your interest! Do not follow the slogans of small groups and unknown manipulators! If the workers stray in all directions, or even cross each other's way, then only misery can come from it, never joy!"

This gives you a quick impression of how the SPD saw the workers' and soldiers' councils. Then, November 9 came, and thanks to our preparatory work in the shops and factories the old world was wiped out. Suddenly, SPD members arrived in drones, fervently trying to join the council system. This is further proof that in revolutionary times—especially today, when the proletariat necessarily carries the revolution as the only revolutionary class—the council system imposes itself naturally. It would be sheer foolishness if one wanted to resist this historical necessity. It is simple: the old bourgeois democracy with its ballots and its petty parliaments will not exist forever. It exists under specific historical circumstances. Today, with socialism emerging as the new foundation of the world, bourgeois democracy will inevitably be replaced by proletarian democracy expressed in the council system.

Comrades and soldiers, many of you applauded enthusiastically when comrade Cohen argued for the national assembly and even suggested to hold elections earlier than planned.⁴ By doing so, you have issued your own death sentence. The declarations made by comrade Cohen and by others, namely that the council system will remain even when the national assembly gathers, are hollow words. What role can a council system play next to a pompous parliamentary, democratic, bourgeois system represented by a national assembly? The councils will be mere staffage, puppets! In the economic sphere, the old trade unions will soon, with the help of the national assembly and the bourgeoisie, push the workers' councils out of the shops and factories. They are already doing it.

No, these two things do not go together. You have to choose one or the other! I warn you, though: if you choose the old system, you can bury all your dreams about a new, free (also culturally and spiritually free) Germany; about a Germany shedding the old spirit of subservience that still haunts it; a Germany whose affairs are really determined by active people doing more than running to the ballot box every two or three years.

It is not surprising that local election results reported from around the country usually see the socialists taking three fifths of the vote and the bourgeois parties two. This proves that the ideology of the bourgeoisie, especially its economic system, still has strong roots in this country. All announcements of a strong socialist majority in the coming national assembly must be regarded with skepticism. Someone who wholeheartedly defends the national assembly and who is a great enemy of the council system, Herr von Gerlach of the *Welt am Montag* [World on Monday],⁵ sees things very realistically. He says the following about the hailed national assembly:

I fear that we will see many all-too-familiar faces in it—people we already know from the Reichstag. It will be an attempt to make new politics with old people,

and we will learn that revolution does not mean evolution for more than some people. I dare predict that it will take but four weeks before the national assembly will be strongly criticized. Once it is forced to accept a tough peace treaty, including reparations for the atrocities committed by the old regime, that is, once the national assembly is forced to take significantly from the upper classes without being able to give sufficiently to the lower, it will be viciously attacked from both the right and the left. This is what will happen because it has to happen.

These are not the words of a Bolshevik, but of a law-abiding bourgeois democrat, an ardent believer in bourgeois democracy and the national assembly. If he reaches such a verdict, then I say: if the old Germany shall disappear and a new one emerge from its tomb, we need to fill the German people with an entirely new political and cultural spirit. I stress the term “cultural.” I mean by it everything that can be summarized under the notion of a “higher development of humankind.” Material goods and political freedoms are not the only things that matter. We also need to think about the new culture that must emerge from the fire that rages globally.

This is what we must consider right here at this hour. We must not only think about Germany and its narrow borders—which we do not even know today.⁶ We must look at all the other countries, bleeding, like us, from thousands of wounds. Their salvation can only come from the strongest force there is, the masses of the people, from *international unity*!

We know that we cannot expect salvation from the likes of Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and all the others. However, I do not share the pessimism of comrade Cohen. Things are on the move in other countries, too. Comrade Cohen should know, for example, that the English trade unions have not had control over the strikes of the ammunition workers for three years. These strikes are administered solely by workers’ councils. This is a remarkable sign of the time.

In France, the councils are also getting stronger by the day. Chauvinism is forced to its knees in other countries as much as it is in Germany. The burden of the war is not only felt by the German proletariat, but also by the French, English, and American, and it causes the same bitterness there. If someone says today that it would be foolish to expect a revolution in those countries because we do not have strong enough indications, I want to remind you that our glorious SPD comrades still spoke of “a few conspirators” on November 7—they could not believe that a revolution was possible in Germany. I had to fight my own friends because they deemed it impossible. And then the revolution came.

The same is happening in the other countries. It cannot be any other way if we consider the laws of history: a world war has to lead to a world revolution, even if the revolution might come earlier in some places than in others. People are also suffering in the Negro villages along the Senegal River and in the farms of

Australia and India. The consequences of the world war are felt around the entire globe. At this historical moment, during the first great revolution in Germany, we have to embrace a new political system, namely the council system. All else would be foolish. It would mean to stubbornly cling to old traditions.

However, I am afraid that this congress will not make the right decisions. The Lüdemann Motion indicates the imminent self-castration of the congress and, hence, the revolution.⁷ If this were a revolutionary parliament with temperament and fire, it would constitute itself as the "national assembly" and state clearly: *we are this body*, we have the masses behind us, we have the power of the soldiers and workers behind us, and we want to determine the future of Germany!

It is wrong to think that this would make a peace agreement more difficult. The Entente would not mind such a move. We don't even know what the Entente thinks about our workers' and soldiers' councils. We receive the most contradictory news. And if today's news seemed negative, let me state this: whenever mister Erzberger is involved, I am very skeptical!

If the Council of People's Delegates has not yet removed Mister Solf, and all the other remaining employees of the ministry of foreign affairs who engage in secret diplomacy, we have to assume that they are using the same old poisonous channels they used during the war, and that they maintain the same connections, reaching from Berlin's Wilhelmstraße to Bern, Christiania,⁸ etc. It is very telling that it has been impossible so far to release any of the secret documents kept in the foreign ministry, the general staff, the ministry of war, and many other places. We are already in the seventh week of the revolution! Imagine the contribution we could make to a satisfying peace treaty if we were able to say, "Look, we, the people, are innocent! We have been lied to, we have been betrayed, and we can prove it!"

This is not happening, however. Old diplomacy still reigns and no efforts are made to change this. It would have been the duty of this first revolutionary congress to demand action. Instead, most of you only follow old paths. *Quieta movere* has to be avoided under all circumstances.⁹ We want to prevent anything new, anything that we don't know yet, by all means. History will pass a harsh verdict on this congress.

The council system is often called a dictatorship, and every bourgeois gets tremendously scared. He thinks of Brownings, machine guns, and other things. Please look at the history of the last few years. We have lived under the most shameful and ruthless dictatorship that the world has ever known. The brutality of the tsarist regime was at least appeased by corruption. The resentfulness of the Germans who had to endure the last four years of military dictatorship as well as the spiritual dictatorship established on August 4, 1914, will never disappear. I am talking about the men and women who did not join the warmongers' camp and who kept their humanity on August 1, 1914.¹⁰ The war was never our business!

Yet, there are people in our midst who wanted to stick to the politics of August 4 even during the events of November! If we consider this, the revolution takes on a different face. We, the truly dedicated revolutionaries, remain skeptical and cautious with regard to these people's actions.

The council system can have the character of a dictatorship. But the developments we have seen in Russia, determined by the laws of history, do not have to repeat themselves in Germany. I am not among those who advocate a mere imitation of the Russian example. I am German and I am proud to be German. During the twenty years I have been involved in party politics,¹¹ I have tried to make German culture, German poetry, and German literature accessible to the masses. These treasures have been kept from them by the bourgeoisie. At the same time, we must apply the useful aspects of the Great Russian Revolution. I have always supported the Bolsheviks, and I still do.

Opinions on the Bolsheviks might differ. But their courage and their dedication to socialism are genuine. They were the first who took the step from talking about peace to realizing it. I know why the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois socialists portray the Bolsheviks as devils: they are afraid. It is understandable that the bourgeoisie bemoans the loss of so much they cherish, of all the comfort it has taken for granted. But—and I direct this question to the soldiers assembled here—has the bourgeoisie ever cared about you facing grenades for four years, about you crawling through the snow of Poland and Russia, about you receiving the injuries you are still carrying with you? No, it didn't. They fed you with nationalist phrases and promised you the gratitude of the fatherland. Most importantly, though, they protected the property of the rulers and made sure that their houses were warm. So, now that the German people have finally freed themselves of their chains and taken initiative, are we really to worry about a "dictatorship"?

What does the term "dictatorship" in Germany really mean? I am holding the economic statistics of 1907 in my hands, the most recent ones we have. The numbers show that proletarians compose the majority in all areas of work: agriculture, forestry, mining, construction, industrial production, trade, and transport. This implies that they were ruled by an economically privileged minority. And now you want a national assembly to continue this pattern? You may shake your heads at my words as much as you want: if a national assembly will gather now, it will neither have the will nor the energy to realize socialism. Yes, it will create institutions that can provide the necessary financial means for such a task; state monopolies and other state-capitalist measures and institutions are conceivable. But an economic system determined by the people and giving equal rights to producers and consumers will not be considered. To establish such a system, one needs to radically change the structure of property and the relevant laws. This requires the rule of the councils.

Needless to say, the current council system is incomplete and still incoherent. During the first revolutionary wave, there was no organizational plan, no organizational structure. But things can be improved and the council system can be established properly, making a unified electoral system for all of Germany possible. First and foremost, this concerns the workers, then the soldiers who will increasingly enter the workforce, and, where relevant, the peasants. On this basis, we can even elect a national assembly. But then it will be a national assembly that will truly unite the country—something a national assembly based on a bourgeois class system never will. The treacherous separatist movements that we are witnessing today are not carried by the workers.¹² They are instigated by capitalists and clerics, in the Rhine Valley and elsewhere. Proletarian solidarity and the council system are the best sealant for a united country!

A change from today's political system to a proletarian democracy will also change the relationship to our Polish neighbors. Maybe comrades from the Polish territories will speak at this congress, testifying that Hakatist politics¹³ are responsible for debates on separation and annexation in Poland. Proletarian politics based on the council system—with a national assembly borne by this system—provide far more guarantees for peace and friendship between Germany and its neighbors than the current system.

Let me return to the so-called "dictatorship": yes, the rule of the councils will be misfortunate for those who have for decades, and especially during the war, derived great riches from the blood and sweat of the people; they will not like to hear that they have indulged enough and that it is now the turn of the formerly oppressed and exploited to enjoy life. But this is the inevitable verdict of history. It cannot be undone by bourgeois whining about the "injustice" of a dictatorship.

There are other things that have to be considered regarding Germany's future. I have already said that the spirit of submissiveness sits deep in the Germans' bones, even in revolutionary times. People demand a leader. It is unbelievable how little trust Germans have in themselves. Even the self-confidence of the soldiers who, from a purely militaristic standpoint, have achieved tremendous things—in the West, in the East, in the Balkans, everywhere—is extremely low. Look at the Great English Revolution: it created its own parliamentary army with carters, merchant's assistants, and horse drivers turning into colonels and brigadiers. Cromwell and his Ironsides trashed the Cavaliers, the reactionary forces of the time. Yes, this happened two hundred years ago, but the world should have advanced and it should be even easier today! The Great French Revolution saw the *Levée en masse*¹⁴ after a revolutionary call went out to the people. The bricklayer Kléber¹⁵ and others took the lead in this revolutionary movement, making use of all military means available. The War of Secession in America, a similar revolutionary period, also created its own organizations. Yet the German soldiers, albeit schooled in military affairs, demand their officers to stay, even refusing to return home otherwise. I

believe that if the soldiers had a better understanding of the council system, and if they had chosen the right leaders, their return would happen more smoothly and orderly than it does now under the officers they have.

The German Revolution has very little trust in itself and the spirit of submissiveness and obedience is a deeply rooted legacy reaching back many decades. This cannot be changed by simple election campaigns with leaflets thrown at the masses every two or three years. It can only be changed by a dedicated attempt to make and keep the German people politically active. This can *only* happen in the council system. We have to abandon the entire old administrative machinery, on the federal, regional, and municipal level. The German people have to get used to self-management instead of governance. But how do you educate a people, how do you let them fully grasp the concept of self-management, if you allow them to simply trot along and send delegates to parliament? Men who will hold fine speeches and engage in party politics without changing anything for the masses.

Let us also address the issue of socialization. How can you truly socialize anything if the workers are not directly involved? Of course, in difficult times like these, one cannot just experiment wildly. We know that. Socialization can only happen according to a proper and commonly accepted plan. It can only be successful, effective, and thorough if we have peace, if we know our borders, if we know which economic means we will have, and if we know which international trade relations we can maintain. But if the workers are not involved, if they are kept dormant and separated from economic affairs, then socialization can either never be realized or it will only turn into state capitalism, into monopolization against the will of the workers.

What we need is the implementation of the council system in the workplace. We need workers to be in charge of their shops and factories through the councils they trust. This has to happen now! The shop and factory owners will grab as much as they can before socialization comes. It is mandatory for the workers to know and understand the entire production process, not just the specific work they are doing. Once again, this is only possible in the council system. Of course the electoral formalities of the council system have to be discussed, but I will not do this now. These are technical questions that will be solved soon and easily enough.

Don't be disheartened by the mistakes and errors that have been made during the revolution's first weeks. Workers' councils have popped up everywhere. There has been little communication and therefore tensions and misunderstandings are inevitable. But these are teething troubles that can be overcome. Or let me say: they *must* be overcome. This is only possible if we are committed to the council system. In this case, many of the complaints that we have heard will soon quiet down.

Right now, all we have is a compromise between the revolution and the old system. Such a compromise cannot lead to anything. The old state machinery is

still in place and all public servants have kept their jobs. The Executive Council in Berlin has only had a monitoring mandate, not a legislative one. It is the same for the workers' and soldiers' councils across the country. Naturally, such a dual system leads to conflict. It is also more expensive than a unified system.

Yesterday, by passing the Lüdemann Motion, you have essentially declared that a dictatorship of millions of workers is a bad thing for Germany, while the dictatorship of six men is good. Once again, this proves the German ideology of submissiveness. We need the workers' councils to really take on administrative responsibility. Then everything giving reason to complain now will be history. This also goes for the abovementioned cultural education. It can only take on life in the council system, which involves all classes and allows everyone to be interested and active.

We must not deceive ourselves: the moral harm caused by the war can still be felt everywhere. There is no point in denying that it is a problem in the ranks of the workers. The workers need to understand how important an intensive period of production is right now for the common good. This is the only way to overcome the corrupting effects of the war bonds etc. But how can the workers understand this if they are handed a ballot every two years? How shall they develop an interest in the state? A state that, in order to be socialist, has to unite politics and economics. This can only be done on the grounds of the council system.

I know that what I am saying is not popular in this circle. Nothing new is ever popular in the beginning. But I'm not worried. Even if you reject the council system, it will come anyway. You may send the smartest parliamentarians to the national assembly and draw up the finest constitution—but you cannot stop the developments on the ground. Do not think that the German Revolution was limited to a few days in November. It will continue. Maybe Germany will experience the same as Russia. Our Russian friends say that the February Revolution was the beautiful revolution and the October Revolution the ugly one—yet it was the October Revolution that really brought social change. So don't be surprised if the German Revolution returns in the near future with waving hair and strong steps, asking, "Why did you throw away the chance I gave you in November?"

I cannot say when this will happen, but everyone who knows just a little about world history knows that it will happen. So, vote against us, celebrate the national assembly, ask for elections already on January 19—do whatever you want, but you cannot stop destiny!

There are mass graves in the East and in the West. Those who have died believed that they gave their lives for a new, for a better Germany. They were misled, and it is our duty to turn their belief into reality.

Not far from here, in Friedrichshain, not only the rebels of 1848 are buried but also those of November 1918. They include my young friend Erich Habersaath. I consider it a duty to mention his name here. He represents the working youth of

Germany who have served the revolution courageously. Yes, he was one of the often-vilified youth of Berlin! Erich Habersaath has sat at my feet when I lectured and distributed leaflets with passion and determination. In the morning of November 9, he stormed out of the barracks with the bravery of the youth—a bullet pierced his heart.

Coming from the mass graves of Friedrichshain, I hear a voice, and you shall hear it too, reciting more words of Freiligrath: “Be prepared, be ready, free the earth in which we lie firm and stiff. Let us not be haunted by the memory that we were free before we became slaves again, destined to remain that way!”¹⁶



1. From the poem “Von unten auf!” [From Below] by Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810–1876).
2. Reference to the bourgeois-nationalist German Revolution of 1848, in particular the preparatory meetings for a national assembly (in German referred to as *Vorparlament*, “pre-parliament”) held in Frankfurt in April 1848.
3. *Kamerad* was the common German term used for fellow soldiers. Used extensively by the Nazis, it remains popular today among right-wing groups but has disappeared from left-wing contexts.
4. Max Cohen (1876–1963), also known as Max Cohen-Reuss, journalist and influential SPD member.
5. Weekly national-liberal journal, published in Berlin from 1896 to 1933. Hellmut von Gerlach (1866–1935), a publisher with pacifist leanings, was, for the most part, its chief editor.
6. Reference to the fact that peace negotiations were still pending, with Germany’s future borders remaining unclear.
7. The SPD member Hermann Lüdemann (1880–1959) had filed a motion for the transfer of all legislative and executive power to the Council of People’s Delegates. The motion was passed.
8. At the time, the name for Oslo.
9. *Quieta movere*, Latin, roughly: “to disturb the peace.” From the Latin saying *Stare decisis et non quieta movere*, roughly: “Stand by old decisions and do not disturb the peace.”
10. Germany declared war against Russia on August 1, 1914. The SPD supported the declaration on August 4, 1914.
11. Däumig joined the SPD in 1900 and the USPD in 1917.
12. Separatist movements were strong in several German regions, including northwestern Germany, the Ruhr Valley, and Bavaria. See the “Brunswick,” “Bavaria,” and “Ruhr Valley” chapters in this volume.
13. The term *Hakatismus* was used for people supporting German nationalism on Polish territory. The name derives from the initials “HKT,” which stood for the names of the three initiators of the *Deutscher Ostmarkenverein* [German Eastern Marches Society], founded by German aristocrats and politicians in Poznań in 1894.
14. In the German original it says *Lever en masse*, but it must be assumed that this is a reference to the mass conscription during the French Revolutionary Wars, known as *Levée en masse* [roughly, “rising of the masses”].
15. Jean Baptiste Kléber (1754–1800), prominent French general during the French Revolutionary Wars; of proletarian background.
16. From the poem “Die Toten an die Lebenden” [The Dead to the Living], which led to a trial against the poet Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810–1876) for high treason. Freiligrath was acquitted.

THE COUNCIL IDEA AND ITS REALIZATION

ERNST DÄUMIG

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I

COUNCIL IDEA, COUNCIL SYSTEM, WORKERS’ COUNCILS, SHOP councils—just a year ago, many of you had probably never heard of these terms. Their meaning was even less known. But the storm of November 1918 saw workers’ and soldiers’ councils emerge all over Germany, spontaneously and without any preparation. The revolution created its own expression with elementary force.

The council idea does not come from the mind of a particular individual. It can be found in any revolution in which workers lead the struggle for freedom and pursue proletarian and socialist goals. The council organizations that have appeared in history have not been random and superficial organizations. They are the organizations that correspond to a revolutionary situation.

Council organizations are strongest where masses of workers fight uncompromisingly for socialism. If one wants to do the council idea justice, one must not forget its revolutionary origins. All attempts to build council organizations within the framework of bourgeois society and on the grounds of capitalist production will either create distortions or they will not survive. The council idea is inherently progressive. Even with a republican façade, a council organization is a proletarian and socialist means of struggle, destined to remove capitalist production and the authority of the state based on capitalist production. The council organization strives for socialist production and self-managed communities.

In its purest form, the council idea is nothing other than practical socialism. It creates the conditions needed by the proletariat to realize

the teachings of socialist science propagated by the socialist parties. Council organizations have to be formed according to this calling, and the council system will mark the completion of the process. Since the council organization is the child of a revolutionary situation, its formation will never follow a set of bureaucratic rules. Rather, it will take on its exterior form and its tactics according to the demands of a particular revolutionary situation and a particular revolutionary development. At the same time, the council system must follow some general guidelines and always stays true to its main goal: the removal of capitalist production and the implementation of socialist production.

The workers' and soldiers' councils that formed during the first days of the revolution were, as already stated, improvised. They remained improvisations for almost a year. Yes, the soldiers' councils disintegrated after a mere six months due to their own incompetence and the political short-sightedness and spinelessness of their leaders. Today, as these lines are written, it will be decided whether the leading sections of the German proletariat have the insight, the will, and the force to build a council system that lives up to its historical calling, or whether the council idea shall be warped in pitiful employees' organizations that carry the council label in order to consciously deceive the masses.¹ It depends on the outcome of this tension whether the German proletariat will create socialism with courage and purposefulness, or whether it will remain for years, maybe decades, under the yoke of capitalism.

The essence of the council idea rests on the following principles:

1. Only the proletariat can carry the council idea, that is, all manual and intellectual workers forced to sell their labor to capital in order to survive. The council idea stands in sharp, and natural, contrast to the common democratic idea that perceives the citizens as a unified mass without regard for the huge contradictions between capital and work and the implied class differences.
2. Since the sections of the proletariat championing the council idea are clearly anti-capitalist, they cannot tolerate any capitalist representatives in the council organizations.
3. Since parliaments within the current formal democratic system are made to serve capitalism as long as the capitalist mode of production exists, the council idea cannot be realized within parliamentarism. It has to spread from the cells of capitalist production, the workplaces, to the different institutions of the authoritarian state based on capitalist production.
4. Since the realization of the council idea demands the workers' permanent and active participation in all economic and political areas, the bodies of the council system cannot hold any powers long-term but must be under

constant control by the voters who can recall councils or council members whenever they have lost their trust.

5. Since the council idea's goal is the liberation of the entire proletariat from capitalist exploitation, the council organization cannot be the domain of a single party or a single profession but must include the proletariat *as a whole*.

If these principles are neglected, then the council system will always suffer from shortcomings. As a consequence, it will likely collapse due to its own deficiencies. In the worst case, it will complicate and prolong the final assault on capitalism, for which the proletariat will pay dearly.

II

The neglect of the abovementioned principles during the first phase of the German Revolution was the reason for the complete disintegration of the soldiers' councils and the increasing loss of influence of the workers' councils. I do not want to dwell on the sad story of the soldiers' councils here. The laughing heirs at their grave are the new German mercenaries, callous enemies of the council system who have repeatedly expressed their hostility in savage ways.² However, let us briefly examine the causes that have led to the demise of the workers' councils...

During the first days of November, the workers' councils had actual political power. Timid and afraid, the capitalist and ruling classes accepted the improvised system. The workers' councils of Great Berlin and its central administrative body, the Executive Council, appointed the first provisional government, a council of six people's delegates. The reason for handing power to these six men was that there was no revolutionary organization ready to take over the production process and the administration of the state on the grounds of a council system.

The highest authority of the fledgling council system at the time, the Executive Council, only demanded the right to control the activities of the people's delegates. The means of production remained entirely in the hands of the capitalist class. The state apparatus had new men at its head but remained essentially unchanged. The few dozen men who the revolution had catapulted to the highest positions of state bureaucracy could not transform the state machinery despite their biggest efforts. Furthermore, some of them were far from committed revolutionaries and rather exploited their position for personal interests.

As soon as the capitalist and reactionary circles realized that the revolution remained very superficial, they gathered new courage and, step by step, reestablished their social positions. This took a few months. Only a widespread council system expressing the council idea's general principles and well established at every workplace and state bureau could have prevented the revival of the capitalists and

reactionaries. However, the necessary revolutionary organization was missing. This, of course, was no surprise. Germany's proletarian masses lack any revolutionary training. The hard lessons of the revolution's deterioration were required to set a process of revolutionary teaching among the proletariat into motion. This process needs to continue dedicatedly, thoroughly, and systematically.

A second reason for the failure of establishing a council system in November was that many were impressed by the propaganda for "democracy." It was a period of excitement and illusion. German workers did not reflect much on constitutional questions. Only a few understood that, after the demise of the monarchy, Germany only had two options: to become a *bourgeois* or a *proletarian* republic. At the time, this was summarized in the question, "National Assembly or Council System?"

Unfortunately, the masses overlooked the hypocrisy involved in most calls for democracy. Everyone was now on democracy's side, including the biggest enemies of the proletariat and socialism. The people forgot about the situation in the Reichstag and in provincial parliaments before and during the war. They ignored the obvious resistance of the capitalist classes against socialization. As a result, the masses were duped by the democratic pied piper's song and they supported the national assembly, which essentially was the death sentence for the workers' councils. The defenders of formal democracy and parliamentarism are perfectly right: the council idea and the council system cannot coexist with democracy in a capitalist world, since democracy in a capitalist world can never amount to anything more than formal political equality.

The formal democratic system is embodied in the national assembly and the parliamentary government. Let us look at the first German government elected after the revolution. It consisted of three parties: one is rooted in the Middle Ages and worships divine and worldly authorities; another fights for the interests of the financial and industrial capital under the flag of democracy; and the third wants to wave the socialist flag in government by all means.³ Just like the parliament supporting it, such a government can only be an enemy of the proletarian and socialist workers' councils.

The same is true for almost all of the provincial parliaments and governments that have been elected in Germany since the revolution, and even on the municipal level, where workers' councils played the strongest role in the revolution's early stages. Everywhere, the power of the workers' councils has been undermined.

The conflict was fueled by strike movements that are characteristic of revolutionary periods. They are strongest wherever the proletariat is a driving force of the revolution. The victory of democracy in Germany did not lead to mitigating but to intensifying class differences. While the beneficiaries of capitalism do everything to maintain capitalist production, the proletariat increasingly sees the only escape from today's hardships in its removal—even if, for the most part, instinctively.

The most revolutionary workers were already sternly committed to the council idea during the first months of the revolution despite all the problems in implementing it. Then, in February and March, the great strike movements forced the government to concessions. It promised to enshrine the workers' councils in the constitution. On the one hand, this proves that the proletariat can enforce changes if it fights with dedication. On the other hand, it proves that these changes will amount to little more than compromises if there is no united workers' front. Only a united proletariat can enforce a radical change of the economic and political system. In the case of the February and March strikes, the government only made the concessions it absolutely had to make given the situation. This reminds us that the force of the entire proletariat is needed to bring about the council idea's final victory.

To enshrine workers' councils in the constitution is a curse disguised as a gift, just like a Trojan horse. Making councils elements of a capitalist constitution means to strangle, or at least paralyze, any serious implementation of the council idea. A council system under the auspices of the government will inevitably be drawn by the cart of capitalism. The constitution's council legislation, particularly the shop council laws, confirms this.⁴ The council idea will always lose its essence when linked to the parliamentary system.

A further reason for the disintegration of the council system during the revolution was that the workers' councils, with few exceptions, were not formed by the proletarian masses or at the heart of the proletarian revolution, namely at the workplace; instead, they largely relied on party affiliation. In many cases, the members of the workers' councils were simply appointed by the leadership of the two social democratic parties without even consulting the rank and file.

The original principle of appointing an equal number of SPD and USPD members in each council was increasingly lost because reformist socialism and revolutionary socialism cannot go together. Only in a few regions do the councils actually manage the production process. The power of the so-called "communal workers' councils" usually hardly exceeds the right to monitor local authorities and a few state offices. Nonetheless, the state bureaucrats try constantly to shut them down by ministerial decrees, municipal enactments, etc., always citing democratic rights. In most places, the parties don't consider the councils important. With proletarian mass support lacking at the same time, many of them simply disappear or are marginalized to the point of complete insignificance. They only remain in areas where capitalism and the state find a proletarian façade useful, for example when illegal trade or housing shortage needs to be covered up.

A problem for many communal workers' councils is also the conflict between "party discipline" and "proletarian duty." It leads many social democrats to embrace their role as council members only halfheartedly. Many council members actively

undermine the power of the councils because their party leaders are hostile to the council idea. (Which they have to be, for reasons of self-preservation alone.)

Where communal workers' councils survive, they are hardly ever controlled by the proletariat, and not even by the parties' rank and file. As a result, the principle of recalling delegates has become meaningless, and a kind of "council bureaucracy" has formed, at times even a system of "council corruption."

All this means that all the current forms of the council system have to be eradicated shall the council idea remain alive and eventually be victorious. We need a council system that truly reflects all of the council idea's demands.

III

I have already stated that the duty of the revolutionary council system consists of turning the theory of socialism into praxis. Socialist theory as well as the experience of social struggle tells us that this can only be achieved by the proletariat. This also means that the council system is closely related to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The phrase has always threatened the bourgeoisie. Lately, however, even the reform socialists portray the dictatorship of the proletariat as the ultimate evil.

Recent developments in Russia, Hungary, Munich, etc., seem to justify this.⁵ A dictatorship that is not built on the proletarian masses (only on a proletarian minority) and only able to defend its power by military means is destined to fail. A dictatorship, however, in which millions of class-conscious proletarians strive for the realization of socialism is not dependent on military means, violence, and terrorist acts; it can rely on the proletarian masses and their power. (Of course things will never go entirely smoothly, and there will be confrontations with the counterrevolutionary enemy that make the use of weapons necessary and might impose civil war upon the workers.)

The first task of the council system is to prepare the dictatorship of the proletariat by establishing the necessary organizational structures. Then, political power has to be seized. Finally, the dictatorship of the proletariat has to take control of the production process and the state apparatus. In practical terms, this means that the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat must imply a thorough expropriation of the capitalist class whose private ownership of the means of production must be replaced by common ownership. It is important, however, that the production process is not interrupted. This can never be in the interest of the people. The council system must carefully prepare the continuation of production under socialism. At the same time, it must focus on more than just the economy. It lies in the nature of the revolution that the council system has strong political implications and that it will be involved in many struggles on that plane, directly or indirectly.

On the basis of these insights, we now have a vanguard of class-conscious revolutionary proletarians pursuing a council system that shall first be established in the production process.⁶ The first steps toward this end have caused an outcry among capitalist, bureaucratic, and military circles. The rulers have a fine sense for class conflict and instantly recognize any danger to their possessions and their power. For us, however, their reaction only confirms that we are on the right way.

The “council system” favored by the government does not even deserve its name. The council organizations that the government is willing to tolerate completely disregard the revolutionary nature of the council idea and make a travesty of its proletarian and socialist origins. At the core of the government’s council system stands the so-called shop council law (*Betriebsrätegesetz*), in which the councils play no role whatsoever in the production process, let alone work toward the abolition of capitalist production. Rather, the councils shall “prevent trouble” in the workplace and help the capitalists achieve the “company’s ambitions.” The “company’s ambitions” are of course nothing but profit, dividends, shares, etc.

All aspects of the council system that the government wants to build on the basis of the shop council law are full of wormholes. For example, district economy councils shall be implemented in which shop council members will discuss socialization with the shrewd representatives of the propertied class. The councils are also allowed to “present ideas” to the authorities, employers’ associations, etc. I believe that it is evident that such a council system does not remove but firmly secure capitalist production. The “council system” label is used to dupe the proletariat into serving the interests of its capitalist class enemy.

In the revolutionary council system, there is no room for the propertied class. The revolutionary council system builds on the workplace, the core of the production process. In the workplace, all proletarians, no matter their party affiliation, stand on common ground. They are all exploited by capital, and the contradictions between proletarian and capitalist interests are obvious. The class-conscious workers familiar with socialist ideas have recognized this contradiction most clearly. Therefore, they form the first line in the struggle for the revolutionary council system. However, their influence on the indifferent and politically uneducated workers must become much stronger. All workers have to understand that the council system is the only means to escape capitalism. There must be tireless agitation since it is essential for the council system that the workers’ political participation is not limited to casting a vote. The workers must always examine the action of the councils. This demands constant intellectual awareness. Only then can the council idea serve as an effective means against the herd tendencies within the proletariat.

At this point, I do not want to write much about the organizational details of the revolutionary council system. There are enough opportunities to discuss the proper council organization at the workplace.

However, I want to address one more thing: the tasks of the council system sketched above imply that the council system is not only relevant for the manual worker but also for the intellectual worker. The monitoring and control of capitalist production and the transformation to socialist production require numerous skills, including those of engineers, technicians, accountants, scientists, and others. Therefore, these people must have a place in the council system. In relation to capital, the majority of intellectual workers are nothing but proletarians: they, too, have to sell their labor in order to survive. The division between manual and intellectual labor is nothing but a particularly clever maneuver by the propertied class. The council system, however, can build the necessary bridges uniting all proletarians. In the end, we will finally realize what Lassalle meant by the union of science and labor.

So much about the council idea and its implementation. I have not spoken the last word on this question, and there won't be a last word anytime soon. In the ups and downs of the social revolution that shakes all of the world's countries, the council idea will constantly find new expressions. Meanwhile, the individual worker who has understood the power of the idea can prepare the realization of socialism, and therefore of a higher human culture, at the very place life has put him in.



1. Reference to the fact that many councils bereft of any real political power were installed to appease the masses. Today's reformist German *Betriebsratssystem*, "shop council system," is a legacy of this.
2. Reference to the Free Corps and other reactionary militia units.
3. Reference to the Catholic *Deutsche Zentrumspartei* [German Center Party], the liberal *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* [German Democratic Party], and the SPD.
4. See footnote 1.
5. References to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the 1919 council republics of Hungary and Bavaria.
6. Reference to the collaboration between radicals from the political and the economic field that already began with the contacts between the Spartacists and the Revolutionary Stewards during the war.

DEMOCRACY OR DICTATORSHIP

RICHARD MÜLLER

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THE REVOLUTION PUT ONE QUESTION TO THE FOREFRONT. It was not a merely theoretical question but had very practical implications: should the fate of the German Revolution be handed to a national assembly elected by every German adult—exploiter and exploited, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary alike—or should the proletariat, the armed workers and soldiers, keep and secure the political power in a council system, establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, and wrest the economic power from the bourgeoisie? In short, the question was: democracy or dictatorship?

On the following pages, I will summarize the basic positions of both the revolutionary forces and of the political parties, as they were expressed at the time.

a) The Council of People's Delegates

The Council of People's Delegates supported the national assembly already in its first programmatic announcement. However, the people's delegates disagreed on the ultimate goal of the revolution and the ways to reach it. The three SPD members put all their hope into the national assembly. The three USPD members were more cautious and recommended to hold off elections for some time. All six of them were committed to a “socialist republic,” but this was a commitment without proper form or content, a pretense without essence, a phrase of agitation to veil the lack of trust in their own abilities. The term served as a curtain behind which they could hide, spin intrigues, and wait for a solution.

In his final public announcement of November 9, Chancellor Max von Baden promised a constituent national assembly before handing his post to Fritz Ebert. Fearing the radical socialists, the bourgeoisie strongly supported the national assembly, exactly as it had seventy years

earlier. The difference was that, this time, they entrusted a social democrat with their interests—this was the “progress” we had made in seven decades.¹ Whether Prince Max or Fritz Ebert called the national assembly did not matter, as long as it came.

However, the events of November 9 seemed to derail those plans. Fritz Ebert was no longer chancellor, but a “people’s delegate” of a “socialist republic.” Would he still be willing to look out for the interests of the bourgeoisie? Would he fulfill its demands? On November 14, he reassuringly told a journalist from the *Vossische Zeitung*: “We are determined to elect a constituent national assembly as soon as possible. Any concerns that the bourgeoisie might have are unfounded. We are already getting prepared and think that we’ll be ready for elections in January.” The same day, Ebert decried “Bolshevism” at a meeting of the soldiers’ councils, meaning all ideas that went further than the bourgeoisie’s demands.

The three USPD members stressed the need to secure the revolution before discussing a constituent national assembly. However, when Ebert promised elections for January, they remained silent. They also remained silent when Ebert—who increasingly acted as if it was his calling to lay out Germany’s future—declared on November 16: “The government of the Reich stands and falls with the national assembly!” The USPD only objected when, on the same day, the *Politische Parlamentarische Nachrichten* [Political Parliamentary News], the publishing organ of the SPD people’s delegates, declared that the government had already discussed the formalities of the elections, that they would be presented to the voters on January 2, and that the elections themselves would take place on February 2. When all these lies were repeated in the SPD-journal *Vorwärts* the next day, the USPD announced in its own journal, *Freiheit*, that nothing of that kind had ever been discussed by the government. This was eventually confirmed by all six of the people’s delegates in a cable sent by Wolffs Telegraphisches Büro (WTB).²

Already during the first days of the revolution, Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg proved themselves worthy successors of the Kaiser’s diplomats. “The way he clears his throat and spits—you copy it well!”³ The right hand did not know what the left hand was doing. The lies, intrigues, and deceptions that marked the “collaboration” with the harmless, naïve, and cautious USPD members was, essentially, a logical consequence of the conflict between the two social democratic camps during the war. While the three people’s delegates of the USPD had supported the USPD leadership’s decision that no elections for a national assembly would be held before April, they still voted for elections on February 16 in the Council of People’s Delegates. Only when the Executive Council objected, it was agreed to leave the final decision to the General Congress of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils in December.

b) The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils

The first and most important duty of the Executive Council was to give the revolution a program, and thereby content and direction. Instead, the Executive Council got caught up in thousands of things, let the first week pass without any initiative, and allowed both opportunists and outright opponents of the revolution to shape public opinion and to announce a date for national assembly elections.

There was only one way to drive the revolution forward, to fulfill the demands of the proletariat, and to secure and expand the workers' power: the momentum of November 9 had to be carried into the future. Each hour that was lost had to be regained by weeks of desperate fighting—if it was to be regained at all. Many things would have been easy to do during the first days of the revolution because no one dared to interfere and the power of the proletariat was much too strong. Only one week later, however, it had become much harder to do these things, and several weeks later it had become almost impossible.

How urgent a clear and understandable revolutionary program would have been for the masses, became already apparent on November 10 during the assembly of the workers' and soldiers' councils at Circus Busch. There, the opponents of the revolution already tried to influence the developments, just as they did when the Red Guards were formed shortly after. These attempts should have been undermined right away. But it took until November 16 before the Executive Council responded to the revolutionary program drafted by Ernst Däumig three days earlier.⁴

Däumig's program was not a legal document. It wasn't a list of articles. At the time, it would have been impossible to present anything like that. Däumig's program was an outline for a new political structure. Most pressing was to formulate and secure the new laws created by the revolution, that is, to replace the class rule of the bourgeoisie by the class rule of the proletariat. As a next step, the administrative organs of the toppled regime should have been replaced by the class organs of the proletariat. This did not necessarily entail the end of the old regime's entire administrative structure but the transfer of all legislative and executive powers to the proletariat.

The Executive Council should have presented such a program and demanded its implementation by the people's delegates. Had the people's delegates refused, they should have been dismissed. This would have kept the revolutionary struggle alive. With a clear program presented soon after November 9, and with a clear commitment to its implementation, the Executive Council would have prevailed.

Ernst Däumig based his draft for a revolutionary program on the power relations created by the revolution in early November. He considered it crucial to secure the new power structure and to strengthen it further in the interest of

the proletariat. This, he reckoned, could only be done the workers' and soldiers' councils. Däumig rejected the national assembly categorically, because it could only lead to a bourgeois-democratic republic and rob the workers of the revolution's achievements. Däumig demanded a proletarian democracy that only grants rights to working people, finding its administrative expression in a central council of the workers' and soldiers' councils. He considered proletarian democracy the only means to keep the counterrevolution at bay, to secure peace, and to realize socialism.

This was the original phrasing of Däumig's proposition:

The workers and soldiers suffered the most under the old regime. They were affected the hardest by the war. The economic and financial consequences of the war put enormous pressure on them. Now, workers and soldiers have removed the old regime. The new political power is embodied in the revolutionary organization of the workers' and soldiers' councils. This power has to be secured and expanded so that the achievements of the revolution will benefit the entire working class.

This cannot happen if the German state is transformed into a bourgeois democratic republic. Germany needs to become a proletarian republic on the grounds of a socialist economy, in which only the working people, that is, all manual and intellectual workers, have public rights. The ambition of the bourgeoisie to convoke a national assembly as fast as possible will rob the workers of the fruits of the revolution.

The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin therefore rejects a constituent national assembly. Instead, it demands the strengthening of the workers' councils, which shall determine the fate of all working people in this country. In order to unite all of Germany's workers' councils, a central council has to be formed. Only this body can draft a new constitution that shall reflect the fundamental principles of proletarian democracy.

Hermann Müller, spokesperson for the SPD in the Executive Council,⁵ rejected the class rule that Däumig and the other USPD members demanded. Müller stated that the current situation was only acceptable due to the extraordinary historical circumstances and that it was essential to elect a national assembly as soon as possible. He emphasized that all citizens had the same rights and duties. Müller declared that the majority of social democrats in a newly elected national assembly was without doubt and that social democratic principles would guide the assembly's politics.

Colin Ross,⁶ spokesperson for most of the soldiers, supported the national assembly because a majority of soldiers had supported it at a recent soldiers' councils' meeting.

After a long and heated debate, Däumig's proposal was rejected by twelve votes to ten. Some SPD members had voted for it. Eventually, a compromise was

passed with a few more SPD votes and those of a few soldiers. It consisted of the first of Däumig's proposed steps and added the following ones: "The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils demands the convocation of a Delegates' Assembly of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany. This assembly will decide on an electoral system allowing to elect a Central Council of German Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. This council will draft a new constitution, reflecting the fundamental principles of proletarian democracy. This constitution needs to be ratified by a constituent assembly summoned by the council."

By accepting this compromise, the Executive Council pulled the rug out from under itself. It abandoned the revolutionary grounds that it had been founded upon. Without these grounds it had no power and was rendered insignificant. Its unclear, ambiguous, and contradictory declaration on the national assembly did not just push the Executive Council to the sidelines; it was an embarrassment. The parts taken from Däumig's original draft outlined the foundations of proletarian democracy: the new political power should be concentrated in the revolutionary organization of the workers' and soldiers' councils; a proletarian republic was favored over a bourgeois democratic republic expressed in a national assembly. The added parts, however, introduced the concept of a constituent national assembly; the fact that this assembly was to be elected by a delegates' assembly of the workers' and soldiers' councils matter little—once the national assembly was elected, the delegates' assembly of the workers' and soldiers' councils would become meaningless.

Despite this declaration of the Executive Council—or rather because of it—the outvoted members of the council focused their energies on propagating the continued fight for the revolution against all of its open and hidden enemies, and especially against the national assembly. Therefore, Richard Müller called an assembly of workers' councils at the Circus Busch on November 19. The Executive Council was asked to present a report about its activities and it was planned to vote on the national assembly declaration. Müller would report about the Executive Council's activities.

In his report, Müller pointed out the enormous difficulties during the first days of the revolution, which, he reckoned, excused some of the wrong decisions that had been made as well as the apparent inefficiency, not least because the Executive Council had been kept from focusing on its most important duties by all sorts of disturbances. Müller proceeded to inform about the activities of the counterrevolution, which included propaganda for the national assembly as one of the more subtle and hidden forms. Müller strongly opposed the national assembly, outlined the consequences that had to be expected, and called upon the workers' councils to defend their revolutionary rights, if necessary with arms.

According to the stenographic protocol, these were the exact words of Richard Müller:

We want all parts of the proletariat, manual and intellectual workers, to be involved. Those who work shall have rights! No one can expect that the freedoms and rights won by the workers and soldiers will be handed over to the counter-revolution. Such a thing can and must not be demanded from us! Everything is in motion right now. Everyone wants to be in a council and to govern. Yes, the people who produce must be in the councils, whether they are manual or intellectual workers—but not every parasite exploiting the labor of others!

Comrades, be aware! We already have “landlords’ councils.” What’s next? “Millionaires’ councils”? Such councils we don’t need.

What’s behind all the talk about a national assembly that currently fills the bourgeois press? The national assembly is nothing but a smooth way to return the power to the bourgeoisie. However, the gentlemen will be out of luck! We do not want a bourgeois republic, we want a proletarian republic! We want a *socialist* republic in the true sense of the word!

Today, the political power is in the hands of the workers and soldiers. This power must not be surrendered. If a national assembly was elected now, it would be the death sentence for the workers’ and soldiers’ councils. They would disintegrate. This must not happen! We have to defend our power—if necessary, with violence. Those who demand the national assembly force this fight upon us. I declare openly: I have risked my life for the revolution, and I will do it again. The national assembly will pave the way to the rule of the bourgeoisie. Its convocation will mean struggle. The way to the national assembly leads over my dead body!⁷

Even if the improvised speech—back then, there was no time to properly prepare speeches—left a strong impression on the audience and was received with big applause, the chairman did not allow the assembly to vote on the Executive Council’s declaration.⁸ Obviously, he had little interest in Däumig’s original draft being passed. The supporters of the national assembly, both social democrats and representatives of the bourgeoisie, voiced their opinion in the following discussion. Their arguments seemed convincing to many. This was no surprise given the propaganda of the press that shaped public opinion.

Still, the meeting had some success. At least it irked the supporters of the national assembly. Richard Müller, and with him the entire Executive Council, became the target of severe attacks, cowardly slander, and ludicrous defamations. The people’s delegates’ reaction was also scandalous. They even sent a WTB cable prohibiting the publication of the Executive Council’s declaration. This illustrates very well how seriously they took the freedom of the press, which they cited every time the counterrevolutionary lies of the bourgeois papers were defended.

Despite all of this, the struggle had to go on. And it did. Now everyone was waiting for the General Congress of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils.

c) *The Social Democratic Party (SPD)*

"The Social Democratic Party of Germany does not fight for new class privileges but for the abolition of class rule and the class system as well as for equal rights and duties for all, without difference of gender or ancestry. On these grounds, it not only fights against current exploitation and oppression of wage laborers but against all forms of exploitation and oppression, whether it is directed at a class, a party, a gender, or a race."

This sentence from the Erfurt program of the SPD⁹ was probably evoked as frequently during the revolution as it is today. Let us only state this here and leave the discussion about whether this has helped the proletariat or not for a future publication.

Friedrich Stampfer is the intellectual voice of the SPD. In a *Vorwärts* article published on November 13, 1918, he cited the Erfurt program and stated that the constitutional change proclaimed by the Kaiser before November 9¹⁰ implied the principle that "no government lacking the trust of the people may remain in office while all military power must be controlled by democratically elected civil authorities." Stampfer considered this principle "universal," since it reflected the Erfurt program. As a consequence, the people's delegates were not to remain under the orders of the workers' and soldiers' councils but had to become delegates of all Germans as quickly as possible. According to Stampfer, this could only be guaranteed by a constituent national assembly.

Such considerations, essentially, condemned the revolution. Stampfer implied that the Kaiser's proclamation had implemented the demands of the Erfurt program. Therefore, no revolution had been necessary. In fact, any proletarian revolution could be rejected with such reasoning.

On November 14, after the people's delegates had declared their commitment to a constituent national assembly, Stampfer wrote about "Die ersten Gesetze der deutschen Republik" ["The First Laws of the German Republic"]: "It is now clear that the German Republic and its laws do not veer toward Russia's Soviet constitution but toward democracy in the sense of the SPD's Erfurt program. This course could only be changed in violation of the law and with the help of violent means." So, apparently, political bodies appointed by the workers' and soldiers' councils can make laws, even if they do not represent the entire people in the sense of the Erfurt program.

At a SPD party meeting, the "general, equal, direct, and secret suffrage of all adult men and women" was hailed not only as the most important achievement of the revolution but also as the means to transform the capitalist order into a socialist order if the people so desired. This reflected longstanding party convictions. However, it also meant that the "most important achievement" of the revolution had already been realized before the revolution—at least according to Stampfer.

Further examples could be named, but I don't consider it necessary. It should be clear that a party expecting to reach socialism by democratic means gets confused in a revolutionary situation. One day, it commits itself to democratic progress; the next day, it interprets progress as a result of revolution.

It is important to note that no one can ever say whether a revolution has occurred in the name of "all people," or even in the name of a "majority." Revolutions are never "democratic" in that sense—which, I suppose, means that no staunch SPD member can ever support them.

SPD politics after November 9 were determined by many factors. This is well illustrated by a leaflet of which millions of copies were distributed in late November. (The SPD distributed an enormous amount of leaflets and pamphlets. You ask, "How were they able to finance this?" Today we know that the bourgeoisie was among those who provided the funds.) The said leaflet, with the telling title, "Nur über meine Leiche" [Only Over My Dead Body], includes the following paragraphs:

Every day that delays the constituent national assembly also delays peace, prolongs the occupation of German territory, and deepens the food crisis. If we want bread, we need peace. If we want peace, we need the constituent national assembly and freely elected representatives of the German people. Peace, freedom, and bread were the goals of the proletarian uprising of November 9. Peace, freedom, and bread were the demands that brought victory. Those who prevent the constituent national assembly from forming rob the workers of peace, freedom, and bread; they take away the immediate fruits of the revolution; they are counterrevolutionaries.

The opponents of the constituent national assembly comfort us with the promise that the workers in France, England, and America will arise once proletarian dictatorship and socialism are established in Germany. These are nothing but hollow phrases, spooks, and dreams. The most categorical opponents of the national assembly seem to know this. Therefore, they suggest that we unite with Soviet Russia in order to continue the war against the imperialists of the Entente. But Bolshevik rule in Russia will only last a few more weeks—a few more months at best. The troops of the Entente hold all of Siberia, the Murman Coast, and the Black Sea Coast. They equip and support the Cossack generals Denikin and Krasnov.¹¹ The proletarian Russian revolution takes its last breaths. [...]

So far, the revolution has not brought us any recognized central power. The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Great Berlin is provisional. Its resolutions do not reflect the will of the German people. The entire southern part of the country demands the constituent national assembly, without exception. The national assembly is the only way to keep southern Germany within the Reich. Without a national assembly,

the *Mainlinie* will be resurrected.¹² While all other nations move closer together, Germany will be torn apart and thrown back to the two hundred miserable years between the Thirty Years' War¹³ and the revolution of 1848: centuries during which there was more despair in Germany than at any time in German history—or in any country's history, for that matter.

German unity requires the national assembly. Germany's new culture, which has always been the goal and the heart of our vision for the country, can only blossom under the national assembly's protection.

The workers' and soldiers' councils were emergency bridges that had to be built in the hour of struggle. We needed to advance, we needed to cross the river in order to remove the old and hostile feudal domains of the monarchs and Junkers. For this purpose, these emergency bridges were indispensable and they have served us well. Without them, we would not have succeeded—had we waited for a solid structure leading the way to the other side, we would have never been able to chase away the enemy. But does this mean that we need emergency bridges forever? Does this mean that we shall never build a solid structure?

The most incredible transformation that a country has ever experienced took merely eight days and cost less lives than an average skirmish at an outpost during the war. Shall such a triumph without blood, such a victory without resistance really lead to a dictatorship? The achievements of the revolution are so deeply rooted in the will of the people that only cowards and hysterics can fear a counterrevolution. The ghosts of those who have been chased away will never return unless revolutionary stupidities fill them with new blood.

Our science, our ideals, our political reason, and the current situation in Germany all demand the fastest possible convocation of the constituent national assembly. Those opposed to it are ready to murder and to walk over corpses without necessity—the corpse of freedom will be the first. We must choose: either we walk over corpses or the constituent national assembly.

d) The USPD and the Spartacus League

[...] In the long run, the USPD could not dodge the democracy vs. dictatorship question. It searched for a compromise. Eventually, it recognized the national assembly in principle but wanted to delay its convocation. It wanted to please the supporters of both democracy and dictatorship. It explained in its second declaration:

All workers' and soldiers' councils hold political power as a just consequence of the revolution. The cabinet executes this power as long as it has the trust of the workers' and soldiers' councils. Meanwhile, the workers' and soldiers' councils expand and become more solid. District councils are being formed.

Soon there will be a central council for the entire country. All forces must unite so that new life can emerge from the political ruins and fill the German Republic with socialist content. [...] The constituent national assembly? Yes, it will come, but it can only come when all the technical and political requirements are met. Then it will truly express the will of the enlightened people.

Now, let us look at how desperately the USPD theorists have tried to make both poles—democracy and dictatorship—fit their banner.

On November 16, Rudolf Breitscheid¹⁴ wrote the following in the *Freiheit*:

Of course democracy does not only mean everything for the people, but also everything by the people. This leads our opponents to the conclusion that we have to wait with radical political transformations until approved by a people's assembly. They would be right if true freedom was at all possible under capitalist rule. But as long as social relationships are marked by the dependencies that the capitalist mode of production creates, formal democracy does not help the workers, no matter how beautiful the paper is on which it stands written. We have to remove the basis of these dependencies by the power that the revolution has handed to us. Only then can the formal aspects of democracy be developed, for example a national assembly that is elected by really free people. But before such a national assembly can take shape, we must change the foundations of society. The national assembly itself cannot make that change.

On November 18, Rudolf Hilferding¹⁵ wrote in the *Freiheit* about the convocation of the national assembly, using the developments in Russia as an example. He argued that the rejection of democracy and the armed struggle against the bourgeois society were based on the economic backwardness of the Russian agrarian state, where the industrial proletariat formed only a tiny minority. In Germany, he reckoned, the situation was different:

Economically, Germany is Europe's most advanced country. The central industries are organized in cartels and trusts, ready to be socialized. The industrial proletariat forms the majority of the people and has been educated in socialism. Now, it has tested its powers and realized its irresistible force. Is there really anyone who can doubt that the German proletariat will be victorious in elections after the collapse of the old regime? Only men without self-confidence, revolutionary trust in the proletariat, or belief in historical necessity can do so.

Hilferding is of the opinion that the continuation of the dictatorship of the councils and the exclusion of all other classes from the political decision-making process will lead to terror and civil war. He says that the German worker has been educated to be a democrat and that the dictatorship will therefore meet resistance also within

the proletariat. Instead of uniting under the victorious red banner, the workers would be divided and hence their power weakened.

Hilferding also explains that there are people who share his belief in a socialist majority in the national assembly but remain suspicious regarding the SPD and its commitment to socialism. He answers them thus:

We must think as Marxists! We must focus on what is crucial, namely social conditions, not good or bad qualities in certain individuals. The SPD was opposed to revolutionary action until the very minute the revolution came. Then, it had to join the revolutionary movement because the proletarian masses forced it to. And now imagine a proletarian majority in the national assembly: the proletariat at the height of its power! Can anyone seriously believe that under such circumstances a representative of the proletariat can neglect his socialist duties? This would mean to undermine the base of your power—you can look at this from whatever angle you want, such an action would simply make no sense.

On December 6, Karl Kautsky wrote a long article in the *Freiheit* under the title “Nationalversammlung und Räteversammlung” [National Assembly and Council Assembly], explaining that the electoral system for the national assembly was better than the one for the workers’ and soldiers’ councils. According to Kautsky, the electoral system for the national assembly would make the will of the majority clearer. In council elections, people would vote not only according to class but also according to trade. Therefore, electoral campaigns for the councils are not part of the class struggle. Kautsky continues: “Furthermore, the electoral law for the workers’ and soldiers’ council is murky and susceptible to all sorts of changes. The electoral law for the national assembly, on the other hand, is clear and precise. The results of council elections will therefore never have the same moral authority as the results of national assembly elections. They can never legitimize the rule of the masses in the same way. This is why terror became necessary in Russia.”

Kautsky states that it is not his attention to declare the workers’ and soldiers’ councils “inferior” to the national assembly. At the same time, he declares the following: “If we pose the question, ‘National assembly or workers’ and soldiers’ councils?’, then the answer would be that the workers’ and soldiers’ councils are inferior. But this is not the proper question to ask. It is much too general and therefore wrong and misleading. The question is, ‘Which tasks belong to the national assembly and which to the workers’ and soldiers’ councils? Where and when do we need the former, and where and when do we need the latter?’”

Kautsky deems the councils necessary and indispensable during the first phase of the revolution, when the dismantling of the old powers is the primary objective. This dismantling will cause disorder and unrest, and the councils need to defend what has been achieved, while the national assembly would be incapable of doing

this. But the second phase of the revolution is one of consolidation, of building socialism. This needs decades and requires a functioning production process. It needs peace and order, which can only be secured if the people trust in the stability of the new regime. Kautsky concludes: "Since this is most likely achieved by a national assembly replacing provisional institutions, this assembly is an economic necessity and a requirement of the socialist revolution; at least if the revolution is not reduced to mere proclamations but really wants to establish socialist production. Today, it is urgent to leave the provisional state and all its insecurities behind!"

Kautsky wants to waste no time in electing the national assembly. He mocks those who are not convinced that a socialist party will gain the majority. He calls it pitiable for any socialist to have such doubts. According to him, the national assembly is on its way and the only consequence of socialist resistance will be a lower number of socialist seats. If the counterrevolutionary parties indeed won the majority, the fault would exclusively lie with the socialist skeptics.

The Spartacus League was originally a faction of the USPD. Its program of November 10 was very clear: armament of the people; control of all military and civil offices by ombudsmen of the workers' and soldiers' councils; abolition of the national and all provincial parliaments as well as of the existing government; transfer of governmental power to the workers' and soldiers' councils of Great Berlin until a nationwide central council was established; election of workers' and soldiers' councils all over Germany, executing legislative and administrative authority.

On November 18, Rosa Luxemburg wrote the following about the first necessary steps in *Die Rote Fahne*:

The abolition of the rule of capital and the realization of the socialist order—this, and nothing less, is the historical task of the current revolution. It is a monumental task that cannot be fulfilled from one day to the next, perhaps with a couple of swift decrees issued from above. It can only be fulfilled by the conscious action of the working masses in the cities and in the country. The strongest of spirits and bottomless idealism will be needed to sail the revolutionary ship through all the storms we have to expect into a safe harbor.

The goal of the revolution clearly lays out its path, and the task its method. The guidelines for all measures of the revolutionary government are to place all power in the hands of the working masses, that is, in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils, and to protect the revolutionary process against its enemies.

Each step, each deed of the government must indicate this direction and function as a compass. What is needed includes the following:

- The reelection and expansion of the local workers' and soldiers' councils in order to replace the councils appointed spontaneously amid a chaotic situation with councils conscious of the goals, tasks, and ways of the revolution;

- ✦ Constant meetings of the councils as representatives of the working masses and the transfer of political power from the narrow Executive Council to the much broader Central Workers' and Soldiers' Council;
- ✦ The fastest possible convocation of a national body of workers and soldiers in order to constitute the proletarians of all of Germany as a common class and a strong political power, able to defend the revolution and to push it forward;
- ✦ The immediate organization not only of the "peasants" but also of the rural proletarians and the small farmers, a class that has not taken any active part in the revolution so far;
- ✦ The formation of proletarian Red Guards for the protection of the revolution;
- ✦ The creation of a workers' militia enabling the entire proletariat to support the Red Guards at any time;
- ✦ The abolition of all remaining administrative, legal, and military organs of the absolutist army and police state;
- ✦ The immediate confiscation of the wealth and possessions of the royal dynasties and the great landlords as a first measure to guarantee basic supplies for the people since hunger is the strongest ally of the counterrevolution;
- ✦ The immediate convocation of a Workers' World Congress in Germany to emphasize the socialist and internationalist character of the revolution since the future of the German Revolution depends on the International and the proletarian world revolution. [...]
- ✦ The state of the German Revolution corresponds to the state of the German spirit. In this sense, the likes of Scheidemann and Ebert are fitting government representatives. Meanwhile, the USPD members in government reveal to be little more than their loyal aids when claiming to establish socialism with the SPD and celebrating a "purely socialist government" in the *Freiheit*.

On November 29, *Die Rote Fahne* wrote:

The national assembly is a means to rob the proletariat of its power, to paralyze its class dynamics, and to let its socialist objective evaporate in blue haze. The alternative is to put all power into the hands of the proletariat, to turn the revolution into a decisive class struggle, and to pave the way for a socialist society. For this purpose, the political rule of the great masses of the workers, the dictatorship of the workers' and soldiers' councils, has to be established. One is either for or against socialism, for or against the national assembly—there is no in-between.

Where did the majority of the party stand? In the general assembly of the Berlin party members on December 15, the "Motion Hilferding" got 485 votes, the "Motion Luxemburg" 195. This ratio probably reflects the opinions of the members in the rest of Germany. [...]

e) *The Bourgeois Parties*

The collapse of the old regime numbed the entire bourgeoisie. By "bourgeoisie," I do not only mean the exploiting class, the noble circles, and the big industrialists but also the intellectuals, the middle class, and the peasants—groups that are strongly related ideologically. The bourgeoisie's political representatives, the bourgeois parties of the old Reichstag, were in tatters, unable to act, and not knowing at all how to react to the events of November 9. [...]

It did not take long before the bourgeoisie got reorganized. The parties dropped their old names and found new ones that seemed to fit the new political conditions. It was not easy to keep track of it all. The right-leaning parties, the *Freikonservative Partei* [Free Conservative Party], the *Deutschkonservative Partei* [German Conservative Party], and the *Christlich-Soziale Partei* [Christian Social Party] united in the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* [German National People's Party]. The *Zentrumspartei* [Center Party] seemed the least shaken and simply renamed itself as *Christlich-Demokratische Volkspartei* [Christian Democratic People's Party], now trying to attract conservative and clerically minded Protestants as much as the old Catholics. Parts of the *Nationalliberale Partei* [National Liberal Party] and of the *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* [Progressive People's Party] united in the *Deutsche Volkspartei* [German People's Party], while the respective party's remaining members formed the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* [German Democratic Party].¹⁶ The *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei* [German Fatherland Party], a product of the war, disbanded;¹⁷ some smaller groups such as the *Deutsche Soziale Mittel-Gruppe* [German Social Middle Group], which stood for morality, the bourgeoisization of the proletariat, social harmony, etc., emerged and disappeared.

It would take way too much time to outline the programs and declarations of these parties, but they all supported the republic and the national assembly while rejecting the workers' and soldiers' councils. They demanded quiet, order, security, individual freedom, freedom of conscience, protection of private property, protection of the middle class, etc.

Only four weeks before the revolution, these people still opposed general, equal, and secret suffrage. Suddenly, their love for equal rights and democracy—the "fundamental rights of the people"—knew no boundaries. This, of course, included dramatic demands to respect their own rights as "equals"; after all, each citizen had a right to express his opinion in speech and writing. The same people who,

for four years, accepted and justified the military stage of siege and applauded the imprisonment of Liebknecht and the shooting of others, were now outraged because the power of the workers' and soldiers' councils "rested on bayonets" or because some bourgeois fellow experienced some harm.

The bourgeoisie showed an incredible fear of the dictatorship, of "Bolshevism." "Bolshevism," so they claimed, would destroy democracy. The *Vossische Zeitung* wrote on November 19: "Dictatorship means war; democracy means peace! Dictatorship brings hunger; democracy gives our children bread! Dictatorship tears the country apart; democracy unites all German tribes! Dictatorship ruins the achievements of the social revolution; democracy transforms the German economy in the spirit of social justice!"

Were these not the arguments of the SPD? If one reads the German press from those days, from the *Vorwärts* to the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, it appears as if all divisions, all fundamental and principal contradictions, all class differences were wiped out by the revolution. The ideological unity was staggering. Reading the articles, one realizes another thing: the bourgeoisie did not need to forge any intellectual weapons against the revolution—the SPD did it for them. [...]

f) *The End*

We have shown how, from the first day of the revolution, the social democratic and the bourgeois press, as well as the politicians whose interests the press represents, have propagated the national assembly while working against the workers' and soldiers councils, the council system, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. They organized protests against the Executive Council, against the so-called "Berlin dictatorship." This was expressed in numerous resolutions and telegrams sent to the Council of People's Delegates. The governments of the federal states, the soldiers' councils, most troops abroad, the bourgeois associations, and the urban administrative bodies demanded the national assembly. Many threatened action in case it would not be elected.

The General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils that gathered in Berlin from December 16 to December 21 was strongly marked by these campaigns. Already during the first meetings, in which the reports of the Executive Council and of the Council of People's Delegates were presented, the canny leaders of the SPD, the likes of Lüdemann, Kahmann,¹⁸ and Severing, filed the following motion:

The General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany, holding all power in the country, transfers the legislative and executive authority to the Council of People's Delegates until an elected national assembly will establish a new division of power.

The General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany shall also appoint a Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers'

Councils whose task it will be to monitor the German and the Prussian cabinets. This Central Council will take on the role of parliament. It has the right to monitor the people's delegates of Germany and—until the new political structure will be finalized—the people's delegates of Prussia.

To monitor the ministries, the Council of People's Delegates will appoint assistants to the state secretaries. Two assistants will be sent to each ministry, one from the SPD and one from the USPD. Before appointing the ministers and their assistants, the Central Council has to be consulted.

The motion was passed by a huge majority. This meant that the following point on the agenda, "National Assembly or Council System?," had been decided before it was even discussed.

Ernst Däumig spoke out against the national assembly nonetheless. He did not manage to rid the "political suicide club" in front of him of its "clinical, simple, and philistine" spirit. His motion was rejected with 344 to 91 votes. The date for the national assembly elections was pushed forward from February 16 to January 19. Even some USPD members voted against Däumig's motion, which I quote here in full:

The delegates' assembly declares its uncompromising commitment to the council system as the foundation of the socialist republic's constitution. The councils will be the highest legislative and executive authority. The delegates' assembly appoints a commission to formulate as quickly as possible a general electoral system for Germany's workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils. On the basis of this electoral system, a national congress of workers' and soldiers' councils will be elected, which will decide on the country's future constitution. As long as the constitution of the socialist republic is not finalized, a central council of fifty-three members, representing all regions of the country, will be the highest monitoring body of the Council of People's Delegates and the ministries.

On January 19, 1919, 16,574,000 Germans gave their votes to bourgeois parties, 11,510,000 to the SPD, and 2,317,000 to the USPD. This meant that the bourgeois parties had a majority in the national assembly. "A victory for democracy." Or rather, the grave of social democracy's dreams, and the collapse of the German Revolution.

It would certainly be interesting to examine what democracy has given to the people. But that is not the purpose of this text.



1. In 1848, the bourgeoisie offered the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV the title of German Kaiser. He declined.
2. One of the world's biggest telegraph agencies at the time; it existed from 1849 to 1934.
3. "*Wie er räuspert und wie er spuckt, das habt ihr ihm glücklich abgeguckt.*" Quote from Friedrich Schiller's (1759–1805) *Wallenstein* trilogy.

4. See below.
5. Hermann Müller (1876–1931), prominent SPD politician.
6. Colin Ross (1885–1945), intelligence corps officer, later a popular journalist, travel writer, and National Socialist.
7. This sentence led to Müller being referred to as *Leichenmüller* [literally, “corpse Müller”] by the social democratic and bourgeois press.
8. The chairman was Brutus Molkenbuhr (1881–1959), Berlin Soldiers’ Council and SPD member.
9. The Erfurt program was adopted by the SPD during the 1891 party congress (in Erfurt). It is one of the most important documents in the party’s history.
10. Reference to the constitutional change of October 3, 1918. See the Timeline.
11. Anton Denikin (1872–1947) and Pyotr Krasnov (1869–1947) were among the generals leading the counterrevolutionary forces in the Russian Civil War.
12. *Mainlinie*, literally: “The line of the River Main.” Historically, the Main has been considered an important geographical divide between northern and southern Germany.
13. The Thirty Years’ War was a three-decade (1618–1648) conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Europe.
14. Rudolf Breitscheid (1874–1944), SPD and USPD member, was later active in the resistance against the Nazis in France, where he was eventually arrested by the Gestapo and transferred to Germany. He died in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp.
15. Rudolf Hilferding (1877–1941), prominent USPD member. He later rejoined the SPD.
16. *Freikonservative Partei* [Free Conservative Party], 1867–1918, mainly supported by the upper and middle classes; *Deutschkonservative Partei* [German Conservative Party], 1876–1918, broad conservative party; *Christlich-Soziale Partei* [Christian Social Party], 1878–1918, conservative party with strong anti-Semitic tendencies; *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* [German National People’s Party], 1918–1933, conservative and nationalist party that later cooperated with the Nazis; *Deutsche Zentrumspartei* [German Center Party], conservative Catholic party founded in 1870, ran for elections in some regions of Germany as *Christlich-Demokratische Volkspartei* [Christian Democratic People’s Party] after the revolution; *Nationalliberale Partei* [National Liberal Party], 1867–1918, popular in liberal bourgeois circles; *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* [Progressive People’s Party], 1910–1918, left-liberal party; *Deutsche Volkspartei* [German People’s Party], 1918–1933, liberal nationalist party; *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* [German Democratic Party], 1918–1930, liberal party with left-leaning tendencies at first, then increasingly nationalistic.
17. *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei* [German Fatherland Party], 1917–1918, nationalist party opposing all peace negotiations at the end of the war; many prominent right-wing extremists of the 1920s and 1930s were organized in the *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*, for example the civil servant Wolfgang Kapp (1858–1922)—see “Kapp Putsch” under “Terms” in the Glossary.
18. Hermann Lüdemann (1880–1959) and Hermann Kahmann (1881–1943) both had successful careers within the SPD after the revolution.

“REVOLUTIONARY GYMNASTICS”

RICHARD MÜLLER

Published as “Revolutionäre Gymnastik” in *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der revolutionären Arbeiterbewegung während des Weltkriegs* [From the Kaiserreich to the Republic: A Contribution to the History of the Revolutionary Workers’ Movement During the World War] (Vienna: Malik, 1924).

“REVOLUTIONARY GYMNASTICS” WAS A DERISIVE NAME for ideas that the Spartacists presented at Revolutionary Stewards meetings during the last weeks before the revolution.

The first time Karl Liebknecht attended a meeting of the Revolutionary Stewards, he expressed his dissatisfaction with their activities in ways that were hardly flattering. In his opinion, the Revolutionary Stewards were not a circle of committed revolutionaries but a club of bourgeois-minded folks who had turned wild, who were meeting secretly, and who refused to let the world know anything about their existence. No one held this against Liebknecht, though; he had been imprisoned and cut off from the movement for some time. He simply was ill-informed. However, Liebknecht’s *ideas* and *demands* could not be accepted. They revealed the strong will of a revolutionary filled with noble principles—but Liebknecht saw things as he wanted them to be and not as they were.

Liebknecht and the other Spartacists insisted that the workers had to get involved in constant action, that they needed to experience constant moments of struggle: demonstrations, strikes, and confrontations with the police should fan the revolutionary will of the masses and push them to the decisive battle. In this way, experienced and hardened by struggle, the proletariat would fulfill its historical mission. The Spartacists liked to cite the example of the Russian Revolution.

Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Stewards had all matured in struggle and had often shown admirable courage and bravery. They longed for the decisive battle against the bourgeoisie and were ready to engage in it by all means necessary. However, they unanimously rejected the methods propagated by Liebknecht and prevented them from being used before November 9. Had the differences of opinion ended with the outbreak of the revolution, we would not have to discuss this now.

But the arguments continued and they remain relevant to this day. In fact, they became decisive for the course of the German Revolution.

In its struggle against the bourgeoisie, the German working class cannot shed its past. Just as each human being carries his clothes and is followed by his shadow, the German working class carries its history.

The German proletariat grew strong in daily organized struggle. This decades-long practice cannot be replaced by new, untried means over night. Of course, the revolution creates new circumstances, shakes the political conditions, produces new forces and counterforces, imposes confrontations upon the workers whether they want them or not, creates new means of struggle, directs the spirit of the people to unknown things, helps them overcome obstacles, and wipes away all tradition. But the better the conditions of the workers, the weaker these effects are. The workers' ability to think politically and critically will strongly affect their response to these developments.

The situation in Russia was drastically different from the situation in Germany. While organized struggle had entered the flesh and blood of the German workers, this was not the case in Russia. The Russian workers and peasants stormed from action to action, constantly inspiring new comrades. Their hatred against the bourgeoisie knew no boundaries. “Death to the bourgeoisie!” was their only motto. Nothing could stop their will to fight. Their social status was extremely low and they still experienced feudalism, long gone in Western Europe. The Russian workers and peasants simply had nothing to lose. The revolutionary experiences from 1905 gave them the compass, the means, and the tactics for revolutionary struggle. Their impetuous, wild rebellion, reaching from innumerable small actions to broad mass struggles, reflected their historical becoming. In Germany, things were very different.

The rise of German capitalism after the Franco-Prussian War,¹ the early strength of the socialist and trade union movement, and the daily confrontations with the capitalists by an organized workforce (determined by the conditions of labor and social life) improved the situation of the German worker and gave the workers' movement a reformist character. Every family had collected a bit of property, mostly based on hard labor, and people were afraid of losing it. Some workers had not just made a petty-bourgeois but a bourgeois life their own. Even the smallest trade union conflict revealed the German workers' approach: possible wins and losses were compared quietly and rationally, and the question was always whether it was worth risking defeat. After losing small and isolated struggles, the workers usually retreated because they did not want to lose even more. Never did any of these small and isolated struggles turn into mass struggles.

During the war, however, we could see a change. The three political mass strikes² proved that the German workers were ready to make sacrifices for their political ideals. At the same time, the strikes proved that the masses could only be won for big, extensive, and organized movements, because this reduced the individual stakes to a minimum.

It is also important to note that the driving forces of the political mass movements during the war were not the poorest social groups, among which the consequences of the war were most devastating, but the qualified and skilled workers—the group that is sometimes referred to as the “workers’ aristocracy,” a group that has, wrongly, been accused of holding back the revolution.

Even before the war, the success of the big workers’ struggles depended on the involvement of the “workers’ aristocracy.” Often, these workers entered struggles not for their own sake but to help the weaker sections of the proletariat. They showed strong solidarity which led to some of the most beautiful successes of the workers’ movement.

The Revolutionary Stewards consisted almost exclusively of qualified and skilled workers. In the daily struggles with the capitalists they managed to be successful even if there was no support of the less qualified workers. However, in the revolutionary struggle against state power, against the entire bourgeoisie, the masses were needed. And although the masses could be mobilized for political strikes three times, the final Reichstag elections in 1918 revealed that the workers had not yet freed themselves from the democratic-reformist illusion. This was true both in the Niederbarnim District and in Berlin’s first electoral district on October 15, right before the revolution.³ The white-collar workers and the civil servants remained not only reserved with respect to the political mass movements but outright hostile.

The development of the revolutionary movement during the war proved that the transformation from democratic-reformist beliefs to revolutionary action within the German workers’ movement cannot be achieved by revolutionary propaganda alone. Political mass struggles are necessary. These struggles, however, can only be successful if they correspond to the means of struggle developed historically. This requires patience, creates extraordinary demands for the leadership, and causes all sorts of accusations from self-declared model revolutionaries. However, it is the right way to proceed.

The isolated actions demanded by the Spartacists can only be carried out by the most advanced groups of the proletariat. It is easy for the police and the military to suppress such actions. In the process, the revolutionary heart of the masses gets lost and the backbone of the revolution broken. It is more than questionable if under such circumstances the masses can ever be successfully led into a decisive battle with the bourgeoisie.

In the German Revolution, the bourgeoisie lost control, but the government still had a loyal police force and loyal troops. By destroying the revolutionary movement piece by piece, both the government and the bourgeoisie were saved.



1. War between France and Prussia in 1870–1871; with most German states helping Prussia to win the war, it laid the foundation for the unification of Germany in 1871.
2. June 1916, April 1917, January 1918—strikes against the war and the war industry.
3. The USPD candidates were defeated in both elections—in Berlin’s first electoral district, the candidate was Müller himself.

SPARTACUS

THE NEXT OBJECTIVES OF THE STRUGGLE

GRUPPE INTERNATIONALE (SPARTAKUSGRUPPE)

Distributed as a leaflet with the title “Die nächsten Ziele eures Kampfes,” signed by the Group International (Spartacus Group) on November 8–9, 1918.

WORKERS AND SOLDIERS! YOUR HOUR HAS COME! NOW, after much patience and idle days, you have stepped into action. Do not underestimate the significance of the events: the world is watching you, while you hold its fate in your hands!

Workers and soldiers! Now that the hour of action has come, there is no turning back! The “socialists” who have worked as pimps for the government for four years and who, during the last few weeks, have tried to appease you with promises of a “people’s government,” of parliamentarization, and of other nonsense, are now trying everything to weaken your struggle and to undermine your movement.

Workers and soldiers! You have to follow the example of your comrades in Kiel, Hamburg, Bremen, Lübeck, Rostock, Flensburg, Hanover, Magdeburg, Brunswick, Munich, and Stuttgart! The victory of your brothers in these places, indeed the victory of the proletariat worldwide, depends on your achievements, on your perseverance.

Soldiers! Act like your colleagues of the navy: unite with your brothers, the workers! Do not let yourself be used against them! Do not follow the orders of your officers! Do not shoot freedom fighters!

Workers and soldiers! The next objectives of the struggle are:

1. The liberation of all civil and military prisoners.
2. The abolition of all federal states and the removal of all dynasties.
3. The election of workers’ and soldiers’ councils with elections of delegates in all factories and army units.

All Power to the Councils!

4. The establishment of immediate coordination between all German workers' and soldiers' councils.
5. The seizing of the government by the delegates of the workers' and soldiers' councils.
6. The establishment of immediate contact with the international proletariat, especially with the Russian workers' republic.

Workers and soldiers! Now is the time to prove that you are strong and wise enough to use your power!

Long live the Socialist Republic!

Long live the International!

THE BEGINNING

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as “Der Anfang” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 3, November 18, 1918.

THE REVOLUTION HAS BEGUN. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT THE time to celebrate its achievements or to rejoice about the fallen enemy. What we need right now is thorough self-critique and iron preservation of energy in order to continue our work. After all, what has been achieved is little, and the enemy has *not* yet fallen!

What are our achievements so far? The monarchy is gone and the highest governmental power is in the hands of workers’ and soldiers’ representatives. However, the monarchy was never the real enemy; it was only the façade, the store sign of imperialism. It was not the House of Hohenzollern that has caused the war, set fire at all corners of the world, and brought Germany to the brink of destruction. Like any bourgeois government, the monarchy was but the executive director of the ruling classes. Those responsible for the mass slaughter are the imperialist bourgeoisie and the capitalist class. These are the criminals.

The abolition of the rule of capital and the realization of the socialist order—this, and nothing less, is the historical task of the current revolution. It is a monumental task that cannot be fulfilled from one day to the next, perhaps with a couple of swift decrees issued from above. It can only be fulfilled by the conscious action of the working masses in the cities and in the country. The strongest of spirits and bottomless idealism will be needed to sail the revolutionary ship through all the storms we have to expect into a safe harbor.

The goal of the revolution clearly lays out its path, and the task its method. The guidelines for all measures of the revolutionary government are to place all power in the hands of the working masses, that is, in the hands of the workers’ and soldiers’ councils, and to protect the revolutionary process against its enemies.

Each step, each deed of the government must indicate this direction and function as a compass. What is needed includes the following:

All Power to the Councils!

- The reelection and expansion of the local workers' and soldiers' councils in order to replace the councils appointed spontaneously amid a chaotic situation with councils conscious of the goals, tasks, and ways of the revolution;
- Constant meetings of the councils as representatives of the working masses and the transfer of political power from the narrow Executive Council to the much broader Central Workers' and Soldiers' Council;
- The fastest possible convocation of a national body of workers and soldiers in order to constitute the proletarians of all of Germany as a common class and a strong political power, able to defend the revolution and to push it forward;
- The immediate organization not only of the "peasants" but also of the rural proletarians and the small farmers, a class that has not taken any active part in the revolution so far;
- The formation of proletarian Red Guards for the protection of the revolution;
- The creation of a workers' militia enabling the entire proletariat to support the Red Guards at any time;
- The abolition of all remaining administrative, legal, and military organs of the absolutist army and police state;
- The immediate confiscation of the wealth and possessions of the royal dynasties and the great landlords as a first measure to guarantee basic supplies for the people since hunger is the strongest ally of the counterrevolution;
- The immediate convocation of a Workers' World Congress in Germany to emphasize the socialist and internationalist character of the revolution since the future of the German Revolution depends on the International and the proletarian world revolution.

These are only the first most urgent steps. But what does the current government do?

It leaves the entire administrative apparatus of the state, from the top to the bottom, in the hands of the former lackeys of the Hohenzollern's absolutism, ready to be tomorrow's tools of the counterrevolution:

- It propagates a constituent national assembly, which will create a bourgeois counterweight to the workers' and soldiers' representatives, put the revolution on a bourgeois track, and abandon its socialist goals;
- It does nothing to destroy the ongoing power of capitalist class rule;
- It goes through huge efforts to appease the bourgeoisie, to declare property untouchable, and to protect the capitalist order;

- ♦ It allows the counterrevolution to organize without appealing to or warning the masses.

“Calm! Order! Order! Calm!” This is what we hear from all sides, be it the government or the bourgeoisie. It is particularly popular to evoke the dangers of “anarchy” and of “putschism,” which is usual for the bourgeoisie worried about its safes, its property, and its profits. Sadly, the revolutionary workers’ and soldiers’ government tolerates this mobilization against socialism; in fact, it participates in it in both word and deed.

The summary of the first week of the revolution is the following: essentially, nothing has changed in the Hohenzollern’s state, and the workers’ and soldiers’ government is merely the substitute for an imperialist government gone bankrupt. All of its actions—and non-actions—are characterized by a deep fear of the working masses. Even before the revolution has taken on force, drive, and its own dynamics, it is robbed of its only true asset, its socialist and proletarian character.

None of this should surprise us. The reactionary state of the civilized world cannot become a revolutionary people’s state within twenty-four hours. Soldiers who have, as minions of reactionary powers, murdered revolutionary proletarians in Finland, Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltics, and workers who have let this happen, cannot become conscious bearers of socialism overnight.

The state of the German Revolution corresponds to the state of the German spirit. In this sense, the likes of Scheidemann and Ebert are fitting government representatives. Meanwhile, the USPD members in government reveal to be little more than their loyal aids when claiming to establish socialism with the SPD and celebrating a “purely socialist government” in the *Freiheit*.

However, revolutions never stand still. They are fast-moving by nature and they eventually transcend themselves. We already see how the inner contradictions of the German Revolution are pushing it forward. The current state is understandable in the revolution’s earliest stage, but it cannot last. The masses must be on their guard, however, to prevent the counterrevolutionary forces from taking over.

The first steps have been taken. What lies ahead of us is not in the hands of the dwarfs trying to halt the course of the revolution and to throw a monkey wrench into the wheel of world history. Today, the agenda of world history is to realize socialism. The German Revolution has entered the orbit of this shining star. It will reach its goal step by step, through storm and tempest, through struggle and anguish, through distress and victory. It must!

THE USUAL GAME

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as “Das alte Spiel” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 3, November 18, 1918.

“LIEBKNECHT HAS MURDERED TWO HUNDRED OFFICERS IN Spandau.”

“Liebknecht has been murdered in Spandau.”

“The Spartacus gang stormed the Marstall.”¹

“The Spartacus gang tried to enter the *Berliner Tageblatt* offices with machine guns.”

“Liebknecht loots stores.”

“Liebknecht distributes money among the soldiers to entice them to counterrevolutionary action.”

Spartacus members were heading to the House of Representatives where a meeting of the *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* took place.² When the assembly heard of this, panic broke out and everyone rushed away to escape the apparently imminent atrocities, leaving behind heats, umbrellas, and other valuable items that are very hard to replace these days.

For a few weeks, the wildest rumors have been spreading about our group in Berlin. Whenever a window breaks or a tire bursts, every philistine’s hair stands on end and shivers run down his spine because he knows that the “Spartacus gang” is coming!

Various people have addressed Liebknecht with the touching request to spare their marital partners, nephews, or aunts from the child murder of Bethlehemian dimensions that the Spartacus folks are supposedly preparing. These are true stories from the first month of the German Revolution.

Who does not think of the delightful scene in *The Magic Flute*, when the rascal Monostatos, startled by Papageno’s shadow, sings full of fear:

Hu! that is the devil, certainly!

Hu! that is the devil, certainly!

If I were a mouse,

How I would like to hide myself!
Were I as small as snails,
Then I would creep into my House!³

The most disturbing aspect of all these wild rumors, ridiculous fantasies, crazy fairy tales, and shameless lies is that they belong to an orchestrated campaign. The slander against the Spartacists follows a careful plan. The rumors are fabricated purposefully and fed to the public with the intention to spread panic, to confuse the citizens, to intimidate and mislead the workers and soldiers, and to create a mood that allows pogroms against the Spartacists in order to stop us before we have even had the chance to present our politics and our goals to the masses.

This is an old game. We all remember the mad tales about golden automobiles, French airplanes, poisoned wells, and pierced-out eyes that were intentionally spread by the agents of the warmongers four years ago, at the outbreak of the war, to instill blind nationalist hatred among the workers soon used as cannon fodder. Today, we see the same with respect to the Spartacists. The people are misled and incited to hatred so that they will turn against the Spartacists with neither hesitation nor conscience.

We know how it works and we know who is responsible. It is the dependent social democrats,⁴ a Scheidemann, an Ebert, an Otto Braun, a Bauer, a Legien, and a Baumeister,⁵ who consciously poison public opinion with shameless lies and who mobilize the people against us because they—rightfully!—fear our critique. Only one week before the revolution, these people denounced the idea of a revolution in Germany as a crime, as adventurism, as “putschism,” claiming that Germany already was a democracy since Prince Max was chancellor and Scheidemann was allowed to don a ministerial suit next to Erzberger. Today, the same people explain to the masses that the revolution is already over, that its goals have already been achieved. Their intention is to sabotage any further revolutionary progress and to protect bourgeois property and capitalist exploitation. This is the “order” and the “calm” they claim to defend against us. And this is what the slander is all about. It is the reason why these men are so afraid of us and, in turn, have so much hatred for us. They know perfectly well that we do not loot stores but reject capitalist private property; that we do not storm the Marstall or the House of Representatives but intend to smash the class rule of the bourgeoisie; that we do not murder but want to push the revolution forward uncompromisingly in the interest of the workers. They distort our socialist goals consciously, turning them into lumpenproletarian adventures. All this to mislead the masses. They speak of coups, assassinations, and similar nonsense when we speak of socialism. By killing Spartacus they try to kill the proletarian revolution itself!

However, they will fail. We will not let them silence us. Maybe they manage to mobilize some confused workers and soldiers against us. Maybe counterrevolutionary attacks even put us back in the dungeons that we have just left. But the iron march of the revolution cannot be stopped.

We will let our voices be heard and the masses will understand us and they will turn with special anger against those trying to incite pogroms with lies. And the target of their anger will not be the Marstall, a store, or a philistine but *you*, the former allies of bourgeois reactionaries and of Prince Max, the protectors of capitalist exploitation, the outposts of the counterrevolution: wolves in sheeps' clothing!



1. The royal stable in Berlin; served as an administrative center during the revolution.
2. "Progressive People's Party," a liberal party existing from 1910 to 1918. This must have been among the last official meetings. In late 1918, the party united with the left wing of the *Nationalliberale Partei* [National Liberal Party] to form the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* [German Democratic Party], which would play an important role in the Weimar Republic.
3. The quote combines different lines from the opera libretto.
4. Derogatory wordplay referring to the SPD, which is compared to the "independent social democrats," the USPD.
5. Otto Braun (1872–1955), Gustav Bauer (1870–1944), and Konstantin Baumeister (1887–1962), influential SPD politicians during the revolutionary period; Scheidemann, Ebert, and Legien are listed under "Personalities" in the Glossary.

THE NEW BURGFRIEDEN¹

KARL LIEBKNECHT

Published as “Der neue Burgfrieden” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 4, November 19, 1918.

“I NO LONGER KNOW ANY PARTIES, I ONLY KNOW GERMANS.” This lie stood at the beginning of the world war. Deceptive phrases suggesting the holy unity of all classes misted the minds of the people and even turned workers into passionate warmongering patriots bursting of murderous madness. It was as if a flood had swept away all proletarian class-consciousness—and this at a moment when nothing but the proletarian class struggle against imperialism would have been able to save the world from the atrocities and the slaughter that followed.

The “holy unity” delivered the masses unconditionally into the claws of the war profiteers; the “holy unity” meant mass murder, the misery of millions, cultural devastation, hell. Its most effective and most unscrupulous propagandists were the politicians of the SPD defending the *Burgfrieden*: everyone who dared raise a warning voice against the betrayers of the proletariat was persecuted as an obstructionist, troublemaker, traitor, and saboteur.

“We no longer know different socialist parties, we only know socialists.” This lie stands at the end of the world war. The flag of a new *Burgfrieden* has been hoisted. Fanatical hatred is sown against everyone who rejects the new delirium of “unity.” Once again, the loudest voices are those of Scheidemann and his allies.

These voices find strong support among the soldiers. This is hardly surprising. Far from all soldiers are proletarians, and sieges, censorship, state propaganda, and indoctrination have left their mark. Nonetheless, most soldiers have revolutionary sentiments and reject militarism, war, and the representatives of imperialism; with respect to socialism, however, they are still divided, uncertain, and immature.

Many of the proletarian soldiers have been subjected to the same deadening social-imperialist blabber as the workers. This means that they believe the claims about a revolution that has already been won.

All they are worried about now is a peace agreement and demobilization. They long after some quiet years after years of torture. However, they ignore that the “revolution”—tolerated by practically all state officials—has so far meant hardly more than the collapse of the autocratic remnants of the “mad year” of 1848;² in other words, what we have witnessed has mainly been the completion of the bourgeois revolution. The proletariat might have seized political power. This step, however, can only be justified if it actually leads to toppling economic class rule, which is the proletariat’s historical task. The soldiers ignore that the problems of peace, demobilization, and economic development can only be solved if the proletariat pursues this task.

Unity. No one can long for it more than we do. Unity means to make the proletariat strong enough to fulfill its historical mission. But not all kinds of unity make strong. Unity between fire and water extinguishes the fire and makes the water evaporate. Unity between the wolf and the lamb turns the lamb into the wolf’s dinner. Unity between the proletariat and the ruling classes sacrifices the workers. Unity with betrayers means defeat. Only forces with the same goals grow stronger from unity. To chain opposite forces together means to paralyze them. Forces with the same goals connect. That is *our* ambition. The ambition of the current apostles of unity is to tie opposite forces together to constrain and divert the revolution. It is the same ambition that the preachers of unity had during the war.

Politics is action. To act together requires agreeing on goals and tactics. Those who share our goals and tactics are welcome as comrades in the struggle.

True unity means unity in spirit, in conviction, in desire, and in action. Mere rhetorical unity is trickery, self-deception, and betrayal. Today’s advocates of unity want to end a “revolution” that has hardly begun. They want to steer the movement into “quiet waters” in order to save the capitalist order. They want to take power out of the workers’ hands by reestablishing a political order based on class and by defending an economic order based on class. All the while they hypnotize the proletariat with their blabber about unity.

The Spartacists are attacked because we pose a threat to their plans and because we are honest and serious about the liberation of the working class and the socialist world revolution.

Can we agree with those who are nothing but the placeholders of capitalist exploiters while pretending to be socialists? Can—*may*—we unite with them without becoming accomplices in their vicious acts? Unity with these people means the demise of the proletariat, the surrender of socialism, the betrayal of the International. These people do not deserve a brotherly handshake. They do not deserve unity—only struggle.

The working masses are the makers of the social revolution. Clear class consciousness, a clear understanding of their historical task, a clear will to fulfill it,

and determined action are the qualities that are required. This implies that the diffusion of the rhetorical mist of “unity,” the denouncement of all halfheartedness and tepidness, the disclosure of all the false friends of the working class becomes their first duty—today more than ever.

Only merciless critique can bring clarity. Only clarity can bring unity. Only unity in conviction, purpose, and will can give us the power we need to create the new socialist world.



1. *Burgfrieden*, literally “Castle Peace,” was the term used to describe the support of World War I by all German parties.
2. In German, the revolutionary year of 1848 is often referred to as the *tolle Jahr*.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as “Die Nationalversammlung” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 5, November 20, 1918.

FROM THE *DEUTSCHE TAGESZEITUNG* AND THE *VOSSISCHE* to the *Vorwärts* and the USPD's *Freiheit*, from Reventlow,¹ Erzberger, and Scheidemann to Haase and Kautsky comes a unanimous call for the national assembly and an equally unanimous fear of the proletariat actually seizing power. The entire “people,” the entire “nation” shall decide on the fate of the revolution by majority decision.

That the open and hidden agents of the ruling classes propagate the national assembly is self-evident. We have nothing to discuss with the wardens of the capitalists' safes, neither *in* the national assembly nor *about* the national assembly. However, also USPD leaders side with them in this crucial question.

As Hilferding² declares in the *Freiheit*, the USPD leaders deem this necessary in order to prevent violence and civil war. Petty-bourgeois illusions! What are their expectations for the most powerful social revolution in the history of humankind? They seem to believe that the different classes will come together, have a nice, quiet, and honorable debate, and then proceed to vote, perhaps employing the civilized *Hammelsprung*.³ And then, once the capitalist class understands that it is in the minority, it will sigh and say, “Well, there is nothing we can do! We have been outvoted. So, let us give in and hand the workers all of our lands, factories, mines, fireproof safes, and beautiful profits.”

The dynasties of the Lamartine, Garnier-Pagès, Ledru-Rollin, of the petty-bourgeois illusionists and babblers of 1848, have not died out.⁴ They live on—without any glamour, talent, or attraction—in the boring, pedantic, and philistine Germanness of a Kautsky, a Hilferding, and a Haase; profound Marxists who have all forgotten the ABC of socialism. They do not recall that the bourgeoisie is no parliamentary party but a ruling class controlling all economic and social means of power.

The Junkers and the capitalists keep quiet as long as the revolutionary government has no higher ambition than putting beauty plasters on

the capitalist wage labor system. They are well behaved as long as the revolution is well behaved, that is, as long as the lifeline, the artery of bourgeois class rule, consisting of capitalist private property, the wage labor system, and the principle of profit, remains untouched. If their profits and the notion of private property come under attack, this graciousness will stop. The coziness of today, with wolves and sheep, tigers and lambs cuddling up as if Germany was Noah's ark, will end exactly at the moment when socialism becomes serious. Should the glorious national assembly really decide to realize socialism and to uproot the rule of capital, then the struggle will begin. Once the bourgeoisie's heart is targeted, a heart beating in the safes guarding its riches, the bourgeoisie will fight for its rule with tooth and nail and instigate a thousand forms of open and hidden resistance against the implementation of socialism.

All this is inevitable. We have to go through this fight, we have to defend socialism, we have to defeat the enemy—with or without a national assembly. The "civil war" that one so desperately tries to avoid cannot be avoided. After all, "civil war" is only another name for "class struggle," and the thought that socialism can be introduced without class struggle, perhaps by a majority decision in parliament, is a pitiful petty-bourgeois illusion.

So, what do we win if we take the cowardly detour via the national assembly? All that will happen is a strengthening of the bourgeoisie and a weakening of the proletariat that will be confused by empty illusions. We will get bogged down and lose valuable time in "discussions" between the wolf and the lamb. In short, we will feed all the elements whose purpose and intention is to rid the proletarian revolution of its socialist goals and to turn it into a bourgeois-democratic travesty. The question of the national assembly is no opportunistic question, no question of "convenience." It is a question of principle, a question of whether the revolution sees itself as socialist or not.

During the Great French Revolution, the first decisive step in July 1789 was to unite the three divided estates in a common national assembly. This decision marked the entire further process of the revolution. It symbolized the victory of a new bourgeois order over the medieval feudal order. In exactly the same way, the symbol of the new socialist order, announced by today's proletarian revolution, is the workers' parliament, the representation of the urban and rural proletariat. The revolution's class character has to be reflected in the revolution's political institutions.

The national assembly is an outdated relic of the bourgeois revolution, a shell without a soul, a remnant from the times of petty-bourgeois illusions about a "united people," about "freedom, equality, and fraternity" in the bourgeois state. Those who demand the national assembly today throw the revolution back to the bourgeois era, consciously or unconsciously. They are disguised agents of the bourgeoisie or hapless ideologues of the petty-bourgeoisie.

The fight for the national assembly is led under the rallying cry, “Democracy or Dictatorship!” Even this slogan, a result of counterrevolutionary propaganda, is adapted by socialist leaders who do not realize that it is a demagogic fraud. “Democracy or dictatorship” is not the question today. The question that history is asking is: “*Bourgeois* democracy or *socialist* democracy?” “Dictatorship of the proletariat” only describes democracy in the socialist sense. “Dictatorship of the proletariat” does not mean bombs, coups, unrest, or “anarchy.” These are conscious distortions of the agents of capitalist profit. “Dictatorship of the proletariat” means to use all means of political power to realize socialism and to expropriate the capitalist class for the benefit—and by the will—of the proletariat’s revolutionary majority, that is, in the spirit of socialist democracy.

There will be no socialism without conscious will and conscious action of the majority of the workers! In order to deepen their consciousness, to strengthen their will, and to organize their actions, an institution of the working class is necessary: *a national body of urban and rural proletarians!* To replace the traditional national assembly of the bourgeois revolution with such a body is in itself an act of class struggle, a rupture with the past of bourgeois society, an effective means to mobilize the proletarian masses, a first open and unambiguous declaration of war against capitalism.

No excuses, no escapes. The dice must fall. Yesterday, parliamentary cretinism was a weakness. Today, it is halfheartedness. Tomorrow, it will be a betrayal of socialism.



1. Ernst Graf zu Reventlow (1869–1943), right-wing journalist and politician, later active in the NSDAP.
2. See footnote 15 in “Democracy and Dictatorship.”
3. Literally, “mutton jump,” the *Hammelsprung* describes a voting procedure in which all parliamentarians leave the assembly to reenter through three doors, one for a “yes” vote, one for a “no” vote, and one for abstention.
4. Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), Étienne Joseph Louis Garnier-Pagès (1801–1841), and Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin (1807–1874) were bourgeois French politicians.

THAT WHICH IS

KARL LIEBKNECHT

Published as “Das, was ist” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 6, November 21, 1918.

THERE HAS BEEN A HUGE CONTRADICTION SO FAR BETWEEN the political form and the social content of the German Revolution. It demands to be solved. In fact, the further development of the revolution depends on this. The political form of the revolution has been proletarian action; its social content bourgeois reform.

Even the political form was first and foremost military action and can only be called proletarian with a grain of salt. It derived not primarily from the proletariat's misery but from general social ills. The victory of the workers and soldiers was not so much based on their own initiative but rather on the interior collapse of the old regime. Furthermore, it was not only marked by proletarian action but also by the activities of the ruling classes, which, with a sigh of relief, handed the responsibility for Germany's bankruptcy to the proletariat, hoping that social revolution could be avoided that way—a revolution that seemed imminent and that filled them with fear.

The current “socialist” government wants to overcome said contradiction by adapting the proletarian form to the bourgeois content. It is the duty of the socialist proletariat to change the content instead. It has to be the most progressive content possible; in other words, the revolution must be turned into a *social* revolution.

“Today, the German proletariat holds political power.” Does this really correspond to the facts? Yes, workers' and soldiers' councils have been formed in all of Germany's bigger cities. But many bourgeois councils have been formed there as well. In the smaller towns, things have hardly changed at all, or only in very superficial ways. “Peasants' councils” have been formed, but none of them are in the hands of the rural proletariat; they are controlled by medium and big landowners.

Very often, even the “workers' councils” are not rooted in the proletariat and therefore not genuine representatives of the working class.

We know about cases in which slimy businessmen or other powerful members of the bourgeoisie have managed to convince the workers to include them. Many times, the elected workers lack class-consciousness and are uneducated, insecure, indecisive, and weak. As a result, their bodies have no revolutionary character and their power over the representatives of the old regime is only illusory. We also see more and more members of all sorts of bourgeois professions presenting themselves as workers. They send their representatives to the workers' councils, which turn into a people's parliament divided by trade, fulfilling the dreams of Mister von Heydebrand.¹

The state of the soldiers' councils is even worse. They unite members of all of society's classes, and while the proletariat is the dominating one, only a fraction of the soldiers' councils' members are revolutionary workers ready to engage in class struggle. Very often, the soldiers' councils have been appointed from above, by officers and even aristocrats who cleverly try to secure their influence and let themselves be elected.

A few additional aspects need to be considered: the soldiers' councils remain much more influential than the workers' councils, which reflects the nature of the revolution; the "socialist" government has maintained or even reinstated the entire administrative apparatus of the bourgeois state and the old military machinery—institutions that are nearly impossible to control for the workers' and soldiers' councils; the enormous economic power of the ruling classes has not been touched, and some of their social powers will continue for a long time, not least due to higher education; the food supplies remain largely in the hands of the anti-proletarian, anti-socialist landowners. All this means that we can only speak of proletarian power today with strong reservations.

Of course, the current government consisting of a six-man cabinet and the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Great Berlin have been elected by the workers' and soldiers' councils of Great Berlin whose maturity probably reflects the average workers' and soldiers' council across the country. But all this is only façade. Political power does not consist of formal assignments or certificates but of controlling *real* and *strong* means of power that also protect those in power from enemy attacks.

On November 9, the levers of state power were seized by workers and soldiers. No one could have prevented them from also seizing the levers of economic power. Instead, they soon lost even the political power they had gained. We must not fool ourselves. The political power that the proletariat seized on November 9 has largely disappeared—and it diminishes further by the hour.

While the proletariat grows increasingly weaker, its enemies unite in a concentrated effort. In the cities as much as in the country, the counterrevolution is mobilizing, more and more openly and cynically. We hear from Schleswig-Holstein

and from other provinces how the provincial councils, government bureaus, town majors, police officers, municipal clerks, schoolteachers, lawyers, factory owners, and peasants build alliances with the wealthy classes that grow bigger and stronger by the day. The more the rural proletariat is exposed to their influence, the more dangerous these alliances become.

A war of starvation and—if it is needed—a German Vendée against the proletarian centers of the revolution are being prepared. The danger is growing fast. We must not lose any time shall the proletariat's hopes not be buried under debris in just a few weeks. The working masses must actively halt the loss of their power and stop the government from contributing to it. They must say, "No more!" At the same time, they must defend what they have gained and proceed to conquer the remaining positions of power in order to bring the ruling classes to their knees and to make proletarian rule come true in flesh and blood. To hesitate means to lose everything; that which already has been won and that which still needs to be won. To hesitate means to prepare the death of the revolution. The danger is enormous and urgent!



1. Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa (1851–1924), chairman of the *Deutschkonservative Partei* [German Conservative Party].

ON THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as “Um den Vollzugsrat” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 26, December 11, 1918.

RIGHT IN THE MIDST OF THE CONFUSION FOLLOWING NUMEROUS counterrevolutionary attacks, defamation campaigns, and conspiracies, we are witnessing a fact of uttermost importance for the future of the revolution: the effective elimination of the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils, which is rendered completely powerless and irrelevant.

Let us recall how things were in the beginning.

The revolution of November 9 was made by workers and soldiers. The creation of workers’ and soldiers’ councils was the first deed, the first achievement, the first visible victory. The workers’ and soldiers’ councils symbolized the end of imperialist bourgeois rule and the beginning of a new political and social order, representing the interests of the masses, that is, of workers and soldiers.

The workers’ and soldiers’ councils were organs of the revolution, pillars of the new order, executors of the will of the masses in work wear and soldier’s uniforms. An enormous effort lay ahead of them. It was their duty to implement the will of the revolutionary masses and to transform the entire social and political state apparatus in the interest of the proletariat and in the spirit of socialism.

To begin their work, the workers’ and soldiers’ councils, spread out across the entire country, needed a central organ expressing their common will and activities with clarity and unity. As such an organ, the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils was elected at the Circus Busch on November 10.

True, it was only elected by the workers’ and soldiers’ councils of Berlin. It had not been possible to convoke a national parliament of workers’ and soldiers’ councils within a day. Therefore, the Executive Council elected by the workers of Berlin was meant to *provisionally* function as the central body of the German workers and soldiers. This is why the Executive Council’s first declaration read thus: “To the inhabit-

ants and the soldiers of Great Berlin! The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, elected by the workers' and soldiers' councils of Great Berlin, has begun operating. All municipal, provincial, national, and military bureaus shall continue with their work as usual. All orders of these bureaus are based on the decisions of the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils."¹

This declaration formulated crystal-clear what ought to be self-evident: the Executive Council held the entire political power in the republic and *all* other political bodies were under its authority as executive organs of its will. No one objected to this at the time. So, what has become of this sovereign power in the course of a mere four weeks?

Next to the Executive Council, a Council of People's Delegates, the "political cabinet" of Ebert and Haase, was appointed. This body was the result of a collaboration between the SPD and the USPD, which divided the six seats between them. The Council of People's Delegates was ratified at the same meeting that appointed the Executive Council.

What was the conceived relationship between the two bodies? If—as demanded by the workers' and soldiers' councils, and as stated in the above-cited declaration of the Executive Council from November 11—the Executive Council was to be the *highest* political body of the republic, then this necessarily implied that the Council of People's Delegates—that means Ebert, Haase, and their colleagues—were *subordinates* to the Executive Council, just like all other political bodies. The cabinet of Ebert, Haase, etc. could only be the administrative organ of the Executive Council and its will. This, and nothing else, was the understanding of everyone at the time the two bodies were formed.

This agreement did not last long, however. Already the next day, it became apparent that the likes of Scheidemann tried to establish the Ebert cabinet as an independent body—first alongside the Executive Council, then above it. The reflections of Lassalle on the difference between a written constitution and the actual relationship of power proved true once again.² According to the will of the workers' and soldiers' councils, political sovereignty lay with the Executive Council, while Ebert and his colleagues had managed to seize actual political power.

Whenever the members of the Executive Council wanted to discuss the relationship between the two bodies, they were given the runaround with endless meetings, deliberations, and conscious delays. During the debates, Ebert's men were very active behind the scenes. They mobilized counterrevolutionary forces, secured the support of the reactionary army officers, found allies among the bourgeoisie and the military, and put pressure on the Executive Council with unscrupulous cynicism.

The peak of these maneuvers, the event completing them, was the coup of December 6, when the Ebert dictatorship was confirmed and the Executive Council disregarded. This was most obviously expressed when the former royal guards entered Berlin.³

If we want to illustrate the current power of the Executive Council, it suffices to state that this event of enormous significance happened without its approval and, in fact, against its explicit objection. The episode was crowned by the oath that the guards pledged to Ebert: “We pledge, in the name of the units we represent, to defend and protect the united German Republic and its provisional government, the Council of People’s Delegates.” This means that the guards were requested to pledge loyalty only to the Council of People’s Delegates. Only the Ebert cabinet represented the “government,” the Executive Council was not even mentioned. It was treated like air. It did not exist!

The reception of the troops, the decision not to confiscate their weapons, the oath—everything happened without the Executive Council, or, more precisely, behind its back. We are absolutely convinced that the Executive Council got to know about all this the same way everyone else did: from the papers. This can only suggest that the entire episode, including the oath from which the Executive Council was excluded, was a conscious maneuver against the Executive Council. The parade of the guards, their arms, the oath—everything was a demonstration of power by the Ebert cabinet and a direct threat and provocation: the Executive Council is a shadow, it is nothing. This is what Ebert and co. wanted to tell the world. Such boldness, such confidence among the counterrevolution only four weeks after the revolution!

Targeting the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils means to target all workers and soldiers. *Their* body, the body of the proletarian revolution, has been robbed of its power, made irrelevant, and delivered to the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie.

Of course, no political body that loses its power ever is without fault. Without the indecision and the indolence of the Executive Council, Scheidemann’s games would have never succeeded. Those who suffer are the workers. Now it is up to them to form a new Executive Council at the upcoming General Congress of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council; an Executive Council that refuses to be sidelined and that will wrest the power acquired by Ebert and his accomplices in counter-revolutionary deceit from their hands.

If the workers’ and soldiers’ councils of Germany will not mercilessly destroy the nest of Scheidemann and Ebert, they will soon find themselves eliminated in much the same way the Executive Council has been eliminated now: strangled by the triumphant counterrevolution.



1. Emphasis by Rosa Luxemburg.
2. In 1862, Lassalle gave an often-quoted talk in Berlin with the title “Über Verfassungswesen” [On the Nature of Constitutions].
3. See “December 10, 1918” in the Timeline.

WHAT DOES THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE WANT?

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as “Was will der Spartakusbund?” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 29, December 14, 1918. With insignificant changes, the text became the first party program of the KPD, adopted at its founding congress.

I

ON NOVEMBER 9, THE WORKERS AND SOLDIERS SMASHED THE OLD German regime. On the battlefields of France, the bloody mania of the Prussian saber terrorizing the world found its end. The criminals who had set the entire world on fire and driven Germany into a sea of blood were at their wits' end. For four years, the German people had been betrayed, in the process forgetting culture, honor, and humanity in the Moloch's service and committing every atrocity demanded from them. Now, finally, they awoke, and found themselves on the brink of an abyss.

On November 9, the German proletariat arose to throw off its shameful yoke. The Hohenzollern were chased away and workers' and soldiers' councils were elected. But the Hohenzollern were never more than cronies of the imperialist bourgeoisie and the Junkers. It was the class rule of the bourgeoisie that was truly responsible for the world war: in Germany as much as in France, in Russia as much as in England, and in Europe as much as in America. The capitalists of all countries were the real instigators of the slaughter. The insatiable Baal was international capital, feeding on millions and millions of steaming human sacrifices.

The world war created the following alternative for the people: either a continuation of capitalism, new wars, and imminent degeneration into chaos and anarchy or the abolition of capitalist exploitation.

With the end of the war, the class rule of the bourgeoisie lost every right to exist. It is no longer able to lead the people from the devastating economic collapse caused by the imperialist orgy. Most means of production have been destroyed. Millions of workers, the best and strongest of the working class, have been killed. Those who are still alive will

be met by the grinning misery of unemployment at home. Famine and disease threaten to eradicate the very basis of a strong people. The country's bankruptcy is inevitable given the enormous debt acquired during the war.

There is no other help, no resort, no salvation from this bloody confusion and from the abyss we are facing than socialism. Only the proletarian world revolution can bring order into this chaos, can provide labor and bread for everyone, can put an end to the mutual slaughter of the peoples, can give peace, freedom, and true culture to a tortured humanity. Down with the wage labor system! That is the call of the hour. Cooperative labor must replace wage labor and class rule. The means of labor must end to be the monopoly of one class, they have to become common property. No more exploiters and exploited! The production and distribution of goods must be organized according to the common good. Today's mode of production, exploitation, and robbery as well as today's trade, which is nothing but fraud, have to be abolished. Comrades working in freedom must replace the employers and their wage slaves. Everyone fulfilling his duty to society shall be guaranteed a humane life. Hunger must no longer be the curse of the worker, but the punishment of the idler! Only in such a society will servitude and the hatred between the peoples be uprooted. Only when such a society is realized, the earth will no longer be ravished by murder. Only then will we be able to say: "This war was the last!"

In this hour, socialism is humankind's only savior. Above the collapsing walls of capitalist society we can see the words of the *Communist Manifesto* blazing like a fiery writing on the wall: "Socialism or demise into barbarism!"

II

The realization of the socialist order is the mightiest task ever to fall upon a class and a revolution. It demands a complete transformation of the state and of the economic as well as social foundations of society. This transformation cannot come from any government office, commission, or parliament; it can only be pursued and implemented by the masses themselves.

In all of the revolutions that we know, it has always been a small minority who guided the struggle, who gave it direction and purpose, and who used the masses as a tool to lead their own minority interests to victory. The socialist revolution is the first revolution that leads the interests of the great majority of the working people to victory. In the socialist revolution they are not fighting for someone else but for themselves!

The proletariat must not only give the revolution clear direction and purpose. It must also, step by step, introduce socialism in everyday life. The essence of a socialist society consists of the working masses refusing to be governed and taking control

of political and economic life in conscious and free self-determination. This means that the workers have to replace all of the traditional organs of bourgeois class rule, from the very top of the state to the smallest towns. Federal councils, parliaments, and municipal councils must give way to workers' and soldiers' councils. The workers have to occupy all posts, monitor all administrative activities, and adapt the needs of the state to their own class interests and to socialist demands. Only in a permanent and lively exchange between the masses and their political bodies, the workers' and soldiers' councils, can the state be filled with a socialist spirit.

Also the economic transformation can only unfold as a process carried by proletarian mass action. Formal decrees of socialization issued by the highest revolutionary councils are in themselves only empty words. Only the workers can make socialization real by their own efforts. The workers can take control of production and, eventually, manage it themselves by confronting capital directly, head-to-head at every workplace, by mass pressure, by strikes, and by creating their own representative bodies.

The proletarian masses have to become free, conscious, and self-determined managers of the production process; they must no longer be the dead machines that the capitalists demand. They have to earn their trust as reliable fighters for the commons, where all of society's riches must be concentrated. They have to prove that they can work hard even without the capitalist's whip, that they can be effective without brutal foremen, that they can be disciplined without yokes around their necks, and that they can create order without oppression.

The moral foundations of capitalist society are monotony, egoism, and corruption. The moral foundations of socialism are uncompromising idealism in the interest of the public good, strictest self-discipline, and true solidarity among the masses. The workers can only acquire these socialist virtues, as well as the knowledge and the ability to manage socialist workplaces, through their own activities and from their own experiences.

Socialization can only be realized by the committed and tireless struggle of the working masses; a struggle that must unfold wherever labor stands against capital, wherever the people stand against bourgeois class rule. The liberation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.

III

In the bourgeois revolutions, bloodshed, terror, and political murder were necessary weapons of the rising classes. The proletarian revolution has no need for terror. It despises the murder of human beings. It does not need such means because it does not fight against individuals but against institutions, because it does not enter the arena with naïve illusions leading to disappointment and bloody vengeance. It is

not the desperate attempt of a minority to shape the world according to its own principles but an act of the people, of millions who are on a historical mission to turn what is historically necessary into reality.

The proletarian revolution is the death knell for all forms of servitude and oppression. That is why the capitalists, the Junkers, the petty-bourgeoisie, the military officers, all beneficiaries and parasites of exploitation and class rule rise against the proletarian revolution as one, ready to fight for their lives.

It is an insane illusion to believe that capitalists would civilly accept the socialist verdict of a parliament or a national assembly; that they would give up property, profit, and the privilege of exploitation without resistance. Let us recall the Roman patricians, the medieval feudal barons, the English Cavaliers, the American slave traders, the Wallachian bojars, and the silk manufacturers of Lyon: they have all spilled streams of blood, walked over corpses, instigated arson and murder, and incited civil war and treason to defend their privileges and their power.

The imperialist-capitalist class is the last scion of the exploiting class. It trumps all of its predecessors in brutality, unveiled cynicism, and immorality. It will defend what it considers sacred, that is, its profits and its privilege of exploitation, with tooth and nail, with the same cold cruelty it has displayed in the entire colonial history and the world war. The imperialist-capitalist class will move heaven and earth against the proletariat. It will mobilize the peasants against the cities, it will incite the uneducated sections of the proletariat against the socialist vanguard, it will send officers to commit atrocities, it will attempt to paralyze any socialist measure by a thousand means of passive resistance, it will create twenty Vendées against the revolution, it will welcome exterior enemies—the murdering tools of Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Wilson—into the country as saviors, it will rather turn the country into a smoking wasteland than to voluntarily abandon wage slavery.

This resistance must be crushed with an iron fist and merciless energy, step by step. The violence of the bourgeois counterrevolution must be confronted with the revolutionary violence of the proletariat. The attacks, intrigues, and maneuverings of the bourgeoisie must meet the unbending determination, attentiveness, and readiness of the proletarian masses. The threats of the counterrevolution must be answered by the arming of the people and the disarming of the ruling classes. The parliamentary schemes of obstruction must be opposed by the active organizations of the workers and soldiers. The omnipresence of the bourgeoisie and its plentiful means of power must be shaken by the concentrated, united, and maximized power of the working class. The following is mandatory to form the indestructible base we need to build a better future: a united front of the entire German proletariat, bringing together the South and the North, the country and the city, the worker and the soldier; the visionary and intellectual guidance of the German Revolution by the International; and the expansion of the proletarian revolution.

The struggle for socialism is the biggest civil war that history has ever seen, and the proletarian revolution must bring all the weapons it needs, and, in order to fight and win, it must know how to use them. The united mass of the working people must hold all political power in order to fulfill the tasks of the revolution. That is the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is therefore true democracy.

Democracy does not mean to have wage slaves sitting next to capitalists and rural proletarians next to Junkers to discuss life in false parliamentary equality. Democracy means that millions of proletarians grasp the power of the state—all of its power—with their mighty fists in order to smash it on the ruling classes' head like Thor his hammer. All else is merely betrayal of the people.

In order to allow the proletariat to fulfill its revolutionary tasks, the Spartacus League presents the following list of demands.

I Immediate measures to secure the revolution

1. Disarmament of the entire police force, of all military officers and non-proletarian soldiers, and of all members of the ruling classes.
2. Confiscation of all weapons, ammunition stocks, and arms factories by the workers' and soldiers' councils.
3. Armament of all adult male workers to form a workers' militia; Red Guards shall be formed as an active part of the militia and a permanent protection against counterrevolutionary attacks and intrigues.
4. Abolition of the authority of officers and sergeants and of military jurisdiction; military hierarchies shall be replaced by the voluntary discipline of the soldiers and the election of all superiors by the troops who retain the right to recall them at any time.
5. Expulsion of officers and military volunteers from all soldiers' councils.
6. Replacement of all political bodies and authorities of the former regime by ombudsmen of the workers' and soldiers' councils.
7. Establishment of a revolutionary tribunal to try those responsible for the beginning and the continuation of the war, the two Hohenzollerns, Ludendorff, Hindenburg, Tirpitz,¹ and their accomplices, as well as all the conspirators of the counterrevolution.
8. Immediate confiscation of all food supplies to secure sufficient provisions for the people.

II On the political and social plane

1. Abolition of all federal states and the establishment of a unified German Socialist Republic.

2. Abolition of all parliaments and municipal councils; their duties shall be transferred to the workers' and soldiers' councils and their committees and bureaus.
3. Election of workers' councils by the entire adult proletarian population of both genders in all workplaces across the country, and of soldiers' councils by the troops with the exception of officers and military volunteers; workers and soldiers retain the right to recall their representatives at any time.
4. Election of workers' and soldiers' councils' delegates across the country for the Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, which elects the Executive Council as the highest body of legislative and executive power.
5. Provisional meetings of the Central Council at least every three months with newly elected delegates every time; this is to guarantee the permanent control of the Executive Council and to establish a direct collaboration between all workers' and soldiers' councils across the country and the highest body of government; the local workers' and soldiers' councils retain the right to recall and replace their delegates in the Central Council at any time should they not act in the interests of their constituency; the Executive Council retains the right to appoint and recall the people's delegates, the ministers, and all government officials.
6. Abolition of all class differences, orders, and titles; implementation of total legal and social equality between the genders.
7. Drastic changes in social legislation and the reduction of working hours to six per day in order to control unemployment and to consider the physical exhaustion of the workers due to the war.
8. Immediate and thorough transformation of food, housing, health, and education policies in accordance with the principles of the proletarian revolution.

III Economic demands

1. Confiscation of all the wealth and salaries of the royal dynasties in the name of the public good.
2. Cancellation of all state debts, other public debts, and war bonds, except for certain amounts to be determined by the Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.
3. Expropriation of the lands of all medium and big agricultural estates and the creation of socialist agricultural cooperatives under unified central leadership across the country; small farms remain in the hands of the peasants until their voluntary incorporation into socialist cooperatives.
4. Expropriation of all banks, mines, mills, and big industry and trade firms by the council republic.
5. Confiscation of all private wealth above amounts to be determined by the Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.

6. Transfer of the entire public transport system's management to the council republic.
7. Election of shop councils in all workplaces; in collaboration with the workers' councils, the shop councils will be responsible for controlling the inner affairs of the workplace, the labor conditions, the production, and, eventually, management.
8. Installment of a central strike commission that shall, in constant collaboration with the shop councils, give the strike movements emerging across the country a unified leadership and socialist direction, while at the same time securing the highest possible support by the workers' and soldiers' councils and their political power.

IV International tasks

Immediate establishment of regular communication with international socialist parties in order to provide the socialist revolution with an international platform and to administer and secure peace by the fraternization and the revolutionary uprising of the world proletariat.

V This is what the Spartacus League wants!

The Spartacus League is hated, persecuted, and defamed by all of the open and hidden enemies of the revolution. The reasons are the Spartacus League's demands and the fact that the Spartacus League is the motivator, the voice, and the socialist conscience of the revolution.

"Crucify them!" yell the capitalists fearing for their safes.

"Crucify them!" yell the petty-bourgeoisie, the military officers, the anti-Semites, the media lackeys of the bourgeoisie fearing for the privileges of bourgeois class rule.

"Crucify them!" yell the likes of Scheidemann who sold the workers to the bourgeoisie like Judas Iscariot sold Jesus—they fear for the silver coins of their political rule.

"Crucify them!" yell the deceived, betrayed, and abused sections of the workers and soldiers who do not yet understand that by echoing the rulers they cut into their own flesh and blood.

In a man like Haase and in the slander against the Spartacus League we see all the counterrevolutionary, anti-socialist, ambiguous, dishonest, and deceitful forces that act against the interests of the people. This confirms that the heart of the revolution beats in the Spartacus League and that the Spartacus League will determine the future.

The Spartacus League is no party that wants to seize power on the back of the workers. It does not want to rule over workers. The Spartacus League is nothing but the most determined part of the proletariat, reminding the working masses of their historical duty at every step they are taking. The Spartacus League is the body that represents the ultimate socialist goal of the revolution at each of the revolution's stages. It represents the interests of the proletarian world revolution in all countries.

The Spartacus League rejects to share governmental power with the henchmen of the bourgeoisie, the likes of Scheidemann and Ebert. Sharing power with such men would mean nothing but a betrayal of socialism. It would mean strengthening the counterrevolution while paralyzing the revolution itself.

However, the Spartacus League also refuses to seize power only because Scheidemann, Ebert, and their cohorts will inevitably end up in a desperate place, with the collaborators of the USPD at their side. The Spartacus League will only ever seize power if it has a clear, unambiguous mandate from the vast majority of Germany's proletarian masses; it will never seize power by other means than a conscious approval of its perspectives, goals, and means of struggle.

The proletarian revolution can only unfold step by step and reach clarity and maturity along a Via Dolorosa of its own bitter experiences, of defeats and victories. The victory of the Spartacus League does not mark the beginning of the revolution but its end. It will mean the victory of the millions of socialist workers.

Proletarians, join the struggle! There is a world that needs to be fought and a world that needs to be conquered! In this final class struggle of world history, with the highest goals of humanity at stake, the word for the enemy is: "Thumbs on the eyeballs and knee in the chest!"²



1. Alfred von Tirpitz (1849–1930), influential German admiral and head of the Imperial Naval Office.
2. Famous quote by Ferdinand Lassalle.

CONFRONT THE COUNTERREVOLUTION!

KARL LIEBKNECHT

Speech at the general assembly of the USPD of Great Berlin, December 15, 1918. Translated from the transcript published as “Der Konterrevolution entgegenreten!” in Karl Liebknecht, *Gesammelte Reden und Schriften* [Collected Speeches and Writings], vol. 9 (Berlin: Dietz, 1968).

BARTH HAS PRESENTED A VERY ONE-SIDED AND NARROW perception of the revolution by speaking of those who have *made* the revolution. The revolution did not depend on the distribution of Brownings but on the movement and the will of the masses. The masses knew better than the leaders what was necessary. Barth said, “You can do certain things, but you don’t talk about them.” These are poor diplomatic idioms. We demand the arming of the proletariat and the disarming of the bourgeoisie publicly and not secretly. We do this so that the socialist republic can turn from idea to reality and so that the workers can seize all positions of power.

Barth has also called the actions of the Spartacus League “buffooneries.” It is quite a thing for a people’s delegate to describe mass demonstrations that way.

Who has dared to deceive the people and to make them believe that everything was okay? Who has incited the majority of the soldiers against Bolshevism? The guilty ones are Ebert, Scheidemann, etc. Haase and Barth are their accomplices. It is the government’s duty to properly inform the masses. The government should have sent messengers to the troops at the front to ignite revolutionary fire. Had the government abolished the authority of the army officers, had it removed the generals from their posts, then these men would not openly hatch counterrevolutionary plans today. The oath that the troops have pledged on the government was an affront to the Executive Council. At the same time, the government has reinstated bureaucratic power and done everything to protect the capitalists’ safes by disarming the proletariat and arming the bourgeoisie. We can see that the balance of power between the

Executive Council and the Council of People's Delegates has shifted completely. The Executive Council emerged from the will of the masses, but its powers were taken away step by step. After the assault of December 6, it turned into a mere caricature.

With the help of Haase, the cabinet has robbed the proletariat of its power. We demand the resignation of the USPD cabinet members. We call upon the proletariat to fight for a new revolution, a real revolution smashing the social patriots!¹



1. Within the radical left, *Sozialpatrioten* was a common derogatory term for the SPD.

TO THE ENTRENCHMENTS

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as “Auf die Schanzen” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 30, December 15, 1918.

TOMORROW, THE CENTRAL CONGRESS OF THE WORKERS’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Germany will gather in Berlin. This means that the body will assemble, which the revolutionary proletariat, both workers and soldiers, regard as the most beautiful blossom on the unfolding tree of the German Revolution, at least on the organizational level.

One might have imagined this event differently. One might have hoped that we already had a Central Congress by now or that the star of the revolution was still shining bright at the hour of its foundation—in the same way it was shining on November 9 when it replaced the darkness of war and bondage. But no Central Congress was established then. Instead, the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Great Berlin put the Central Congress’s duties in its own hands; unfortunately, they were too weak.

Now, the Central Congress convenes at a time when the revolution has already lost much of the brightness that blinded the revolution’s opponents for some days, and, sadly, also its supporters, many of whom thought that the revolution was already completed with the miracles of November 9. Today, they can see properly again. Everyone who believed that the old powers, the classes that had ruled for thousands of years, could be replaced by jubilant masses, waving soldiers, and flying red flags under the linden trees¹ see the counterrevolution and capitalism rising again. Capitalism only feigned death during the first days of the revolution, like a bug. Now, it is ready to suck blood once more.

That the counterrevolutionary forces are mobilizing is obvious. This started as soon as they had managed to send their agents Ebert, Scheidemann, and co. into government. This paralyzed all revolutionary energy and led the revolution to counterrevolutionary paths.

What has this “socialist” government done? Every day, it has issued a decree: a decree to reinstate the old state apparatus; a decree to reinstate

the provincial parliamentarians, chiefs of police, and mayors; a decree declaring private property untouchable; a decree declaring the courts, the organs of class justice, "independent," effectively issuing a charter for the continuation of class justice; a decree ordering everyone to pay the same taxes as before. *Nulla dies sine linea*,² no day without a decree that helped rebuild the rotten structure of capitalist rule that was on its way to crumble.

Who cannot understand the bourgeoisie if, under such promising circumstances, it feels strong enough to attempt ousting its placeholders, the government Ebert-Scheidemann-Haase, and to take the reins into its own hands again? The bourgeoisie does not rush anything. It operates calmly and takes every step at a time. It had its agents in government prepare the bourgeois return to power via the national assembly. Ebert, Scheidemann, and co. got to work with the fervor characteristic of turncoats: they propagated the national assembly day and night, on all streets and squares; they did their utmost to support the bourgeoisie; they organized coups and let proletarians be shot; they paid homage to military leaders and saluted the black-white-and-red flag.

Still, none of this was enough to earn the gratitude of their master, capitalism. Now that the master has grown impatient and thinks that its time has come again, it wants to get rid of its servant and does not give a damn about the new national assembly—it wants the old Reichstag!

These are the circumstances under which the Central Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany will gather. Capitalism has regained its strength and is ready to act. And the revolution? Let us be honest. If today's state of the earliest revolutionary organs, the workers' and soldiers' councils, indicate the state of the revolution, then the picture is dreadful. The workers' and soldiers' councils are subject to incredible smear campaigns.

Mistakes are inevitable in chaotic times and they were a daily occurrence under the old regime. In fact, mistakes were routine in the old regime, while today they are merely the result of lacking routine. Nonetheless, the tiniest mistake is turned into a capital crime and used as the ultimate proof for the inaptness of the council system.

Another means to kill the councils is to evoke the shadow of the Entente. Ebert was the first: he offered the councils' head to the Americans in exchange for food—no, in fact, he demanded from the Americans to send food only in exchange for the councils' head!³ The government Ebert-Scheidemann-Haase exploited the fear of hunger in Germany. They told the people over and over again: "Either the councils or bread!"

Then came the news that the Entente was threatening to march into Germany. Every day, we heard something of the kind: "The Entente is at the border! The Entente issues threats! The Entente is about to send a decree! Clemenceau has

declared this and that! Lloyd George has declared this and the other!" Every day the same, every day a new lie. It was all lies. Nothing about it was true. Each single word that was printed was an invention of the ministry of foreign affairs and of the chancellor's office. In fact, the impudence during those days outdid even the impudence of the old regime. The old regime was less unabashed, persistent, shameless, and dishonorable in its lies than the current government.

The councils were not able to resist any of this. They left the entire apparatus forming public opinion in the hands of the cabinet, and therefore the counter-revolution. They watched silently while the cabinet, this counterrevolutionary club, threw firebombs into their homes every day.

However, the weakness of the councils is not the weakness of the revolution. The revolution cannot be killed by any of these petty means. The revolution is growing and it is slowly developing into what it truly is: a proletarian revolution. The strike wave across the country is spreading like a wildfire. Yesterday, the workers arose in Upper Silesia, today they will arise in Berlin, tomorrow in Rhineland-Westphalia, Stuttgart, and Hamburg.⁴ They are breaking the chains that the government, the parties, and the unions have held them in. They are facing their enemy, capitalism, eye to eye. The "democratic" tinsel that made the first days of the revolution so beautiful for many sham socialists is gone and the revolution emerges as a naked, muscular giant that shall smash the old world and build the new.

These are the forces, which the assembled councils can count on, which they have to serve and guide at the same time. Here is the source from which their strength and energy must come. The revolution will live without the councils; but the councils will die without the revolution.

Many things that should have happened did not happen. The councils acted too cautiously and lacked direction. They were too influenced by outdated formulas of party politics, and their vision was impaired by empty slogans and catchphrases. They never understood their role and significance in the unfolding events; in fact, they never understood the unfolding events either. They were too caught up in pretense.

If the Central Congress that now gathers wants to correct the mistakes of the workers' and soldiers' councils and take its proper place, four things are mandatory:

1. It must remove the nest of the counterrevolution, the core where all threads of the counterrevolutionary conspiracy come together, namely the Ebert-Scheidemann-Haase cabinet.
2. It must demand the disarmament of all returning troops who do not unconditionally recognize the authority of the workers' and soldiers' councils and rather act as the personal lifeguards of the Ebert-Scheidemann-Haase cabinet.
3. It must demand the disarmament of all military officers and of the White Guards formed by the Ebert-Scheidemann-Haase cabinet; instead, Red Guards have to be formed.

All Power to the Councils!

4. It must reject the national assembly as an attack on the revolution and on the workers' and soldiers' councils.

If the workers' and soldiers' councils implement these four measures immediately, without any further delay, they can still take control of the revolution. The proletariat is willing to be guided by them if they want to be strong leaders against capitalism. In that case, the workers will give them everything and they will honor them with the rallying cry, *All Power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils!*



1. *Unter den Linden* is a famous boulevard in the center of Berlin.
2. Literally, "not a day without a line," the saying refers to the principle of everyday activity, usually in the context of writers and artists.
3. Soon after the revolution, Ebert had begun to negotiate the delivery of food supplies with U.S. authorities.
4. Contrary to Luxemburg's prediction, the December 1918 strikes by Upper Silesia's railway workers did not cause a strong strike wave across the country.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR COUNCIL GOVERNMENT?

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as “Nationalversammlung oder Räteregierung” in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 32, December 17, 1918.

“**N**ATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR COUNCIL GOVERNMENT?” That is the second point on the agenda of the national assembly of the workers’ and soldiers’ councils. It is also the cardinal question of the revolution right now: we either elect a national assembly or we empower the workers’ and soldiers’ councils; we either forgo socialism or we engage in uncompromising class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

It is a nice idea to realize socialism the parliamentary way, by a simple majority vote. Too bad that this enchanting plan from fantasy-land does not even correspond to the reality of the bourgeois revolution, let alone the proletarian one.

Let us recall the situation in England. England is the cradle of bourgeois parliamentarism. In England, parliamentarism developed the earliest and the strongest. When, in 1649, the first modern bourgeois revolution occurred in the country, the English parliament already had a history of more than three hundred years. Unsurprisingly, the parliament functioned as the center, the stronghold, and the headquarters of the revolution from its very first moment. The famous Long Parliament, in which all phases of the revolution, from the first minor arguments between the opposition and the royalists to the trial and the execution of Maria Stuart, took place, was a formidable and very effective tool in the hands of the upcoming bourgeoisie.

And what was the outcome? This same parliament had to form its own “parliamentary army,” led into the battlefield by generals from its own ranks, in order to fight feudalism and the army of the loyalist Cavaliers in a long, harsh, and bloody civil war. The fate of the English Revolution was not decided during debates at Westminster Abbey, even

if this was the revolution's intellectual center, but on the battlefields of Marston Moor and Naseby; it was not decided by grand speeches in parliament but by the peasant cavalry and by Cromwell's Ironsides. The revolution's course led from parliament to civil war, to two violent "cleansings" of parliament, and, finally, to Cromwell's dictatorship.

How were things in France? In 1789, Mirabeau and others declared that the three hitherto separated estates, the aristocracy, the clergy, and the "third estate," should unite in a national assembly. This was a groundbreaking demand of world-historical dimensions, based on class instinct. The assembly became a tool of the bourgeois class struggle by uniting the three estates in the same political body. Together with strong minorities of the two upper estates, the third estate, that is, the revolutionary bourgeoisie, had a solid majority in the national assembly from the very beginning.

And what was the outcome there? The Vendée, emigration, betrayal by the generals, intrigues by the clergy, uprisings in fifty departments, the Napoleonic Wars of feudal Europe, and, finally, dictatorship and the regime of terror as the only means to secure victory.

This illustrates how insufficient a parliamentary majority was to fight the bourgeois revolution to its end—and yet, the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and feudalism are many times weaker than the ones between labor and capital! What did "class consciousness" mean in the confrontations of 1649 or 1789 compared to the deadly, deeply rooted hatred between the proletariat and the capitalist class today? It was no coincidence that Karl Marx took his scientific dark lantern to shine light on the most hidden mainsprings of the bourgeoisie's economic and political mechanisms. He understood that the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the bourgeoisie, down to their most subtle expressions, were a result of the basic fact that they lived their lives as vampires, sucking proletarian blood. It was therefore no coincidence either that August Bebel closed his famous speech at the SPD party convention in Dresden with the words: "I am, and always will be, an irreconcilable enemy of bourgeois society!"¹

The battle we are facing is the final battle deciding the continuation or the abolition of exploitation. It indicates a turning point in human history. It is a battle that has no place for escape, compromise, or mercy. And then some people suggest that this battle, more powerful than anything that has ever been, shall be solved by a means that has never solved any class struggle and any revolution! They insist on transforming the deadly clashes between two different worlds into the benign bickering, the rhetorical spats, and the majority votes of parliament.

During everyday life under bourgeois rule, the parliament did serve as an arena for class struggle: it was the stage that allowed to gather the masses around the flag of socialism and to prepare them for revolution. Today, however, we are in the midst

of this revolution and must take the axe to the tree of capitalist exploitation itself. Bourgeois rule has lost its right to exist, and with it bourgeois parliamentarism as its most important political expression. Today, class struggle presents itself naked, unveiled. Labor and capital no longer have anything to discuss, they only have to grab one another for one last fight until one of them ends up on the floor.

“To be revolutionary means to always call things by their name.” These words of Lassalle are more important today than ever. To call things by their name today means to say: “Here is labor—there is capital!” We do not need the hypocrisy of amicable negotiations when we are facing a matter of life or death. We do not need victories of “unity” when there are two, entirely separate, sides. The proletariat, constituted as a class, must seize all political power: clearly, openly, honestly, and strongly as a result of it.

“Equal rights and democracy!” We have heard this from the big and small prophets of bourgeois class rule for decades. “Equal rights and democracy!” We hear the same today from Scheidemann and his cohorts, the bourgeoisie’s stooges. Meanwhile, the ideals are finally becoming reality as the promise of “equal rights” can only have meaning where economic exploitation is destroyed with root and branch, while “democracy,” the rule of the people, can only begin once the working people have seized political power.

The 150-year-old abuse of these terms by the bourgeoisie must finally be ended by the practical critique of historical deeds. “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!” The proclamation of the French bourgeoisie of 1789 must become reality for the first time—through the abolition of bourgeois class rule!

In light of world history, the first declaration of the people’s salvation must be announced and recorded for everyone to hear: the promise that parliaments, national assemblies, and ballots for everyone will bring equal rights and democracy is a pack of lies! The only true meaning of equal rights and of democracy lies in putting all power into the hands of the working masses and to use this revolutionary weapon to crush capitalism!



1. August Bebel (1840–1913), one of the founding fathers of Germany’s social democratic movement and the SPD; the Dresden party convention was held in 1903.

A PYRRHIC VICTORY

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Published as "Ein Pyrrhussieg" in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 36, December 21, 1918.

THE FIRST MEETING OF THE COUNCIL CONGRESS IS OVER. If you judge the outcome by the discussions that the delegates engaged in and by the decrees that they issued, it was a total victory for the Ebert government and the counterrevolution. The revolutionary street remained excluded, the political power of the workers' and soldiers' councils was annulled, the national assembly will be elected, and the dictatorial power of the December 6 clique has been confirmed. Could the bourgeoisie wish for anything better, for anything more under the current circumstances? "The dictators have no interest in their dictatorship," rejoices the *Freiheit*, the sad organ of political ambiguity.

Sadly, it is true that the congress, the political body elected by the workers' and soldiers' councils of Germany, did not embrace its historical mission to seize political power for the cause of the revolution; rather, it disembodied itself and handed its power, entrusted by the proletariat, to the enemy. This reveals not only the general inadequacy and immaturity of any revolutionary attempt but also the difficulties of this particular proletarian revolution, the specific character of these historical circumstances.

During all former revolutions, the fighters entered the arena with open visors: class against class, program against program, coat of arms against coat of arms. Every revolution had its share of lies, intrigues, and secret plots, but those were the notorious lies, intrigues, and secret plots of the counterrevolution, of the royalists, the aristocrats, the reactionary military officers. It was always the henchmen of the toppled or threatened regime who employed counterrevolutionary tactics in its name and for its rescue. It sufficed to disclose the hidden symbols and emblems of the counterrevolutionaries, inevitably those of the ruling classes, for the masses to zealously tear them apart.

Today, the defenders of the old order do not hide any symbols and emblems of the ruling classes. They enter the arena under the

flag of the “social democratic” party. Were the names of Ebert, Haase, and co. those of Heydebrand, Gröber, or Fuhrmann¹—which would reflect their actual politics—then not one among the congress’s delegates would follow them. If the cardinal question of the revolution would openly and honestly be presented as “Capitalism or socialism?” then there would not be the slightest hesitation or doubt among the workers.

But, history does not make it that easy for us. Bourgeois class rule is fighting its last historical struggle today under a foreign flag, the flag of revolution itself. A socialist party, the supposedly most authentic expression of the workers’ movement and the class struggle, has turned into the strongest tool of the bourgeois counter-revolution. The core messages, the overall tendencies, the policies, the propaganda, the tactics—everything is capitalist. The only socialist elements that remain are the symbols, the appearance, and the phrases. These are used to deceive the masses and to degrade a delegates’ council of the revolutionary proletariat to the mamluks of the counterrevolution.²

This is German social democracy, this is the result of how it has developed over the last twenty-five years. The spirit of August 4, 1914, can be felt everywhere at the congress. We meet the old, pre-revolutionary Germany of the Hohenzollern, of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, and we are reminded of the sieges and atrocities of Finland, Ukraine, and the Baltics. All this despite the terrible defeat on the battlefields of France and the events of November 9. And still: the old Germany is no more. It is the wonderful secret of all socialist transformations—the result of historical necessities as much as of inner growth—that *one day* of revolution can change the face of society and make the old forever a thing of the past. The events of November 9, as weak, as insufficient, and as confused as they were, have created a gap between yesterday and today that cannot be bridged. One tiny snowflake can be enough to cause a gigantic avalanche burying mountains, valleys, and entire villages. In much the same way, the modest acts of November 9 were enough to cause an earthquake unraveling the class structures of Germany. This process of unsettling and toppling bourgeois class rule can find no other end than the triumph of the social revolution. After the bankruptcy of imperialism, there is no other possibility, no other salvation than socialism. Each day, the situation becomes more desperate. Each day, history shows more clearly and brutally that drastic measures are inevitable.

The masses of soldiers returning home are slowly transforming into masses of workers. They take off the livery of imperialism and don the coat of the proletariat. That way, the soldiers reconnect with their origins, the roots of their class consciousness, while the threads that have tied them temporarily to the ruling classes are cut. Simultaneously, the gigantic problems of unemployment, economic battles between capital and labor, and the bankruptcy of the state increase.

The inner collapse of the capitalist economy reveals that its head resembles Medusa's: behind the economic contradictions are glowing embers from which new blazes of class struggle emerge every day. This also means that the revolutionary tension and the revolutionary consciousness of the masses will become stronger every day. In fact, the Council Congress has made an important contribution to this by demonstrating clearly how far removed it is from the actual situation in the country and from the mood of the masses. Its debates make it entirely clear that, in order to save their own lives, the workers and soldiers have no other choice but to fight the counterrevolutionary government to the bitter end.

Only indecision, halfheartedness, and haziness can put the revolution at risk. Everything that contributes to clarity, every disclosure of the truth only fuels its fire. In this sense, the Council Congress is doing a tremendous job. It removes all the deceptive veils from the counterrevolution's face and shakes the conscience of the proletarian masses like only the explosion of a land mine can.

As soon as the delegates of the congress have uttered their final word, it will be time for the workers' and soldiers' councils across the country to speak. And they will not only speak but also *act*. The victory of the Ebert government will prove to be the same as every victory of the counterrevolution: a Pyrrhic victory.



1. Heinrich von Heydebrand und der Lasa (1851–1924), chairman of the *Deutschkonservative Partei* [German Conservative Party]; Adolf Gröber (1854–1919), prominent member of the Catholic *Deutsche Zentrumsartei* [German Center Party], and Paul Fuhrmann (1872–1942), aristocrat and prominent member of the *Nationalliberale Partei* [National Liberal Party].
2. The mamluks were a warrior caste recruited from slaves in Muslim societies, usually loyal to their superiors.

ABOUT THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY STEWARDS

KARL LIEBKNECHT

Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck negotiated with delegates of the Revolutionary Stewards about them joining the KPD during the party's founding convention. This report by Liebknecht was published as "Über die Verhandlungen mit den revolutionären Obleuten" in Karl Liebknecht, *Gesammelte Reden und Schriften* [Collected Speeches and Writings], vol. 9 (Berlin: Dietz, 1968).

THE NEGOTIATIONS BEGAN YESTERDAY EVENING WITH A commission of seven delegates sent by the Revolutionary Stewards. These included the comrades Ledebour, Däumig, Richard Müller, and Nowakowski.¹ We assumed that the participation in elections would be the biggest point of contention. The Revolutionary Stewards made it clear, however, that they had no interest in participating in the elections for the national assembly. Only Comrade Ledebour did not share this view and declared that he demanded a participation in the elections under all circumstances.

Since there were no major differences regarding principles and tactics, we proposed that the Revolutionary Stewards should send five delegates to the commission that the party conference had appointed to draft a party program and an organizational structure. We could not imagine the conference delegates objecting to this, even if it made the number of commission members from Berlin disproportionately high. However, the discussion of the proposal was unexpectedly interrupted by comrade Richard Müller. Comrade Müller rose from his chair and declared that it was mandatory that we stopped our putschist politics. I asked him instantly if he was a representative of the *Vorwärts*. His remark seemed even more curious considering that every single action organized by the Spartacus League so far had been approved by the Revolutionary Stewards who had even participated in them. However, the incident revealed a fundamental difference in principles and tactics that remained obvious when we returned to discussing the Revolutionary Stewards' participation in the program and organizing commission.

The stewards demanded a strict division of seats: they wanted to send as many members as we had already appointed. Of course, we had to reject this. We emphasized that the party conference that had appointed the commission was a national conference. It was impossible to jeopardize its most fundamental decisions, for example the boycott of the national assembly. At the same time, we wanted to demonstrate goodwill and respect for the work and the influence of the Revolutionary Stewards, and therefore suggested to continue the negotiations this morning and to ask the conference delegates to gather one more time in order to receive and discuss the results. The Revolutionary Stewards accepted our suggestion, thereby seemingly proving their will to work with us.

This morning, the negotiations did not start in time because some of the delegates of the Revolutionary Stewards were late. Once they all had arrived, they retreated to first discuss among themselves. They returned with five demands:

1. They asked the party conference to revoke its general opposition to parliamentarism.
2. They repeated their demand to occupy half the seats in the program and organizing commission.
3. They wanted us to specify our "street tactics."
4. They demanded strong influence on our journals, the publication of leaflets, etc.
5. They demanded that the term "Spartacus League" be removed from the party's name.

We declared first that their demands did not reflect the will of the Revolutionary Stewards overall. Then we responded to the demands specifically. We made it clear that the party conference had not categorically rejected parliamentary politics and only decided on the boycott of the upcoming national assembly elections. We emphasized again that this decision would not be revoked. We also pointed out that the first demand indicated that the delegates of the Revolutionary Stewards had no real interest in collaborating with us, because they knew perfectly well that we could never accept it. As far as the appointment of members of the program and organizing commission was concerned, I repeated what we had said the day before. The issue of the party's name was minor and we stated that we could certainly come to an agreement. The demands three and four, however, expressed such deep mistrust that all collaboration seemed in question since we apparently stood on very different grounds. A young party like ours cannot cope with deeply rooted differences in principles and tactics, otherwise its capacity to act will be significantly impaired—and it is exactly this capacity that is most important right now!

A longer debate followed, during which comrade Däumig conceded that fundamental differences existed. However, he expressed himself in a reasonable manner,

while comrade Ledebour proved to be an almost fanatical foe of the Spartacists. It is not easy for me to state this publicly, since he has been a close friend for years.

We declared that we wanted to continue with the negotiations, but only with all Revolutionary Stewards, not with appointed delegates. This was approved. We said that we wanted the Revolutionary Stewards to vote on the demands presented to us by the delegates. With respect to participating in the elections for the national assembly, twenty-six voted no, sixteen yes. All, except for seven, demanded equal numbers in the program and organizing commission. Eight supported our proposition to appoint five members to the commission.

To summarize: I have already emphasized that I believe the Revolutionary Stewards to be the best and most active force among Berlin's proletariat. They stand miles above the bureaucratic fat cats of the USPD. Therefore, they deserve all respect. Our collaboration with them belongs to the most inspiring chapters of our political work. Yet, we must not fool ourselves into thinking that all of them represent the left wing of the revolutionary working class. Some are hostile toward us, unfortunately also some comrades with much influence.

Still, the votes today don't say much. They are the result of a certain weariness, which is understandable. We are not responsible for this. It is the consequence of the given circumstances. I am convinced, however, that in specific cases the Revolutionary Stewards will remember their duty. It is encouraging that there are already some stewards from the most important workplaces that have joined us. It is only a matter of time before the others will, too.



1. Richard Nowakowski, member of the USPD and the Revolutionary Stewards.

DESPITE IT ALL!

KARL LIEBKNECHT

Published as "Trotz alledem!" in *Die Rote Fahne*, no. 15, January 15, 1919.

HERE COMES THE GENERAL ATTACK ON SPARTACUS! "DOWN with the Spartacists!" is the rallying cry we can hear in every alley. "Grab them, whip them, stab them, shoot them, spear them, kick them, tear them to pieces!" We have already heard of atrocities that trump those committed by German troops in Belgium.¹

"Spartacus on the Ground!" rejoice the journals, from the *Post*² to the *Vorwärts*. "Spartacus on the Ground!" The sabers, revolvers, and carbines of the old regime's reinstated police and the disarmament of the revolutionary workers will seal its defeat. "Spartacus on the Ground!" The upcoming elections for the national assembly will be held under the bayonets of Oberst Reinhardt and the machine guns and cannons of General Lüttwitz.³ A plebiscite for Ebert, a new Napoleon!

"Spartacus on the Ground!" Yes. The revolutionary workers of Berlin have been defeated. Yes. Hundreds of their best have been slaughtered. Yes. Many hundred more have been thrown into dungeons. Yes. They were defeated because they had been abandoned by the ones they relied on: the sailors, the soldiers, the security forces, the people's militia. Their power was inhibited by the indecision and the weakness of their leaders. They drowned in the counterrevolutionary sea of mud where the uneducated sections of the population unite with the ruling classes.

Yes, they were defeated. It was a defeat that followed the law of history. The time was not ripe for victory yet. And still, the struggle was inevitable. It would have been disgraceful to surrender the police headquarters, this palladium of the revolution, to Ernst, Hirsch, and their cohorts without a fight.⁴ The struggle was forced upon the proletariat by Ebert and his gang, and the masses of Berlin responded instinctively, despite all doubts and concerns.

Yes, the revolutionary workers of Berlin were defeated. Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske won. They won because the generals, the bureaucrats, the Junkers, the priests, the moneybags, and everyone with

a narrow mind and an empty heart supported them, assuring their victory with cannons, bombs, and mines. However, there are defeats that are victories, and victories that are more deadly than defeats.

Those who were defeated during the bloody week of January can be proud. They fought for something big, for the noblest goal of the suffering people, for the intellectual and material salvation of the agonizing masses. They have spilled blood for a sacred cause, and their blood has been sanctified. From every drop of it avengers will emerge; from every frazzled fiber new fighters for the mighty cause will grow, a cause as eternal and as unfading as the firmament.

The defeated of today will be the victors of tomorrow. They will learn from their defeat. Today, the German proletariat still lacks revolutionary experience. There is no revolutionary tradition in Germany. The German proletariat can only receive the practical schooling that guarantees future victory through painful setbacks and failures.

The basic, original forces of the social revolution, whose unstoppable growth is the natural law of social development, only grow further through defeat. They go from defeat to defeat in order to eventually reach victory.

And the victors of today? They did their heinous work for a heinous cause. They did it for the powers of the past, for the eternal enemies of the proletariat. However, they have already lost! They are nothing but the prisoners of those who use them as a tool—they have never been anything but tools. They still help the powerful survive. But they don't have much time left. Already, they are in the pillory of history. Never before has the world seen Judases like them who not only betrayed what they considered holy but also nailed it to the cross. In August 1914, German social democracy sank lower than any other; today, at the dawn of the revolution, it is uglier than ever.

The French bourgeoisie had to recruit the slaughterers of June 1848 and of May 1871 from its own ranks. The German bourgeoisie doesn't have to bother—the social democrats do the dirty and contemptuous, the bloody and cowardly work for them. Their Cavaignac, their Gallifet is called Noske, a "German worker."⁵

Bells gave the signal for the slaughter to begin. The reactionary soldiers responsible for the deed were celebrated with music, waving scarves, and cheers by the capitalists saved from "Bolshevik terror." While the powder is still smoking and the fire of the proletarian murder still glowing, while the corpses of the dead are still scattered and the wounded still moaning, Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske already receive parades of the murderous troops, full of conceited pride. It will haunt them!

The world proletariat is already turning away from these men in disgust—men who have the audacity to reach out to the International with the blood of the German workers on their hands. Even those who abandoned the principles of socialism during the madness of the war push them away, infuriated and full of

contempt. So here they stand: dishonored, expelled from the ranks of humanity and decency, banished from the International, hated and cursed by every worker. They have put all of Germany to shame. Traitors govern the German people, traitors of their own kind. "My tablets! Quick, my tablets! 'tis meet that I put it down!"⁶ Their glory cannot last much longer—a little more time and they will be judged. Fires spread their ideas into millions of hearts where they turn into infernos of outrage! They think they can drown the proletarian revolution in blood, but the revolution will rise again like a giant, and its first words will be: "Down with Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske, the assassins of the workers!"

Those who were defeated have learned their lesson. They are cured from the illusion that the confused troops can bring them salvation; cured from the idea that they can rely on weak and incapable leaders; cured from the belief in the USPD (which has long abandoned them). They will only rely on themselves in the battles to come, and they will succeed. The conviction that the liberation of the working class can only come from the working class has taken on a whole new and deeper meaning after the bitter lessons of the past week.

The misled soldiers will realize soon enough what they are being used for. They are about to feel the whip of the restored militarist order again. They will awake from the delusion they are caught in today.

"Spartacus on the Ground!" Wait! We have not fled yet, we are not defeated for good. Even if they put us all in chains, we will still be here, we will remain, and victory will be ours!

Spartacus stands for the fire and the spirit, the soul and the heart, the will and the deed of the proletarian revolution. Spartacus stands for all the misery, longing, and determination of the class-conscious proletariat. Spartacus stands for socialism and world revolution.

The Via Dolorosa of the German proletariat has not been completed yet. But the day of salvation, the Judgment Day for Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske, and the capitalist rulers who still hide behind them is near. We are caught in events that resemble enormous waves, taking us up and down. We are used to be thrown from the mountaintop into the abyss. But our ship follows its course undeterred and proud until it will reach its final port. Will we still be alive when this happens? Our program will be. Its principles will guide humankind after salvation. Despite it all!

The clatter of the imminent economic collapse will awake the sections of the proletariat that are still asleep. They will hear the trumpets of Judgment Day, and the corpses of the murdered fighters will rise from the dead to demand justice from the cursed traitors of the revolution. Today, the volcano is still rumbling underground—tomorrow it will erupt and bury them all in ashes and lava!

Despite It All!



1. During the war, Germany violated Belgium's neutrality while attacking France. German soldiers were accused of committing numerous atrocities.
2. *Berliner Morgenpost*, founded in 1898, is to this day one of Berlin's leading dailies.
3. Walther Reinhardt (1872–1930), German officer; Walther von Lüttwitz (1859–1942), German general, involved in the Kapp Putsch. Reinhardt und Lüttwitz were central figures in the military suppression of the workers' uprisings during the revolutionary period.
4. Eugen Ernst (1864–1954), SPD member, police president of Berlin, 1919–1920; Paul Hirsch (1868–1938), social democrat, minister president of Prussia, 1918–1920.
5. As minister of war, Louis Eugène Cavaignac (1802–1857) was responsible for the bloody suppression of the proletarian June 1848 rebellion in Paris. The French general Gaston-Alexandre-Auguste Marquis de Gallifet (1830–1909) played a decisive role in the crushing of the Paris Commune of 1871. The comment, "Noske, a German worker," refers to Noske's proletarian background.
6. Quote from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

NOSKE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE COMRADES' MURDERS

KARL RETZLAW

Translation of the chapter “Noske und der Beginn der Genossenmorde” in Karl Retzlaw, *Spartacus—Aufstieg und Niedergang. Erinnerungen eines Parteiarbeiters* [Spartacus—Rise and Fall: Memories of a Party Member] (Frankfurt: Neue Kritik, 1971).

AT THE END OF 1918, A CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN BERLIN by the Spartacus League, Bremen's IKD, and other individuals and groups close to the Spartacists. The conference took place from December 30 to New Year's Day 1919. It turned into the founding congress of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund)* [Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus League)] (KPD).

Due to the support of the war by Germany's social democratic leadership, the heart of socialism—that is, anti-capitalism, international solidarity, and anti-militarism—had been ripped apart. Socialists opposed to the politics of the SPD were scattered and had only limited contact. The consequences of this became apparent during the conference. The state of siege and the illegality or imprisonment of leading Spartacus members had made it very difficult to discuss the future tasks of revolutionary socialists beyond small circles.

Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches, Paul Levi, and other founders and members of the central committee of the Spartacus League wanted the party to participate in the upcoming elections for the national assembly, as well as in elections for provincial and municipal parliaments. This followed the resolutions of the General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils from December 16, 1918, where the delegates had expressed clear support for parliamentarianism. Furthermore, Luxemburg and Jogiches wanted to call the new party “Socialist” and not “Communist.” Karl Radek's invitation for the party to join the Communist International was rejected by Luxemburg and Jogiches as premature. However, all of Luxemburg's and Jogiches's proposals were voted down by the majority of the conference participants. They were against participation in the elections for the national assembly and the

provincial parliaments, and decided to call the new party *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund)*. The speech by Karl Radek, who had been sent from Moscow as a representative of the central committee of the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviks), had made a big impact.

Needless to say, Luxemburg and Jogiches were committed to a council constitution. They also supported the foundation of a new socialist party and of a new Socialist International, but given the development of the revolution since November 9 they had drawn the conclusion that the vast majority of the German proletariat did not support the Spartacus League's revolutionary course. They knew that the military forces of the old regime had been hit hard during the war, but that other elements of the regime, such as the police force and the justice system, remained largely intact. All considered, the old state apparatus was still more powerful than the divided and tired proletariat, especially because it was supported and restored by the SPD. While Luxemburg and Jogiches stuck to an uncompromisingly anti-capitalist approach, the education of the people seemed most urgent to them.

The party program had to express the ideals of socialism radically and clearly, especially because the membership was small. Rosa Luxemburg did not find full support as the program's author. In general, her draft was accepted, but a commission was appointed to revise it in parts.¹ The program should build unity within the party across the country. However, new events pulled us into a whirlpool that almost destroyed us. Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Leo Jogiches were all killed by cowardly murderers.

The counterrevolution consolidated itself much faster than we did. During the seven weeks that had passed since the old regime was toppled in November, many units of the Kaiser's army were reerected under the name "Free Corps" and we had to expect their attack any day. As a member of the national government, Noske was appointed commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht in early 1919 by an Oberst Reinhard.² In a meeting with delegates sent by Hindenburg, Noske declared under the applause of the officers that one had to move unrelentingly against the revolutionaries. He confirmed that he would take the responsibility and stated literally, "Someone has to be the bloodhound." The officers were very pleased that a social democrat was ready to take on that role. Originally, General Hoffmann³ was to be appointed as the new commander-in-chief. However, Oberst Reinhard simply crossed out his name and replaced it with Noske's. The Ebert government accepted this random act of an individual officer without any objection.

Someone like Noske suited the noble men of the military caste assuming to be the "nation's elite" very well. They had been brought up with an aversion against the big cities and their proletarians. They had been taught the words of Bismarck in the military schools: "I mistrust the population of the big cities... I do not find true Prussian people there. However, should the big cities ever rise up again, the true Prussians will know how to teach them obedience even if it means wiping them off the face of the earth."

So, the right man had been found for the most pressing task of the counterrevolution, namely the suppression of the revolutionary workers: the social democrat Noske. The next task, an avenging war, needed more time. For this purpose, the military leaders were looking for a man who could create the mass support they needed. They found him during the following months of 1919: Adolf Hitler.

I had been familiar with Noske for quite some time. I knew about him even before his ardent support of the war. I was a young boy when, I think it was in 1912, I read an article about a debate in the Reichstag that left a deep impression on me. Karl Liebknecht had filed a motion protesting against corpses being used during shooting drills at the military training ground of Döberitz in Berlin. The Döberitz commanders used to pick up corpses from hospitals around Berlin, and the bodies were bound to posts in order to demonstrate the effect of gun and revolver shots on human beings. During Liebknecht's speech, his party comrade Noske got up and yelled, "Shall they use living men?" This caused laughter and happy approval among the bourgeois parties and embarrassed silence among the social democrats.

As the new commander-in-chief, Noske partook in the meetings of both army and Free Corps officers. Therefore, he must have known about their plans firsthand. He was also responsible for the continuation of military aggression against the new states in Eastern Europe where German troops did not keep the truce of November 9, 1918. The right to self-determination was disregarded and the Baltic provinces of Russia were not cleared, although the Russian government had annulled the bloody Treaty of Brest-Litovsk⁴ immediately after Germany's disintegration in November.

A few weeks after the collapse of the Kaiserreich, the most contentious political question in the country became clear: should the workers' and soldiers' councils be strengthened and expanded, and hence the old state apparatus abandoned, or should a new national assembly be elected? The government of the people's delegates favored dissolving the workers' and soldiers' councils. The majority of the delegates at the General Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils supported this. Many delegates at the congress were far from revolutionary and they did not share a common program. Only a few workers' and soldiers' councils actually understood their political role. Therefore, most of them simply withered away. The rest was dissolved by violence. Some delegates were also murdered. The former president of East Prussia, the social democrat August Winning,⁵ tells about one such murder in his memoirs: a soldiers' council delegate died after he was shot in the back leaving the barracks. The murderer was never found. In Winning's words, "The soldiers remained loyal."

There are parallels in German history. In March 1848, Prussian militarism had received a strong blow during uprisings in Berlin. Quite a few republicans believed it had been crushed, and two members of the so-called *Vorparlament* in Frankfurt, Struve and Hecker, presented a republican program in 1848.⁶ The *Vorparlament* postponed its

decision and appointed a commission to investigate the opinion of the people. Struve and Hecker were not included in this commission. They left the chamber in protest, and a demonstration in their support was organized in Baden. The parliament they had envisioned was later elected in Frankfurt's St. Paul's Church, but valuable time had been lost. The military interfered, dissolved the parliament, and an army general became minister president. At that point, many supposed republicans and democrats began to support the Junkers and military officers and became even more reactionary than them. The indecision of the democrats led to the Prussianization of Germany in 1848, in much the same way that the union between the social democrats and the military in 1918–1919 led to National Socialism. Both in 1848 and in 1918–1919, the saviors of militarism came from militarism's supposed enemies.

In 1918–1919, the social democratic *Vorwärts* wrote more about the alleged terror of the Spartacus League than the bourgeois press did. There was no "terror." No one was murdered, nothing was looted. What was called "terror" was the dissatisfaction and the anxiety of the masses and the almost daily demonstrations and political assemblies that frightened the government. Some of those were organized by the Spartacus League to prevent the return of the Kaiser's reactionary caste of public servants and generals, but the daily gatherings in front of the food stamp, unemployment, and welfare offices were spontaneous protests of a population demanding food, fuel, medicines, etc. The government and local authorities, incapable to satisfy these needs caused by daily hardship, argued that everything would become even worse if the Spartacists took power: in that case, the Entente would not only intensify its blockade but renew military operations. The press was more than happy to publish such claims. "Spartacus" turned into a very broad derogatory term and was used like "Sozi"⁷ in the old days and "Jew" some time later.

Fate soon caught up with us. After the USPD cabinet members had resigned,⁸ the Ebert government wanted to get rid of the popular chief of police of Berlin, Emil Eichhorn, who also belonged to the USPD.⁹ The government's intention was to hand the post to the SPD member Eugen Ernst.¹⁰ Eichhorn received a notice of dismissal but refused to obey it. He made it clear that he had been appointed by the Executive Council, which was the only body that had the right to recall him. Eugen Ernst and the new town major of Berlin, Fischer, who had personally come to the police headquarters, had to leave again. When the people of Berlin got to know about the planned dismissal of Eichhorn, several hundred thousand spontaneously gathered at Alexanderplatz to express their solidarity with him. The day was Sunday, January 6, 1919. I was one of the people there. I joined a big crowd heading to Alexanderplatz together with other members of my youth education association.¹¹ The crowd grew consistently as we approached the square.

Outside police headquarters, Eichhorn and USPD leaders spoke to the masses. Everyone mentioned the particularly scandalous slander by the *Vorwärts*. When

the speeches were over, calls of “Go to the *Vorwärts*!” rang out. These were echoed by thousands. Immediately, a crowd of several thousand men formed, me included. We got on our way.

At the entrance to the *Vorwärts* offices there was a short scuffle with some security guards, but they had no means to stop us. We occupied the building and the security guards were sent home together with the employees. No guns had been used, no one had been killed. In the building, we found a selection of light and heavy weaponry, from handguns to mortars.

No one will ever know who started the “Go to the *Vorwärts*!” calls. There have been many theories about possible *agents provocateurs*. This is a possibility. But it might as well have been a protestor excited by the moment and the enormous crowd. This is how spontaneous mass actions emerge: someone puts a sentiment into words that everyone is feeling. This is what happens in agitated times.

It is an undisputable truth that the march to the *Vorwärts* had not been prepared—at least not by the newly formed KPD, and not by the “Revolutionary Commission” (*Revolutionssausschuss*) either. The Revolutionary Commission had been formed in the early morning hours of January 6 by Karl Liebknecht, Georg Ledebour, and Paul Scholze.¹² The occupation of the *Vorwärts* happened before this revolutionary committee ever got to do anything. In fact, it never did anything other than declaring the Ebert government unlawful. Then it dissolved.

None of these events can be judged by a conservative mind disappointed about the loss of the war. It was hardly surprising that the bitterness of the betrayed workers was directed against the press. The press had lied to them year after year, had encouraged them to go to war against other peoples, and now piously demanded “quiet and order.” During the war, the *Vorwärts* editors were the worst propagandists, a trait typical for many converts. To make matters worse, the editors who had been dismissed by the military at the beginning of the war had not been reinstated. This outraged many of Berlin’s workers. Ebert and Scheidemann held on to Friedrich Stampfer. The left wing of the SPD, which later turned into the USPD, had always considered the *Vorwärts* a journal stolen by the military.

After the occupation of the *Vorwärts*, workers proceeded to occupy the entire *Zeitungs Viertel*, the neighborhood where most of Berlin’s press offices were located.¹³ Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches knew nothing about any of this—they did not know anything about the formation of the Revolutionary Committee either. No revolutionary force in history has followed a laid-out path, assessing its power calmly and carefully every step of the way. In the beginning, no one knows where the limits of power are.

The way in which the occupation of the *Vorwärts* unfolded confirms that the action was neither planned nor organized. There were about a thousand people inside and outside the building on this cold January day, discussing what to do next.

I searched in vain for someone in charge. After some hours—it was late evening by then—I returned home like most of the others. I had been on my feet since the early morning and I was tired and hungry.

The next morning, I returned to the building and met Karl Grubusch,¹⁴ who informed me about everything that had happened the night before, especially the formation of the Revolutionary Committee and the occupation of the entire *Zeitungsviertel*. The publication of the *Vorwärts* meant to continue with the added subtitle, *Organ der revolutionären Arbeiterschaft Groß-Berlins* [Organ of the Revolutionary Proletariat of Great Berlin]. I was asked to help. First, I was sent out on my bicycle to summon all typesetters and printers. The position of editor-in-chief had been taken over by a pale, lank man: Eugen Leviné.

The printers arrived at work. There was plenty of paper available and the first number of the new *Vorwärts* appeared on January 7 at noon. The front page contained a call that opened with words characteristic of revolutionary pathos: "Workers! Comrades! Everyone out onto the streets! The Revolution is in danger! You must prove that you are ready to make sacrifices! Confirm what you have shown yesterday, namely that the entire proletariat of Great Berlin is willing to stand up and to fight for the revolution..."

Meanwhile, Grubusch had started to organize the defense of the building together with workers who had spent the night in the *Vorwärts* or who had returned to the building on Monday morning. I was considered unfit because I had never held a gun in my life. Nonetheless, I spent the following nights in the *Vorwärts* ready to support the fight against the government troops should they attack. I only returned home to eat. Every day, I embarked on several tours of the city on my bicycle to observe the movements of the troops. Preparations for the government's counterattack were already on their way. The soldiers marched through Berlin with heavy weaponry, including cannons. No one stopped them.

The "statesmanlike qualities" ascribed to Ebert and Noske consisted of them transferring authority to so-called experts. These men did everything in accordance with their military profession. Their revenge against German workers was as callous as their wars against the Hereros, Belgians, Russians, French, and so forth. The phrase "Germans do not shoot at Germans" meant nothing to Ebert, Noske, and the military officers.

As bloodless as the occupation of the *Vorwärts* had been, as fatal was the following confusion and weakness. Karl Grubusch tried hard to coordinate the defense of the *Vorwärts* but he had little authority and the tiniest measure was discussed for hours in a randomly formed board of twenty to thirty people. When some of these people demanded that guards should be placed in the machine rooms to prevent possible acts of sabotage, this happened. As a result, the machines of the *Vorwärts* remained untouched. At the same time, much more urgent security measures were neglected. For example, when someone suggested pushing through

the basement walls to create escape ways in case of an artillery attack, the proposal was voted down. Some of the most naïve among the occupiers refused to believe in an artillery attack until bullets started hitting the building. Thanks to the machines being intact, the *Vorwärts* could be published again in its old form just one day after the Noske troops recaptured the building. The issue included the infamous “poem” calling for the murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg.¹⁵

It had only taken a few days to gather the government troops selected for the attack on the *Vorwärts* in the military training grounds of Wünsdorf-Zossen and Döberitz. By Thursday, the entire quarter around the *Vorwärts* was sealed off, although traffic was still allowed through. On the street corners, the troops had built pyramids of rifles and machine guns. Passers-by were searched for weapons. All this happened under the eyes of Berlin’s one million inhabitants, almost all of whom remained passive. Had larger segments of the population been truly revolutionary-minded, the troops could have been disarmed easily.

Part of my duties was to keep contact with the secret office of the party’s central committee. I went there once a day. When I came to the office on Friday, Mathilde Jakob¹⁶ told me in the name of Rosa Luxemburg that I should guide Eugen Leviné from the *Vorwärts* to an important meeting with the central committee before it got dark. On my way back to the *Vorwärts*, I noticed that the troops had advanced a few blocks and tightened the siege. I had no weapons on me and tried to act as innocently as possible. I managed to make it back to the *Vorwärts*. The building housing the *Vorwärts* was huge, and it took me a long time to find Leviné. After discussing the central committee’s message with his colleagues, Leviné was willing to join me. He wanted to return later that evening, however.

By now, it was already dark. I led Leviné to the appointed meeting place nonetheless. From there, I went home to eat and to put some things in order, just in case I should not return from the fight that now seemed inevitable. I didn’t tell my mother anything about my intentions, I only left a few lines. I returned to the besieged *Vorwärts* one last time. I was stopped on several occasions but always allowed through. It was midnight when I was back at the building. Leviné never returned.

In the early morning, the unequal fight began. It ended after a few hours with our surrender. The government troops had advanced on the building from all sides in the cover of darkness. They had brought heavy machine guns, cannons, and mortars in position at a distance of about three to four hundred meters. Snipers lay on the roofs and behind the chimneys of the neighboring buildings. The snipers had clear sight into the *Vorwärts* building, which had large windows, and into the surrounding yards. Anyone defending the *Vorwärts* was an easy target. Soon, several of our men were dead or heavily wounded—at this point, we hadn’t even seen anyone shooting yet. We realized to our dismay that the *Vorwärts* was not occupied by a disciplined fighting force. It became obvious that many occupiers

never expected a deadly assault. Now it was too late for them to leave. They looked for cover in the basement and behind the paper rolls of the print shop.

We were still hoping that the workers of Berlin would come to our rescue. For days, rumors had been circulating among the occupants that hundreds of thousands of workers would attack the Noske troops from behind. We were eager to believe it. The very last evening before the government attack we were told that the workers of the Schwarzkopf factories¹⁷ and a thousand armed men from Spandau were coming to help. Repeatedly, we believed we heard signals behind the Noske troops. But those were all illusions.

With this account, I do not want to discredit any of the men who were in the *Vorwärts* that day. Most of them had probably been social democrats before the occupation. They had no experience in revolutionary struggle and were obviously stunned that their party comrades in government mercilessly attacked them by means not used in Germany since 1848. Kaiser Wilhelm II had talked about soldiers possibly having to shoot their fathers and mothers, but he never ordered them to do so. The social democrats Ebert and Noske did.

Only a few brave men answered the fire of the government troops. They fought with such heart and determination that the government troops did not dare a direct assault. I carried water and ammunition from room to room. The only weapons and bullets we had were the ones found in the building.

I am not very good at describing a combat scene. In this case, everything was very simple, though, due to the one-sidedness of it all. With heavy machine guns, the Noske troops shattered all the windows and front walls of the *Vorwärts* and the neighboring buildings. When we refused to surrender two hours into the fight, they continued with artillery fire. Grenades came through the walls, tore down jutties, and covered the building in dust. At times, the dust became so thick that we could no longer see. In some rooms, the gas lines were damaged and fires broke out. This caused panic among the occupiers who were ready to surrender. They ran through the hallways yelling, "Gas! Gas!" People crowded into the room where Grubusch and others still tried to coordinate the defense, pleading with them to hand over the building.

Karl Grubusch and the poet Werner Möller¹⁸ offered to lead a delegation to negotiate. They left the building with five other men, waving white sheets. None of them ever returned. We saw their mutilated corpses two hours later in the courtyard of the Dragoner barracks in Belle Alliance Street. Shot, stabbed, and beaten, their corpses lay openly among laughing Noske troops, many of whom were covered in blood.

The murderers later claimed that the envoys had dumdum bullets in their pockets. They had learned this infamous lie in the war. Especially during the early stages of the war in Belgium and Northern France, it was regularly used to justify the shooting of civilians—of men, women, and children—and the burning down

of villages. With respect to the *Vorwärts* occupation, defenders of the murderers, journalists, and “historians” who copy from one another without checking the facts repeat this fairytale to this day. Who can seriously believe that unarmed men on their way to negotiate surrender would fill their pockets with dum dum bullets?

We meant to defend the *Vorwärts* until the negotiators would return. Despite heavy cannon and machine-gun fire, we lasted one more hour. The government troops still didn’t dare launch a full-out assault. Instead, two soldiers appeared with a white flag, claiming that a surrender had been negotiated with our envoys. They mentioned nothing about the envoys being murdered. Instead, they told us to put down our weapons and to leave the building one by one with the hands above our heads. We were about three hundred people, among them a number of women wearing Red Cross armbands. I was surprised about the high number. While delivering water and ammunition, I would have guessed that there were no more than one hundred people in the building, of which about forty to sixty actively took part in the fighting, firing rifles and machine guns.

We were ordered to line up in rows of four. Then we were escorted to the Dragoner barracks, our arms still up in the air. All the while, the Noske soldiers whipped us and beat us with their rifle butts. The streets were filled with men and women. Some of them hit us with sticks and umbrellas. I particularly remember the driver of a passing wagon carrying beer: he was wearing a leather apron and lashed at us viciously with his whip.

When we arrived at the Dragoner barracks, we were led into the yard with the massacred envoys. Heavy machine guns were put in place, the barrels pointing at us, ready to shoot. I stood in the front row. I was not afraid. I quickly took off my coat and laid it down in front of me. I guess I irrationally assumed it would be returned to my mother. Of course, our belongings would have been robbed in the exact same way the belongings of the envoys had been robbed. But nothing happened. We stood there for several hours. As I got to learn later, the officers were on the phone with the Ebert government, demanding written approval for the shooting of three hundred prisoners. Noske apparently encouraged them to shoot us, but refused to give a written order.

Soldiers came and went, taunted and threatened us, yelled “Damn deserters!” and beat some of us to the ground. Suddenly, the space between us and the firing squad was cleared. The soldier facing me put his finger on the trigger, another one held the cartridge belt. At that very moment, a motorcycle entered the yard whose driver handed the commanding officer a piece of paper. We stood there, facing machine guns ready to fire, for another hour. Finally, we were led into a horse stable where we would spend the night.

When the order had been given for the firing squad to get ready, many prisoners fell to their knees, including both my neighbors. They clung to me and almost

tore me down as well. Another prisoner close to me kept standing as I did. In the stable we spoke to one another. He was an Italian journalist by the name of Misiano.¹⁹ He had been in the *Vorwärts* building to cover the events. When he tried to show his press card after the surrender, he was beaten. At the time, Misiano was a member of the Italian Socialist Party. He joined the Italian Communist Party when it was founded. Ten years later I met him again in Moscow.

We spent the night standing or sitting on the floor because there was not enough space to lie down. The next morning, we were escorted to the prison in Lehrter Straße. Again, we marched in rows of four through the streets of Berlin, hands above our heads. We had cars with mounted machine guns ready to shoot right in front of us and right behind us. We were flanked by soldiers with bayonets. It was Sunday morning. Not many people were out. The few men and women we met probably were on their way to church. As the day before, some of them jeered, threw rocks at us, and beat us with umbrellas and walking sticks. An old woman, dressed in black, ran next to me down an entire street yelling, "Kill them, kill them!" The soldiers thought this was very entertaining. The revolutionary proletarian masses of Berlin were nowhere to be seen. I assume that they kept their Sunday rest.

We were four to a cell. The events of the last days had made me forget hunger and fatigue. They now returned twice as strong. I had not eaten or slept in forty-eight hours. The prison administration was not prepared for three hundred arrivals on a Sunday. We sat hungry and exhausted on the floor. Everything was quiet.

Things got moving the following night. We heard doors slamming, yelling, and shooting. Several times, soldiers hit their rifle butts against our cell door and yelled, "Be prepared! You will be shot in the morning!" These were no empty threats. The shots we heard proved that prisoners were executed. Ever since I had been arrested, I was certain that I was going to die. The exact number of victims was never established. Both the Prussian and the national government refused an investigation. It was admitted at some point that "in the context of the occupation of the press offices" 165 civilians had been killed. The government troops had only suffered minor losses.

The next morning, the soldiers came into our cells together with prison employees and trustees handing us soup and a piece of bread each. The three men I was sharing the cell with were now calm enough to play nine men's morris with me. I scratched a board on the floor and took buttons from my coat and suit. Some more days and nights passed without us being interrogated or even asked our names. Once a day, we received water, bread, and soup.

At one point, there was a lot of commotion in the hallways. We heard rifle butts and boots kicking against cell doors and much yelling. Then a soldier came to our cell, kicked a few times against the door, and yelled, "Liebknecht and Rosa are dead!" He called Rosa Luxemburg only by her first name. Even today, I cannot express what I felt. The news had a bigger impact on me than the nightly threats of execution.

Later that day, when my three companions and I had calmed down a little, we figured that this was just another attempt to intimidate us. But the next day, a trusty carried a copy of the *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag* while distributing water. It was folded in a way that allowed us to read the headlines on the front page: "Liebknecht Shot During Escape Attempt, Rosa Luxemburg Killed by a Mob!"

Now the interrogations of the prisoners began. Some were released. The soldiers disappeared too. The interrogations were conducted by police officers. After four days, I was called to the prison office. My personal details were taken down and I was told that a court procedure had been opened against me. Shortly after the interrogation had finished, I was called from my cell again. I was led to the outside gate and freed.

Several hours later, I was told that my rapid release had been the result of a mixup. I mention this because I was later accused by the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*²⁰ that another prisoner had stayed at Lehrter Straße for a few more days because of it. But has there ever been a prisoner who double-checked with the authorities if he really was the person they wanted to release?

When I came home, my mother only said, "I am glad that you are back." I told her right away that I had a bad feeling and did not want to stay. I quickly changed my clothes, ate something, and went to Paul Nitschke. Nitschke shared my opinion that I should stay away from home for a while. Our suspicion proved right. Already the same afternoon, a military patrol arrived at my mother's place to pick me up.

I was released just in time to attend the funeral of Liebknecht, of the envoys from the *Vorwärts*, and of others who had been killed. With hundreds of thousands of mourners I escorted twenty-seven dead men to the Friedrichsfelde Cemetery.

Three days later, on January 29, we were dealt yet another blow. Franz Mehring, co-founder of the Spartacus League and a member of the central committee, died at the age of seventy-three. He had been ill for some time. His imprisonment during the war had taken a strong toll on him. The murder of his friends Liebknecht and Luxemburg proved too much.

I think it was Wilhelm Pieck who ordered me to arrange a wreath and attend Mehring's funeral. I carried the wreath with a red bow all the way from Steglitz to Mehring's apartment where he was lying in state. I recognized Leo Jogiches and Pieck who were also there. They had come to say goodbye despite the Free Corps and the police looking for them. The other members of the central committee had all been arrested or were in hiding.

It was due to the courage and the energy of Jogiches that the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg were not covered up. He was able to prove that everything circulating in the press was but a pack of conscious lies. Jogiches found out who the murderers were and revealed the details of the killings. Several of the perpetrators had been photographed at a beer table after the deed. Jogiches managed to get a copy of the picture.

For a long time, the body of Rosa Luxemburg remained missing. This caused rumors that she had been able to get away. But Jogiches proved her murder and did everything he could to find the body. Several times, he voiced the suspicion that it had either been burned or thrown in the water. Months later, after Jogiches had been murdered himself, the body was found in the Landwehrkanal.²¹

Both the leadership of the KPD and the further investigation into the murders was taken over by Paul Levi. Levi obviously put himself into a lot of danger. He knew very well that his name now topped the counterrevolution's death list. But even if Levi was a quiet man who lacked ambition, he knew no fear.

Today, hardly any institutions are interested in researching the events from 1918 to 1920. This is particularly true for the history departments. Nonetheless, some documents have been published that get us closer to the truth. For example, the diaries of a former general of the Supreme Army Command, Major General von Thaer, were published in 1958 by the Academy of Sciences in Göttingen.²² Von Thaer wrote: "How does a man like Ebert deserve that the former royal guards risk their reputation for him? ...Ebert and Scheidemann were terrified by Liebknecht and Rosa and wished for them to disappear by criminal means. At the same time, they denied all involvement!"

Much responsibility lies with the editors of the *Vorwärts* who introduced character assassination in Germany under the chief editorship of Friedrich Stampfer. Consider the following lines written by Artur Zickler:²³ "Hundreds of dead bodies, proletarians, but no Karl, Rosa, Radek, or anyone of their gang!" Never did the *Vorwärts*, a self-proclaimed workers' paper, summarize the outcome of the world war that way. Had they done so, it could have looked something like this: "Eleven and a half million dead bodies, proletarians, but no Kaiser, Hindenburg, or Ludendorff!"

Twenty-five years later, during World War II, Sumner Welles, the U.S. under secretary of state, wrote in his book *The Time for Decision* about Liebknecht: "Had there been enough Karl Liebknechts, the future of Germany and the entire world might have been different. Behind the façade of the Weimar Republic, the forces responsible for the catastrophe of 1914 remained active and powerful."²⁴

Germany's social democratic proletariat has never reached this insight. Only the SPD members who found themselves on the gallows or under the guillotine during the Nazi regime may have understood in their final hours that the beginnings of Hitler's rule lay in Ebert's government and that there would never have been a Hitler dictatorship, nor the degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Stalin's dictatorship, had not the strongest possible opponents of the dictators been murdered.

The murdering of comrades began in Germany. The murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht haunted Germany's social democracy and the Weimar Republic, just as Stalin's murders haunted Russian communism and the Soviet Union.

Rosa Luxemburg never demanded to occupy the *Vorwärts*, only to fight against the counterrevolution. She was an outspoken opponent of political coups and clearly stated in the program of the Spartacus League: "The Spartacus League will only ever seize power if it has a clear, unambiguous mandate from the vast majority of Germany's proletarian masses; it will never seize power by other means than a conscious approval of its perspectives, goals, and means of struggle."

Luxemburg's critique of the Bolsheviks followed the same principles. In my youth education association and in the KPD—which prevailed despite the strong persecution—we discussed the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg many times. We reached the following conclusion: "Had the left wing of the SPD broken with the rotten bureaucracy at the right time (meaning, much earlier), had it engaged in parliamentarian as well as in public politics, and had it organized cadres in Lenin's sense, then Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Jogiches, and many others would not have been killed in such horrendous ways."²⁵

I must emphasize that, during the first months of 1919, we lived under siege in Berlin and under the terror of martial law. Any political activity was prohibited for us communists. We had no journal and no legal means to confront the lies and defamations of the government and the press. Any expression of public discontent, anything that did not suit the authorities, was blamed on the Spartacists. One headline read: "Spartacus Feasts on Rice Pudding with Brown Butter!" No one could explain what this meant. Should it simply distract from the fact that many children were dying from the flu?

We had to organize illegally and under the most dangerous conditions. Jogiches managed to have leaflets printed, although each printer working for us put his life on the line. One leaflet contained the results of Jogiches's investigations into the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Another dealt with the incredibly tasteless but very dangerous lies of the *Antibolschewistische Liga*, which was supported by the government.²⁶ One of its most notorious claims was that "Spartacus planned the socialization of women." It must be rooted in the characteristics of the German bourgeoisie that such nonsense was believed.

The death of our party leaders could not keep us from following their vision. The KPD had to be consolidated and individual chapters were organized. The apparently radical decision not to participate in elections made the work for us very difficult. We continued to propagate the council system as the ideal form of government. However, since the councils themselves had abandoned the council idea, we were forced to engage in *realpolitik*.

In my district, Berlin-Moabit, the provisional chairmen of the KPD consisted of the old Spartacus group that had formed during the war, with the exception of the two oldest members who had withdrawn from political work. I was out every night to recruit new members. Soon, an organizational framework was established and small groups met under all of the necessary precautions. Once again, this framework only lasted for a short time...

Moabit was patrolled by Free Corps units on a daily basis. The police regularly inspected the taverns. I had a feeling of being watched and feared being arrested.

Upon the recommendation of a comrade, I moved to a relative of his, an old deaf woman in Schöneberg. I continued to work in Moabit, however.

During my illegal activities for the central committee, I, once again, barely escaped death. I had picked up leaflets at a small print shop near Nürnberger Platz that had already printed for us during the war. Right before entering the metro, a strap of my rucksack broke. To fix it, I had to put down the heavy rucksack. While I tried putting it back on, a military patrol passed by. Had they checked the rucksack, I would have probably been shot on the spot or sentenced to death by a drumhead court-martial.

Some days later, I was in a similar situation. I had picked up leaflets from a print shop at Frankfurter Straße together with a female comrade who had also helped print the Prince Lichnowsky memoir.²⁷ We were using a handcart when a military patrol appeared from a side street. My comrade got such a fright that she let go of the drawbar and ran into a shop. I continued pushing the cart as casually as possible and passed the patrol without being stopped.

A basement in Ritterstraße served as our dispatch room. From there, we sent the leaflets, inconspicuously packaged, via various post offices to hundreds of addresses in Germany. The ones in charge were Otto Franke,²⁸ the abovementioned female comrade, and I. We worked under the orders of Jogiches with the greatest care. Poorly written addresses, wrong postage, or torn thread could all lead to controls of the packages and hence endanger the addressees.

One February day at dusk, Jogiches came to work with us. He was very unhappy with the cold, unfriendly room we were working in. He said that he, "as a unionist," could not tolerate this. Otto Franke said he was sorry but he had not been able to find a better room. I remember this small episode well because it was the last time I saw Jogiches. The basement was never discovered, by the way.

After the elections for the national assembly had taken place without any disturbances, *Die Rote Fahne* was briefly allowed to appear again. The first issue contained the summary of Jogiches's investigations into the murders of Luxemburg and Liebknecht and, covering half a page, the abovementioned photograph of the murderer Runge in the midst of his accomplices.²⁹ All of the soldiers involved in the murder were listed by name and rank. After the publication of these documents, strikes broke out in several big factories and the government now deemed it necessary to have the murders investigated by court. Some of the murderers were temporarily arrested, but the proceedings were deliberately delayed and finally ran out in the sand. Only a long time later, a few of them received small sentences—but not for murder, only for "criminal enrichment"; one officer, for example, had tried to sell Rosa Luxemburg's watch.

While the new national constitution and the new German Army, now called Reichswehr, were discussed in Weimar, Berlin saw the bloodiest massacre of modern German history. For several weeks, the *Vorwärts* had printed pages full of advertisements by Free Corps leaders looking for members. The Free Corps had strong

support among the millions of demobilized soldiers who had returned from the war. The units offered a salary and plenty to eat. Among the leaders of the Free Corps were German-Baltic officers trained in the methods of the tsarist *Okhrana* because they themselves had been members of these pogrom and terror organizations.³⁰

On March 9, 1919, it was once again the *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag* that opened with a sensationalist headline about the Spartacists. It read, "Terrible Mass Murder by Spartacists in Warschauerstraße: Sixty Police Officers and Many Other Prisoners Shot!" March 9 was a Sunday. The following day, the *Vorwärts* and the *Berliner Tageblatt* also printed the news. The *Berliner Tageblatt* had at least called the head of the police department of Prussia's ministry of the interior, Doyé. Doyé, as a good public servant, confirmed the news and encouraged the paper to print it. After all, Noske was waiting for the news to spread. He had already put Berlin under martial law the day before, right after he had been informed about the events. He had not made any efforts to substantiate the information. Instead, he ordered the arrest of all communists. The suburb Lichtenberg was put under siege, its blocks sealed off, and the worst mass murder in Germany since the Peasants' Wars began.³¹ People were beaten and shot to death in the streets, in backyards, and in their apartments, sometimes in front of their families. I cannot report details because I was not there. But eyewitnesses, among them friends and acquaintances, told me about the unspeakable carnage.

The government later declared that "about 1,200 Spartacists" had died. These "Spartacists" were random left-leaning workers and citizens. The KPD did not even have 1,200 members in Great Berlin! Further investigations raised the number of the victims to two thousand. Many families had registered the deaths of their loved ones as "accidents," when, in reality, they had been brutally murdered in or outside their home.

After the troops had raged for several days, the public began to wonder about the story that had triggered all this. The corpses of the allegedly killed police officers and the "other prisoners" were nowhere to be found. Nor were any police officers or alleged prisoners missing. In short, the news had been an invention, plain and simple.

The responsibility of the massacre lay with Noske and the editors of the *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*. The executors belonged to the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division*,³² based in the Eden Hotel—the same division that had murdered Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

No one was ever brought to justice. The editors of the *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag* stood by its claim that it had received the news by telephone from the Eden Hotel. A Free Corps leader stated, "We had no time to have the news confirmed." Noske expressed himself more "poetically": "You play with matches, you get burned!"

On March 10, police officers under the leadership of a certain Tamschick³³ arrested Jogiches in his apartment in Neukölln. Jogiches was immediately brought to Moabit Prison and killed on the stairs of the small hallway leading to the cells by a shot in the back of the head. I received the details about the arrest and the

transfer to Moabit from Willi Winguth, a militant of the Metal Workers' Union.³⁴ Winguth also lived in Neukölln and was arrested at the same time. He told me that Jogiches had been beaten so badly by the officers in the interrogation room that he had barely been conscious when he was led to the stairs.

A few weeks later, the same Tamschick killed the leader of the Electricity Workers' Union, Wilhelm Sült,³⁵ who was shot in the back after being arrested. Another few weeks passed before Tamschick killed the navy lieutenant Dorrenbach, the former commander of the Volksmarinedivision; he was also shot from behind.³⁶ After this third murder, Tamschick was promoted to police lieutenant and sent to a country town by the Prussian minister of the interior, the SPD member Severing.

The attacks on the former members of the Volksmarinedivision, dissolved in March 1919, also proved that the March massacre of Berlin-Lichtenberg was part of a thought-out scheme. The former navy soldiers received a subpoena on March 11 to pick up their "discharge papers" and their "outstanding salaries" in a building on Französische Straße. About three hundred men came. A lieutenant Marloh³⁷ selected thirty of them and asked the others to leave. The remaining men stood in the yard when, suddenly, machine-gun fire erupted. Twenty-nine of them were killed; one had ducked fast enough and was only wounded. He was able to escape and report the bloodbath.

As usual, no one was brought to justice. Lieutenant Marloh took part in the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch one year later and occupied the *Vorwärts* with a group of putschists. Later, he was discharged, but not because of his participation in the coup, rather because the army had to be reduced to one hundred thousand men.³⁸ Marloh received a severance package and opened a cigar shop in the workers' district of Berlin-Neukölln. Apparently, his business went well. Nobody even smashed his windows. When Hitler took power, Marloh enlisted again and became a prison director.



1. See Rosa Luxemburg, "What Does the Spartacus League Want?" in this volume.
2. Radek probably means Walther Reinhardt (see footnote 3 in "Despite It All!").
3. Max Hoffmann (1869–1927), highly decorated German officer.
4. Peace treaty signed between Russia and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) on March 3, 1918.
5. August Winning (1878–1956) had strong nationalist tendencies and later left the SPD, serving as the governor of East Prussia under the Nazi regime.
6. *Vorparlament*, literally: "pre-parliament"; convoked in Frankfurt in March 1848 to prepare a parliamentary democracy in Germany within the framework of a constitutional monarchy; the attempt failed in 1849 due to the resistance of the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. Gustav Struve (1805–1870) and Friedrich Hecker (1811–1881) belonged to the most radical republicans.
7. Short for *Sozialist*, "Sozi" is a derogatory German term used for socialists.
8. See "December 29, 1918" in the Timeline.
9. Emil Eichhorn (1863–1925) was a left-wing SPD member since the party's foundation; after joining the USPD in 1917, he joined the KPD in 1920.

10. Eugen Ernst (1864–1954), prominent SPD member.
11. *Jugendbildungsvereine* played an essential role in early twentieth-century German workers' culture.
12. Paul Scholze (1886–1938) belonged to the Revolutionary Stewards. Later, he was active in the proletarian aid organization Workers International Relief (*Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe*, 1921–1933) and moved to the Soviet Union, where he became a victim of Stalinist purges.
13. Literally, "Newspapers' Quarter."
14. Karl Grubusch was involved in the formation of *Roter Soldatenbund* [Red Soldiers' Association], a workers' militia close to the Spartacists.
15. See below.
16. Mathilde Jakob was a lifelong communist activist. Expelled from the KPD in 1921, she died in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp.
17. Schwarzkopf is a traditional German cosmetics company.
18. Werner Möller (1888–1919), proletarian poet and IKD and KPD member.
19. Francesco Misiano (1884–1936), journalist, film producer, and co-founder of the Communist Party of Italy.
20. Daily journal founded in 1894, traditionally social democratic.
21. The Landwehrkanal [Defense Dike Canal] is a 10.7 km long canal in central Berlin built in the mid-nineteenth century.
22. Albrecht von Thier (1868–1957); his World War I diaries, published posthumously under the title *Generalstabsdienst an der Front und in der O.H.L.* [The General Staff at the Front and in the Supreme Army Command], were widely read.
23. Artur Zickler (1897–1945), social democratic journalist.
24. Sumner Welles (1892–1961) served as under secretary of state from 1937 to 1943. *The Time for Decision*, a book about post-World War II Germany, was published in 1944 in New York. This quote is from a reprint of the relevant passage in the Australian journal *The Argus*, July 15, 1944.
25. Retzlau does not provide a bibliographical reference for this quote.
26. "Anti-Bolshevist League," short-lived (1918–1919) but influential reactionary organization with ties to the murderers of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.
27. Karl Max, Prince Lichnowsky (1860–1927), German diplomat and ambassador to the United Kingdom from 1912 to 1914. Lichnowsky was very critical of Germany's role in World War I. The pamphlet *Die Denkschrift des Fürsten Lichnowsky. Meine Londoner Mission 1912–1914* [The Memoirs of Prince Lichnowsky: My Mission to London 1912–1914] was published by "A group of friends of peace" in 1916.
28. Otto Franke (1877–1953), central figure in the Spartacus League and the KPD; in exile during World War II, he later became an SED member.
29. Otto Runge (1875–1945), a Free Corps soldier, allegedly killed Rosa Luxemburg by crushing her skull with a rifle butt.
30. Okhrana, secret police of tsarist Russia.
31. German peasant uprising of 1624–1625.
32. The *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division* was a reactionary army division formed in early 1918. Apart from the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg and the suppression of workers' uprisings during the revolution, it was involved in the Kapp Putsch of 1920.
33. Ernst Tamschick, a reactionary sergeant major.
34. *Deutscher Metallarbeiter-Verband*, independent metal workers' union (1891–1933).
35. Wilhelm Sülz (1888–1921), KPD member.
36. See footnote 10 in "The Wilhelmshaven Revolt."
37. Otto Marloh (1893–1964), reactionary officer and state administrator; joined the NSDAP in 1930.
38. Stipulated in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles.

BRUNSWICK

BRUNSWICK WAS ONE OF THE FIRST FEDERAL STATES OF GERMANY where a workers' and soldiers' council ousted the rulers and established a "socialist republic."¹ It was proclaimed on November 10. The Brunswick Workers' and Soldiers' Council remained in charge until April 17, 1919, which made it one of the longest-ruling councils in the country.

Many saw Brunswick as a crucial force in establishing socialism in Germany, not least due to its central location. Gustav Landauer called it the "center [of the] federalist movement."² Indeed, on January 25, a conference was organized in Brunswick to discuss a "Northwestern German Republic." Representatives from Oldenburg, Bremen, Düsseldorf, Leipzig, Essen, Hamburg, and Hanover were present. Only the USPD backed the proposition, however, and no conclusions could be reached. Nonetheless, Brunswick remained a thorn in the eye of the SPD. A secret report of the Berlin government, disclosed after the end of the socialist republic, stated that Brunswick "proves to be the heart of the communist movement and the center of all difficulties for the central government, [...] threatening the entire Reich."³

When government troops finally approached Brunswick in April 1919, the SPD had already proven that it did not shy away from using violence against revolutionaries. Furthermore, the government troops were hugely superior over Brunswick's Red Guards, the revolutionary forces in Germany were already weakened in general, and the Brunswick Workers' and Soldiers' Council decided not to resist the government troops. The Brunswick Socialist Republic ended peacefully on April 17. Its leaders were detained for a few days but were not taken to court or punished in other ways.

It is difficult to find firsthand accounts from the revolutionary period in Brunswick. The text included in this chapter is the first official declaration of the revolutionaries after ousting Duke Ernst August.⁴ The text was published in the formerly social democratic *Volksfreund* whose editorial offices had been seized by the revolutionaries on November 8.



1. The federal state of Brunswick must not be confused with its capital, the city of Brunswick—both called *Braunschweig* in German. Albeit the city of Brunswick played a major role in the federal state, the federal state also included various municipalities in the city's vicinity.
2. In a letter to Hugo Landauer from January 29, 1919.
3. Cited by the provincial government in a meeting on April 24, 1919. Quoted from Teutonicus, *Braunschweig unter der Herrschaft der roten Fahne. Meinungen, Stimmungen*

All Power to the Councils!

und Tatsachen [Brunswick Under the Rule of the Red Flag: Opinions, Moods, and Facts] (Brunswick: Goebel, 1919), 130–31.

4. Ernst August (1887–1953), descendant of the House of Hanover, a powerful royal dynasty, and the Duke of Brunswick.

THE REVOLUTION HAS COME

VOLKSFREUND

The offices of the *Volksfreund*, Brunswick's social democratic paper, were occupied in the morning of November 8 and subsequently published with the subtitle "Republican Organ for Brunswick and Its Environs." In its first issue, printed the same day, the following manifesto was published by the revolutionaries.

THE REVOLUTION HAS COME OVERNIGHT AND IT HAS BROUGHT
POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

The hardships of the poor, oppressed, deceived, and betrayed German people, a consequence of both domestic and foreign policies, became unbearable; the servitude of the common man in the soldier's uniform too brutal; the injustice committed by capitalist governments against the lower classes too outrageous.

An eruption was inevitable. The ruling class demanded too much from the people while allowing the misery of the war to grow to intolerable heights, including mountains of dead corpses. The longer the war dragged on, the more blood sacrifices were requested from the common man, while the ruling class knew itself and its millions to be safe and their bloody profits growing. The situation became insufferable. Last night, the patience of the people finally ended. All of the sudden, the revolution came, the red, saving revolution! Since last night, Thursday, the red flag is flying above Brunswick! The banner of freedom has been hoisted!

The proletarians in work wear and in the soldier's uniform have shaken hands brotherly. They are united by common misery, but also by common longing!

By noon yesterday, it was clear what was going to happen in Brunswick. Navy units could be seen in heated discussions with local soldiers who moved in the streets in small groups. They were watched by secret police, but to no avail. The usual measures of oppression were no longer working, because the people were no longer defenseless!

Comrades, brothers in civilian clothes and in soldier's uniforms, fighters for human rights, November 7 and 8 will be remembered as days of glory for the class-conscious proletariat! This is the beginning of

a new era, but only the beginning! The rule of those who believe that the slaughter of millions can save the world (or at least themselves), who have led millions of proletarians to their deaths, and who have turned these deaths into profits for themselves—in short, the rule of capitalism is not over yet. It will defend itself and a system that rests on the oppression of the masses. Do not put your hands in your laps yet! Be on your guard, be ready when the Brunswick Workers' and Soldiers' Council calls upon you! Obey the elected council! Only the strictest discipline and individual loyalty to the will of the masses (embodied in the elected council) promise the proletariat's final victory over its enemies, over capitalism and imperialism.

Long live the revolution! Long live the free socialist republic! Long live the new International!

The events of Kiel, Hamburg, and Bremen have inspired the workers and soldiers in Brunswick like everywhere else. The revolutionary energy among Brunswick's workers, long kept underground, finally surfaced when the news arrived that the Hanover Garrison had fallen to rebels. Women and men, the young and the old—all were on their feet, lending their support.

The flames are blazing! Now we must defend and expand what has been won!

BREMEN

IN BREMEN, A WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS' COUNCIL SEIZED POWER ON November 14, 1918. Radical forces were strong in town. The IKD was founded in Bremen and many radical labor organizers, including syndicalists, were active. Quarrels with the SPD led Bremen's radicals to proclaim Bremen a council republic on January 10, 1919. This put the central government on high alert. Bremen setting an example for other towns and regions in Germany had to be avoided at all costs. When Bremen's council republicans did not give in to repeated threats, Gustav Noske sent central government troops supported by Free Corps units to crush the Bremen Council Republic by force in late January. The operation was successfully concluded on February 4, 1919. About eighty people died in the fighting.

This chapter includes a report about the proclamation of the council republic by KPD member Karl Jannack, a leading figure among Bremen's radicals, a report about the futile military defense of the council republic by the soldier Latzel, and a reflection on the possibilities of the council system in Germany by Karl Plättner, one of Bremen's most radical council republicans and later one of the leaders of the "communist bandits" in eastern Germany.

WE FOUGHT IN BREMEN FOR THE COUNCIL REPUBLIC

KARL JANNACK

Originally published as “Wir kämpften in Bremen für die Räterepublik” in *Vorwärts und nicht vergessen—Erlebnisberichte aktiver Teilnehmer der November-Revolution 1918/19* [Forward and Never Forgetting: Accounts by Active Participants in the November Revolution of 1918–1919], edited by the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED [SED Central Committee’s Institute for Marxism-Leninism] (Berlin: Dietz, 1958). Slightly abbreviated.

THE ONLY THING THAT WAS CLEAR CONCERNING THE POLITICAL situation in Germany in November was that the monarchy was gone. The military, police, judicial, and administrative powers of the old regime suddenly had no idea what the future might bring. The working class was divided and there was no revolutionary party organization to form central organs of power. The influence of the left radicals,¹ the Spartacus League, and their newly founded party, the KPD, was not strong enough to immediately take the country a big step forward.

The State of Bremen² was too small for such an undertaking. Between Bremen and Hamburg there were few industrial workers; communication and mutual help were not guaranteed. The national government was led by reformists who were mainly concerned with establishing a bourgeois republic and stopping the working masses from moving further to the left. They served the bourgeois state and not the working class. To the northwest of Bremen, in Oldenburg-East Friesland, the USPD member Kuhnt led the government.³ No revolutionary support could be expected from Hanover in the south, since the reformist influence was particularly strong. Under these circumstances, every move in Bremen seemed premature. Still, we wanted to set an example proving that what had been possible in Russia was also possible in Germany. The most important question was: who controls the weapons?

We had to implement the revolutionary demands that the workers—with the dockworkers at their head—had presented on November 29. The dockworkers' main organizer and leader was Johann Knief.⁴ The first demand was the arming of the workers. The SPD fought this with tooth and nail in the Bremen Workers' and Soldiers' Council, but this made little impression on the workers. They sent a delegation to a council meeting. The delegates demanded that Henke⁵ spoke to the masses on the streets. Henke tried to play the old game of "on the one hand" and "on the other hand." The SPD was afraid that the USPD would move further to the left as well. Therefore, the SPD members planned to sabotage a possible majority in the council for the arming of the workers. Knief addressed the masses and encouraged them to remain strong and determined and not to dissolve until the question of arms was decided by the council.

The unity of the masses won. The Bremen Workers' and Soldiers' Council approved the arming of the workers with the votes of the left radicals and the USPD. The dockworkers were well prepared and formed workers' companies and platoons before handing them weapons and ammunition. In the barracks, the reactionary forces responded by spreading rumors about the soldiers now becoming "unemployed."

In December, we took another few steps forward. In Oldenburg, the Kuhnt government tried to separate the soldiers' councils from the workers' councils. It called for a conference of all soldiers' councils of the region. Johann Knief, the seaman Onasch,⁶ and I traveled there without invitation. I requested from Kuhnt that he should allow us to speak as representatives of the neighboring federal state. This was approved. Knief held a fiery speech. He presented the steps that had already been taken in Bremen and emphasized that the only future option we had was a united German council republic. Knief's speech earned a lot of applause. This deeply frightened the reformists. They barely held on to a majority at the conference.

Meanwhile, the IKD was preparing a national conference for late December. Delegates came from Bremen, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Wilhelmshaven-Rüstringen, Bremerhaven, Hanover, and Berlin. At the conference, it was decided to separate from the Borchardt group.⁷ The most important decision, unanimously supported, was to unite with the Spartacus League in order to form a revolutionary workers' party. Heated discussions were caused by the question about whether to participate in the elections for the national assembly. Almost all speakers argued against it, with Knief being one of the few exceptions. He wanted to use the electoral campaign to propagate the council system. However, a vast majority supported the boycott of the elections. Some even proposed active sabotage to prevent a new bourgeois state from forming. So far, the Council of People's Delegates only had a provisional mandate.

There were some soldiers' councils' representatives present. Apart from me, there were comrades from the Stuttgart Soldiers' Council and a delegation from the Commission 53, the Great Soldiers' Council of the Imperial Naval Office. The Commission 53 comrades were ready to stage an attack on the Ebert cabinet. Knief, however, did not think that we had enough armed cadres to topple the provisional government. He once again argued for participation in the elections to win more supporters and to form more cadres for a centralized revolutionary action. Knief thought that isolated removals of local leaders could easily harm the revolutionary process. However, the majority at the conference considered a return from the workers' and soldiers' councils to bourgeois parliamentarism a step back since workers were armed all over the country. Counterrevolutionary forces provoked local power struggles to disarm the workers. This is what many saw as the main obstacle to centralized revolutionary action. The differences of opinion remained. As a consequence, Knief asked not to be sent as a delegate to the founding congress of the KPD. He suggested only sending delegates who backed the conference's majority decisions because we had decided on imperative mandates. We finally nominated Paul Frölich as our representative in the KPD's central committee.

The return of Army Regiment Seventy-Five caused a power struggle in Bremen. The regiment was fully armed and set up camp next to Bremen on December 31. It demanded the reinstatement of the Bremen Senate, safe passage to the town's barracks, and a guarantee for keeping its arms. I went to Knief to discuss the situation. We decided that the chairman of the soldiers' councils, Willems, should travel to meet the regiment. Willems promised the officers that the regiment could enter Bremen with their arms but emphasized that he was not able to give any further guarantees. The regiment's soldiers' council, led by the regiment's leader, Major Caspari, rejected the proposal.⁸ Caspari refused to enter Bremen without his political demands guaranteed. This was a boost for the reactionary forces in town.

Willems, Ecks,⁹ and I decided on a little plot. We included the representative of the workers' council in the soldiers' council, Frasunkiewicz.¹⁰ The plan was the following: Willems should return to the regiment, invite it to return to Bremen, and explain that preparations for a welcoming event were underway; the soldiers' council of the garrison would wait for them at the market square. This would be our final proposal. Should the regiment refuse, we would come and arrest it.

Willems returned with an agreement. Now we discussed the plan's details: The market square was to be surrounded by a group of reliable soldiers. After the welcoming ceremony, the regiment would not be led directly to the barracks, but to a school in Bremen-Neustadt whose yard was surrounded by a high wall. There, the regiment was to be disarmed. Then, it was to be escorted to the barracks without arms and immediately demobilized.

Willems gave the welcoming speech at the market square on January 1. Ecks led the march to the school. I accompanied him. At the school, Ecks tried to prepare the soldiers for disarmament. When Major Caspari understood what was happening, he gave the order, "To arms!" At this point, our soldiers jumped over the school's wall and took possession of the weapons. The upper windows opened, and armed sailors waved at the infantrymen. Everyone made clear that no harm would be done to the soldiers and that we were only acting in their interests. The following minutes were tense. I offered the regiment's soldiers' council to follow me to a classroom to negotiate. Since the authority of the officers already seemed undermined, the council complied.

The bottom line of my proposal was that Army Regiment Seventy-Five would surrender all weapons and march to the barracks for demobilization. This was met by total silence. We did not get anywhere. Lieutenant Sies and the two sergeants waited for Major Caspari's decision. I took my watch and gave them five minutes. One of the sergeants and Lieutenant Sies signed immediately, the other sergeant soon after. But Major Caspari said it would be dishonorable for him as an officer to surrender his weapons at a school.

I had to find a solution. Finally, I suggested that the officers should keep their weapons until they got home and that they would be collected the following day. This was the ultimate proposal I could make. With his hands shaking, Caspari signed the paper. We stepped outside and Lieutenant Sies announced the agreement. The soldiers cheered. The infantrymen and the sailors went united to the barracks. We had resolved a potentially very dangerous situation peacefully. [...]

After the return of the delegates from the founding conference of the KPD, the revolutionary spirit among Bremen's workers grew even stronger. In several meetings, the proclamation of a council republic was prepared. It was my task to report on the support that could be expected from the soldiers. Dannat¹¹ informed me about the KPD leadership's decision that I was to prepare the representative of the workers' council in the soldiers' council, Frasunkiewicz, for the councils seizing power. So I did. At first, Frasunkiewicz got very concerned and asked what Henke thought. I told him that Henke knew nothing about our plans and that it was up to him, Frasunkiewicz, to let him know. I also told Frasunkiewicz that the soldiers supported the proclamation of the council republic and that they would protect the demonstration outside the Rathaus with armed units. Then Frasunkiewicz asked about the date and the composition of the government. I had been told to promise Frasunkiewicz that Henke could be chairman and he, Frasunkiewicz, his assistant. I had also been told that Henke himself should proclaim the council republic, stating that the posts of people's delegates and people's commissioners should be divided equally between the socialist parties. I, myself, would join the

government as the representative of the soldiers' councils. Frasunkiewicz kept on asking for a date. I finally said, "Tomorrow."

Paul Frölich demanded to act rapidly. He had the approval of Leo Jogiches. This, however, did not suit Frasunkiewicz, the district secretary of the USPD. However, since he trusted me, he followed my advice, called Henke, and agreed to meet and inform him about the developments. I went to brief Knief.

Henke was very reluctant, but the promise that he could act as the government's chairman in the council republic made him hope that he could influence its course. He also knew that we would proceed without him anyway. Eventually, he agreed.

The text of the council republic's proclamation was not discussed in detail. Most important to us communists were the armed cadres and the revolutionary spirit among the population. This is what we were working for night and day.

On January 10, 1919, the square in front of the Rathaus was packed with people. They were greeted by a huge red flag. The people's delegates and the people's commissioners had all gathered on the balcony. Adam Frasunkiewicz began his speech: "I hereby declare bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism a part of our history. From now on, the councils rule..." Yes, with the support of the dockworkers it was possible to say such things. Martial law was declared, but it was declared by representatives of the working class—therefore it was something new, something extraordinary. Now the die was cast.

Our time in government contained amusing and frustrating episodes. The banker Schröder, a USPD member, often tried to convince his comrade Frasunkiewicz that the government had to draft a constitution. We formed a commission, consisting of Dannat, Frasunkiewicz, and me. Every time Schröder had talked to Frasunkiewicz, Frasunkiewicz told me that Schröder's bank needed loans. I told Frasunkiewicz that we couldn't be bothered by such things right now—as long as we had machines to print money, other questions were more important. But Frasunkiewicz felt pressured by Schröder and repeatedly urged us to do something. We usually discussed sitting on the big chairs of the former senators. Frasunkiewicz was short and crippled and almost disappeared in them. When I finally told him sternly, "The banker does not want our council constitution but a bourgeois constitution and we will not write one!" he looked perplexed, sighed, and finally said, "Okay, now I know."

One day, while eating lunch in the barracks' mess hall, a few sailors appeared behind me. This was not unusual because lunch breaks were often used to discuss different matters. Another group appeared behind the town major Ecks. However, it didn't look like they had come for discussion. We were both arrested and detained. Meyer, a member of the soldiers' council from Delmenhorst, was the hired leader of the counterrevolution. He had prepared the coup carefully and counted

on the moment of surprise. We had not been vigilant enough and had not analyzed the mood among the population.

The soldiers gathered on the barracks' yard. A reformist trade union leader spoke to them, the chairman of the Tobacco Workers' Union, Deichmann.¹² He demanded from the soldiers to go to the dockyard and disarm the workers. He tried to spread envy between the soldiers and the workers. Ecks and I observed this from our individual cells, but we could not interfere.

The soldiers went to the dockyard, but our workers were no cowards. When it became clear that the soldiers approached with hostile intentions, one of the workers jumped to the machine gun and started shooting. The soldiers dispersed. There was great confusion and anger. Henke came and used the moment to sign a "truce." The document also included the demand to immediately release Ecks and me.

In the next meeting of the Council of People's Delegates, I demanded the dismissal of the soldiers who had attacked the dockyard. Henke opposed this because he had "given his word" that no such thing would happen. Plättner and Jörn, a teacher from Nienburg, took things into their own hands and attempted to enter the barracks together with a few comrades in order to disarm the soldiers—unsurprisingly, without success.

The murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg hit us all very hard. The reactionary forces, on the other hand, gained new courage. The reformist Deichmann was among those who demanded from Noske to crush the Bremen Council Republic with military force. Noske was sympathetic and send the Division Gerstenberg to Bremen.¹³ It was joined by the Free Corps Caspari. The troops surrounded the town. We were trapped. However, surrender was not an option. I suggested to the government to travel to the White Guards' headquarters in Verden an der Aller. The government members were uncertain. Would this be our last journey? Would we be taken hostage? I suggested that the USPD and the KPD should send an equal number of delegates.

We finally decided that Henke und Drettmann from the USPD and Bäumer¹⁴ and I from the KPD should go. When we left on January 31, we could feel what the others felt—everyone was silent.

Shortly before arriving in Verden I spotted an outpost in a ditch. Since I was wearing uniform, I demanded the guard to escort us, a delegation of Bremen's government, to the White Guards' headquarters. I told him to step on the car's running board to guide us. This is how we arrived. We were led to Captain Danner. Danner talked so much that for quite some time we couldn't get a single word in. He particularly emphasized, "The former worker Noske has given us the order to establish peace in Bremen and we are proud to fulfill his order!" Danner demanded that we should order the workers of Bremen to hand in their weapons immediately.

We proposed instead to send an officers' patrol to Bremen. The officers could see for themselves that there was peace in the city. Bäumer made it clear that the surrender of weapons was out of the question. He stressed that there was peace in Bremen and that claims to the opposite were simple lies serving as a pretext to invade.

After our return to Bremen, the government met around the clock. The USPD canceled its collaboration with the KPD and demanded to form a coalition government with the SPD to solve the crisis politically. Basically, we should surrender without a fight. We rejected this, of course.

Our comrades got no more sleep. The women wanted to join the defense and demanded weapons. Attempts were made to organize help from outside. The party decided to send Karl Becker¹⁵ to Hamburg and me to Leipzig. We traveled together to Hamburg first, the trains already being controlled by White Guards. Soldiers with black-white-and-red armbands searched the compartments for suspects.

In Hamburg, the chairman of the soldiers' council from the Ninth Army Corps tried to double-cross us. He promised us military support and an immediate intervention. At the same time, he sabotaged the support that Ernst Thälmann¹⁶ had organized: the train with the workers recruited by Thälmann was pushed on a dead track.

In Leipzig, I visited the chairman of the workers' council, the USPD comrade Seger.¹⁷ I explained the situation to him and asked for the immediate arming of the Leipzig workers, for the workers' council to proclaim a general strike, and for a telegram sent to Noske urging him to suspend the attack on Bremen. Seger wasn't very receptive. He accused us of doing "foolish things." Still, he did not want to reject my demands outright. He allowed me to present them in the Leipzig Workers' Council the following day.

Some speakers in the council, among them the navy soldier Alwin Heucke,¹⁸ supported me. Seger spoke against me. He repeated that we had done "foolish things" in Bremen. At the end of his speech, he graciously said, "But we can send a telegram to Noske." Essentially, I returned with empty hands.

The government of Brunswick sent an airplane to Bremen. However, the Neuenlander Feld airport was already occupied by White Guards. One single bourgeois officer from Oldenburg came and offered his support. But he was an artillery officer and we only had two cannons. We had minesweepers with cannons, but they lacked ammunition; it had been confiscated by the Allies.

On February 4, some of our sailors defended the Weserbrücke¹⁹ with nothing but light automatic weapons except for one heavy machine gun. Eventually, we were defeated by the White Guards who had bigger numbers and highly superior equipment. But we had put up a decent fight. Twenty-nine of us were dead compared to seventy-five of them. In the end, we had stowed away some weapons on barges and

were heading down the Weser. At the Rotesand lighthouse strong winds forced us to end the journey and to call at Bremerhaven.

The “victors” declared a state of emergency in Bremen. The dockworkers simply defied them. However, the conquerors managed to occupy the Rathaus. The SPD formed a provisional government. The members of the council government were persecuted for high treason. Everything in Bremen changed. The inner city was sealed off with barbed wire and the hunt for revolutionaries began. Those arrested were detained in Missler’s “Emigrants’ Halls.”²⁰ All humpbacks in town were targeted to find Wilhelm Buchholz, Carl Stucke,²¹ and Adam Frasunkiewicz. Nothing happened to Henke. He became a delegate in the national assembly in Weimar. The other government members who escaped arrest were living underground.



1. Reference to the *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands* (IKD); see “Organizations” in the Glossary.
2. The city of Bremen became a federal state in 1806, which also includes the sea port of Bremerhaven.
3. Bernhard Kuhnt (1876–1946), SPD and USPD member, acted as president of the Republic of Oldenburg-East Friedland, founded on November 11, until March 3, 1919. Jannack calls him a *Rechtssozialist* [Right-Socialist] in his text, which would indicate SPD membership; Kuhnt had, however, joined the USPD in 1917.
4. Johann Knief (1880–1919), prominent IKD member.
5. Alfred Henke (1868–1946), USPD member and chairman of the Bremen Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council.
6. Probably Jan Onasch, a Bremen communist who was imprisoned in 1933 in the Nazi concentration camp Bremen-Mißler (see footnote 20 in “We Fought in Bremen...”).
7. Julian Borchardt (1868–1932) was the editor of *Lichtstrahlen. Zeitschrift für internationalen Kommunismus* [Rays of Light: Journal for International Communism] (1919–1921) and a driving force behind the *Internationale Sozialisten Deutschlands* [International Socialists of Germany] (ISD), an anti-militaristic split from the SPD. The ISD served as a predecessor of the IKD.
8. Walter Caspari (1877–1962), reactionary army and police officer.
9. Bernhard Ecks (1884–ca. 1970), IKD and KPD member, speaker of the Bremen Soldiers’ Council.
10. Adam Frasunkiewicz, prominent USPD member.
11. Adolf Dannat (1885–1922), IKD and KPD member, people’s delegate in the Bremen Council Republic.
12. Karl Deichmann (1863–1940), trade unionist and SPD politician.
13. Named after Colonel Wilhelm Gerstenberg.
14. Johann Drettmann (1876–1933); Ludwig Bäumer (1888–1928) left the KPD in 1919, turning toward syndicalism.
15. Karl Albin Becker (1894–1942), IKD and KPD member; executed by the Nazis in 1942.
16. Ernst Thälmann (1886–1944), USPD and KPD member; KPD chairman from 1925 to 1933; executed in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp.
17. Friedrich Seger (1867–1928), SPD and USPD member.

All Power to the Councils!

18. Alwin Heucke (1890–1962) played a prominent role in the sailors' uprising in Kiel; KPD member and lifelong labor activist.
19. Strategically crucial bridge across the Weser in Bremen.
20. Friedrich Missler managed a successful emigration business in Bremen and owned big halls near the port where people waited for the ships overseas. During World War I and II, the halls were used by the authorities in various ways. The Nazis established the concentration camp Bremen-Mißler (*Mißler* is an alternative spelling for *Missler*).
21. Wilhelm Buchholz and Carl Stucke (1890–1940), IKD and KPD members. Stucke was murdered in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp.

SHAME! BLOODSHED BY THE GOVERNMENT TROOPS

DER KOMMUNIST

Report on the fighting in Bremen by “Comrade Latzel,” published as “Schande. Bluttaten der Regierungstruppen” in *Der Kommunist*, no. 48, April 14, 1919—Latzel’s report had originally been sent to the *Bremer Arbeiter-Zeitung*.¹

ON FEBRUARY 3, I WAS ON PATROL WITH FIVE MEN AT THE Arberger Mühle. We had the order to find a patrol of seventeen men that had left in the morning and never returned. When we reached the missing men at about 10 a.m., they were engaged in a firefight with government troops. Some were wounded while others had retreated. We came to their defense, but were hugely outnumbered by the enemy. Eventually, I was the last one on the field and had to surrender. My coat was taken from me after all the buttons and a sleeve had been torn off. I was brought to the next town, I think it was Uphusen. I had to undergo a body search in an inn where the government troops were based. Then I was led to the next room, where a number of workers were already detained. At about 2 p.m., a train brought us to Etelsen where we were interrogated at the castle of Prince Reventlow.² When a lieutenant announced the arrival of four Spartacists from Bremen, the officers rushed toward us, pushed us around, slapped one in the face, and kicked another.

A drumhead court-martial decided to immediately execute those who had been caught with weapons in hand. We were led into an empty room in the next building. Soldiers guarded the door and the window. Someone brought ropes to tie our hands behind our backs. This was witnessed by the servants of the castle, who cursed, abused, and spat at us. We waited for about two hours before we were fetched for further interrogations. Now it must have been around 5 p.m. After all four of us had been interrogated, we were bound in pairs. I was bound with a navy soldier who had come from Cuxhaven. Our two comrades were taken to the railway station because they had been caught without weapons.

A navy officer and two soldiers took us to a lonely path. Once the soldiers felt unobserved, they started to taunt and threaten us, saying things like, "Soon, we will have extra food stamps and Germany needs less imports," or, "We have served for twelve years in the army and you Spartacists want to ruin our careers!?" They constantly announced our imminent execution. Finally, we had to stop, our ropes were cut, and we were challenged to run away. Eventually, the soldiers fell silent, and then the shots came. We both fell into the snow. I had been shot in the lungs; my comrade, if I remember correctly, in the leg.

After half an hour, a cart came to take us away. The soldiers told the farmers who drove the cart that we were Spartacists from Bremen who had been trying to escape. They shone their flashlights on us and concluded that I would "probably soon be gone," and that my comrade's wound was "a nice one." We traveled for about forty-five minutes. When we reached the railway station at Baden, between Etelsen and Achim, we were transferred to a military wagon. This area was already controlled by the government troops. The soldiers told the local peasants that we were Spartacists receiving seventy marks a day; in Russia, they added, everything was taken from the peasants.

In the wagon, the soldiers checked if we were still alive. I had managed to smear blood in my ears and on my mouth to make them believe I was dead. I was hoping that would make them leave me alone. Since my comrade, who was in agonizing pain, was obviously still alive, the soldiers decided to "let him have another one." A moment later, they fired a shot that must have hit him in the breast or stomach. However, he was still alive and pleaded with the soldiers, "Let me live, I have to feed my mother—my father died in the war!" The soldiers responded by saying, "Don't worry, we'll take care of it," and fired another shot that hit him in the head. I had to witness all this without making a sound or lifting a finger. The tiniest reaction would have cost me my life.

We traveled to Achim in high speed. A medical council member lived there with his daughter, a nurse. He was called, and I was put on a table. The soldiers were horrified when they realized that I was still alive. They once again explained that we had been trying to escape. The medical council member told them that this seemed improbable—clearly, we had not been shot from behind.

I remember the soldiers whispering, "Gosh, he is not dead, he will spoil everything!" My poor comrade, who had suffered for hours in agony, died at 2:30 am.

Der Kommunist added the following note to the text: "We are anxious to hear what the provisional government has to say about these things. When we first published the news about the murders by government troops on February 4, it was so embarrassing for the likes of Deichmann and Winkelmann³ that they decided to ban our journal. They probably thought this would bury the case once and for

all. So, what will they say now? We would like to ask, 'How long will these beasts in human form be allowed to run free?' The workers will give the answer."



1. Journal of the Bremen USPD from 1918 to 1922.
2. Prince Christian zu Reventlow (1845–1922), German aristocrat.
3. Karl Deichmann (1863–1940), Carl Winkelmann (1865–1924), trade unionists and leading SPD politicians in Bremen.

THE COUNCIL IDEA IN GERMANY

KARL PLÄTTNER

Translation of the chapter “Der Rätegedanke in Deutschland” in *Das Fundament und die Organisierung der sozialen Revolution* [The Foundation and the Organization of the Social Revolution], published as a pamphlet by the Saxony-Anhalt KPD district office in 1919.

THE COUNCIL IDEA AND THE COUNCIL SYSTEM IN ITS practical form have been brought to us from Russia. In Russia, the council idea was turned into reality and became a solid foundation for the development of the proletarian revolution and its revolutionary laws. This, in fact, made it rather easy to introduce it in Germany because practical examples are always compelling.

Of course it is impossible to claim that everything that has happened in the Russian Revolution and in its development can be applied to Germany. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that we should have followed the Russian Revolution in establishing a dictatorship of the councils over the propertied bourgeois class. The advantage we have over the Russian Revolution is that we can select the elements that have proven useful. Therefore, in comparison to Russia, it should be child's play to lead the revolution to victory in Germany because we do not have to engage in all sorts of experiments. The Russians have already done that for us. However, even if we had made perfect use of the experiences of the Russian Revolution, we would still have gone through bitter experiences and painful failures—the proletarian revolution cannot be brought to its end without them.

It is exasperating to look and reflect upon the development of the German Revolution today. The Russian Revolution was bloody. However, the German Revolution has already been bloodier¹ and even more blood will flow once the workers free themselves from the yoke of wage labor and capital. There are only two options: struggle and victory—or subservience and demise. In this context, we must not forget that the Russian revolutionaries are engaged in a war at the same time: a war against the well-organized militarism of international capital.

The German revolutionaries have not had to face this war yet. Their revolution turned bloody in the fight against domestic capital that continues to rule over us. The eventual war against foreign capital is inevitable, however, at least as long as the revolution has not been ignited in Western Europe.

There is another thing we must not forget: in Russia, it was easy to ignite the revolution on the ruins of the tsarist regime, but it was tremendously difficult to execute it. In Russia, capital was far less powerful than it is in Germany or Japan. Russia was predominantly agricultural. The tsarist regime had a strong military and strong class justice—think of Siberia. But that was it. We only have to look at the fights in the Russian parliament today. Russia had no proper administrative apparatus or a well-developed transport system. In addition, the royal Russian regiments had completely ruined the country economically in collaboration with Hindenburg's gangsters.

In a certain sense, the same happened in Germany. Yet, there were important differences and they need to be considered. Germany is the country of advanced capital. Germany is the country of organization, of administration, of efficiency, of bureaucracy—it is harder to ignite a revolution here, but it is easier to keep it running, because of these German qualities.

We still see German revolutionaries become desperate at time. The revolution moves sluggishly; it disappoints and it frustrates. This must have its reasons. Let us try to establish them, if that is possible in a text like this.

The German proletariat was not revolutionary because it had been educated in the spirit of the counterrevolution. Order and conformity were the two central values taught by the socialist pedagogues and their subordinates to the masses of workers going through the schools of the trade unions and the social democratic parties of Schulze,² Haase, and Kautsky. The workers who have not gone through these schools do not embrace these values. Good! The young ones, the new generation of workers, have a different spirit. They say to the older generations: "You have paid a heavy price for going through these social democratic schools!" But the older generations have internalized this spirit and they depend on it despite all the punishment that came with it.

When we hear people preach order today, they mean the order of capital. In our understanding, of course, the order of capital means complete disorder. It is responsible for mass hunger and mass slaughter; for putting human beings on the same level as animals.

If we look for further reasons for the slow revolutionary process, we have to divide the development of the council system in Germany into three phases: the first phase is rooted in the past, the second is forming in the present, and the third reaches into the future.

If we regard the councils of the past, we have to consider the following questions: What did the councils at the time see as their task? Did they understand

the essence of the councils and of the councils' role? I want to be very clear: they did not. [...]

How about the councils of the present? We need to look at their composition, their origins, their current functions—or the lack thereof.

Most importantly, however, we have to look at the councils of the future. What are their tasks during the coming months and years? They will have to function as illegal, unlawful councils, and its members must be aware of this. They will be revolutionary organs that cannot give a damn about the current order and about current laws. From the standpoint of the bourgeois government, they will be unlawful councils with unlawful functions. In other words, the most important task of the communist councils of today is to prepare the coming proletarian revolution. As organs of the revolution, they must form its foundation. This is what gives the councils of today their meaning and content—and nothing else! If the councils do not live up to this task, they will disappear. And they *should* disappear. In fact, if we look at the reality of today's councils, we must hope that they disappear and will be replaced by truly revolutionary ones. Today, all we have are corrupt and irrelevant workers' councils, mostly in the form of shop councils serving the shop owners or, in the best case, as kitchen commissioners.³

We doubt that there is much point in discussing the details of the future councils and their functions. It can be done, but we won't earn much from it, especially if it is the kind of theoretical, fanatical, nitpicking, and sophistic reflection we so often meet. The functions of the future councils will emerge from the few of today's councils that actually have value. Other than that, we will see what happens and reflect upon it all once it has happened.

If we look at things from afar, they always seem complicated. But when social problems emerge, when we are forced to find a solution, then a seemingly difficult task often becomes very easy. We have to remember that in the moment of the proletarian dictatorship our power and our initiative know no limits. Then, the entire apparatus of power will be in our hands and under our command.



1. This appears to be a bold or uninformed statement by Plättner.
2. Plättner might refer to Heinrich Schulz [*sic*] (1872–1932), a prominent SPD politician.
3. It was a common complaint among radicals during the German Revolution that the SPD idea of workers' councils extended to little more than workers choosing their lunch.

BAVARIA

BAVARIA WAS ALREADY DECLARED A REPUBLIC ON NOVEMBER 7 BY USPD leader Kurt Eisner. King Ludwig III was forced to abdicate.¹

Bavaria was a conservative state, but Munich hosted both radical workers and bohemian artists. These groups united to create a unique chapter in the history of the German Revolution. Bavaria was also a center of federalist sentiments, strongly embraced by the prominent anarchists Erich Mühsam and, especially, Gustav Landauer, who became important forces in Bavaria's revolutionary movement. Mühsam had moved to Munich in 1909. Landauer had moved to Krumbach, a small town in the Bavarian part of Swabia and the home of his second wife, Hedwig Lachmann, in 1917. He arrived in Munich after the revolution because his friend Eisner had asked him in a letter "to advance the transformation of souls as a speaker."²

Eisner was first hailed by many, including Landauer, but radicals were disappointed when he called for Bavarian Landtag elections in January 1919. The KPD refused to take part, the USPD suffered a devastating defeat, and the SPD was far from taking an absolute majority. The result was an SPD-led government supported by bourgeois parties. When Eisner was shot dead by a young aristocratic soldier on his way to officially resign as minister president on February 21, the revolution not only seemed threatened by bourgeois parliamentarism but also by right-wing extremists.

After ever-increasing conflicts with the SPD-led government, the anarchists Mühsam and Landauer, radical writers like Ret Marut (a.k.a. B. Traven) and Ernst Toller, as well as individual USPD and even SPD members decided to proclaim Bavaria a council republic in early April. This was seen as the only way to save the achievements of the revolution. To their surprise, the KPD did not support the proclamation. Essentially, this meant that the initiative was doomed from the start.

After the council republic's proclamation on April 7, the SPD-led government retreated to the northern Bavarian town of Bamberg. From there, it launched its first military attack on Munich on April 13. The attack was repelled by the KPD's Red Guards and the KPD now decided to take over the council republic's administration.

On May 1, the second military attack was launched, this time with central government troops and Free Corps units sent by Noske. Now, the Red Guards stood no chance. Up to one thousand people died in the fighting. Most of the prominent figures of the council republic were arrested. Landauer was lynched by reactionary soldiers on May 2. The KPD leader Eugen Leviné was executed on July 5.

This chapter contains three parts, focusing on the anarchists' involvement in the Bavarian Council Republic, not least because Landauer and Mühsam were the driving forces behind the council republic's proclamation.

The first part is a collection of letters by Landauer written during the revolutionary period. The letters capture both the developments in Bavaria and Landauer's personal reflections on the revolution and its possibilities. Landauer sent the letters partly from Munich, partly from his home in Krumbach. His increasing disillusion with the course of the revolution becomes apparent, but also his dedication to the revolutionary cause.

The second part consists of a pamphlet written by Landauer after the outbreak of the revolution, *Die vereinigten Republiken Deutschlands und ihre Verfassung* [The United Republics of Germany and Their Constitution], which lays out his vision of a federalist Germany, emphasizing his difference to the Berlin "centralists."

The third part is Mühsam's detailed eyewitness report of the revolution in Munich. Mühsam wrote the report in 1920 while imprisoned for his involvement in the council republic. It was finally published as *Von Eisner bis Leviné* [From Eisner to Leviné] in 1929. Mühsam's preface to the report explains the delay in detail. *Von Eisner bis Leviné* is one of the most comprehensive accounts of a direct participant in the revolutionary activities in Germany, and a crucial document for understanding and analyzing the events from a radical perspective.



1. Ludwig III of Bavaria (1845–1921), descendant of the House of Wittelsbach, a powerful German dynasty, and last King of Bavaria.
2. *Gustav Landauer. Sein Lebensgang in Briefen, 2. Band* [Gustav Landauer's Life in Letters vol. 2], edited by Martin Buber and Ina Britschgi-Schimmer (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten und Loening, 1929), 296.

LETTERS FROM BAVARIA

GUSTAV LANDAUER

To Gustav Lindemann and Louise Dumont-Lindemann¹

Krumbach (Swabia), November 11, 1918

FRIENDS,

During the last fateful days, I found myself in bed with the flu. Today, I'm up for the first time. I still feel weak, but I hope that I'm on the way to recovery.

My dear Bavarians have done well. As soon as I can, I will travel to Munich.

As far as Berlin is concerned, I have strong doubts. [...]

Your Landauer

To Margarete Susman²

Krumbach (Swabia), November 14, 1918

DEAR FRIEND,

No, it is best for me to be in Munich and I will travel there today. The very difficult and almost discouraging situation demands that I do not push from behind but pull from the front. Discouraging is that the old forces, the political parties and the bourgeois press, have already been allowed to raise their heads again with the greatest impudence. This and nothing else hides behind the name "national assembly." If a national assembly comes now, if all important decisions will be put in its hands, then everything will be lost—Germany would take its place even behind the embarrassing and pitiful so-called "French Republic."

“National assembly” means that the revolution unhitches the horses and puts them in the stable. This is not at all what we need! I hope that I can contribute to Bavaria doing the things that are really needed and that there won’t be elections for a national assembly before a new spirit has been created.

As long as I do not tell you otherwise, Krumbach remains my address. I hope that we can talk soon and I ask you to come to Munich once it is possible to travel again!

With love,

Your Landauer

To Martin Buber³

Krumbach (Swabia), November 15, 1918

DEAR BUBER,

I have recovered enough to return to Munich tonight. The situation there is the best in Germany, even if it is not ideal. You should come too; there is enough work to do. I will write once I have found a suitable task for you. In the meantime, let me make it clear that I am strongly opposed to convoking a national assembly anytime soon! Should this happen, it will only be in the interest of the rotten parties, which shamelessly act as if they have already regained legitimacy. This is not the case! There has to be a new spirit first, born from new conditions. These conditions can only be instigated by revolutionary interventions. We need an entirely new press. I would not condemn any act of violence that helps destroy the old! I am favoring an advertising monopoly for the state and the municipality; right now, this means the workers’ and soldiers’ councils.

I am in total opposition to the pompousness of “intellectual councils.” There shall be no more divisions between manual and intellectual workers—nothing that resembles the idea of Hiller’s *Herrenhaus*!⁴ [...]

Yours,

Landauer

To Martin Buber

Krumbach (Swabia), November 22, 1918

DEAR BUBER,

I rushed back here last night, because I felt the flu returning, and I did not want to be sick away from home. After sleeping properly, it now only feels like a common cold. I hope to be able to return to Munich in a few days.

I work closely with Eisner. The situation in Munich is very serious: it will almost be a miracle if the revolution can survive the economic problems left by the

war. The worst danger is that the Entente demands a central government, elected by the people through a national assembly, in order to engage in peace negotiations. Otherwise, the autonomous republics would manage despite all difficulties, and Prussia would dissolve into different parts.

In any case—and this I can promise—Bavaria will not abdicate its autonomy. You should write down your thoughts on people's education, on publishing, etc., and send them to me; or even better: you should come with them to Munich soon! Apart from counseling, my work in Munich consists of, as Eisner calls it, "transforming the souls through lecturing." The collaboration with Eisner functions very well. I am sure you have seen from his proclamations how "anarchist" his understanding of democracy is: he favors the active participation of the people in all social bodies, not bleak parliamentarism. [...]

Yours,
Landauer

To Leo Kestenberg⁵

Krumbach (Swabia), November 22, 1918

[...] I do not share your opinion on the relationship between Berlin and the rest of the nation. I have always been a federalist, and the spontaneous movements that have erupted everywhere prove how strong the independence of the individual states is. The dominance of Prussia has ended. I am convinced that not only the eastern German and Polish but also the western German parts want to separate from Prussia to be independent. I am certain that once all these states, including Austria, are autonomous, they will unite to form a union of German republics. However, this union cannot be the (centralist) beginning of the movement, it has to be its (federalist) end!

This process would be natural if the economic situation left behind by the war and the necessity of peace negotiations did not stand in the way. We need solutions soon, and all peoples need to chime in. Unfortunately, it will be difficult to avoid the requirement of convoking a national assembly. This is the big danger: those who have made the revolution and who are ready to expand it hold the key to a new humanity and a new spirit—but for the sake of the Entente and under the threat of the possible occupation of Germany, the bourgeois and social democratic reactionaries will get a chance to ruin it all: the parties of Schiffer,⁶ Solf, and Scheidemann, now even supported by men like Witting and Einstein.⁷ Once again, the only salvation would be a union of independent republics based on the direct democracy I have always propagated. Luckily, it is very close to Eisner's vision.⁸

Unfortunately, I fear that we will face tremendous difficulties in the near future: the parties in Berlin are already engaged in bitter feuds, because no new spirit has been created that could bury these. The shortages of coal and the damages of the railway system are also huge problems.

I intend to continue working where things have begun in an exemplary way and where there is still hope that they will carry on that way: in the Bavarian Republic. I believe that I can serve the cause best if I do not push from behind but pull from the front. [...]

In heartfelt connection,

Your Gustav Landauer

To Hugo Landauer⁹

Krumbach (Swabia), November 22, 1918

DEAR HUGO,

[...] I have been meeting Kurt Eisner every day and I believe that we will continue to work well together. You have probably read his programmatic declarations. The revolution has developed better and more smoothly in Bavaria than anywhere else. If it wasn't for the reparation payments due to the war, we could be very optimistic and begin with fundamental social transformations. Under the given circumstances, however, it is impossible to start any such process. How can one think about fundamental social transformations if it is uncertain whether we will have coal next week?

Many of your ideas are very good. You only forget that one cannot draw a strict line between yesterday and today in a situation like this—one has to find solutions on a day-to-day basis in order to survive.

For example, nothing would be more desirable than to end the domination of Prussia and of the central government in Berlin. The revolutionary development is certainly heading that way. The most beautiful outcome would be a federation of autonomous republics. It makes no sense to discuss a national assembly or a new German constitution before radical political and social changes have been made. If the national assembly is established before a new spirit and new social institutions have been created, then we will only have the same old bleak, dastardly party politics under a new label. But it is true: the Entente demands a central government elected by the people as a condition for peace negotiations; the danger that it will treat us the same way we treated the Russians is great!¹⁰

Of course it would help if the revolution soon reached the countries of the Entente as well. But will this happen? Maybe it would help if the countries of the Entente understood how well the German republics are doing, that they are going

through a development that must not be hindered. But their bourgeois governments might fear ordered socialism even more than they fear the Bolsheviks! Maybe it would help if the rulers of the Entente countries convinced themselves that the German republics are heading in a positive direction, that this is a development that must not be interfered with. But their bourgeois governments fear ordered socialism maybe even more than they fear the Bolsheviks!

In short, right now I think we can only adapt to the situation on a day-by-day basis and to keep the revolutionary ship from sinking completely. We will always be able to make small steps in the right direction. But significant social transformations following a solid and committed plan are not possible right now. We are facing so many dangers—some threatening to destroy the revolution completely—that, at this point, we have to be satisfied if the old economic and administrative institutions at least keep on functioning.

The bourgeoisie was shocked by everything that happened. If it dares to do anything right now it is to revive its old rotten parties. The only forces we can rely on at the moment are the workers', peasants', and soldiers' councils. I have become a member of the Central Workers' Council of the Bavarian Republic and try to spread the idea of socialism. I also intend to give lectures in the barracks—in fact, I have already started doing it and it has been very encouraging; I get to talk to men who will soon be dispersed across the country! You should try to become a member of the peasants' council in Baden.¹¹

As soon as I am healthy, I will return to Munich. I will be in touch and I hope that you will come and see for yourself what is happening and what the future possibilities are. Munich will be without doubt the center of developments in southern and western Germany!

Warm greetings!

Your Gustav

To Margarete Susman

Krumbach (Swabia), November 23, 1918

DEAR FRIEND,

[...] I am very happy that I agree with you on all the crucial questions.

Yes, the citizens... Whatever policies the SPD and the trade union bureaucrats are supporting now, I have not expected anything else from them. They have really adapted to the new situation masterfully. It is a disgrace. But it must not matter to us.

I do in not believe that we need the central government of Berlin or a national assembly based on the old party system and parliamentarism for the sake of the

Entente. We rather need a constitution and a democratic structure based on the people's direct participation in all the individual republics. [...]

Hessen (Rhein Hessen and Kurhessen), Frankfurt, the Rhine Valley, and Westphalia shall separate from Prussia and form an autonomous republic. Hanover will follow. Then, the union of the southern German, western German, and Austrian republics must form. Then the rest of Brandenburg-Prussia must follow. Each republic must be sovereign and based on participatory democracy, strong municipal autonomy, and cooperatives. The current workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils are the right beginning.

Eventually, delegates from each republic can form a federal council. This federal council will have enough central authority to engage in negotiations without threatening the freedom and the development of the individual republics. Furthermore, the danger of Bolshevism will be kept at bay. The true, the spiritual revolutionaries only have to follow my example and become active in the workers' and soldiers' councils instead of pursuing elitist and exclusive politics. The term "worker" has to be understood more widely: everyone working in the fields of technology, trade, and administration has to be included. Our motto must not be "dictatorship of the proletariat" but "abolition of the proletariat." The next steps in Bavaria are the eight-hour workday and the work-free Saturday afternoon.

The individual republics must also establish adult education centers where the workers can make use of their newly won time. Ministries and independent bureaus for people's education have to be established. However, I repeat: most importantly, Prussia must be destroyed! The old Reich no longer exists. The central government of Berlin has to be ignored. [...]

Warm greetings to both of you!

Your Gustav Landauer

To Auguste Hauschner¹²

Krumbach (Swabia), November 24, 1918

MY DEAR FRAU HAUSCHNER,

[...] You are absolutely right in your critique of the shameless opportunism we are witnessing. No word is strong enough to express one's disapproval of these sham revolutionaries with their parties and their propaganda for the national assembly. All they want is to continue old politics under a new label. The only excuse they might have is the fear of a dictatorship of the proletariat. This, however, is no danger as long as Berlin's presumptuous power is broken. The great hope, I dare say, is our Bavaria where the revolution has been conducted with reason and humanity from the beginning. I hope that Bavaria will unite with western Germany and

Austria. In that case, the Berlin terrorists of all shades will be left without power, from Scheidemann to Liebknecht. [...]

Affectionately,
Your Gustav Landauer

To Adolf Neumann¹³

Krumbach (Swabia), November 25, 1918

MY DEAR NEUMANN,

A second bout of the flu drove me away from Munich. I still need a few days of rest. I only received your letter today. [...]

About the situation: the political and social transformation of Bavaria can only continue if coal arrives immediately. This is an imminent danger. It is relatively unimportant what is happening in Berlin right now, since there no longer is a central government and no Great Prussia either. All developments confirm that the immediate foundation of a West German Republic and of a Republic of Hanover is an absolute necessity. The West German Republic should consist of Rheinhessen, Kurhessen, Nassau, Frankfurt, the Rhine Province, Westphalia, Lippe, and Detmold. Once the republics of Austria, Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, West Germany, Hanover, and Bremen unite, they will form the core of the Union of German Republics, which Brandenburg-Prussia will have to join. The autonomous republics send delegates to a federal council, which will have the authority to negotiate with the Entente in the name of the new German union.

All ties to the old Reich must be cut. Otherwise, we will end up with a Caesarean-proletarian dictatorship, no matter whether it will be led by Scheidemann or Liebknecht. The new national assembly must only consist of delegates sent by the autonomous republics. Each republic must have its own assembly, formed by delegates from the workers', peasants', and soldiers' councils. The factory owner and the merchant who is involved in administration is a worker; the shareholder, if he does nothing other than holding shares, is nothing. That is why "citizens' councils" and "councils of intellectual workers" are mere shenanigans.

The direct (atomized) and secret ballot corresponds to the past conditions of oppression. In a free society, we need indirect (corporative) and public vote, consensus, imperative mandates, the possibility to recall delegates at any time, and representatives of permanently active corporative bodies, not "people's delegates."

This is the way in which we will defend the revolution and humanity while establishing the democratic institution that the Entente rightfully demands of

Germany. However, this democratic institution will not be the rotten parliamentary system and the rule of the parties!

Warmest greetings!

Your Landauer

To Georg Springer¹⁴

Krumbach (Swabia), November 27, 1918

DEAR SPRINGER,

[...] I will return to Munich as soon as possible. The work with Eisner delights me. But not even ten horses would get me to Berlin to engage in politics there (although they would get me to the Volksbühne¹⁵ and to my friends)—this nest of foolishness and of party egoism shall be on its own. Luckily, Germany is not France and 1918 is not 1789. We have no central city in which the fate of the German people is decided. [...]

Warm greetings!

Your Landauer

To Fritz Mauthner

Krumbach (Swabia), November 28, 1918

DEAR FRIEND,

[...] If, after four years, you want to reflect philosophically on politics again (and the assertion that man is evil is philosophy), then grant me a bit of heresy: why should anyone—you, we, anyone with an understanding of eternity and humor—care about what you call Germany? The German people [...] have been defeated, the Reich has collapsed, and now, suddenly, Germany leads humanity in the struggle for justice and reason, expressed in all public institutions. A man who has led a modest, pure, and honorable life as a starving writer, Kurt Eisner, has suddenly become the spiritual leader of Germany, only because this brave Jew is a man of spirit. Formerly unimaginable forces are all around us. Everything is on the move and will develop. This is about meaning or about mania, you call it as you wish; be a participant or an observer, but tell me one thing, my dear philosopher: why do you not thank fate that it lets you experience this time? Let disappear what has to disappear! Let emerge what has to emerge! Help or step aside, but we did not study Spinoza to satisfy our teachers, we studied Spinoza to learn for life.¹⁶

This revolution might last as long as the war. However, I was only able to endure the horrors of the war because I was always hoping for what we have now. I have the same approach today. I feel free and at ease, because I constantly remind

myself of the revolution's ultimate goal. There will be terrible hardship, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Germans will be unemployed, and factories will turn into ruins like castles did. If we have learned one thing from this war, it is the following: men will only do what is necessary and right when misery has become unbearable and when it has become impossible to do anything wrong. Considering this, they will probably not use this chance of salvation, no matter how much we urge them to. They will probably throw themselves into disaster instead. But, eventually, the revolution will give people something that the war couldn't give them, except for those who already were revolutionaries: genius, both in word and deed, momentum and fire, a glowing and intensive life, the fulfillment of the moment and of centuries, and historical existence. I wish my wife could have experienced it, but I will faithfully carry everything I experience and do during this time to her.¹⁷

I try to experience and realize some of the hopes I have for humanity. I admit that I expect things to change. For me, the expectation that the next generation will create new and unfamiliar things belongs to the greatness of this time. But this is not what's most important. Most important is that the people have finally become active. Without this activity there can be no renewal. You talk about keeping the church out of the schools and consider this a big step forward. Yes, I do too, and I agree that this separation must be implemented at some point. But more exciting is that religion now fills the people! We can already see it, the people's activity is the beginning. At first, it might cause the destruction of Germany, but that is only an important step. In the long run, the unity created among the German people will be much stronger than anything a Bismarck could have ever achieved. The process that has started now will take us a long way further. It will take us to what Buddha and Jesus have already taught us: the unity of humankind. That's why I dedicate all my strength to the struggle against the remnants of the Germany of Bismarck—for the sake of German unity!

In heartfelt friendship and trusting that you won't be mad at me,

Your Gustav Landauer

To Adolf Neumann

Krumbach (Swabia), November 28, 1918

MY DEAR NEUMANN,

[...] In Munich, I am very happy with everything concerning Eisner. Unfortunately, many stupid things are being done as well, especially by the workers who do not know what to make of their power. I hope to return to Munich next week. In the meantime, one must be aware of the counterrevolution that sits in Berlin and in the central government's offices! These men lie and betray more than ever. It is

also possible that the counterrevolution comes in the form of armies crossing the Rhine,¹⁸ in agreement with Berlin and Wilhelmshöhe. The West German Republic must form fast, no, *immediately*, and, at least in its first phase, it must cut all ties to Berlin! [...]

Warmest greetings!

Your Gustav Landauer

To Auguste Hauschner

Krumbach (Swabia), November 29, 1918

DEAR MRS. HAUSCHNER,

[...] I am very happy with everything that Eisner has done, especially during the last days, and if he really manages to reach the people, the effects will be evident.¹⁹ By enforcing old ways with old men, the Berlin central government is at fault for our entire relationship with the Entente: we have to deal with a truce that was made for the Kaiserreich. There is no shame in making mistakes. But once the truth is clear, one must feel and express remorse. Men who don't must not lead a republic.

Warmest greetings!

Your Gustav Landauer

To Hugo Landauer

Krumbach (Swabia), December 2, 1918

DEAR HUGO,

It is entirely impossible for me to continue this correspondence. There is not enough time. And you are too emotional to understand what I am saying. I have, in my quiet disappointment with humankind, foreseen everything that must happen before misery will bring men to reason. And you turn this into something ugly and outrageous? You know me, and such misunderstanding should not be possible!

You contradict yourself constantly. First you say that the people are ready for socialism; then you urge me to understand that they are not. You even accuse me of wanting to introduce socialism from above! How shall I have the time to clarify all this!?

If at all possible, try to be less emotional! Nobody can steer the developments we are in—only history knows how everything will unfold. All we have now are a thousand currents clashing. Nobody can be made accountable for what will come, you included. We can all only do our duty to the best of our knowledge and conscience right where we are. So, do yours where you are! I think that quite

a lot can be done in the Lake Constance region, with both thousands of workers from the war industry and big landowners there. Join the peasants' council, talk to your neighbors, go to the workers in Friedrichshafen, etc.! This is much more useful than to interrupt the life of others and to steal their time with terrible misunderstandings.

Concerning Eisner, you are completely blinded by the press of the counter-revolution. (There is no other yet, you just don't realize that!) How you could welcome the writings of Mühlton, Lichnowsky,²⁰ and others during the war, when you now—at a time when a new, pure Germany must show remorse to the world—reject the simple truth that our old rulers were responsible for this catastrophe, you have to negotiate with yourself. Erzberger, Solf, the entire ministry of foreign affairs, Scheidemann, and David²¹ are all perpetuating the old lies.

I do not consider the politicians of the Entente to be angels. But this is the business of their people. We have to deal with our own government. I grant you your hatred against the French. If they were angels they would forgive and trust us. But my hate does not reach them yet. I am no grasshopper that can jump over its own guilt. [...]

We violated Belgium's neutrality, and that was the only reason we were able to devastate northern France. Otherwise, we would have been defeated earlier—on our own territory! You might deem it fortunate that this didn't happen, I don't! I am German but I have a human conscience, not a German one. Besides, I prefer to be the victim of injustice and misery rather than the perpetrator. We have practiced a murderous campaign against travelers and trade ships,²² pulling even America into the war because of it. You know all this, yet you want us to remain silent about our guilt and to cover it up. At the same time, you hate the French because they might do something for revenge that we simply did for power. This is the politics of fear. This is the politics of German patriotism. It is not the politics of humanity, not the new politics that alone can bring salvation.

Only the truth and a complete change of heart can save us. Also the other peoples would have to change their hearts, that is true. But shall we wait for them? Now it is our turn! This is the hour that history has bestowed upon us. We have to repent! You don't trust Eisner, you say. I believe you—because Eisner's conscience is braver than yours.

If you believe that the national assembly, that is, the reactionary forces, will save us from the Entente, you are wrong. The counterrevolution would have probably already happened (because of you, the bourgeoisie!) if the rulers didn't have to fear the immediate invasion of the Entente. The Entente and Wilson will negotiate with a union of autonomous German republics, *not* with a central government in Berlin that is only the perpetuation of the old regime. Whether there will be a national assembly or not doesn't matter.

I know that the provisional government of Eisner will only last a short time. He knows it too. That's exactly why he does everything that he considers right and appropriate. There will come a new phase afterward, and then another, and so forth. Not because that's the way we want it, but because that's the way it has to be.

Warm greetings,

Your Gustav

To Charlotte and Brigitte Landauer²³

Munich, Hotel Wolff, December 9, 1918

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

I am fine, as exhausting as all this is. Right now, the Bavarian Central Workers' Council is assembling. I gave a long speech yesterday and must partake in many discussions and councils.²⁴ Those who have been affected the least by the revolution and who remain the old squares are the social democratic workers. [...]

Be kissed from the heart!

Your dad

To Margarete Susman

Krumbach (Swabia), December 13, 1918

DEAR FRIEND,

[...] A difficult case are the Bolsheviks (Spartacus). They are pure centralists like Robespierre and his men. Their aspiration has no content, it only knows power. They advocate a military regime that would be uglier than anything the world has seen. Dictatorship of the armed proletariat? I'd rather have Napoleon! Unfortunately, the best of the country have ended up in their ranks. Their radical means attract many, because radical understanding and radical ambition—in other words, the humility and piety of the new humanity—have not found the right earth-shattering tone yet. We not only have to say *what* we want, we have to say *how* we want it. And we have to implement it. We have to *begin*.

All the best to you, from the bottom of my heart,

Your Gustav Landauer

To Kurt Eisner

Krumbach (Swabia), January 10, 1919

DEAR EISNER,

I am sending you:

1) a pamphlet of mine that appeared some weeks ago, but that I only received now;²⁵

2) a response to the pamphlet by Professor Hans Cornelius (University of Frankfurt am Main),²⁶ which deserves highest attention; and

3) a pamphlet by Cornelius related to this.²⁷

As I've already stated in the telegram I sent you today, I am convinced that it is crucial right now to speak to the masses and to work calmly and quietly at the same time. Only this can save us from the Entente, from the collapse of the revolution, from newly elected, but essentially old parliaments. The revolution, shall it not be crushed between party parliamentarism (the counterrevolution) and desperate and misguided social insurrections, needs a new vision. Here it is! The vast majority of the German people of all classes will agree. Let us Bavarians take the leadership! The time is here. This is Bavaria's calling! The cause contains everything: true democracy and true socialism, everything we want to save and build. I will come to you as soon as you have time to discuss this and everything related to it.

One more thing: despite it all, win back the Spartacists! Their radicalism is driven by blindness. Either they have no direction at all or they are heading into the wrong one. *But we need them!*

Calling elections for the Landtag was a mistake. The consequence is that your "machine gun" (the referendum)²⁸ has become unusable. Well, I am not completely certain of this. But I fear that it is the case. Immediately after the elections, the counterrevolution will get to work. Their demand will be: "Away with Eisner!" However, a parliament of that kind will have to be dissolved. If this won't happen, if you will be pushed into parliamentary opposition (where you would be almost alone), then our only help would be the social desperation of the unemployed and tormented masses—and this would be worse than an immediate strike against an intolerable parliament.

Affectionately,

Your Gustav Landauer

To Adolf Neumann

Krumbach (Swabia), January 11, 1919

[...] PS: I have to add that I am a candidate for the Bavarian Landtag. I reject the creation of this parliament, but I will use the opportunity to share my ideas with the voters. I would do the same inside the Landtag. But there is no chance that I will be elected. Women will carry the *Zentrumspartei* to victory, as they did in Baden.²⁹ And mine is the most conservative district of all of them.

Apparently, someone has also put me on a list of candidates for the German National Assembly. But I can't be concerned with such things right now. This is the time of reckoning for the revolution, and the situation is gloomy. People should have listened to me at the right time. Even in Bavaria, the situation is bad: Eisner has been forced by the circumstances and by his own complicated politics to estrange the non-political and eccentric among his friends, that is, practically all the friends he really had. What will come of this? Long and dark confusion. I think I am the only person who remains calm and joyful. To be in the middle of things while observing them as if you were on another planet is the privilege of someone who has already experienced all this a long time ago and who has left it all behind.

Again, warm greetings,

Your Gustav Landauer

To Margarete Susman

Krumbach (Swabia), January 13, 1919

DEAR FRIEND,

Your beautiful pamphlet³⁰ has passed a hard test: I read it right after I received the first results of Bavaria's parliamentary elections.³¹ The results confirm everything that I expected. However, this provides no joy, as it means that we are back in times when those in solitude remain right—and lonely.

The revolution should have never trusted the business of voting and parliamentarism. It should have used the new social structures to remodel and educate the masses. I fear that we will now have to deal with the old party politics again, that is, with the counterrevolution. This will last a long time—until things will become so miserable that people will finally no longer accept it.

Kurt Eisner has a pure spirit and pure goals. However, due to a mixture of prudence, calculation, naïveté, and optimism, he has left his true way and chosen to engage in deceitful political games. He was horrified by the revolutionary energy. He has lost his bearings between Spartacus and compromise. He has postponed

his own way, which he never recognized as clearly as I did. He has been a social democrat for too long. The entire German Revolution is bound to fail because its dependency on the social democrats.

The Spartacists will not be able to win. Nor should they. As frightening as it may be: we need a power vacuum. Misery has to rise in Germany for the creative spirit to emerge. My only conciliation is that the struggle will continue. It is a struggle for meaning—even if it now expresses itself in meaningless ways.

There is one part of your pamphlet where you miss the point. What you say on page six and seven needs additions.³² The revolution has to bring people happiness—in every respect. It has to provide people with a reality, a here and now, a salvation. For a few hours, maybe for a few days, our revolution was great and real, because it meant liberation, physical joy, and redemption to our soldiers. Then, it did not know how to proceed and was not able to provide people with anything real—something to do, something that could have changed their plight. This caused a pause in its development—a pause that we are still in.

Help can only come from a new economy. Only an emergency socialism can provide what we require. It will arise from a combination of free action and desperate need. Some of this I have already said in the preface to the new edition of *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*—you should receive a copy soon. A lot remains to be said, however. [...]

With love to you both,

Gustav Landauer

To the daughters

[Munich], January 15, 1919

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

Here is a longer greeting after my telegram. It comes from my heart.

I am fine. Everything is calm. No need to be afraid. However, I am not in the least happy with how things are developing. I will tell you more in a longer letter or in person. I am not sure how long I will stay here.

Many regards, also from the Eisner children and Helma,³³

Your father

To Charlotte Landauer

Munich, Hotel Wolff, January 16, 1919

MY DEAR LOTTE!

The date line already reveals that my thoughts are not really gathered today.³⁴ The terrible news of the death of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg has just arrived. It is received with open happiness by the bourgeoisie and even by many workers! One could almost despair with such people. Liebknecht was the only one who brought Germany some honor during the war. No individual deserves more credit for this revolution than him. And now he has been killed by the supposed leaders of the German Republic in the most repugnant and cowardly of ways.

You, my children, still keep me alive. I will not give up. It is only due to my ethos and my hopes for humankind that I object to the methods of violence and revenge, and that I work for the passionate but peaceful creation of socialism instead. Don't be afraid in any way! I will continue on my way as I have done until now. [...]

Yesterday evening, I spoke to a big assembly of Munich workers slowly understanding the big changes that lie ahead. However, the situation here has become very difficult. It is everyone's fault, also Eisner's. I don't have the time to go into details now, but I will tell you more about it in person when I get the chance. [...]

Live well, dear children! Be kissed!

Your father

To Gustav Mayer³⁵

Munich, Hotel Wolff, January 17, 1919

DEAR MAYER,

I actually have to respond to two letters of you. However, our opinions differed already before the war and the revolution. Why should this have changed? Why start to argue before at least trying to understand each other properly?

I am not satisfied by the way you have read my pamphlet.³⁶ You say, for example, that I reject majority rule. How so? In mathematics, $3+4+6=13$, but in democracy the majority vote of thirteen thousand people is something very different to the majority vote of three towns with three, four, and six thousand people, respectively. Yet, it is still a majority vote... I am for corporative processes of discussion and decision-making. I am against political parties and their lists (in both senses³⁷). I find that the electoral system of proportional representation is but the completion of the atomization and isolation of the mass individual. But none of this

contradicts majority rule, which, if properly implemented, is very practical and useful. You should have understood this. My pamphlet expresses it clearer than I have done now.

And why are you talking about the Bolsheviks, about Radek and Trotsky? The difference between you and me is only that you are afraid of these folks while I have the cure against all forms of violent centralism: the federalist principle.

“Domestic politics remain a function of foreign politics,” you say. But then you should be as consequential as Ranke and be a monarchist!³⁸ This crazy principle fits only a monarchy. In a republic, you are expected to act as a decent individual in the public realm and to be as just and gracious to the people outside the republic’s borders as to those within. Whoever is not willing to be that should not join a revolution or a republic.

What you write about the foreign office, documents, and the responsibility for the war does not alleviate my concerns. I do not speak of the general danger of war and its preconditions. I speak of *this* war, declared by a certain people at a certain time against Serbia, Russia, and France; I speak of the decision to invade Belgium, of the war with England, and of the war with America. In all these matters, we can point to certain individuals who have done and ordered certain things, while not doing and ordering other things. Philosophers of history can outline the general context, and subjective aspects will always play a role. But when I look through documents related to the war, I look for proof of individual people’s actions—German people’s actions, first and foremost. Needless to say, the documents of the foreign office alone will not suffice to find such proof.

I do not believe that Eisner has “unlimited trust” in the rulers of France. However, he is certainly right in not ignoring them, like the sentimental fools do, and in permanently corresponding with Wilson.

By the way, you must not see Eisner and me as one. What you call his brave journey to Berlin was very well done, had very positive effects, and will continue to have them. But as far as I am concerned, he did not go far enough in his critique of the central government.³⁹ Even his domestic policies I am less willing to support the longer I am working with him.

You will soon be able to read an article in Herzog’s *Republik* about my views on the terrible recent developments in Berlin.⁴⁰ [...]

Warm greetings to both of you and the children,

Your Gustav Landauer

To Hugo Landauer

Munich, January 17, 1919

DEAR HUGO!

[...] I am very upset about the atrocities in Berlin and about the entire course that the revolution is taking. Maybe you now start to realize what the national assembly, the central government in Berlin, and the provincial parliaments mean. Even in Munich the situation is not very encouraging, neither politically nor with respect to the development of socialism. Eisner means well, he is by far the best of everyone in power, but he zigzags between the different parties and political currents and he doesn't have the energy to implement his ideas. Sadly, without this energy we are lost.

The way things are right now, one has to hope that Eisner leaves the government soon, and his allies with him. Backed only by the workers' and peasants' councils, which are too well established now to disappear, he will be able to do more than in a government backed by parliament—something we would never have if anyone had listened to me.

It will be a long and difficult struggle before people find the way to socialist creation. Misery will force them to. Meanwhile, one has to do small things and show the way. [...]

Warm greetings to you all,

Your Gustav

To Georg Springer

January 25, 1919

[...] To me, the deplorable things that you write about in your letter are a symptom of the sordidness of the German spirit. The revolution has, in every respect, got stuck in the mud. We will see whether Kestenberg is right in his consolation that we are only at the beginning.⁴¹ If we are only at the beginning, that is, if the united efforts of the Entente capitalists and the splendid German social democrats will not save German capitalism from its collapse, then we still have terrible chaos awaiting us. After all, we are not listening to the few who actually have a solution: the creation of a new *Bedarfwirtschaft*.⁴² I already feel almost as alone as I did before the revolution. I only see helplessness, confusion, and mediocrity. Unless the conditions will become even more miserable, I do not believe in a renewal of the revolution among these pitiful people. Even such noble and courageous souls as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg did not know anything better than to struggle for power in order to create a new society; even such spirited men like

Kurt Eisner lose their spirit the moment they begin speaking of socialism. All are blinded by Marxism and have lost sight for reality. They do not realize that socialism needs to fulfill the needs of eternity and of the moment at the same time. They do not understand that the peaceful creation of socialism needs thousands of tiny, decentralized beginnings as much as revolutionary energy and power concentrated in one point. As a result, we have all sorts of bloody battles that I want no part of and that I refuse to take sides in, because all positions are equally wrong. If I do open my mouth, I am taken for a “mediator” or someone who stands “in the middle.” The truth is, I stand somewhere else entirely—on very radical ground!

Look at the political situation: the old parliamentarism has returned, and with it the truly “Prussian” constitution of unitarian centralism⁴³ and all the means of mediocrity that turned Germany into a bleak country already a long time ago. All I see is the philistines on top and the revolutionary spirit in a lonely corner—it is the same as before. In the best case, we will have a situation like the one in France in 1848 and some Ludendorff will become a Napoleon III; if this man joins the SPD and acts cleverly on the domestic as well as on the international plane, it will take him less than two years to seize power.

Be generous regarding my disheartenment. I have been too close to the best people we have. They have already been consumed by the revolution. Meanwhile, their possible successors no longer find the spirit among the people they need to take the revolution further. We have to put our hope in other peoples; the Germans are too pitiful.

I will finish here. However, there is only consequence I can draw from my bitterness: to do my work even better than I have so far!

Warmest greetings!

Your Gustav Landauer

To Hugo Landauer

Krumbach (Swabia), January 29, 1919

DEAR HUGO,

[...] You are probably disgruntled and distressed about the state of the revolution and the pitiful prospects for the economy and for socialism. But you probably don’t understand that you are only harvesting what you have sown. Our goal was to transform the entire economy, that means both *Arbeitswirtschaft* and *Bedarfwirtschaft*,⁴⁴ and to create new agriculture, new village artisanry, and new factories with the help of big-city proletarians leaving for the country.

In order to do all this, we would need strong revolutionary energy and a central administrative power that could rely on many decentralized people’s initiatives

in small towns and in the country. We would need a new revolutionary government, not obstructed by the old parties and their counterrevolutionary capitalist interests but based on the solidly structured people's organization of the workers' and peasants' councils and the new public servants appointed by them. My main intention, however, was never to simply *speak* about socialism to newspaper readers or lecture audiences (or to no one, in case no one was listening), but to contribute to a political organization willing and able to *implement* the new economy of the *Bedarfsarbeit* and its voluntary cooperatives.

And what happened? You people, with your fear of the Entente, have re-instated the old governmental system and the old parliamentarism, even diverting a man like Kurt Eisner from the right way with all your panic. As a result, almost everything has been lost. A final hope lies in the federalist movement whose center is Brunswick; but I fear it will be crushed with military force too. And then what? With the help of the Entente a disgusting mix of capitalist, state-monopolist, and state-controlled industry will return. We will be fed and clothed poorly by the victors of the war and we will have to pay for their service. We will have to pay reparations and will be controlled in all respects by the League of Nations, or rather by the capitalist governments afraid of losing power. If, as it will probably be the case, the conditions for the working class will become so bad that it resists, then Caesarism will come, some Napoleon III, only worse than the original, be his name Ludendorff or something else. A shrewd, brutal military officer with an organizing talent who joins the SPD has great chances to become Germany's dictator within two years. Already now, those who look into the future have no other hope than a new people that has more talent for revolution and creation than the German people. You were all afraid of your own power and decided to ask the majority of the people, most of whom had not even been touched yet by the revolution, for their opinion. Now you have their answer.

Do not confuse me with the Spartacists. I have never had anything to do with this Marxist current who knows as little about realization⁴⁵ as the other social democrats. One should have never recognized the central government in Berlin. This would have saved us from civil war and the national assembly. The union of autonomous republics should have been established instead. But what am I doing, talking about details? The whole spirit of renewal, destined to lead to self-determination, to the self-management of new bodies and cooperatives, is gone!

From all this bitterness, we can draw only one consequence: we have to begin slowly and with small steps. The revolution has at least widened the group of people who are ready for realization and for a new beginning. Unfortunately, this is almost its only achievement.

By March 1, *Der Sozialist* shall appear again.⁴⁶ If you can help in any way with funds for advertising, it will be appreciated.

Warm greetings to you all!

Your Gustav

To Charlotte Landauer

Munich, Hotel Wolff, February 10, 1919

MY DEAR LOTTE,

Yesterday, I only sent you a short card; the day was very busy. I do not know if you have read about the bold arrest of a Spartacus leader, Dr. Levien.⁴⁷ There is also a new trial pending against Mühsam.⁴⁸ These are all preparations of the counterrevolution. There have been meetings with the justice minister, the state prosecutor, and long sessions in the Munich Workers' Council. We are preparing a great demonstration for Sunday.⁴⁹ Hopefully, Eisner returns these days and will make the right decisions.⁵⁰ He needs to make them now! [...]

Warm greetings to you all. Tell your sisters to write me a proper letter at some point, too!

Your father

To the daughters

Munich, Hotel Wolff, February 11, 1919

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

I am happy about the good news! The weather is wonderful for your winter activities. I do encourage you to go for a walk in the snow landscape too! It is a quieter thing to do, but an absolute pleasure.

Today, we managed to free Dr. Levien by the simple and peaceful means of announcing a mass demonstration. I am very happy about it. Now, the demonstration—for very general demands—will probably happen on Sunday anyway.

Tonight, Kurt Eisner shall return. He has to make a decision now. He returns as Germany's most celebrated man abroad,⁵¹ while he is the most despised man among his own people—now more than ever. This is how Germans are.

Live well and be kissed! Greet the Eisner children and Helma!

Your father

To the daughters

Munich, February 17, 1919

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

I am doing very well. The demonstration was fantastic. It took over an hour to watch it pass by. Red flags were flying everywhere and there were many signs with all sorts of slogans. All over Munich, “Long live this” and “Down with that” could be heard. In-between, revolutionary songs were sung.

At least eighty thousand people joined. Others watched, often in tight rows, and the reception was in most cases very positive. The demonstration certainly made an impression!⁵²

I will definitely come home this week—Wednesday or Thursday, I will let you know.

Be greeted and kissed!

Your father

To Ludwig Berndl⁵³

Krumbach (Swabia), March 14, 1919

DEAR FRIEND BERNDL,

[...] I am sending you what I said at Eisner’s grave.⁵⁴ Be not concerned about my life! Of the three dimensions, length was always the one I was least worried about. [...]

The problem of violence does not give me any headaches. I don’t engage in bloody violence. The rest is self-defense. Most importantly, I know more about creation than the Bolsheviks, who are tragic fools. In Russia, you only need to work the land and give craftsmen something to do. Everything here is more difficult. Their theories are Marxist madness. I could help. But the world is deaf, so I will be silent.

The children are fine.

Greetings from the heart!

Your G.L.

To Hans Cornelius⁵⁵

Krumbach (Swabia), March 20, 1919

DEAR MR. CORNELIUS,

In private circles, one repeatedly hears the suggestion to unite the councils in a bigger political body. I cannot get excited about such plans. It seems most important to me right now to get to *work*—not to quibble about matters of structure and authority.

You are far away and you might only receive insufficient reports. There are two very different understandings of council democracy. One wants to use the current, insufficient and spontaneous, form of the councils to establish a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” The other trusts the councils as a new instrument and the spirit that fills these bodies enough to make them the basis of public administration, whereby local activity is crucial, not the replacement of parliament by a council congress.

However, the most urgent questions right now are the following: how shall the councils be formed, and how shall the delegates be appointed or “elected”? The bureaucrats demand the proportional system. This is without doubt the worst option because it will only give us millions of voters and a few dozen parliamentarians, but no self-determined, organic political body of the people. At the same time, it is difficult to vote according to workplaces and trades—these are no organic bodies either. They are destined to disappear with capitalism.

One solution is: the councils aren’t, they *become*. The transformation of the economy must go hand in hand with the growth and the transformation of the councils. The other solution is: no elections according to workplace and trade, but according to municipality and neighborhood. This works very well for the country and small towns. But in the cities there is nothing organic about this either. The cities also belong to capitalism and will disappear with it. In other words, each attempt at a solution rests on a parallel creation of a new economy and a new political structure. This needs a provisional phase. I would never call this phase “dictatorship of the proletariat,” but it is true that it is not the formal participation of all people that matters but the content and the spirit, the direction and the way we are following with strong energy. Yet, this implies an enormous danger of abuse and confusion. It is wrong to assume that the evil means employed by the counterrevolution can be justified if employed by the revolution. The provisional phase can only bring us forward if we are guided by men who are as upright as they are strong.

The provisional phase is the point at which every revolution faces the danger of enormous corruption. Nonetheless, the good can only be prepared in the shell of evil. This is a part of humanity’s destiny. We always face the same dilemma that we face in education: the adults shall educate the children to purity, but they

themselves have been spoiled. The only thing that can help is a revolution that brings the hidden to the surface, that awakes the child in the adult, and that inflames the good that lies somewhere inside all of us.

We must face all the dangers ahead of us and still advance. We must put ourselves at risk, and even others, as long as the revolution is alive. If all those who remain untouched by the revolution see us as irresponsible criminals or fanatical lunatics, it is only a confirmation that we are on the right way.

I hope you understand that I did not digress, but that all this concerns the core of what we are discussing.

Greetings,

Your Gustav Landauer

To Fritz Mauthner⁵⁶

Postcard with Landauer's photograph⁵⁷
Munich, April 7, 1919

Thank you, dear friend. The Bavarian Council Republic has honored me by making my birthday a national holiday.⁵⁸ I am now the "people's delegate" for propaganda, education, science, arts, and a few other things. If I'll have a few weeks, I hope I can achieve something; however, it is very likely that it will only be a few days, and then all this will have been but a dream.

I wish both of you all the very best,

Your Gustav Landauer

To the daughters

Monday, April 14, 1919, 11 a.m.

MY BELOVED CHILDREN,

I am still free and secure, as I wrote yesterday. Apparently, there was fighting in Munich, but the council republic prevailed. Some of my friends were or are still imprisoned. But do not worry about me! I am looked after well in every respect and I will be cautious!

My greatest concern is that false rumors will reach and worry you. I do not know how long it takes for my messages to arrive, but I do hope that you have received the telegrams that I have sent.

My second concern is that agitated bourgeois and peasants might harass you. I hope not. If it happens, however, be wise and prudent. If you decide to leave Krumbach for some time, go to the Bernsteins⁵⁹ who will assist you. Do not forget

to take the little money that is in the house as well as your and your mother's jewelry! [...]

I hope to hear from you soon! Now I kiss you, dear Landauer and Eisner children.

Your father

To the daughters

Fragment, Munich, April 16, 1919

MY BELOVED CHILDREN,

I am writing a letter again. Yesterday I telegraphed. I wonder whether you received the message. In any case, I have not received the response I had asked for. I wanted you to come to Gr.-Hadern; however, there is no way to reach Munich right now anyway. If you are harassed even in the least, start traveling to Uncle Hugo—all of you. It will be his pleasure to be your host. As far as I am concerned, I am all right staying here, although I am starting to feel rather useless.

To the Executive Council of the Second Council Republic⁶⁰

Munich, April 16, 1919

I have declared that I would continue working for the council republic in the name of liberation and a more beautiful life for humanity once the old central council was replaced by an organization that seemed to have the trust of Munich's proletariat.⁶¹ So far, you have not shown any interest in my services. In the meantime, I have seen your work and I have gotten to know your means of propaganda and struggle. I have seen what your council republic looks like compared to the one you call a "sham council republic."⁶² We both speak of creating conditions that allow each human being to participate in the goods of the earth and of culture, but we mean different things by it. Therefore, the reservations to working together are mutual—which, in fact, was never a secret. Socialism, when it becomes reality, instantly frees all creative forces. You, however, do not understand this, neither on the economic nor on the spiritual level.

This message is only meant for you, and I will keep it that way. It is far from my intentions to further complicate the very difficult work that you are doing and the defense of it. However, it is very painful to see how little this work has in common with mine, a work of warmth and growth, of culture and revival.

Gustav Landauer



1. Gustav Lindemann (1872–1960), theater manager and director; Louise Dumont-Lindemann (1862–1932), theater manager and actress.
2. Margarete Susman (1872–1966), left-leaning German essayist and poet.
3. Martin Buber (1878–1965), Austrian-Israeli philosopher and mystic. A close friend of Landauer's, Buber published many of Landauer's writings posthumously, including a collection of his letters in two volumes (*Gustav Landauer. Sein Lebensgang in Briefen* [Gustav Landauer's Life in Letters], edited together with Ina Britschgi-Schimmer).
4. "Ein deutsches Herrenhaus" [A German Manor House] was a 1918 essay by the German essayist Kurt Hiller (1885–1972), propagating a kind of Nietzschean *Geistesaristokratie* [literally, "aristocracy of the spirit"].
5. Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962), Czechoslovakian-German-Israeli pianist and educator.
6. Eugen Schiffer (1860–1954), liberal politician and leading member of the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* [German Democratic Party], founded in 1918.
7. Richard Witting (1856–1923), a banker and jurist, and the famous physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) had both been active against the war.
8. See "The United Republics of Germany and Their Constitution" in this volume.
9. Hugo Landauer (1868–1933), close cousin.
10. Reference to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (see footnote 4 in "Noske and the Beginning..."); it was a commonly held opinion that Germany took advantage of Russia's internal conflict when signing the treaty, especially with respect to territorial demands.
11. Hugo Landauer lived in the federal state of Baden, near Lake Constance.
12. Auguste Hauschner (1850–1924), writer and friend of Landauer's.
13. Adolf Neumann (1878–1953), German publisher and last owner of the prestigious publishing house Rütten & Loening, which published Landauer's collection of letters.
14. Georg Springer (1872–1929), chairman of the *Volksbühne Berlin* (see the following footnote).
15. The *Freie Volksbühne* [Free People's Theatre]—the *Neue Freie Volksbühne* [New People's Theatre] was a temporary offshoot—was founded in 1890 with the vision of making educational and cultural projects accessible to workers. It was the country's first organization of its kind. Landauer joined in 1891 and remained dedicated to the project until his death. The *Freie Volksbühne* exists to this day, now officially called *Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz* and commonly referred to as *Volksbühne* or *Volksbühne Berlin*.
16. Fritz Mauthner published a book on the philosopher Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677), entitled *Spinoza*, in 1906.
17. The poet Hedwig Lachmann (1865–1918), Landauer's second wife, died on February 21, 1918.
18. Reference to a possible occupation of Germany by the Entente.
19. Kurt Eisner demanded the resignation of the former war supporters Matthias Erzberger, Wilhelm Solf, Philipp Scheidemann, and Eduard David (SPD, 1863–1930) from the foreign office.
20. Johann Wilhelm Mühlen (1878–1944), German diplomat who was critical of Germany's role in World War I. For Lichnowsky see footnote 27 in "Noske and the Beginning..."
21. See footnote 19.
22. The Imperial German Navy was notorious for its indiscriminating attacks on foreign ships in the Atlantic Ocean.
23. Charlotte Landauer (1894–1927) and Brigitte Landauer (1906–1985), two of Landauer's daughters.
24. Landauer presented a report about the activities of the Revolutionary Workers' Council (see Erich Mühsam, "From Eisner to Leviné," in this volume).

25. "The United Republics of Germany and Their Constitution" included in this volume.
26. Hans Cornelius (1863–1947), German philosopher.
27. Presumably, "Völkerbund und Dauerfriede" [The Union of Nations and Permanent Peace].
28. According to a "Provisional Constitution" sketched by Eisner, the Landtag could be dissolved by a referendum anytime.
29. On January 12, the Catholic *Badische Zentrumspartei* [Center Party of Baden] won the elections in the federal state of Baden.
30. "Die Revolution und die Frau" [The Revolution and Women].
31. The USPD suffered a devastating blow at the January 12, 1919, Landtag elections in Bavaria, capturing only 2.53 percent of the vote. The majority of the vote went to bourgeois parties, the *Bayerische Volkspartei* [Bavarian People's Party] being the strongest with 34.99 percent. The SPD got 32.98 percent.
32. Susman called "atonement" the "essential meaning of revolution," and wrote that revolution is "about the future, not the present."
33. Helma Rosenthal looked after Landauer's children.
34. Landauer wrote "Krum..." (as in "Krumbach") first, then crossed it out.
35. Gustav Mayer (1871–1948), journalist and historian of the German workers' movement.
36. "The United Republics of Germany and Their Constitution;" included in this volume.
37. The German term *Listen* can be plural for both *Liste* (list) and *List* (ploy, trick). The wordplay cannot be reproduced in English.
38. Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), royal historian.
39. Eisner had traveled to Berlin to discuss a new German constitution with the Berlin government and political leaders from around the country.
40. "Überschätzung der Wahlen" [Overestimating the Elections], January 21, 1919. *Die Republik* was a short-lived daily (1918–1919), edited by Wilhelm Herzog (1884–1960), USPD and KPD member.
41. Leo Kestenbergs (1882–1962), Czechoslovakian-German-Israeli pianist and educator, friend of Landauer's; see also the letter to Kestenbergs from November 22, 1918, in this volume.
42. *Bedarfswirtschaft* was a term used by the sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) to distinguish an economy (*Wirtschaft*) based on needs (*Bedarf*) from *Erwerbswirtschaft*, an economy based on income (*Erwerb*).
43. Hugo Preuß (1860–1925) was a liberal politician who held the post of state secretary of the interior in the first post-revolutionary German cabinet of 1919. He is considered one of the main influences on the constitution of the Weimar Republic. His last name means as much as "a man of Prussia." In this sentence, Landauer spells the word "Prussian" "*Preußisch*," blending *Preuß* and *preußisch*. The wordplay cannot be reproduced in English.
44. See footnote 42. Weber's term opposing *Bedarfswirtschaft* is actually *Erwerbswirtschaft*, not *Arbeitswirtschaft* (*Arbeit* = work/labor), as Landauer suggests here.
45. "Realization" (*Verwirklichung*) is a central term in Landauer's philosophy; it means "realization" in the sense of "to make something real" rather than in the sense of "to grasp or understand."
46. This never happened.
47. Levin was released four days later after fierce protests by the Revolutionary Workers' Council under the leadership of Landauer.
48. See Erich Mühsam's "From Eisner to Levin" in this volume.
49. Theresienwiese demonstration of February 16—see Erich Mühsam's "From Eisner to Levin" in this volume.
50. Kurt Eisner had traveled to the International Socialist Congress in Bern, meeting with leading socialists from the Entente countries.
51. Eisner's speeches at the International Socialist Congress were well received—see the previous footnote.

All Power to the Councils!

52. See Erich Mühsam's "From Eisner to Leviné" in this volume.
53. Ludwig Berndt was an editor, writer, and translator friend of Landauer's.
54. Landauer gave the eulogy at Eisner's funeral. Printed in *Arbeit und Zukunft* [Labor and Future], February 28, 1919, and in other journals.
55. See Landauer's letter to Martin Buber from January 10, 1919, in this volume.
56. Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923), journalist, philosopher, and close friend of Landauer's.
57. Included in a series of postcards from the council republic's proclamation.
58. The proclamation of the Bavarian Council Republic—declared a national holiday—coincided with Landauer's birthday.
59. Distant relatives.
60. Different drafts of the letter exist. This translation follows the version included in volume 2 of *Gustav Landauer. Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*.
61. Reference to the Munich KPD.
62. *Scheinnätereipublik* was commonly used by KPD members as a derogatory term for the Bavarian Council Republic before the KPD took over.

THE UNITED REPUBLICS OF GERMANY AND THEIR CONSTITUTION

GUSTAV LANDAUER

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BLESSED PUFENDORF,¹ I HAVE ASKED FOR YOUR FORGIVENESS a long time ago, and I am doing it again. I was about fifteen years old when I bought your booklet on the constitution of the German Reich for twenty pfennig in a Reclams Universal-Bibliothek edition.² I was surprised and disappointed that it contained the description of a past document, rather than the actual constitution of the German Reich founded by Bismarck. Today, however, I have learned that a constitution is not a document with a number of paragraphs, but an actual social condition.

Another German Reich has disappeared recently, and it will only live on in history as a temporary expression of violence. Bismarck, master of realpolitik, countered the ideas of 1848 with a union of fiefdoms that was both hammered together by war and crafted with shrewd diplomacy.³ This union has been smashed by the revolution. The German Reich of 1871–1918 is gone. It has collapsed in shame. That is always the case when an apparent power disappears like dust in the wind because no one is embracing and defending it.

Now we must face the new situation, both its being and becoming, and we must do what we can to understand it. The spook of the old regime burst because new forces appeared that used their energies and desires wonderfully—not only tearing down the old but building the new, right in the midst of upheaval. I speak of the movement of democratic soldiers and rebellious workers that began on the North Sea Coast and in western Germany, rapidly swept away all royal dynasties in Germany, and included the proclamation of republics in Austria and Bavaria.⁴

Things are in a stage of becoming; they are growing. New divisions and new alliances have appeared and will continue to appear. A glorious

public spirit can be felt in all of Germany (occasional stupidities and excesses are, as a southern German idiom has it, as superfluous as a goiter) with one exception: it appears that the new spirit has not yet reached Berlin and parts of Brandenburg. However, this can be turned into a rather insignificant affair if we do what needs to be done.

In Berlin, death, disguised as life, still reigns. In Berlin, one attempts to uphold the legacy of the old Reich with its Prussian-Caesarian central government and its stifling party politics. In Berlin, one issues resolutions for the entire country, cooked up by a few random Berlinians—the revolution might be their mother, but Prince Max, the Kaiser, and Ludendorff are certainly their fathers. No one ever bothers asking the new autonomous republics whether they need these resolutions. Would it not be better right now if Brandenburg-Prussia was modest and focused on its own affairs, just like the other republics in Germany and Austria do? Is this not what nature demands? Does not everyone feel that this is the way, the *only* way, in which the new country can grow together beautifully and securely? I speak of Brandenburg-Prussia, because today's Prussia is a result of land theft and consists of territories that do not belong together. It will soon dissolve into its natural parts. Schleswig will leave. The regions of the North Sea Coast will leave. Hanover will leave. Rheinhessen, Kurhessen, Frankfurt, Nassau, the other Rhine provinces, Westphalia, and Lippe-Detmold will form a West German Republic. This is inevitable. These tribes work well together, while they will never work well with Prussia unless all German republics will form a union. If Prussia refuses, if it does not want to be a part among parts but to maintain the old Reich and to remain a privileged leader, then northwestern, western, southern Germany, and Austria will first form an independent union. This is the only organic development that will create an unconquerable entity.

Two concerns are being raised against this encouraging and comforting idea that understands, accepts, and demands with clarity the current state of being and becoming: 1. The fear of the Entente and its demand for a democratically elected government legitimized to negotiate in Germany's name. 2. The fear of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which exists both among wide parts of the German people and among the governments of the Entente. Both concerns are closely linked.

He who laughs last laughs best, and he who makes the political revolution last shall and must establish the best form of democracy. Democracy as self-determination of the people, and of individual groups among the people, is something entirely different to the nonsense of elections, which means abdication of power by the people and governing of an oligarchy. Our revolution has already begun returning to the true democracy we can find in the medieval constitutions of municipalities and provinces, in Norway and in Switzerland, and especially in the meetings of

the sections of the French Revolution.⁵ No longer shall there be atomized voters abdicating their power. Instead, there shall be municipalities, cooperatives, and associations determining their own destiny in big assemblies and through delegates; delegates who are in constant exchange with their constituencies, who can be recalled and replaced at any time. The principle of the imperative mandate will be crucial, not only in the fields of government and legislation but regarding all motions presented to the people by executive bodies. Atomizing, “direct” elections and, in particular, the detestable secret ballot do not contribute to a people determining its own destiny. Both electoral procedures belong to an era of disempowerment, of rape, of a Caesarian and demagogical betrayal of the people by men with privilege and their political parties. A republic is a public affair, a common body. This means that the people themselves take care of things, publicly, in their own bodies, with their own responsibility, and under their own control. Beware everyone, trying to put political or economic pressure on the people! The degrading times of the voting booth, of the secret ballot and its box must be gone forever!

We must return to the times when men put their tools into a corner, picked up their weapons and sticks, and went to the Thing. There they discussed whatever concerned the community and all of the energy left after work united to commonly take care of public affairs. The communities of villages and towns gathered that way, the delegates reported, new delegates were appointed, there were heated debates and anger and unity and resolutions, and it was all free and open—each individual proudly represented himself and worked for the common good.

There must be equality and freedom. There must be federative structures, and they must form from the bottom to the top. Furthermore, German freedom must be colorful and diverse. The municipality takes care of municipal affairs, independently and without anyone’s interference. The same goes for the district, the region, the province, the autonomous republic, the union of German republics, and the union of all nations.

This is not about imitating the old society of estates in romantic nostalgia. Not everything has to be decided upon in personal meetings when electricity can spread information today from town to town, from country to country, across the world. People will trust their delegates and will not limit their ingenuity. The spirit of community will find its place among the people and it will spread wide and far. The people and their institutions will always be involved in determining their destiny.

This form of democracy is intrinsically linked to socialism. I will explain this in more detail in another text.⁶ We are speaking of democracy and socialism in which all people unite with their neighbors and colleagues, where there no longer will be isolated, secluded, and dispersed individuals. Democracy and socialism, with their institutional and communal bodies, will provide the conditions for individuals to grow, independent and original in soul and spirit.

The workers', peasants', and soldiers' councils that the revolution has brought us on the basis of both old revolutionary examples and the current developments in Russia are the best beginning for all this. Who is not a worker? The laborious housewife is one, the tradesman or factory owner involved in organizing the workplace is one, and so is the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the writer, and the public servant. The fact that this will change in the future, especially with respect to the dreadful nonsense and misfortune of the purely intellectual trades, does not change it now. Let us only state that there has never been anything like "non-intellectual" labor. In any case, there won't be any such thing in the future. The shareholder who does not do anything but holding shares is no worker but a parasite. I am not going to elaborate on their future economic situation here, but since I have empathy for disabled men who are unable to change I propose that they shall receive welfare benefits just like everyone else in need. Politically, however, they cannot have any rights, because political rights will be reserved for those who are—in the widest sense—productive: workers, peasants, and soldiers. Only they can they join a trade organization or be accepted as observers.

Let me not be misunderstood, though: it is impossible that we will see councils of factory owners or shop owners as political bodies. They can form as private associations to represent their class interests, but in everything that concerns the common good, the factory owner has to be in the same body as his technical and commercial helpers and his workers. He must be one active part among many. This will benefit everyone. The same is true for a writer or an artist. The writer must unite with publishers, printers, booksellers, and newspaper agents. The priest with doctors and undertakers. The artistic painter with house painters. The minister with sewage workers and garbagemen. Together, they must nominate their delegates for a workers' council. This will be a blessing for everyone and for the spirit of our people. Our intellectuals should not be afraid to meet the people who Jesus of Nazareth met. A spirit that is honest and communal will prevail everywhere. In many individual cases, the heart of a worker can come to a better conclusion than the mind of a scholar or the imagination of a poet.

Who does not acknowledge today that a new political structure of true democracy is developing? It grows organically from the bottom to the top, to a federal council that can certainly lead negotiations and come to agreements with foreign powers, representing the will of the people. Who does really fear a dictatorship of the proletariat? If this was really a possibility, I would not only fear it, I would hate it and I would fight it like the plague. But it will not come. What will come is not the dictatorship of the proletariat but its abolition and the emergence of a new humanity.

Someone might still ask, "And the national assembly?" Well. Whoever poses that question will be in the same situation as I when I was searching in vain for

the constitution of the Reich in Pufendorf's book. I have outlined the national assembly here: assemblies of all German workers, male and female, organized according to trade, will elect responsible delegates for their provinces, and the provinces elect (publicly and responsibly) delegates for the federal council. What else do we need? Do we need an extra body that legitimizes the organic union of the new country? What for? We need organic growth. We are on the best way. All we must do is continue—in the spirit of the revolution.

My dear intellectuals, it was the spirit⁷ that crushed the old regime and that brought to life the new political structure that is developing—a beautiful structure like everything that is young and growing. There is no need to “bring” the spirit to the revolution now, after the fact, as you seem to foolishly and self-importantly assume. The spirit prepared the revolution, executed it, and carried it. It filled the hands and, when it was necessary, the fists of our beautiful, tormented, and now liberated and joyous soldiers, of some workers and youths and of their leaders—determined freedom fighters of eternal youth who you dared call “utopians.”

By the way, fists were not necessary very often. In general, the revolution followed the excellent prescription of the youthful preceptor of all revolutionaries, Étienne de la Boétie, who wrote against tyranny in the sixteenth century.⁸ The people no longer supported the parasites and no longer worked against their own interests but formed their own government while ignoring the individuals who took themselves for rulers. Once the rulers had lost the grace of the people, God's grace disappeared too.

The problem of revolution has occupied the minds of scholars and politicians for decades as the most complicated problem of all. Well, you clever and earnest philistines and professors: what else could have solved this problem in such an incredibly simple manner but the spirit?

The revolution is the victorious spirit that has finally, *finally*, realized itself. Now there are many who impatiently want to be part of it—since ignoring it is no longer possible. They demand a national assembly and desperately try to give their parties a new face. But they must understand that the spirit has no particular place that can be occupied by those who get there first. The spirit is time, filled by magic. I recommend those who were unprepared for the revolution to sit back, to be quiet, humble, and reflective, and to wait to catch up.

The old Reich is dead, its royal dynasties are gone. The government has crumbled. Also the old parties are dead, even if they still seem alive. In any case, when history shook everyone's conscience, when it was time to admit guilt and to repent, they acted dead. Now, they act alive in order to strangle the revolution and to transform the republic into a sham democracy of shrewdness. They know that the old comfort of the violent regime will not return. They demand elections and “their” national assembly, hoping for the support of those not affected by the

revolution yet, which is the majority in the country. However, the spirit of the revolution always represents everyone. Those who have made the revolution and who carry it stand for the exact same that only isolated prophets stood for earlier: not for an instrumental, random majority of a still lingering past, but for the future, for becoming, for everything that moves the world forward and that contributes to happiness, for historical unity and community, and for a new humanity.

November, 25, 1919

Postscript, December 6: By now, the remains of the party system have won disdainful victories over the revolution; it appears as if the revolution was caught unaware, resting on its laurels and trying to catch some breath. This will prolong and complicate its course.⁹



1. Samuel Freiherr von Pufendorf (1632–1694), jurist and philosopher, formulated a critique of the Holy Roman Empire, centered on the Kingdom of Germany, in his 1667 treatise *De statu imperii Germanici* [On the State of the German Empire].
2. The Universal-Bibliothek [Universal Library] has been edited by the Reclam publishing house, founded in 1828 in Leipzig, since 1867. With small and cheap volumes, the series consists of over two thousand titles today and remains hugely popular.
3. Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), minister president of Prussia from 1862 to 1890, was the driving force behind the unification of Germany in 1871 under Kaiser Wilhelm II.
4. In October–November 1919, the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy split into several different republics.
5. The revolutionary sections of Paris were organizational bodies during the French Revolution.
6. Due to the developments, Landauer never got to write this text.
7. “Spirit,” *Geist* in German, is a key term in Landauer’s philosophy, indicating a development of the soul and the mind as a necessary requirement for building socialism—see Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*, edited by Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press, 2010).
8. Etienne de la Boétie (1530–1563), French jurist, philosopher, and writer. Landauer played a leading role in the rediscovery of de la Boétie’s work, mainly the *Discours sur la Servitude Volontaire* [Discourse on Voluntary Servitude] (1549), which Landauer is referring to here.
9. Reference to the outcome of the General Congress of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Germany, December 16–21, 1918.

FROM EISNER TO LEVINÉ

THE EMERGENCE OF THE BAVARIAN COUNCIL REPUBLIC

ERICH MÜHSAM

Mühsam was arrested during the first attack on the Bavarian Council Republic on April 13. He was sent to a prison in Ebrach near Bamberg in northern Bavaria. After the fall of the council republic, he was sentenced to fifteen years of confinement in a fortress. He was freed by an amnesty in December 1924.

Mühsam wrote this text in September 1920 while incarcerated in the Ansbach Fortress. He called it “a personal account of the revolutionary events in Munich from November 7, 1918, to April 13, 1919,” written “for purposes of information to the creators of the Russian Soviet Republic,” and addressed to “Comrade Lenin.” Mühsam explains his intentions in the preface.

The original booklet, published as *Von Eisner bis Leviné* by Mühsam’s Fanal Verlag in Berlin in 1929, also included the following lines: “Dedicated to the memory of Gustav Landauer, courageous comrade and martyr of the revolution, and to all the heroes of Munich’s proletariat.” The preface also explains the delay in getting the text published.

Mühsam mentions various councils that played a central role during the Bavarian Revolution. The most important are: the *Revolutionary Workers’ Council (RWC)*, which formed immediately after the proclamation of Bavaria as a republic on November 7 and consisted of about fifty self-appointed members, mostly USPD and KPD members—Mühsam calls it the “the strongest force of the Bavarian Revolution until April 1919”; the *Munich Workers’ Council (MWC)*, a body of about four hundred members, most of them close to the SPD, appointed by workers’ councils elected in Munich’s shops and factories and including the RWC; the *Bavarian Central Council (BCC)*, a body supposedly representing all of Bavaria’s workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ councils, but effectively appointed by the RWC and the socialist parties in Munich; and the *Provisional Central Council (PCC)*, a body of members appointed by the instigators of the council republic in April 1919, replacing the BCC. In addition, the *Bavarian Council Congress* convened in Munich from February 16 to 20, 1919, assembled again on February 24, after Kurt Eisner’s assassination, and served as a kind of people’s parliament for a couple of weeks.

Preface

ON JULY 12, 1919, MUNICH’S COURT-MARTIAL FOUND ME GUILTY of high treason. I was sentenced to fifteen years of confinement in a fortress. I have already written about the legal implications of this sentence.¹ A tribunal of royal officers and judges installed by social democrats spoke republican justice on the basis of monarchist laws.

This not being enough, it was also unclear which republic they referred to: that of the Bamberg mini-cabinet,² or that of the council republic of the Bavarian workers and peasants?

On December 20, 1924, I was released from the Niederschönenfeld Fortress after my sentence had been reduced to eight years and I had been given probation for the remaining time due to good conduct.³ The punishment had, contrary to the sentencing, no longer any relations to the monarchy. In the monarchy, confinement in a fortress meant privileged treatment for officers and students. In the republic, however, confinement in a fortress was turned into a tool of revenge, with the aim of physically and morally crushing the proletarians and their advocates. I have already compiled a book on this, based on the material I was able to collect. It is called *Niederschönenfeld. Eine Chronik in Eingaben* [Niederschönenfeld: A Chronicle in Petitions]. It will be published as soon as I have found a publisher.⁴ I hope it will help reveal the disinformation campaigns of the authorities both with respect to the situation of us fortress prisoners and to the events that brought us there.

On July 14, 1928, the Reich's amnesty law cleared my legal record and forced the Bavarian judiciary to return the manuscripts they had confiscated over the years. While looking through the material, I found a copy of this text.

I probably would have never written this account (and definitely not in this form) had it not been for the publication of P. Werner's *Die Bayrische Räterepublik. Tatsachen und Kritik* [The Bavarian Council Republic: Facts and Critique]. Werner's booklet was perceived by all of us fortress prisoners—irrespective of political affiliation—as nothing but malicious and biased propaganda. Today, I am much less infuriated by the account, especially since I have learned that the author is a communist comrade who was a KPD member at the time and who has now been expelled.⁵ I personally know and respect him in many ways and am convinced of his personal integrity, despite all the confusion and party bias in his text. Nonetheless, I still feel a strong need to rectify the “facts” he presents, as they are exclusively based on one-sided information. P. Werner's “critique” must be rebuked as completely off-target.

Concerning the individuals Werner brushes away with the mere wave of a hand, it has to be said that he knew nothing about them. According to Werner, Gustav Landauer had done nothing but “publish a number of historical works” — apart from the fact that Landauer had done much more, this even distorts the nature of his literary output. It is also ludicrous to say that Landauer approached the Bavarian Revolution “with ethical-insurrectionist intentions” and was “forced into a conflict contradicting his own principles.”

The fact that I had been involved in the workers' movement for about eighteen years before the revolution came, did not stop Werner from calling me “an epigone of those (*those!*) merry café poets described by Peter Hille”;⁶ to Werner, I was a “political child” whose “moving naïveté” earned me at least some sympathies.

Silvio Gesell,⁷ whose name is misspelled throughout the text, is mocked as a kind of economic quack doctor, while Werner has no proper knowledge of his ideas whatsoever. Gesell's theories are entirely based on Proudhon, by the way, something Werner also denies.

Werner's critique of other participants in the First Council Republic⁸ is based on statements made in court. Neither we, the protagonists of the First Council Republic, nor the KPD members had this information at the time, for example the scandalous confession of the peasants' delegate Kübler⁹ that he had only accepted his post in the council republic to prevent it from falling into the hands of more radical comrades. Werner must have known that Kübler always professed radical ideas, which is why he was trusted by the revolutionaries.

The distinction between the "sham council republic" and the council republic run by the KPD (supposedly the only "true" one) was drawn by the party communists to justify to the proletariat its lack of support for the First Council Republic. The presentation of this nonsense in a published account of the council republic can only be characterized as demagogic historical revisionism. The workers associated with the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" the simple notion that the oppressed class throws off the chains of capitalism in a revolutionary uprising in order to exercise self-determination over its own affairs through its councils. This is all they were interested in. They knew nothing about a distinction between the council republic proclaimed on April 7 and a council republic that formed on April 13 under a new administration. They fought for *one and the same* council republic, risking their lives and sacrificing their freedom. They were the comrades who shouted after Eisner's murder (and even before) "Power to the Councils!," who demanded the proclamation of the council republic in early April, who refused to accept a reactionary bourgeois dictatorship in Bavaria modeled after the one in northern Germany,¹⁰ who forced the ill-prepared events from April 4 to 6, who declared their confidence in the Central Council of the "sham council republic" on April 11, who stormed Munich's Central Station after the Palm Sunday Coup,¹¹ and who sacrificed their lives as Red Guards, were executed, or spent years in the dungeons of the vindictive social democratic justice system.

The one thing I would like P. Werner to know is that his biased account evoked outrage among *all* of the Red Guards in the fortress (apart from a few whose personal discipline kept them from commenting) and that there were quite a few comrades from the KPD among the prisoners who urged me to write a response.

In late summer of 1920, I learned from communist papers we received in the fortress that Werner's text was the only document on the revolutionary movement in Bavaria that was widely read—apparently also, and even especially, in Russia. It was only then that I decided to heed my comrades' call and write a text correcting at least some of Werner's false claims.

I was in a very bad state at the time. I had been sent to prison for two months for libel against the Bavarian Minister of Justice, Müller-Meiningen.¹² When I returned to the fortress in Ansbach, where I was confined at the time, the comrades who I had spent a year with and gotten close to had been transferred to Niederschönenfeld. I had only four fellow inmates left, one of whom was later exposed as an informant. His main tasks were to undermine my reputation among the comrades by means of defamation, to keep an eye on my activities (for example, my entire correspondence was handed to this prisoner before I received it), and to isolate me. Unfortunately, he succeeded. Out of the other three inmates, one is now with the nationalist extremists, one ended up in a monastery, and the only one who remained true to the revolutionary cause was threatened into joining the boycott against me. During this time, in which I was even subjected to physical assaults, I wrote the report presented here. It had to be based entirely on my own memory.

In my eyes, Werner's main mistake was to rely exclusively on hearsay. This is the reason why he is not doing the events he meant to portray any justice. When I wrote my account, I knew that I could only include the parts I had experienced and partly initiated myself. Perhaps wrongly, I omitted many things that did not seem very important at the time. For example, I did not mention the developments in the ministry of war during the first days of the Bavarian Revolution, which were in many ways eye-opening. I was working in the security department and had my first serious disagreements with the social democratic minister of defense.

When I wrote the account, not much time had passed since the collapse of the revolution, and many things seemed mainly anecdotal to me. Should I get another opportunity to write the true history of the Bavarian Revolution—hopefully, with the possibility to draw on other material as well—I promise to make up for this. What is mandatory, I think, is to put the events into historical perspective. In this respect, too, P. Werner failed completely. Otherwise, he would have at least mentioned the obvious example of the Paris Commune, which shared many features with the Bavarian Council Republic.

Like I said, I did not have the means to do a comparative historical study. However, I want to use this preface for at least one comparative reference, which is very important to me for two reasons: one, the party communists love to hold the anarchists—by which they always mean Gustav Landauer and me—responsible for the mistakes of the so-called “sham council republic”; two, even many of our anarchist comrades often believe that our undertaking was condemned to fail from the outset due to the power of the KPD and its Marxist doctrines. I believe that I can respond to both criticisms with a quote by Friedrich Engels, who, in 1891, in his introduction to Karl Marx's *Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich* [The Civil War in France] wrote the following words about the collaboration between Proudhonists and Blanquists in the Paris Commune: “What was more important [than the

previously criticized failures] were the many things that were accomplished by this commune consisting of both Proudhonists and Blanquists. Of course the Proudhonists were primarily responsible for the economic resolutions (for better or worse), and the Blanquists for the political decrees. However, as it is usually the case when doctrinarians take control, in the end both did the opposite of what their doctrine demanded. Such is the irony of history."

Does this not perfectly sum up the roles of the KPD and of the anarchists in the Bavarian Council Republic? On the crucial night from April 4 to 5, Landauer and I decided, against our usual convictions, that it did not really matter whether or not the proclamation of the council republic happened with the mandate of the factory workers. Furthermore, despite certain concerns, we had decided to participate in a provisional "government," thinking that this was a historical necessity. The party communists, on the other hand, who generally imposed authoritarianism on the masses, criticized our actions, because they insisted that a council republic could only to be built from the bottom up. Nonetheless, on April 13, the pressure of the events forced them to do exactly what we had done a week earlier. Unfortunately, the party egoism of the KPD had prevented collaboration at that decisive moment. Otherwise, some mistakes of the First Council Republic might have had less fateful consequences, some mistakes of the second might have been avoided, and the many things that had been achieved during both (at least in terms of goodwill) might have led to real success.

My account was written in the form of a letter with the address, "For purposes of information to the creators of the Russian Soviet Republic, Attention of Comrade Lenin." Today, it might seem strange for an anarchist to make such a choice. One must remember, however, that at the time the text was written, the civil war in Russia was still in progress. We knew that the Red Guards (whose organizer Trotsky we admired) were engaged in the fight against the White bands of Kolchak, Yudenich, Denikin, etc., and we had no idea that the revolutionary proletarian forces were already being corrupted and that the absolute power of the councils was replaced with the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party. The terrible crime against the sailors and workers defending the rights of their councils in Kronstadt only happened later, and if we had heard the name of Nestor Makhno at all, then only in connection with the Bolsheviks and the Ukrainian anarchists commonly fighting the White Guards of Denikin and Petliura.

Lenin's name symbolized to all of us the tremendous force of the Russian Revolution. Bolshevism was a formula for the revolutionary council idea. The Russian Revolution itself was a burning fire, a shining star, a glowing beacon of hope. How could I have known in 1920 what Russia would be like in 1929? Therefore, I will not omit anything of what I wrote at the time. I have no reason to be ashamed of my words.

This is why I decided to leave the text exactly as I had first written it. Of course I see many things differently today. But each alteration, even the tiniest addition, would distort the image of who I was in 1919 and of what I thought in 1920. Ten years after the events, I do not want to tell the world what I think of all this today. I want people to know what I had to say right after the events, which I had witnessed and participated in. The readers are welcome to criticize my actions and intentions. I do not want to bend the truth by pretending I knew more than I actually did.

The handwritten draft of the original text was smuggled out of the fortress in the fall of 1920. Then, typed copies were produced. One of them was meant to be returned to me by regular mail. It ended up being confiscated by the censors. It is this document that is now in my possession again and that has been printed here.

Another copy of the text was brought to Moscow by a comrade in 1921 and was, if the information is correct, read by Lenin.¹³ Whether it is true, as I was assured of, that the text convinced him of the mistakes his Bavarian party comrades had committed, I do not know. It would need someone who was there to confirm this. However, this matters little. What matters is that, with the publication of this text, we finally have an alternative to the biased material about the Bavarian Revolution that has been available so far. What matters even more—in fact, what matters the most—is that the revolutionary proletariat of today and of tomorrow can learn from our mistakes and failures while gaining strength and inspiration from what we *did* achieve in the ongoing struggle of liberation from misery, slavery, and the state.

Berlin-Britz, February 1929, Erich Mühsam

Comrades!

My dear Russian comrades, there have been so many misleading and biased reports about the history of the Bavarian Council Republic that, as someone who has experienced the revolution in Munich from its first day, I consider it my duty to present a picture that will show the events in a less gloomy light. Of course I am aware that, as a direct participant in the revolution, my account can only be subjective. It should become obvious, however, that it is in no way my intention to cover up the mistakes that have been made. At the same time, I deem it necessary to present an alternative to P. Werner's account *Die Bayrische Räterepublik. Tatsachen und Kritik*. Werner's account has so far been regarded as a reliable source. To me, it is a self-righteous attempt to glorify the role of the KPD and to defame everything that was not instigated by the party. With my account, I hope to allow outsiders to form their own picture—or to rectify the picture they already have—of what actually took place in Bavaria during the weeks in question.

I have no intention to talk about the, in my opinion, crucial mistakes that were made by the leaders of the KPD in a condescending or accusing manner. Crucial mistakes were made by everyone. I believe that the task for us revolutionaries lies in looking critically at ourselves, and not in trying to defend our personal opinions with dubious claims against those who are, in fact, not enemies but simply people whose opinions might differ from ours. At the same time, I see no reason why wrong accusations should stand unchallenged, and I especially think that I have the duty to clear the memory of the great revolutionary Gustav Landauer, my teacher and best friend, who was slaughtered on May 2, 1919, by White Guards.

I want to clarify right at the beginning that this text can only lead to a very basic understanding of the events. After the proletarian revolution was crushed, I was sentenced to fifteen years of detention by a drumhead court-martial in Munich. I will soon have done one and a half out of these fifteen years. My hope for revolutionary developments in Germany, including Bavaria, is so strong that I happily delay the presentation of a historically accurate and extensive report on the Bavarian Revolution from November 7, 1918, to April 13, 1919 (the day of my arrest and deportation from Munich), until I will be freed, have access to all the necessary documents and papers needed to fulfill such a task, and do no longer have to submit my writing to censors. This is also the reason why it is not my intention here to polemicize against Werner or other historians, but only to present my views, entirely personal, in broad strokes to you, comrade Lenin, and to whoever else you decide to share this report with.

The following information might help you understand who I am: I first came in contact with revolutionary politics in Germany at the age of twenty-two (in 1900) and became part of the communist-anarchist movement under the guidance of Gustav Landauer. I have since remained loyal to this movement. Some early lack of clarity brought me close to Stirner, then, under Landauer's influence, to Proudhon. This had to be overcome before realizing the necessity of the uncompromising and unconditional class struggle. Concerning its means, I always followed Mikhail Bakunin, and concerning its goals—with slight reservations—Peter Kropotkin.

In 1909, my Bakuninism led me to the attempt of organizing the lumpenproletariat in Munich. I ended up in court in 1910. However, the article on conspiracy cited by the prosecution proved ineffective and the code of law contained no provisions of use in this case; as a result, I was acquitted.¹⁴ I tried to spread revolutionary ideas in a monthly journal entitled *Kain* (founded in 1911), particularly among the academic youth and artistic bohemia. My intention was to make intellectuals aware of their natural affiliation with the proletariat. When the war broke out, I suspended the journal's publication because I was not willing to submit my thoughts to military censorship.

During the war, I was in regular contact with many revolutionaries. In 1916, I attempted to unite all revolutionary socialists without consideration of academic

formulas in an illegal alliance to take action. The attempt failed, but it also brought me to Berlin on April 16, where I discussed the idea with a cautious yet sympathizing Karl Liebknecht. I had not been entirely without support—I had Landauer on my side and the late comrade Westmeyer (Stuttgart).¹⁵ In my opinion, the failure of the attempt was due to the conspiring maneuvers of some USPD leaders I had tried to include in my plans.

In 1917, I corresponded with Franz Mehring about my idea to reorganize the Second International. My opinion was that the suspension of the London Resolution from 1896, which had excluded anarchists and anti-parliamentarians,¹⁶ would cause the entire Scheidemann wing to leave, and would thus revitalize the revolutionary spirit.

In the spring of 1917, Kurt Eisner started to organize weekly study circles in Munich, in which he evaluated and discussed the most recent political developments from his democratic-pacifist perspective. After some of his younger listeners had asked me to join, I strongly opposed Eisner by confronting his democratic ideal with the ideal of socialism, and his Entente-chauvinistic war opportunism with my revolutionary internationalism. Eisner called himself a Jaurèsist,¹⁷ while truly reiterating the views of Eduard Bernstein.¹⁸ What led to an open rift between him and me were our opposing views on the Russian Revolution. Following his bourgeois mentality, Eisner praised Kerensky.¹⁹ The June Offensive seemed to him the beginning of a new (the Wilsonian) era.²⁰ The passage of the Bolsheviks through Germany meant treason and proved to him that Lenin and Trotsky were Ludendorff's puppets.²¹ Contrary to this, I expressed my disgust with the politics of Kerensky who made the proletarian Russian Revolution serve Western imperialism, and who, in order to please French and English capitalism, executed revolutionary deserters. My strong defense of your insurrectionist plans and the adoption of the term "maximalist" for myself,²² drew the wrath of Eisner to the point where, from about mid-December on, I was no longer welcome at the study circles.

When the January strikes began,²³ in which Eisner played a leading role in Munich hoping they would incite the revolution, his first order was to prohibit me from speaking. "Front Against the Left!" became the leitmotif of a supposedly proletarian revolution. Eisner's minions followed this order loyally. This is why, at first, I avoided the fate of Eisner and some of his closest comrades, namely arrest.²⁴ A few months later, however (in April), I was sent to Traunstein, because military emergency laws were enforced.²⁵ I was detained there until the German Army collapsed. (There were no preventive custody laws in Bavaria before it became a republic.)

I decided to include this personal information to counter the suggestion that the council republicans from April 6 had no political experience. This certainly does not apply to me. As I have mentioned, my sympathies for Bolshevism date back to Kerensky's time. Back then, I even had the opportunity to defend these sympathies

against Russians: my (illegal) social interactions in Traunstein mainly consisted of dealing with incarcerated Russian civilians who were all Mensheviks, and among whom I was the only one defending and supporting Bolshevism—as a German!

The revolution in Munich started two days before the one in Berlin, on November 7, 1918, the anniversary of your victory!²⁶ Its political dynamics carried it far beyond any of the plans that Eisner had made with the counterrevolutionary social patriot Auer.²⁷ Originally, the two wanted to do little more than extort a “purely democratic” constitution from the government by means of a mass demonstration. They had no intention of toppling the monarchy. They simply wanted to install a “socialist” cabinet, or at least a cabinet containing some so-called socialists. Their promises were the usual: inheritance tax, dissolution of the upper house, taxation of war profits, etc. Eisner only instigated the formation of a workers’ council in the evening, several hours after the end of the official demonstration at the Theresienwiese,²⁸ when he realized that the mood among the masses was revolutionary. The crowd had grown dramatically and the demonstrators were joined by the entire Munich Garrison, defying orders to remain in the barracks. I had already proclaimed Bavaria a republic and called for the formation of workers’ and soldiers’ councils in the afternoon. Eisner only proclaimed Bavaria a “socialist republic” after a workers’ council had been formed with him as chairman. The very same evening, Auer demanded five hundred “reliable” units from the military authorities in order to suppress the revolutionary movement. However, such soldiers were no longer to be found. Since I was busy agitating on the streets until late at night, I took not part in the formation of the workers’ council and was only informed about the events at the Landtag the next morning.

I wanted to include this brief historical introduction to emphasize the special character of the first workers’ council, which was going to play an important role during the months to come. It constituted itself spontaneously from about fifty proletarians actively involved in the revolution. These proletarians gathered around Eisner who was at the time immensely popular. The Revolutionary Workers’ Council (*Revolutionärer Arbeiterrat*) (RWC) that they formed remained the strongest force of the Bavarian Revolution until April 1919. Its regulations included the right to expel unreliable members and to appoint comrades of their own choosing.

While, on November 9, Eisner formed a “socialist” government with himself as minister president and the traitor Auer as minister of the interior, the RWC went straight to work. Already on the second day, it used its powers to call me into its midst—very much against Eisner’s will. Shortly after that, we appointed Gustav Landauer, who had arrived in Munich some days after the revolution’s beginning. It was the RWC which then initiated the formation of the Munich Workers’ Council (MWC) after elections in the factories. The RWC also organized elections for workers’ councils all over Bavaria, and prepared a general organization of Bavarian

councils, including soldiers' and peasants' councils, with a Bavarian Central Council (BCC) at its head. All fifty members of the RWC entered the MWC, and we also attended the first constituent meeting of the general council organization.

The MWC consisted of four hundred members. Our first resolution was that no official representatives of the SPD or of the trade unions were allowed in our ranks. We argued that it was necessary not to compromise the council as a representative body of the workers. When the leaders of the reactionary trade unions attended the first public meeting of the MWC nonetheless, we physically threw them out. We were fifty men against four hundred, but we set the tone.

The revolutionary spirit of the RWC grew constantly stronger because wavering men were expelled while dedicated revolutionaries were appointed. Eisner, who was still the official chairman but never acted as such, soon realized that this body was his most dangerous enemy. As its chairman, he was summoned by it only once: in January, he was asked to justify his highly ambiguous politics.

In the beginning of the revolution, the differences between the different currents were very murky. The members of the RWC belonged for the most part to the USPD. Landauer, me, and two or three workers, were anarchists and not organized in any party. Quite a few comrades—and by no means the worst—were formally still members of Scheidemann's SPD. We never asked anyone if and where they were organized. The only thing that mattered to us was how they acted as individuals. Our sole condition was that they had the will to pursue the revolution until a socialist society, based on the council idea, could be implemented. The KPD did not yet exist. The Spartacus League existed as the left wing of the USPD, but had no presence in Bavaria.

In late November, I founded a revolutionary proletarian organization. To give you an idea of it, I present the following leaflet, which was published on November 30. It had a great impact on the proletariat's revolutionary vanguard.

Revolutionary and Internationalist Communist Workers and Soldiers! Men and women!

Not everyone is happy with how the revolution has developed.

We are not happy with the restriction of revolutionary demands to everyday political causes. We demand the realization of socialism as the crowning of the current people's movement.

The end of the world war together with the world revolution means the collapse of capitalism. On its rubble we do not want to preserve the old but to create the new. We do not care about the way, we care about the goal. The means of revolution is revolution. This does not mean murder and slaughter, but visionary work and construction. With these means we want to create a just socialist society, so we can give the same example to the brothers of the

International that our Russian comrades have given before. Just like them, we want to make the love for humankind the guideline for our actions.

First, we have to enlighten the people and to gather the forces recognizing that the salvation of the world lies in the revitalization of a radical and uncompromising socialist-communist International. We call upon the Bavarian and the German people to help us unite with the people of all countries in order to smash international capitalism and imperialism, and to make both manual and intellectual workers the beneficiaries of their own labor.

Long Live the Freedom of the People! Long Live the World Revolution!
Long Live the Socialist International!

Alliance of Revolutionary Internationalists of Bavaria.

Erich Mühsam - Jos. Merl - Hilde Kramer - F.A. Fister²⁹

This very general call to action did not mention the fundamental communist demand, namely the council dictatorship, with a single word, and it only hinted at the sympathies we had for you Bolsheviks. Yet, it represented the most radical left that existed in Munich at the time.

We organized meetings for the masses every day. This was the only way we could do the work that so urgently needed to be done: to disperse the deeply rooted reservations against Bolshevism among the people; to destroy the superstitious belief in liberation via parliamentarism, promised by Eisner; to popularize the term "communism"; and to gather the revolutionary will under the formula, *All Power to the Councils!*

Very soon, the Alliance of Revolutionary Internationalists (*Bund Revolutionärer Internationalisten*) (ARI) gathered much support among the revolutionary workers. Its meetings became the focal point of the opposition against Eisner's bourgeois-democratic politics; an opposition that grew stronger by the day. I am certain that the growth of our organization was mainly due to forgoing party structures. I used to tell the workers: "Keep records if you want, and as many as you want...or don't. We don't want to argue about questions of organization. The ARI wants to gather all those who wish to direct the revolution toward communism and who want to know how to do this. Propagate our ideas in your party, your union, your factory, your circle of friends!"

Proper membership did not exist. The means for agitation, etc., were raised by donations. Our committed work within the proletariat proved very rewarding. In the late evening of December 6, after I had given a speech against the rottenness and treachery of the press, the audience basically forced me to lead a march to the office of a particularly despised clerical paper. Since we were joined by about one thousand soldiers along the way, we ended up occupying almost all of Munich's bourgeois newspaper offices that night. Instantly informed by the reactionary

forces, minister president Eisner appeared personally with the town major and the chief of police. At the time, the workers still held him in high enough regard to end the occupation. The press he had liberated thanked him by orchestrating a smear campaign against him, which finally led to his assassination at the hands of Anton Graf Arco on February 21.³⁰

The ARI met daily in a small circle in the side room of an inn. Many members were also in the RWC. During these meetings, the bookkeeping took place, the leaflets and posters were prepared, and our principles and tactics were discussed.

In late December, we were approached by comrade Max Levien who wanted us to become the local chapter of the Spartacus League. I was opposed to this. (Landauer, who lived away and only came to Munich occasionally, was not part of the group.) I feared that forming a party would have the same consequences it had always had in Germany: the submission of the proletarian revolutionary will to party interests. Furthermore, I could not agree with the point in the Spartacus League's program that demanded a unified, centralist council republic for all of Germany. Bavaria, and all of southern Germany, only joined the Reich fifty years ago. Prussia had always dominated the Reich, and the last war of German states against Prussia only dated back to 1866. Separatist sentiments were very strong in Bavaria; in turn, the "unification" pursued by the "democratic" government and the social democratic parties was extremely unpopular. I explain the current rise of reactionary forces in Bavaria (which makes it, at the time I am writing this, the German Vendée) mainly by the instinctive hatred that the peasant, and partly also the proletarian, Bavarian feels toward "Prussianization." I explained the special situation in Bavaria to Levien and got the support of the ARI. At the same time, the debate made it very clear that joining a revolutionary party organization was an urgent wish of many comrades. Therefore, I suggested joining Bremen's IKD. Like me, the comrades in the IKD wished to maintain the federalist character of Germany.³¹ The ARI comrades approved, and we joined the organization in the north. Personally, I tried to find a compromise: on the one hand, I wanted to retain my integrity as an anarchist; on the other, I wanted to express my total solidarity with the comrades. As a consequence, I became an IKD member, but only as an observer. I did, however, dedicate a few copies of my journal *Kain*, which I had resurrected in November, to discussions of the IKD. Despite joining the International Communists, the ARI continued to exist in its own right.

In early January, after the Spartacus League had left the USPD and founded the KPD by uniting with the IKD, the revolutionaries whose unification I had initiated (it shall become clearer later why I emphasize this) turned into the Munich chapter of the KPD under the leadership of comrade Levien.

In the beginning, Levien and I worked together very closely. It was in a spirit of strong camaraderie. We were very productive. Many posters calling for meetings

were commonly signed by the local KPD chapter and the ARI. At many meetings, Levien and I appeared as speakers together. We also spoke separately at simultaneous meetings after we had agreed on the contents of our speeches. The ARI slowly became unnecessary. The KPD provided me with plenty of opportunity to address the masses. In many meetings, I was their appointed speaker and often had to replace Levien when he was not available. The party even sent me to rally support outside of Munich. Among the revolutionary workers, Levien and I were equally popular, I believe, although it was known that I was no party member.

I am convinced that the rapid revolutionization of Munich's proletariat happened because of the decision to boycott the scheduled elections for the national assembly and the Bavarian Landtag. The boycott was supported by both the KPD and the ARI. Propagating parliamentarianism was so central to the social democratic belief system that workers who became disillusioned with the social democratic leaders also became disillusioned with parliamentary politics. By advocating the council republic instead of parliamentary democracy, we won the support of the proletariat's most revolutionary sections.

On November 8, Eisner had promised the fast implementation of the Landtag. Facing the growing radicalization of the workers, it was the reactionary forces that now demanded from Eisner to stand by his promise. The support for the Landtag, or lack thereof, defined the border between the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary proletariat. I have no doubt that if the KPD had decided to run in the elections, the party—or at least the Munich chapter—would have dissolved, since the vast majority of workers organized in the KPD were strongly opposed to parliamentary politics. Even Eisner, a firm believer in parliamentarism, had to acknowledge the growing resistance against his politics, especially within the RWC. This was hardly surprising, considering that Eisner's vision for the councils amounted to little more than a "side parliament" with a few monitoring rights.

Eisner tried to play for time. He tried to appease the bourgeoisie with promises of returning the last army units, and even the prisoners, from the war. In late December, however, an armed demonstration of reactionary army regiments finally forced him to announce elections for January 12, 1919.

Since Eisner feared disruptions of the elections from our side, he decided to resort to violence on January 10. In the early morning, he had the leading figures of the KPD and the RWC arrested. In total twelve people, among them Levien and me. However, the act backfired and Eisner lost the last sympathies he had had with the masses since his courageous stance during the January strike and the proclamation of the republic in November. A spontaneous demonstration marched to the ministry of foreign affairs and demanded our release. Eisner wanted to avoid this under all circumstances and refused to even negotiate with a speaker of the demonstration. Finally, the sailor Rudolf Eglhofer, later commander-in-chief of

the Red Army,³² made his way into the ministry by climbing up the walls of the building and into Eisner's office. Eisner realized how angry the masses were and ordered our immediate release. In the Landtag, where the masses awaited us, we were received with thunderous applause. Eisner had lost his gamble: while the revolutionary workers had now lost all trust in him, the reactionary forces had regained enough strength to attack him and to replace him with Auer, who was ready to do anything against the proletarians.

The bourgeois hatred against Eisner had other reasons than the fear of socialist radicalism. It was rooted in nationalism. Eisner had adopted the rhetoric of the Entente against the *Boches*,³³ and while he did by no means fight capitalism, he had turned against (righteously, I might add) militarism, the corruption of the press (although he never dared to really challenge the power of the press), bureaucratic inflexibility, secret diplomacy, and chauvinism. These moves were perceived as shameful and dangerous by orthodox nationalists. In his very first proclamation as minister president, Eisner took a bow in front of the "great patriot" Clemenceau, and later, following his sympathies for Wilson, he published Bavarian documents to prove Germany's responsibility for the war. As a socialist, however, the Bavarian capitalists really did not have to fear him. It took Eisner only a few days in office to publish a declaration reassuring the capitalists that an attack on their exploitative interests was out of the question. Eisner stated that there was no need to contemplate socialization if there was nothing to socialize. He took the stand that the capitalist system that had collapsed during the war had to recover and blossom again before it could "grow into" socialism.

Generally, the bourgeoisie could have been content with Eisner. In one of his resolutions, he reinstalled all officers and civil servants driven out by the masses. In the fight against Bolshevism he gave minister Auer, who controlled the police, a free hand. As a result, we had our posters banned and our leaflet distributors arrested, while the *Liga zur Bekämpfung des Bolschewismus* [League Against Bolshevism]³⁴ could freely call for pogroms. The two other SPD ministers assisted their colleague Auer loyally. Mr. Timm, controlling the judiciary, used the old paragraphs of the monarchist code of law against revolutionaries, and Mr. Roßhaupter, the minister of defense,³⁵ served as a tool for the Wittelsbach officers in their fight against the soldiers' councils.³⁶

After the elections, which brought a devastating loss for Eisner's party and strong gains for the "Aurochs," as I liked to call the SPD members in meetings,³⁷ the revolutionary masses grew more and more impatient. Two events brought the tensions to a head.

First, Roßhaupter reinstated the rights of the officers of the old regime that delivered the soldiers' councils to their mercy; he also declared that he was going to dissolve the soldiers' councils because they were unnecessary given the imminent end of military power. Strangely enough, these announcements received their

strongest support from the Central Soldiers' Council itself. When the radical wing of the MWC sent deputies to a meeting of the Central Soldiers' Council in early February, demanding the dismissal of Roßhaupter (I was the messenger), the council members flatly rejected us. In the barracks and among the workers, however, this attack against the revolution caused extreme concern.

The other event concerns a speech that comrade Levien—who had also become a RWC member by now—held in the MWC. He called for a committed struggle against the bourgeoisie that had to be fought “eye to eye, chest to chest.” The consequence was his arrest based on the article of incitement in the old criminal code. The RWC organized a special meeting of the MWC, in which it was unanimously decided to demand Levien's unconditional release. Delegates were sent to see the state prosecutor. They came back with no results, having been told that the gentleman had just gone to the movies. The next step was to elect three RWC delegates to see the minister of justice, Timm, the following day, threatening a mass demonstration. The delegates were the comrades Landauer, Hagemeister,³⁸ and I. Mr. Timm hid behind the state prosecutor, who was his subordinate, and made no promises. However, Levien was released the same afternoon. Mr. Timm must have understood that refusing to do so would have put him and, in fact, Eisner's entire cabinet in danger.

This was on February 9, a memorable day for the Bavarian Revolution. In the evening, the MWC was going to meet at the German Theater. In the afternoon, the RWC discussed the current situation in the Landtag and decided to file a motion for the organization of a mass demonstration in the MWC. During the debate, comrade Levien entered the room, arriving directly from prison. Following a proposal by Landauer, we decided to march together to the German Theater with a red flag in order to join the MWC meeting. So it happened.

Due to the significance of the meeting—nothing less than the basic right of free speech was at stake—all stewards from Munich's shops and factories had been invited to attend. They filled the rows of the two bottom levels, while the balcony was filled with KPD members. When the RWC, led by Levien under the red flag, entered the hall, the welcome was enthusiastic.

The meeting itself developed dramatically. Levien gave a stirring speech in which he stressed that he was released from custody because the rulers feared the proletariat's revolutionary wrath, but that the criminal proceedings against him were continuing. Meanwhile, two comrades showed me letters from the investigating magistrate. The two had been called as witnesses in a case against me. Apparently, the government now wanted to sentence me for “disturbing the peace,” two months after the occupation of the press offices on December 6. When I told the assembly about this, many demanded a demonstration forcing the government to guarantee that none of the old penal clauses would ever be used against revolutionaries.

The debate was very emotional, and when we radicals requested that the resignation of Auer, Timm, and Roßhaupter *and* the suspension of the elections for the Landtag should be demanded, there was a scuffle. In the end, the SPD workers, who constituted a big majority in the MWC, left the hall in protest. Landauer jumped on the empty chairman's desk and asked the shop and factory stewards to take the empty seats as true representatives of the proletariat. Under thunderous applause from the stands, and while I waved the red flag on the podium, the rearrangement took place. Once things had quieted down, a unanimous decision was made to organize a demonstration on February 16. The demonstration's demand should be the suspension of the political laws. Apart from that, it should demonstrate the proletariat's revolutionary commitment both to the government and to the people.

The same week, a general Bavarian Council Congress assembled in Munich. Its main purpose was to define the powers of the Landtag. The Landtag was to be convoked on February 21. In the Council Congress, the RWC was represented by ten members, one of whom was I.

Eisner had just returned from the Socialist Congress in Bern, where he had held an apologetic speech in front of the representatives of the Entente countries, pleading for the admission of Germany to the League of Nations³⁹ as well as to its socialist dependency, the Second International. He had earned the sympathies of Renaudel and his comrades⁴⁰ but provoked the wrath of the German nationalists—to a point that would later cost him his life.

The reactionary press—the “freedom” of which he had never touched despite our repeated warnings—accused him in defamatory ways of supporting the French's intention to keep German prisoners of war (the opposite had been the case). Circles of students and military officers openly demanded his assassination. Even within his own cabinet, a shrewd intrigue was spun against him: upon returning from Bern, Eisner found out that Auer and Roßhaupter (who Eisner himself had appointed as ministers) had already formed a shadow cabinet. Auer himself claimed the presidency, while Eisner and his two USPD aids, the minister of social welfare, Unterleitner, and the minister of finance, Jaffé (by far the most revolutionary minister in Eisner's government), had been ditched.⁴¹ A very emotional Eisner disclosed these plans at the Council Congress. Roßhaupter was personally present. The next day, however, the cabinet held a meeting without any consequences. Eisner even defended “his friend” when Landauer called Roßhaupter a “Noske ape.”⁴² As a result, I demanded that the entire cabinet should be dismissed and replaced by a revolutionary body.

Meanwhile, the RWC prepared the demonstration on February 16 with a lot of dedication. Our intention was to give it a clearly revolutionary character, especially since it became known that the social democrats wanted to participate in it in order to rally for “democracy,” “quiet and order,” and the parliament. However, most party and trade union leaders realized early enough that the sentiments of the

masses were against them, and so they ordered the other social democrats to stay home. Eisner, on the other hand, who had long tried to sabotage the entire event, knew that his authority among the proletariat was profoundly shaken and decided to spearhead the march himself—not least in order to sabotage its revolutionary character. By doing so he hoped to achieve two things at once: one, to turn a protest against the government into a rally of confidence for himself; two, to strengthen his popularity among the masses. The latter seemed necessary if he wanted to align himself with the radical opposition once he was ousted from government—which, given the moves of the SPD cabinet members, had to be expected soon.

Eisner's intention failed in every respect. When the masses gathered on February 16 on the Theresienwiese for a demonstration never before seen in Munich, Eisner appeared in an open vehicle. Contrary to his expectations, however, there were no ovations, and he could gather the discontent of the proletariat from the passion with which the assembled men and women carried the banners that had been distributed by the RWC. It was obvious that the only symbol accepted to represent the convictions of those marching was the red flag, which was carried along by thousands. Among the slogans painted on signs were the following:

"Remember Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg!"

"All Power to the Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils!"

"A Sovereign People Allows No State Prosecutor to Stop the Revolution!"

"Long Live Lenin and Trotsky!"

"Don't Let Babblers Represent You, the People Rule Themselves in Their Councils!"

"The Workers' and Soldiers' Councils Don't Dance to the Landtag's Tune!"

"Enough Workers' Blood Has Been Shed—Disarm the White Guards!"

"Eight More Days of This and the Bloodhound Noske Will Shoot in Bavaria!"

"Down With the Dictatorship of Capitalism! Long Live the Dictatorship of Socialism!"

The red flags flew from all of Munich's public buildings and from many private homes along the way. Fifteen thousand people might have taken part. The KPD alone made up a whole bloc. Various regiments of the Munich Garrison constituted entire blocs as well. The disabled were taken along in carts. Many delegates of the Council Congress participated, and various factories were represented by delegations. The RWC, as the organizer, carried a huge revolutionary emblem and was greeted with cheers. Eisner, however, driving at the head of a march that protested his own politics, felt so out of place that he left halfway through the demonstration and joined the ministers Unterleitner and Jaffé who awaited the delegation of the masses in the German Theater. There, Landauer, as the delegation's speaker, presented the proletariat's demands. Meanwhile, the march continued through the main streets of the city under hails for Soviet Russia and the Bolsheviks, and

jeers for Noske, Auer, Scheidemann, Roßhaupter, the press, and the bourgeoisie. In front of the ministry of war, from which huge red flags were suspended, one could hear angry shouts, especially from the soldiers, "Down with Roßhaupter!" There were very positive responses from the windows of Roßhaupter's own ministry.

Later in the afternoon, the march returned to the Theresienwiese, where the results of Landauer's meeting with the government were delivered: Eisner had agreed to stop the legal persecution of Levien and myself and had promised to demand the abolition of the political laws in the ministerial council. The tangible results of the demonstration were therefore modest. The masses were not content and expressed desire to march to Eisner's ministry. However, after a short meeting of a few members of the RWC and the KPD, we agreed that this contained incalculable risks and that we did not want to jeopardize what was the biggest success of the demonstration, namely that we had sent a very strong message to the bourgeoisie and the passive citizens. Therefore, we asked everyone to go home. Levien and I gave the closing speeches. We stressed the necessity to continue the fight against Eisner's government and praised the proletarian world revolution.

The Council Congress ended a few days later and transferred all of its powers to the Landtag, which was to assemble on February 21 in the same building. In response to inquiries of our comrades as to which powers should remain with the workers' councils, Eisner said (as far as I remember on February 18, the last time I saw him) that he intended to force all inns to have a common menu and that the workers' councils were meant to supervise this. I told him that I was really looking forward to the meals at the *Regina-Palast-Hotel*,⁴³ but that we revolutionaries would prefer an actual improvement of the economic situation in Bavaria over jokes. I demanded, under applause from the stands, that Eisner should establish diplomatic relationships with Soviet Russia and pursue economic collaboration, no matter what Berlin might think. Eisner did not respond.

I am mentioning this to illustrate the mindset of a leading and hugely influential USPD figure at the time: right from the outset, Eisner's intention had been to diminish the influence of the councils and to render their activities completely insignificant. With regard to his position toward Soviet Russia nothing had changed since Kerensky's time. When Eisner was questioned by the RWC in January, I was the elected RWC speaker. Already then, I asked him how he saw the future relationship of his government to Russia. His literal response was: "I entertain no relationship to a government that works with millions." I assume you Russian comrades have received a personal account by comrade Towia Axelrod⁴⁴ on how Eisner executed his wrath against the Bolsheviks.

The Council Congress ended officially on February 20. Since I was convinced that nothing of any importance could still come from it, and since the revolutionary organizations had agreed to let the Landtag assemble without interference, I left

on a trip to Baden on February 19 to give some speeches. I had been invited by Mannheim's and Heidelberg's Spartacists. On the very same day, the reactionary forces dared for the first time to engage in an open act of violence against the revolution: a group of sailors, called in all the way from northern Germany, allegedly "to protect the Landtag," staged a coup against the Council Congress and tried to occupy the parliament building. The attempt failed. There are strong indications that the orchestrator of the coup was none other than the social democratic minister of the interior, Auer, himself. However, I do not want to get into details of what happened that day, because I was not there. As I have stated before, it is important to me to only address the things I personally witnessed or participated in.

On February 21, I heard about Eisner's assassination. I was in Mannheim. I immediately tried to get back to Munich, but I only made it there on the morning of February 24. The delay was due to the disruption of the railway system. There was so much confusion in Munich that I could not even get through on the phone to arrange a car or a plane. Unfortunately, Landauer was not in Munich at the time either, which left us unable to influence the first moves after the tragedy.

I assume that, in general, you know what happened. However, you might appreciate some extra information: Eisner was shot dead on the way from his official residence to the Landtag. As it became known later, he had decided to resign and to hand all of his powers to the counterrevolutionary parliament. The assassination was not an independent act of the murderer Arco, despite what he claimed and what the court concluded. Arco was part of a far-reaching conspiracy. Apart from Eisner, also Landauer, Levien, and I were to be assassinated. A day before the murder, a soldier came to see my wife in order to warn her. As an orderly, he had overheard in an officers' mess hall that the next day (February 21) an officer was supposed to come to my house in a regular soldier's uniform—his intentions would be far from good. Similar plans had been made with regard to Landauer and Levien. The soldier did not speak of Eisner, but named the officer who wanted to come visit me. Since Landauer and I were away and Levien did not have a steady apartment and was always difficult to find, there were no further assassinations. The conspirators probably found out about our absence early enough.

It must be noted that the small group to which Arco belonged was not even able to distinguish between the views of Eisner and of us communists, despite their great differences. This became obvious in the trial against Arco, when he repeatedly mentioned Eisner and me in the same breath, obviously thinking we had been the closest of comrades.

The murder was directed against the proletarian revolution. With his death, Eisner saved it from the downfall he was about to deliver it to.

It was only natural that there was a lot of sympathy for Eisner among the proletariat after his death. His murder turned him into the symbol of the Bavarian

Revolution. In fact, the urge for vengeance was strongest among the proletarian radicals who had criticized his politics the hardest. It was also natural that the urge for vengeance turned against the parliament as such, and especially against Auer. It was commonly known that Auer had wanted to topple Eisner, just as it was commonly known that in order to do so he had assured himself of the support of the bourgeoisie. It had been proven that in his role as minister of the interior he had initiated and organized the armament of the reactionaries among the peasants. In fact, he had, together with the SPD minister of justice, Timm, signed a petition demanding the formation of a "Civil Defense Force" (*Bürgerwehr*), meaning: a White Guard, against the proletariat. The names of Auer and Timm led the list of the signers.

The suspicion that Auer might have been responsible for the murder of Eisner was probably false. But it was understandable. I was convinced that a failed shooting attack on me on December 26 could be traced to Auer's influence. That no means were too low for this "socialist" in his fight against revolutionaries became crystal-clear later: during the trial against the comrade Lindner⁴⁵ it was revealed that the wife of a first lieutenant who had come to visit me regularly was an informant sent by Auer.

Lindner, who had been a member of the RWC since the first day of the revolution, was a very simple, but reliable proletarian, devoted to the communist cause. He was also an easily excitable man. His interruption of a Landtag's delegates' meeting, in which Eisner's murder was hypocritically condemned, and the shots he fired on Auer were the simple reflex of the revolution and the consequence of the calculated violence of its enemies.⁴⁶ It is characteristic that Lindner's act was judged by the class court as a regular crime, while the premeditated murder by Arco, who had shot Eisner in the back, was seen as the result of honorable ideals. Comrade Lindner is in jail, while Arco's sentence was reduced to confinement in a fortress.⁴⁷ Conditions in the fortress are dramatically better for Arco than for the revolutionaries—with regard to us, entirely new rules have been established.

When I returned to Munich on February 24, I was hoping that the RWC had formed a provisional government until a new Council Congress, based on new revolutionary shop and factory councils, would decide the next steps for a country abandoned by cowardly Landtag members.⁴⁸ And indeed, at first, the RWC took the right steps: it declared a state of emergency in Bavaria, proclaimed a general strike, occupied the offices of the newspapers (which were only to appear under strictest censorship), and armed the workers. Unfortunately, however, it did not dissolve the old BCC. This allowed the BCC to reconvoke the old Council Congress. So, basically, we ended up with what we had had before: a Workers' Peasants' and Soldiers' Council Congress that, given the dominance of the social democrats not only in the congress but also in the BCC, saw itself only as a temporary replacement of the bourgeois parliament and its government. This was particularly worrying

because the Council Congress had now become the only sovereign power in the country, since the cabinet no longer existed.

The day of Eisner's funeral was a memorable day in Bavaria's history. In all towns and villages, the church bells rang and processions were organized. The bourgeoisie partook in cowardly fear. In Munich itself, a neverending flow of red flags and wreaths moved from the Theresienwiese to the Ostfriedhof [Eastern Cemetery], where the memorial service and the cremation took place. The USPD had sent a delegation from Berlin, including Luise Zietz,⁴⁹ as well as Haase, Kautsky, and Barth. Unfortunately, these three former members of the Scheidemann government did not travel back to Berlin with Mrs. Zietz, but infiltrated the Council Congress, laying the seed for all of the misfortune that was about to come.

Now that it held the entire legislative power in Bavaria, the Council Congress proved to be a completely helpless and directionless body. It did not dare to implement anything of relevance, it did not even implement its own resolutions. The following example might illustrate its ineffectiveness.

In November, a certain Aschenbrenner⁵⁰ had established himself as the commander of the Central Railway Station. Together with a squad of the Republican Defense Force (*Republikanische Schutztruppe*), controlled by town major Dürr, a social democrat,⁵¹ he had installed a true terror regime. People were arrested for distributing communist leaflets and terribly beaten under the pretense of being looters. Aschenbrenner continued with this even after Eisner's death. One day, two young people who had been mistreated in the station's police room came to see the Council Congress. They uncovered their torsos and showed their wounds and bruises. A delegation was sent to Aschenbrenner. It returned with one of the delegates, comrade Dr. Wadler,⁵² carrying one of the torture instruments, a whip handle with an exposed inner wire frame. The outrage among the Council's Congress members was huge. It was decided to remove Aschenbrenner from his post. However, the BCC, whose duty it was to implement the decision, proved unable to do so. Aschenbrenner sent the insolent message that someone should come and get him. Nothing ever happened and he stayed in his post.

There were only two groups in the Council Congress with any kind of a plan: one, the social democrats, who tried by all means to reinstall "quiet and order," meaning: a "rightful" democratic government in which they would dominate; and two, the few radicals: ten representatives of the RWC as well as the delegates of the unemployed and of the demobilized soldiers who had forced the Council Congress to include them. Our weak numbers were strengthened by the stands, where our speeches used to be cheered, and by the street, where meetings took place all the time, mostly organized by the unemployed. Delegations from these meetings were sent to the Council Congress with revolutionary demands almost daily. In the Council Congress itself, we also found support among some USPD members and a minority

of the peasants' councils' members. The core of the Council Congress, however, was formed by compromising USPD members and peasants who were only reluctant revolutionaries. The soldiers' councils were almost entirely reactionary.

The aims of the demands expressed by the proletarians meeting in the streets and put forward with our help might be illustrated by the following excerpt from an article I published in *Kain* after Eisner's murder:

Now, there is no turning back. Now is the time to strangle the counter-revolution, so it can never raise its head again. The council republic needs to be proclaimed immediately. There will be no more place for compromises with bourgeois parliamentarianism. One can no longer allow the "freedom" of the press, monopolized by capitalist interests, to poison our souls and to incite murder. One has to render the conspiracies of the military officers and the students impossible, using the most radical means of the people's dictatorship. One has to expropriate the big landowners, take away the rights of capital, start socialist work in towns and villages, and not refrain from revolutionary resolutions of world-tumbling dimensions. One has to chase all the representatives of the old system from their posts, disregard the grip of Weimar,⁵³ and connect quickly with the natural allies of the socialist revolution, namely the glorious pioneers of world liberation in Russia...

Council Republic! After Eisner's death, this was the central slogan of all rallies. Within the proletariat, its immediate proclamation was strongly demanded, and especially the KPD adopted the demand as its own.

You have probably noticed that I have not said much about the KPD so far. Up to this point, the party had focused its activities on agitation among the masses and on organizing its own ranks. The wrath it drew from the bourgeoisie, which took to calling them "Spartacists," proved that their work was effective. However, the local chapter was still too weak to act alone. This is why it always left concrete political work to the RWC, of which Levien was a member and which consisted to at least 50 percent of KPD members. Through the RWC, the party was also represented in the Council Congress. Furthermore, some delegates of the workers' councils from the rural areas belonged to the KPD, but without forming its own faction in the Council Congress.

The demand for a fast proclamation of the council republic was even more understandable given the steady rise of reactionary activity in Bavaria. First, the arming of the proletariat was sabotaged. Although town major Dürr had ordered the distribution of guns to shop and factory workers, he had hardly done anything to actually make this happen. The few weapons that were distributed ended up in the hands of selected social democrats. This implied the danger that weapons would finally be controlled by reactionary trade union leaders.

In addition to this, the BCC expanded right after Eisner's death because two trade union officials were appointed as members by the SPD. In turn, the RWC appointed two comrades to the BCC as well, Levien and Hagemeister.⁵⁴ They were instantly expelled, however, because the influence of the social democrats had turned the BCC into a political body full of double standards.

The main reason for the proletariat to seize power as soon as possible were the secretive actions of the three USPD leaders from Berlin. Erich Barth, for example, appeared on the speaker's podium of the Council Congress and talked about the necessity of a new state order. He also appeared as a guest at a RWC meeting, trying to discourage us from pursuing a council republic. He argued that one had to proceed diplomatically, that this would get us much further, and so on. I decidedly argued against him and he found no support. Meanwhile, however, intrigues were spun behind the scenes. A Council Congress meeting had to be interrupted because the Munich chapter of the USPD held an important conference—it leaked out that the gentlemen Haase, Kautsky, and Barth took part in this conference. There was also a joint conference of the USPD and the SPD. Something was in the air.

The communist agitation for the council republic made the counterrevolutionary forces very nervous. On February 27, airplanes dumped leaflets over Munich with the signatures of Nuremberg's town major Schneppenhorst and Dr. Ewinger, who would later become the dictator of Upper Bavaria.⁵⁵ The leaflets were mainly directed against Levien and me. The same day, another incident enraged the proletariat even more. During a meeting of the Council Congress, the leaders of the Republican Defense Force entered the hall, waved their guns about, and yelled, "Hands up!" Levien and me were pulled out, mistreated, and thrown down the stairs. Landauer, who just entered the building, was also arrested, and furthermore Dr. Wadler as well as the representative of the unemployed, Cronauer, and the delegate of the demobilized soldiers, Markus Reichert (KPD). As it became known later, we were to be abducted and used as hostages for negotiations with the proletariat in the case of an armed conflict. The plan did not succeed, however, mainly thanks to the Republican Defense Force unit protecting the Landtag. The unit had always proven its revolutionary spirit, probably because of its constant contact with the RWC members. It now came to our defense, confronting their colleagues. When the situation got extremely tense and a violent conflict seemed inevitable (machine guns were already in place), the town major gave orders to retreat and we were freed.

The RWC now decided—with the approval of the KPD—to demand clear measures from the Council Congress. I was appointed to file a motion the next day, demanding Bavaria to be proclaimed a council republic. The Council Congress would be asked to turn a provisional into a definite arrangement, while the proletariat itself would become active, take up arms, rid all state bureaus of counter-revolutionary elements, reelect the factory councils, and implement the council

system under a proletarian dictatorship. I presented the motion on February 28. Seventy delegates voted for the council republic, 234 against it. I have to add that my friend Landauer was also among those who voted "No." He refrained from an explanation of his position in front of the Council Congress, but in private, he cited reasons that were very close to those cited by the KPD five weeks later. His main concern was that the proclamation would be premature.

The opinion of the masses became obvious during the counting of the votes. A huge demonstration of agitated workers appeared outside the Landtag to await the results. The tension was high. Landauer, one of the most popular revolutionary figures, tried to placate the workers by explaining the reasons that did not make the proclamation of the council republic feasible right now. He had to retreat. The crowd demanded Levien and me. It was very difficult to persuade the masses to dissolve. They were ready to storm the building and chase the congress to hell, even though they were unarmed. I later very much regretted that we pulled the brakes that day. Otherwise, the council republic would have been born by a heroic act of the proletariat and we would have spared the Bavarian workers the internal struggles that condemned our activities to fail later.

The tensions in Bavaria remained. A few days earlier, motions filed by comrade Dr. Wadler in the MWC had already proven how popular the idea of a council republic was even among SPD workers. Although they held a majority in the MWC, Wadler's motions were passed: instant proclamation of the socialist council republic; appointment of people's delegates; appointment of a revolutionary tribunal; martial law against the reactionary forces.

Meanwhile, the counterrevolutionary forces were not satisfied with the rejection of the council republic's proclamation by the Council Congress. They continued their defamations. On March 1, more leaflets were dropped over Munich, this time signed by Munich's town major Dürr, the chief of police, Stainer (USPD), and representatives of the SPD and the free unions. The leaflets said:

How much longer do you want to bear the terror of the streets? Can you allow people like Levien, Mühsam, Hagemeister, Cronauer, and their lot, to put their foot on your neck, their pistol on your chest? No! Just like the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie would throw us back into misery, the Spartacists and their followers, the looters, will throw us into misery. That is why all workers and soldiers have to shake off the unbearable yoke of a militant minority and settle together on the grounds of order provided by a united social democracy, the true rule of the people. We have to build a truly socialist cabinet without delay!

We especially have to put an end to the dangerous game of the Spartacus League and the ever-increasing lumpenproletariat. Workers! Soldiers! It is

time to act! Be sensible and stay home! The street has to remain free for the soldiers whose destiny it is to establish a socialist order! Everything is at stake! The achievements of the revolution are at stake! The protection of the rights of the councils from the terror of the street is at stake! A unified socialism is at stake! Soldiers! Gather around your destined leaders! Follow only the orders of those you trust! To the barracks! There, your elected barracks' councils and your leaders will guide you in what needs to be done for the people's good.

This was an open declaration of war.

In the evening of the same day, I publicly settled the score with Dürr and Stainer by demanding their dismissal. Both of them were present. They managed to get away with citing "nervousness" as an excuse, and the same MWC that, a few days earlier, had passed Wadler's radical motions, now, in a vote of confidence, expressed their support for a chief of police and a town major who had called for a bloodbath against the revolution. The meeting ended late at night. Because my friends from the RWC were concerned about my safety, they forced Dürr and Stainer to take me home in their car, and so the town major and chief of police who had wanted to arrest, and possibly execute, me the same afternoon dropped me off at my house twelve hours later.

After it rejected the proclamation of a council republic, the Council Congress decided to recognize the Landtag elected in January as legitimate, despite the Landtag's delegates' cowardly flight during their very first meeting. Characteristic for the halfheartedness of all of the Council Congress's measures, however, was the decision to postpone the assembly of the Landtag. This simply happened out of fear of the proletariat's hostile reactions. Following this decision, the SPD members hurried to present a motion in which they declared themselves ready "to join a socialist cabinet." At the same time, they demanded a reshaping of the Council Congress based on a proportional electoral system. This would have rendered the right to recall delegates meaningless—without this right, however, the entire council system doesn't make sense. Furthermore, the SPD proposal would have restricted the rights of the councils in a way leaving them practically powerless.

During the debates, it became obvious that the main objective of the SPD was to deal a deathblow to the RWC. The speaker of the Aurochs declared that it was impossible for his party to work together with RWC members in an action committee (*Aktionsausschuss*). He therefore demanded to expel the three members that the RWC had appointed to the committee. Landauer responded. He pointed out that the man who had just spoken here had been able to do so only because he had been invited by the RWC, the same body he now wished to exclude. On this occasion, Landauer spoke the later often quoted words: "In the entire natural history I know of no more disgusting creature than the Social Democratic Party."

Meanwhile, the tensions between the revolutionaries and the “socialist” counterrevolutionaries became fiercer and fiercer. The town major dared to remove the unit of the Republican Defense Force that had protected us at the Landtag and that had the complete trust of the Council Congress. He even expelled some particularly revolutionary soldiers from the force. The soldiers turned to the Council Congress, which promised to act on their behalf. The Council Congress also demanded the return of the unit to the Landtag. However, the BCC proved once again unable to enforce a resolution. The Council Congress’s order was simply ignored.

In general, the debates in the Council Congress now mostly took on the form of completely unnecessary blabber about trivialities. Essential things got delayed and in the end just forgotten. For example, a motion filed by me and a radical peasants’ council member, proposing to dissolve the existing administrative bodies in the rural areas and to transfer their powers both to the peasants’ councils and the urban workers’ councils, never even came to debate.

By now, following the activities of Berlin’s USPD members in Nuremberg, the SPD, the USPD, and the more moderate branch of the peasants held a joint conference, and on March 7, the “Nuremberg Compromise” (*Nürnberger Kompromiss*) was presented to the Council’s Congress by one of the most reactionary peasants’ council members. Since this agreement caused a chain of events, I choose to present it here at length:

1. Immediate convocation of the Landtag for a short meeting. Formation of a socialist cabinet by the two socialist parties. Appointment of a ministry of agriculture and forestry with a peasants’ council member as minister, after consulting with an action committee of the workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ councils. Ratification of this ministry by the elected Landtag, drafting of an emergency constitution.
2. Transfer of far-reaching powers from the Landtag to the ministry of governmental affairs.
3. Enlargement of the department of information.
4. During the time of the provisional arrangement, the legislative and executive powers lie in the hands of the cabinet alone. One representative each of the workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ councils can partake in the meetings of the ministers’ council in an advisory capacity.
5. Immediate formation of a voluntary civil defense force by union workers; immediate abolition of the standing army.
6. In the representative bodies of communes, districts, counties, and administrative offices, the workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ councils have the right

to participate in practical work through delegates. In the ministry of the interior, a departmental section for the councils' organization is to be formed and its members appointed in collaboration with the action committee.

7. The workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils have the right to file complaints, submit petitions, and introduce bills in the Landtag and in government, with one of their delegates being present. The newly elected councils have the right to appeal against the resolutions of the Landtag that affect the entire population. (Referendum.)
8. Reelections of the councils are to be held in the whole country as soon as possible, according to proportional vote. Concerning the active and passive right to vote, special regulations have to be made by the cabinet with participation of the action committee.
9. The rights of the councils are to be established immediately by a special law and under special consideration of points 6 and 7.

The revolutionary minority was outraged by the self-abasement that was apparently expected from the Council Congress. However, it could not prevent the adoption of the agreement. The points were debated one by one. After the call for forming a cabinet was approved, it was elected right away. Needless to say, the involved parties had long agreed on the outcome. The SPD member Hoffmann was appointed minister president. He had been the minister of cultural affairs in Eisner's cabinet, rather passive and inconspicuous. Only now, reaching the peak of his career, he showed his true face. Even as minister president, he kept the ministry of culture and education, although the Council Congress had first voted for the left-leaning SPD member Niekisch,⁵⁶ chairman of both the BCC and of the Council Congress. Hoffmann even took over the ministry of foreign affairs.

The commissioner of demobilization, Segitz,⁵⁷ was elected minister of the interior, and Mr. Endres⁵⁸ minister of justice—both were SPD members. The ministry of social welfare was handed to the right-leaning USPD member Unterleitner, who had already held the post in Eisner's cabinet. The ministry of commerce and industry went to the right-leaning USPD member Simon from Nuremberg.⁵⁹ The only candidate who was elected unanimously was Prof. Jaffé as minister of finance. Jaffé had proven himself to be the most revolutionary spirit among the ministers under Eisner. The already mentioned Schneppenhorst was proposed as minister of military affairs. However, after the leaflet he had dropped over Munich, even reformists had strong reservations and the USPD objected to his appointment. The SPD gave in and the right-leaning USPD member Scheid⁶⁰ was appointed instead.

After this procedure, the remaining points of the Nuremberg Compromise were dealt with. When it was all done, only a small minority understood the

terrible danger that this agreement meant for Bavaria. When the adoption of the agreement was announced, I yelled, "Lord, forgive them, for they don't know what they do!" Then the Council Congress disbanded. It had sold out the revolution.

The workers themselves, however, remained committed to the revolution's ideals. They followed the further developments suspiciously and attentively, committed to defend their revolutionary rights by any means.

The Landtag reunited at the parliament building, while the RWC was sent to the former royal palace instead. The "heroes" of February 21 met under grotesque military security by obeying the dictate of the Nuremberg Compromise. Once their first meeting opened, the decisions of the Council Congress were simply ignored. The next meeting got rescheduled, and the Nuremberg Compromise parties, together with the BCC, changed their "purely socialist" cabinet by dismissing the two individuals who held the posts most important for the Council Congress.

First, Prof. Jaffé, who had already worked under Eisner in the spirit of the left wing of the USPD, was thrown overboard, even though he was the only ministerial candidate against whom not a single voice had been raised in the Council Congress. He was Jewish, though, and considered a radical. The ministry of finance was then provisionally left to a civil servant, and another minister was to be appointed at a later date. Mr. Scheid, elected as minister of defense, was the other USPD member taken from the list. He had so far held the office provisionally, and probably seemed too radical for the counterrevolutionary "socialists," even though his signature was among those on the civil-war-inciting leaflets of March 1. Scheid was replaced by Schneppenhorst, although Schneppenhorst had been rejected unanimously by the Council Congress. He was now going to play the role of the Bavarian Noske.

The Landtag tried to prove its democratic intentions by adopting a ridiculous law rendering aristocratic names illegal in Bavaria. This was a mockery of a proposal that Landauer and I had made in the Council Congress, where it wasn't even discussed. We had wanted to abolish aristocratic privilege by abolishing punishment for carrying false aristocratic names and titles. Since the law adopted by the Landtag only applied to the Bavarian aristocracy and since the families in question declared that the aristocratic title was an inseparable part of their name, the whole move remained completely pointless.

The will of the masses was clear. One night, the SPD convoked five mass meetings in which their newly appointed ministers were meant to present themselves to the public. All of these meetings turned into communist rallies and all of the speakers were viciously opposed. The masses did not leave any doubt about the radical opposition that the new government had to face. They also reminded the government that the reactionary forces were already campaigning for White Guards. The common ground of all of the proletarians' words and actions was one demand: *Council Republic!*

The March Riots in Berlin and the atrocities committed by the White murderers troubled Munich's workers.⁶¹ They demanded guarantees against such events in Bavaria, forcing the government to ban all military campaigns for the so-called "Border Protection East" (*Grenzschutz Ost*), a reactionary military unit, and all anti-Bolshevik activities. They forced even Mr. Schneppenhorst to issue arrest warrants against recruiting officers. This caused Colonel Epp,⁶² who wanted to play the role of a Bavarian Kolchak⁶³ (and later, with Schneppenhorst's support, really did), to move his activities away from Bavaria. He went to Ohrdruf in Thuringia, where he raised an anti-Bolshevik Free Corps.

As it had to be expected, the Landtag meeting ended right after it had done the job the government needed it to do. From then on, it was only meant to assemble when the BCC needed it—one expected that the next time would be in late May. Meanwhile, the governmental affairs lay formally in the hands of the individual ministers. All the practical work, however, was done by the state commissioners who had been working since Eisner's murder. Some of them did a good job.

One of the centers of administrative work was the state commissioner's office of demobilization, where the head of the department, Paulukum, a USPD and RWC member, was highly committed to protecting the interests of the workers. As commissioner of housing, comrade Dr. Wadler acted so rigorously that he was hated by the bourgeoisie. He confiscated all speculation property to build homes, registered all big apartments, and accommodated workers' families in capitalists' homes. He personally traveled around the country to gain a firsthand impression of the dreadful housing conditions of the workers near the big industrial plants (for example, around the mines of Penzberg) and to take measures to improve the situation.

In the spirit of solidarity, I consider it my duty here to add a few words about this comrade: Dr. Wadler only reached a socialist conviction after the outbreak of the revolution. A lawyer by profession, he was a military officer during the war and entirely under the influence of pan-Germanic ideas. In Belgium, he played an important role in the forced deportation of Belgian workers. He did his job according to the ideology of his superiors, and his reports and proposals, disclosed by the court-martial, revealed indeed the unsocial sentiment that characterized the German military dictatorship during the war.

When the German Army collapsed, Wadler's eyes opened. He realized how blinded he had been, and now dedicated himself to the revolution with his whole heart. No one who ever worked with him had the impression that he was merely an ambitious sham revolutionary. The RWC received him happily in its midst, and he proved himself loyal in every situation. The martial court later sentenced Wadler in denial of his civil rights to eight years in prison. It justified this shameful sentence by claiming that his role during the war proved that neither his revolutionary

beliefs nor his commitment to communism were genuine. In reality, the sentence delivered by lawyers and military officers was an act of revenge against the lawyer and military officer who had changed his colors. And it was also an act of revenge by the bourgeoisie against the person who had given workers shelter in their homes. By doing so, Wadler had violated the holy bourgeois notion of private property. That Werner repeats the arguments employed by the counterrevolutionary court-martial against Wadler's honor and thereby further incriminates this man who, as it happened, had not joined the KPD, is disgraceful.

The government was well aware of how the masses felt, and it knew that it could not restrict the powers of the popular state commissioners. It rather had to meet—or at least pretend to—some of the most important demands of the proletariat, for example the expropriation of the expropriators. The ever more threatening demand for total social revolution, a revolution beyond the mere formation of a dictatorship of the councils, had to be kept at bay, and therefore the term “socialization” was popularized—or, rather, abused.

It was around this time that the political economist Dr. Neurath arrived in Munich.⁶⁴ Neurath had presided over an institute for national economics in Leipzig before. This highly intelligent and knowledgeable man started to give public lectures about socialization, in which he developed far-reaching plans for the nationalization of economic production. He presented himself to the RWC, was invited to speak by the MWC, and was very well received by the workers. He only caused suspicion by presenting his ideas to anyone who would listen, even to the most reactionary bourgeois circles.

His basic idea was that the entire economic production should be devoted to the satisfaction of basic needs. As these he defined adequate housing, food, clothing, and entertainment, for all people without distinction. He wanted to bring an end to the industries of luxury and speculation, believing that this would guarantee a sufficient supply of fuel and power for the production of food, textiles, tools, etc. He also wanted to facilitate the transfer of large enterprises and estates into the hands of the people without compensating the former owners.

These were socialist demands that the proletariat welcomed. The only problem was that Neurath was of the naïve opinion that his measures could be implemented without changing the country's political constitution. He used to say that he would collaborate with any government that would let him go to work, whether it was an absolutist monarchy or a council republic. Out of sheer opportunism, Neurath joined the SPD. He thought that with the support of what seemed to be the most powerful party in the country he would be able to convince the entire bourgeoisie, by virtue of his diplomatic eloquence, of the usefulness and necessity of his ideas. He won over the minister of trade, commerce, and industry, Mr. Simon, who in his very opportunistic USPD mind seriously thought it possible to introduce social-

ism in Bavaria by ministerial decrees. Thanks to Simon, Neurath was appointed commissioner of socialization with extraordinary powers by the ministerial council.

On March 21, the news about the proclamation of the council republic in Hungary struck like a bombshell.⁶⁵ The excitement of the proletariat was overwhelming. Next to those of Lenin and Trotsky, the name of Béla Kun⁶⁶ was now on every proletarian's lips. The speakers at the demonstrations and assemblies found excited approval when they encouraged the workers to emulate the Hungarian example. For the bourgeoisie, the spook of the council republic had now become a reality.

The government was very worried and put its hope in Neurath. He persuaded the cabinet to issue a proclamation announcing "total socialization." The SPD government of Saxony was invited to follow the example, but Mr. Gradnauer in Dresden was not interested at all.⁶⁷ When Neurath even managed to win a leader of the clerical agro-bourgeoisie, Mr. Dr. Schlittenbauer,⁶⁸ for his plans, it became evident how distressed the bourgeoisie was. Schlittenbauer probably saw the inevitability of the communist victory so clearly that he thought only a pact with the revolutionary forces could save him and the big landowners he represented. Neurath himself, however, who had tried to achieve something very practical, had to realize more and more that the capitalist forces were much stronger than the limited powers of minister Simon. Neurath soon had to aim much lower.

The main concern of Hoffmann's government was to consolidate its position amid a population that got increasingly impatient and demanded revolutionary action. Again, it was Neurath who the government turned to. At a mass meeting convoked by the RWC in the last week of March, at which I held the main speech, Neurath asked to speak unannounced and surprised the audience of several thousand people with a program for which he claimed to have the government's approval practically secured: the Bavarian state would provide the communists with a big and fertile area of land able to support a few thousand people. The communists would further be provided with all the necessary tools and a capital of a million marks to cultivate the land according to their principles. This would allow them to prove that the realization of their ideas was possible.

Neurath painted the splendiddness of his plan in bright colors and promised total government cooperation in the selection of the area, general generosity on part of the government, and the government's readiness to work out all the details in a joint effort. The assembly was perplexed and rather at a loss at how to respond. Landauer suggested accepting the proposal, pointing to the Russian model communes and emphasizing the possible outcome of such an exemplary revolutionary seed.

In the speeches afterward, not a single speaker mentioned Neurath's proposal, a sign of how skeptical the workers themselves were. Speaking at the end, I poured quite a lot of water into Neurath's wine. I agreed that the plan should be considered,

if only to avoid the suspicion that we were afraid of communist experiments. However, I made Neurath understand that the workers did not want to become passive receivers of governmental handouts. It was crucial that they would join the negotiations as equal partners. This meant that strict conditions had to be formulated to prevent the government from believing that sending a few thousand communists out into the country would put an end to communist opposition.

I told Neurath to let the government know that his offer would only be discussed if the communist area in question was recognized as politically autonomous, if its inhabitants would not be subjects to the Bavarian capitalist laws, if the community was allowed to have its own diplomatic representatives (and not only in Munich and Berlin, but also in Russia and Hungary), if all men were armed in order to defend themselves and their communist structures, and if their agitation in the rest of Bavaria would not be interfered with. My words found the decided approval of the assembly. No one ever heard of the matter again.

The uplifting news from Budapest—the Hungarian council government had immediately installed a bureau of information in Munich—was a huge inspiration for the communists' activities. Almost every day, overcrowded mass meetings took place in which the prospects of the proletarian revolution were discussed. They always ended in calls for the Bavarian Council Republic to be established soon.

Almost all of these meetings were organized by the KPD, some by the unemployed, some (very few) by the RWC. Levien and I were invited as speakers over and over again. I ended up speaking even more often than Levien because he focused most of his energy now on strengthening the structures of the party and on the party's paper, *Münchener Rote Fahne* [Munich's Red Flag]. When he was busy, people always turned to me, and he was busy a lot. It happened that I spoke every night for an entire week. One day, the KPD had organized a row of parallel meetings and I had to speak in four consecutive ones.

At the end of March, all this ended from one day to the next. I was told that the party headquarters in Berlin had sent special organizers to Munich and that the Munich KPD therefore had enough speakers now. This did not bother me at all, since I was overworked anyway and had completely neglected my economic existence. So from then on, I restricted myself mostly to talks at factory meetings and got in closer contact with the factory councils and the workers in general. This had not really been possible when I was constantly running from lecture to lecture. On April 1, I joined comrade Paulukum in the commission of demobilization as an assistant. I did this, on the one hand, for the financial security of my family, and, on the other, for gaining personal insight into the dismantling of the war economy and the transition to a peace economy. I never got to learn much about this difficult and complicated matter, though, since entirely unexpected events

shook the Bavarian Revolution to the bone on April 4—events that were the beginning of its end.

Behind the obvious facts, much of what happened remains unclear even today. This also means that a balanced description of the Bavarian Council Republic's proclamation is not possible yet. I can only contribute with my personal experience—which will hopefully contribute to an overall better understanding of the events. If I limit my account to what I have personally experienced (even more so than I have already done in this text), it is because I believe that the unaltered presentation of subjective experience holds more truth than a tortured objectivity without any actual knowledge. So, from now on, I will only speak of what I have personally witnessed.

On the afternoon of Friday, April 4, I took part in a factory meeting to which the factory councils had invited me. I gave a talk on the ideological differences among the workers. At 6 p.m., an RWC conference was scheduled in the Wittelsbach Palace. As I was about to enter, a few comrades met me in the front garden, among them a number of members of the RWC, including Landauer, Niekisch, and a few USPD members. They told me to follow them, saying that they were on their way to the ministry of foreign affairs, because the Bavarian Council Republic had to be proclaimed immediately. I first thought they were joking. I soon realized that they were not.

On the way to the ministry, I got the following briefing: Niekisch had just returned from Augsburg where he lived. The workers in Augsburg were on general strike and demanded that the BCC proclaimed the council republic, dismissed the government, and handed all power to the proletariat right away. These demands alone would not have caused such a far-reaching decision, however. More important was the evidence that the counterrevolution was preparing to strike: violating the agreement with both the Council Congress and the BCC, the government wanted to assemble the Landtag already on April 8, mainly to establish legislative securities for the bourgeoisie that was frightened by Neurath's plans of "socialization." I was told that if we did not want to surrender to the capitalists, we had no choice but to act and to fulfill the desire of Augsburg's workers now.

The spirits of the small crowd were soaring, and I will not deny that this affected me. The imminent realization of the proletariat's dreams made my heart beat faster. The euphoria with which I entered the ministry of foreign affairs quickly waned, though. The minister of the interior, Segitz, received us. He was regarded as one of the most upright and honest individuals among the leading SPD members. He knew about the developments, because Niekisch had already met with the ministerial council. Apart from Segitz, the other ministers present were Simon, Unterleitner, and Schneppenhorst, whom I met for the first time in person. Furthermore, the town major Dürr and the chief of police Stainer appeared, as

well as a few leaders of the Bavarian Peasants' League,⁶⁹ the USPD, and the trade unions. All in all, we might have been thirty people. When Niekisch was about to open the meeting, I wanted to make sure whether the KPD was fully represented. I was told that Levien was expected to arrive any minute. When he did not, the meeting began nonetheless.

Everyone agreed that the situation was very urgent, and an agitated Dürr explained that under the given circumstances the proclamation of the council republic was a necessary measure for defending the revolution against counter-revolutionary attacks. He vouched for the support of the troops. With this promise, the smooth course of the proclamation seemed secured and we proceeded to discuss its contents. Landauer and I were instructed to draw up a declaration that should be read to the people the next morning. It should contain the names of the people's delegates replacing the ministers. The posts should, if possible, be equally divided between the SPD, the USPD, and non-party-affiliated socialists.

It seemed mandatory to radicalize the BCC, and so we intended to fill it with a number of delegates from the RWC and the KPD. For now, Niekisch should continue as chairman. Upon Landauer's proposal, it was decided to emphasize the provisional character of all measures. The proclamation ought to be signed by a "Provisional Central Council" (PCC) and by a "Provisional Council of People's Delegates," since all final resolutions and appointments had to be approved by the councils themselves.

I was not satisfied with the meeting and got even more irritated when the election of the provisional people's delegates took place. I did not oppose Segitz to be appointed people's delegate of the interior—analogous to the Hungarian example, his party should be represented. However, when Simon and Unterleitner were also confirmed in their posts, I became suspicious. I expressed the concern that simply changing titles from "minister" to "people's delegate" was not what the workers expected from a council republic. Thereupon, it was decided to hand the department of information to Landauer. I furthermore demanded that the three most important posts would be transferred to communists, namely the ones of foreign affairs, justice, and defense.

For foreign affairs, Dr. Mühlön was proposed,⁷⁰ a pacifist writer who became known during the war by publishing facts compromising the German government. His publications were based on his experience as a former director of Krupp Enterprises.⁷¹ Since Mühlön—who, by the way, was not in Munich at the time—had publicly propagated the council system while also enjoying the respect of the Entente governments, some among us believed that he might be able to create close ties with Russia and Hungary without drawing too much protest from the Western Allies. I was the only one to object. For justice, we wanted to ask the KPD to propose one of their members, perhaps someone from northern Bavaria.

I suggested offering the department of defense to Levien. The SPD, however, declared that they had to demand two departments, since two had already gone to the USPD and to non-party-affiliated socialists. This seemed even more necessary since Segitz's participation was not secure yet: he insisted that he could only accept his post with the explicit permission of the party. To my astonishment, the USPD member Simon proposed the previous minister of defense, Schneppenhorst, as the new people's delegate of defense.

This led to a fierce controversy between Schneppenhorst and me. I emphasized that the people's delegate of defense had to arm the proletariat and raise a Red Army able to protect the council republic against all interior and exterior attacks. Schneppenhorst, however, had the reputation of being a Bavarian Noske and was not trusted by the masses at all. Firstly, because of the leaflet affair, and secondly, because he had ordered the military in Nuremberg to move toward Munich.

Schneppenhorst responded very emotionally. He excused the leaflets by claiming that he had been wrongly informed. He said that he was told Levien and I were ready to violently dissolve the Council Congress and introduce the council dictatorship ourselves if the Council Congress refused to do so. Once he, Schneppenhorst, had understood that this was not the case, he felt very sorry for his hasty actions and he apologized. Concerning the troops in Nuremberg, he stated that he had never wanted to send them against Munich. This was all a misunderstanding and completely harmless. What had happened was that he had received notice that the Republican Defense Force in Munich was exhausted after weeks of constant alert. Therefore he simply wanted to send a number of soldiers from Nuremberg for relief. They had not even been armed, and in the end never got sent anyway. In an attempt to prove his proletarian loyalty, Schneppenhorst stressed that he had prevented military recruitment in Bavaria and even arrested recruiting officers.

Schneppenhorst's crafty speech left a strong impression on those assembled. I responded that I could not verify his statements, but that even if he was totally honest, he still seemed unacceptable to me as a people's delegate of defense. I stated that the sentiment of the proletariat had to be considered above all when filling this important post, and that the workers simply had no trust in him. I remained alone with my opposition.

The appointment of the people's delegate of agriculture was unanimously left to the radical Peasants' Alliance.⁷²

The members of the RWC insisted that the final resolutions concerning the council republic could only be adopted once they were approved by the KPD. However, since Levien was still absent despite various attempts to bring him to the ministry of war, it was agreed that another, bigger meeting should take place there in the evening. The proclamation of the council republic was scheduled for the morning of April 5.

Landauer and I retreated to a secluded inn where we drew up the declaration. I did not hide from Landauer my fear that the proletariat might be disappointed with the list of people's delegates, especially with Schneppenorst included. Landauer thought of this more sanguinely. He reckoned that the events in Hungary had convinced the revolutionary workers that the unification of the proletariat was possible and necessary. The involvement of the social democrats in our plans was proof that they had realized, just like their comrades in Budapest, that no other way remained open but the adoption of our principles. And as far as the people's delegates were concerned, this was of little concern since the proletariat would soon replace them anyway.

No one even considered the possibility that the KPD might oppose our plans. We all knew how passionately Munich's proletariat demanded the council republic, and so we overlooked the danger implied in the random form of its proclamation as we had planned it. I believed that we had been given an opportunity that was unlikely to repeat itself: a general strike in Augsburg with a clear demand by the proletariat for the immediate proclamation of the council republic; a breach of the agreement that the bourgeoisie had reached with the Council Congress; the fresh impressions of the events in Hungary; unrest in Brunswick and Thuringia, with the explicit goal of establishing a Bolshevik council dictatorship; the possibility of building bridges, since the power of the Bauers and Adlers⁷³ in Austria was expected to crumble as soon as the country would be wedged between council republics in Hungary and Bavaria; the possibility of islands in Brunswick and in central Germany, making our actions the signal for a general German Revolution that would shatter the rule of Ebert-Scheidemann-Noske. These were the reasons why I believed that the proclamation of the council republic in Bavaria was a necessity in the pursuit of world revolution.

In the evening, about 150 people assembled in the conference hall of the ministry of war. Many members of the RWC were present—among whom a significant number belonged to the KPD by now; official delegates of the SPD, the USPD, and the trade unions; the ministers Schneppenhorst, Simon, and Steiner (minister of agriculture);⁷⁴ a strong delegation of the peasants' councils; representatives of the soldiers' councils; the town major; the chief of police; and others. The KPD as such was not officially represented, despite being urged to come.

Niekisch spoke in his role as chairman. There was a consensus on the necessity of our actions. The representative of the peasants, Gandorfer,⁷⁵ laid out the conditions under which his friends would take part. The most delicate issue concerned the peasants' demand that property under 1,000 Tagwerk⁷⁶ was not to be socialized for now. Since working against the peasants seemed entirely out of the question, we were forced to accept these demands. (After April 13, the KPD complied with them as well.) I deemed it necessary to make the SPD and halfhearted USPD

members understand in all clarity that proclaiming the council republic did not mean the overhaul of some enterprise, but the transformation of a social system. I explained furthermore that we had to learn from the example of Hungary and declare our uncompromising commitment to communism. While I outlined the next measures—among them the formation of a Red Army, the appointment of a revolutionary tribunal, the immediate nationalization of the banks, etc.—I was interrupted by a shout from a union leader: “I’m scared, but I’m in!” To me, this seemed to show both the weakness of these people and their good and honest will to accept the inevitable.

At some point, three men I had never seen before entered the hall, and the chairman informed us that a delegation of the KPD demanded leave to speak.

First, comrade Schuhmann took the podium.⁷⁷ He declared to the total surprise of everyone that his party objected to the proclamation of the council republic. Besides, the proclamation of the council republic could not be decided by this meeting, but, if at all, only by the Council Congress. I took it upon myself to respond. (I responded to all the KPD speakers that night.) First, I laid out, one more time, the reasons that demanded fast action, reminded everyone that the Council Congress had proven to be a reactionary body without vision, and that it was the BCC that now had the initiative and therefore the authority to implement a provisional arrangement, even if it had to be ratified later by a new Council Congress assembled on the basis of revolutionary council elections.

As the second speaker of the KPD, comrade Dietrich⁷⁸ claimed that the masses were against the proclamation of the council republic. All he earned was laughter, and I remarked that his comments revealed how alienated he was from the realities in Bavaria: the council republic had been the constant demand of the proletariat since Eisner’s murder. I also reminded everyone of the crowd that was ready to oust the Council Congress on February 28.

Finally, “comrade Niessen” spoke, also entirely unknown to everyone. We only got to know a few days later that his real name was Eugen Leviné. His talk had to be taken far more seriously than those of the previous speakers. Leviné mainly argued against collaborating with the SPD. He pointed at the SPD’s treacherous tactics in Berlin, in Hamburg, and especially in Bremen. Then he attacked the minister Schneppenhorst and the town major Dürr viciously, which caused strong reactions among the SPD members in the hall. Schneppenhorst almost got engaged in a fight.

My response was that I completely shared the reservations against the SPD, but that it still seemed inappropriate to draw analogies between the SPD in Berlin and in other parts of Germany; besides, people should not be defamed as traitors before there was any proof. Furthermore, my opinion was that a Provisional Central Council and a Provisional Council of People’s Delegates appointed this evening were in no way binding for the proletariat. I expressed the hope that as

soon as the council republic was proclaimed, the masses would come together on the Theresienwiese to chase us all to hell and appoint the men they really wanted to represent them. However, I also assumed that a coalition of all socialist parties and movements would be welcomed by the proletariat, especially since the events in Hungary had shown that such a coalition was possible. After I had explained all this, the KPD delegation left.

The confusion that this entirely unexpected incident caused was huge. Generally, even among the KPD members belonging to the RWC, one seemed to agree that these three men who no one knew (they were complete strangers even to me despite my close relationship with the party) could not possibly express the opinion of the communist workers of Munich and only represented a party leadership that was out of touch with the proletariat. Concerning the opposition to the proclamation of the council republic it was suspected that their hidden agenda was to wait for a time when they could proclaim such a republic solely in the name of the KPD. The questions floating around were: Why did no one come to the afternoon meeting despite our urgent call? Why does the party send three men from northern Germany instead of Leven or another party comrade known to the Bavarian people? Who were these three men? Who delegated them? About one thing there seemed no doubt: if the council republic was proclaimed, the rank and file of the KPD would be at the forefront of supporting and defending it, regardless of the leaderships' stance. Even today it remains my conviction that if we had proclaimed the council republic on the morning of April 5, we would have had a united proletariat behind us—which does not deny the fact that the KPD was right in its critique, but more about this later.

The consequences of the KPD's position were felt instantly. The SPD explained that we were facing an entirely different situation now with the workers' unity threatened. This unity had been a precondition for their own participation. At around midnight, they demanded to interrupt the meeting for fifteen minutes in order to retreat and discuss among themselves. When they were not back after a full hour, the negotiations continued without them. Finally, they reappeared. By then, it was expected that they would denounce their participation. In that case, Landauer wanted to proclaim the council republic right away in the name of the RWC. The social democrats did not withdraw entirely, however. Schneppenhorst announced that they wanted to postpone the proclamation by forty-eight hours to get the country prepared. Otherwise, the reactionary military of northern Bavaria might attack. Schneppenhorst wanted to travel to Nuremberg first. He said that since the Second and the Third Bavarian Battalions were totally under his control, he could make sure that all of northern Bavaria would be loyal to the council republic.

We radicals protested fiercely against the postponement, in particular Landauer, who argued that only a surprise attack against the bourgeoisie could prevent the reactionary forces from preparing a counterstrike. It was obvious that Landauer was losing trust in Schneppenhorst. Landauer reminded him that one cannot just take back one's words. Schneppenhorst swore on his life that the only reason he wanted to travel to Nuremberg was to work in the interest of the council republic. He tried very hard to convince us of his integrity.

We found strong support for the immediate proclamation of the council republic in a member of the peasants' council, the editor Kübler.⁷⁹ In an excellent speech, he demanded to move fast and swiftly. The SPD, however, was supported by the right wing of the USPD. The only one who suggested postponing the proclamation not just by a few days but, given the circumstances, by a few weeks was Dr. Wadler. He found no support.

We voted on how to proceed. The majority decided for a postponement of forty-eight hours. I thought this to be a very dangerous move and, thinking of Landauer's earlier suggestion, I proposed that the RWC should leave the meeting, get in touch with the KPD, and proclaim the council republic together with the party communists in the morning. Unfortunately, Landauer talked me out of the idea. Today, I believe that this would have been the only way to get out of the muddled situation we had gotten ourselves into, because it would have been a truly revolutionary act: the revolutionary vanguards of the proletariat would have worked together and treason could have been prevented. However, we accepted the decision of the vote.

The list of the people's delegates was now ratified. It was decided to make the best of the forty-eight hours we had to prepare the country for the council republic. Delegates should be sent into the rural areas as soon as possible, the USPD minister Simon was sent to Nuremberg along with Schneppenhorst, and I was requested to travel there to negotiate the possible involvement of the Nuremberg KPD, maybe even persuading them to appoint a people's delegate.

The meeting ended in the early morning. I still had to drive a number of comrades home who lived further away. We only had one car at our disposal. Then I had to organize travel permits at the police station and reserve seats over the phone. I only got home at around 5 a.m. At 8 a.m., I already sat in the express train to Nuremberg. I shared the compartment with Schneppenhorst and Simon. More delegates were with us, among them the comrades Hagemeister and Sauber,⁸⁰ who were traveling to Würzburg. Politics were not really discussed. I do recall, however, that Schneppenhorst criticized the conditions for the support of the peasants. He suggested that sparing properties under 1,000 Tagwerk from socialization was a selfish act by Gandorfer whose property was 800 Tagwerk.

In Nuremberg, I met comrades all day. I was accommodated in the apartment of one of them who had a telephone. The board members of the local chapter were summoned to a meeting there, and I was asked to join. I first asked about Schneppenhorst. The information I received made me phone the RWC immediately. I told them that Schneppenhorst could under no circumstances be part of the council republic. I had to make my own participation dependent on this. Then, with my assistance, the Nuremberg comrades drew up their minimal demands for participation. These resembled almost word for word the demands that were later presented by Toller for the USPD.⁸¹ I promised that I would make these demands my own.

In the evening, I traveled back to Munich in the company of Toller, who had been in Nuremberg by chance. I informed him about the recent developments. I now had proof that the KPD in Nuremberg did not share the views of the KPD leaders in Munich. The comrades in Nuremberg had also promised to send two delegates to Munich the following day.

When I got to the Wittelsbach Palace late at night, I found a number of comrades assembled. I was told that Wadler had announced the proclamation of the council republic in a public meeting, and that this was met with enthusiasm.

After a very short night's sleep, I had to attend an RWC meeting in the morning of April 6. Spirits were high, also among the KPD members. I found out that a general meeting of the KPD took place in a public hall at the same time. I went there in the company of an old KPD comrade. Even though I was not a member, I was greeted jovially by the guards and was allowed in without any problem. There might have been six hundred people at the meeting. While comrade Leviné spoke, I went to the podium and asked Levien to give me leave to speak because I had to deliver an important message from the party comrades in Nuremberg. To my bewilderment, Levien made big difficulties and protested against me having intruded into a closed members' meeting. I demanded that the members should decide whether they wanted to hear me or not.

After Leviné had ended, Levien told the assembly that I was present although I was not a registered member. "Mühsam is my personal friend but my political opponent," he declared to everyone's surprise. The assembly loudly expressed their desire to hear me speak. So I was allowed to give an account of my mission to Nuremberg. I passed on the information I had received about Schneppenhorst, read the conditions of the Nuremberg KPD, and explained that my own participation in the council republic was dependent on both the fulfillment of these conditions and on the removal of Schneppenhorst from public office. The strong applause that followed proved to me that the KPD rank and file did not share the opinion that their unknown delegates had presented at the meeting in the ministry of war.

After me, comrade Leviné spoke again. He attacked me viciously. He alleged that just a day earlier, I had not only made common cause with the same Schneppenhorst I now attacked, but that I had also traveled with him to Nuremberg for common agitation. I tried to correct this and yelled in protest, which only led to the allegations being repeated in even worse form. This made me so mad that I lost my nerve. I felt my righteous intentions were pulled through the mud in front of my closest comrades, many of whom I had won for revolutionary politics, and I left the hall furiously. This was a huge mistake. Had I stayed, I am sure I would have been given the opportunity to justify myself, especially with respect to Schneppenhorst, and I am sure that also comrade Leviné would have come to understand that he was ill-informed and that I had not conspired with Schneppenhorst (I had shared a train compartment with him by pure coincidence). After all, I had gone to Nuremberg to confer with Leviné's own party comrades. In the end, there would have been a simple difference of opinion, and, given the popularity I enjoyed among the KPD members, the conflict over the next few days would have been significantly milder, whether we would have reached an agreement or not. Instead, I allowed myself to get angry due to overexertion and fatigue, and by simply leaving the meeting I might have given the impression of feeling guilty and of trying to avoid responding to Leviné's accusations. I was not aware of the effects of my conduct at the time. To the contrary, after the positive response of the KPD members to my speech and after the disapproval with which the speeches of the comrades Levien and Leviné had been received, I believed that the masses of communist proletarians organized in the KPD did not condone the tactics of their leaders, and that they would force them into participating in the council republic.

In the evening, the same group of people (with a few exceptions) who had met on Friday, April 4, got back together in the Wittelsbach Palace (in the bedroom of the former queen, to be exact) in order to ratify the final proclamation of the council republic. None of the former SPD ministers were present. An emergency SPD meeting had been held in Munich and a vote about participation in the council republic had brought a split result. Whether this caused Segitz and Endres to be undecided, or whether they had already worked in the interest of the counter-revolution like their colleague Schneppenhorst, does not matter. The SPD was now only represented by a few second-tier members who remained quiet and cautious. Meanwhile, the USPD had sent their most active leaders, and Toller—who had already voiced his opposition to the Nuremberg Compromise in the Council Congress and who had filed a resolution of disapproval at a party meeting in Munich—acted as their main voice. The RWC was almost fully represented, and a number of the members belonging to the KPD declared that they were ready to participate in the council republic even if this meant violating a party resolution. The two comrades that were expected from Nuremberg did appear, but only to

let me know that they had to withdraw their support for the council republic after talks with the KPD leadership in Munich.

Facing the apparent lack of support for the council republic by the KPD, I was convinced that the measures needed to secure the council republic had to go beyond the demands that I had originally agreed upon with the Nuremberg KPD. To only keep Schneppenhorst out was not enough. I demanded that not a single SPD member and not a single member of the previous cabinet, including the USPD ministers, were to belong to the Council of People's Delegates. Since my influence on the RWC was known, and since it was clear to everyone that without the consent of the RWC no revolutionary action was possible, Niekisch conceded that a fight over certain individuals was not worth it and my demands were accepted—with the exception that the peasants' councils should still be allowed to elect their own representative.

The membership of the PCC changed as well. Niekisch remained chairman, but the body became decidedly more left-leaning by the appointment of six RWC members. The election of the new people's delegates was very difficult, and only the emphasis on the provisional character of all of our decisions allowed us to come to a conclusion. Mühlön was proposed again as people's delegate of foreign affairs. The proposal was rejected upon my initiative. I pointed out that the people's delegate of foreign affairs needed to be a man with unconditional trust in Russia and Hungary. As a consequence, the RWC proposed me. Opponents expressed the fear that my politics against the central government in Berlin would be too aggressive. Since I confirmed that in the case of my election I would take an uncompromising stand against Ebert's bourgeois republic, the proposal was rejected as well. The USPD proposed one of its own members, the comrade Dr. Lipp, who was hardly known outside the party.⁸² Since his extraordinary expertise in international politics was highly praised, since he declared himself an uncompromising supporter of the council system, since we did not know who else to appoint, and since the USPD vouched for him, he was elected. The USPD member Soldmann was appointed as minister of the interior since he was reputedly left-leaning.⁸³ As minister of transport, comrade Paulukum, one of the most radical RWC comrades despite being an USPD member, was appointed instead of the bourgeois Mr. von Frauendorfer⁸⁴ who had been appointed by Eisner and who had kept his post until now. Due to the lack of anyone more suitable, the member of the peasants' council, Kübler, was elected people's delegate of justice—he had earned the trust of the revolutionaries by his speech in the ministry of war. Professor Jaffé vehemently refused to take over the financial department; in fact, he refused to take part in the council republic at all. Landauer and I proposed the physiocrat Silvio Gesell,⁸⁵ whose wide-reaching knowledge in financial matters and his sincere anarchist orientation were known to us. Furthermore, the realization of his theory of free money,⁸⁶ together with the

nationalization of the banks, seemed to be an effective means against exploitation and usury. Even the SPD approved his appointment, but probably only because, at that point, the SPD approved everything. Comrade Hagemeister, who had not returned from Würzburg yet, got elected people's delegate of welfare, and Gustav Landauer got elected people's delegate of information. The most difficult election concerned the people's delegate of defense. I insisted that the command over arms must be entrusted to an absolutely reliable communist revolutionary. The guns, I said, always shoot to the left. Therefore the man who controlled them could not have anyone left to him. I was still hoping that Levin would eventually be persuaded to take the post. First, however, someone else had to be found. We elected comrade Killer, one of the most radical and reliable comrades of the soldiers' council although he was in the USPD.

During the meeting, comrade Levin appeared as the official delegate of the KPD. He presented no resolutions, however. All he did was ask a number of questions, which were all answered patiently. After the meeting, I took Levin aside and explained the situation to him. I pointed out that we had ousted the SPD from government and that we had ensured that they would remain a minority in the PCC. I reminded Levin of the desire of the masses, of Hungary, and of the general political situation in which any hesitance on our side was an enormous moral boost for the reactionary forces. I stressed the danger that lay in letting pseudo-communists do communist politics while the real communists remained passive. I explained how much the revolutionary idea among the masses would be strengthened if he, Levin, took the formation of the Red Army in his own hands as a people's delegate. Levin did not seem categorically opposed to what I said but explained that he had to ask his party first. He left and never returned.

We proceeded with preparing the council republic's proclamation. An address to the workers was drawn up, as far as I know by Niekisch. I signed it upon request. The address included unfortunate phrases that added to the many problems we already had. Monday, April 7, was declared a "national holiday." This was instantly criticized by the party communists who said that we violated our professed internationalism. Furthermore, a state of emergency was declared. This was a demand made by Landauer. However, Landauer had made it clear that the state of emergency was meant to be a demonstration of power of the proletarian dictatorship over the bourgeoisie and that it would only apply to the latter. This specification was missing in the address's final draft, and the following day the workers thought they were under martial law.

Other preparations included sending a radio telegram to Budapest and Moscow. I was told to write a message and to sign it with Dr. Lipp in the name of the PCC. Further preparations: the newspaper offices were occupied; orders were given to ring all bells in Bavaria at noon when speakers would address the

people on public squares; the day of the proclamation was announced as a workers' holiday. Sadly, treason had found its way into the new government before the council republic was even proclaimed. In the morning hours, the attendance list of our last meeting was missing after it had been made available for inspection. It could not be retrieved, even though everyone's bags were searched.

I took it upon myself to send the radio messages personally and arrived at the radio tower at about 7 a.m. Once the messages were sent, the supervisors of the radio department called their teams together and I gave a speech that was received enthusiastically. At around 9 a.m., I finally got home. However, at noon I already had to be at the Stachus, one of Munich's main squares, to speak. Admittedly, I was not too excited given how things had gone so far. Once I got a sense of the sentiments among Munich's proletariat, I became outright pessimistic. Even if life did seem more vibrant than usual, there was uneasiness in the air, a frightening silence revealing skepticism and a lack of confidence.

On the Stachus, I climbed a bench. A big crowd gathered around me. The first comments I heard were anti-Semitic insults. The reactionary forces already knew that the proletariat was divided and they dared express their beliefs openly despite the proclamation of martial law. I soon noticed a KPD comrade from the RWC in the crowd who, passionately supported by nationalist students, heckled my speech relentlessly and told the people to reject the council government. Instead of celebrating the council republic I was defending it.

After me, speakers took the stage to oppose my words: first the mentioned RWC comrade, then an older man who claimed that, during the war, I had written poems honoring the German Emperor. When I asked him to prove this, he couldn't. I demanded that he should at least justify his accusations, which he only did when pressured by the crowd. Finally, he took everything back.

The entire situation was very unpleasant. Certainly, a big part of the crowd was on my side and when I was escorted to a car, I was given an ovation. Nonetheless, I left with the bitter feeling that I had joined a dreadful and stupid adventure, although I still did not understand what I had done wrong. I put all the blame on the KPD.

In the afternoon, the PCC assembled in the Landtag. We discussed the unification of the proletariat. The actions of the KPD were generally interpreted as an attempt to establish the dictatorship of the party rather than the dictatorship of the councils. While we were trying to establish a council republic as quickly as possible by reelecting all workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils, the KPD, seemingly by principle, tried to sabotage anything that was not based on its own initiative. While some speakers suggested to simply give up on the KPD and even, if necessary, to operate against it, the RWC stated very clearly that an agreement

with the KPD had to be reached at all costs. We could not afford to engage in a fight with the strongest force of the revolution.

We knew that the KPD was holding a public meeting at a different location. I received a mandate to drive there with two RWC comrades and to negotiate the conditions for the KPD's participation. I expected the party to demand the exclusion of all SPD members and trade union leaders from the PCC, a different Council of People's Delegates, and perhaps the immediate convocation of a new Council Congress. I was determined to make the demands of the party my own.

When I arrived at the meeting, I went to the podium while comrade Leviné was speaking. As soon as the crowd noticed me, all hell broke loose. People shouted "Traitor!" "Villain!" "Backstabber!" and so forth. I was even physically attacked. Under the protection of a few comrades who had not completely lost their mind, I managed to get outside and escape the danger of being torn apart. One of the comrades I had arrived with—a KPD member himself—was badly assaulted. The incident had a devastating effect on me since I had never expected such hostility among the workers. It became known afterward that the assembly was made to believe that I had gone to Nuremberg with Schneppenhorst to help him incite an attack on Munich's proletariat by the military of northern Bavaria.

Now, all attempts at negotiation with the KPD leaders had failed. They had not appeared on the afternoon of April 4, when a single word from them would have been enough to stop the entire plan of proclaiming a council republic. In the evening of the same day, they had sent three comrades entirely unknown to us with arguments so inaccurate that nobody believed they could possibly represent the will of the masses. They had sent Leviné to the crucial meeting of April 7 with questions rather than with resolutions. And now, when turning back was no longer possible, they instilled wild hatred among the workers against the revolutionary participants in the council republic. After the reception I had received at their meeting, I was very close to throwing everything in and to just letting things go their way. I had lost all joy in working for the council republic. However, I reckoned that, at this point, I could not become a deserter.

Landauer, with whom I otherwise agreed on almost everything, had an entirely different take on the KPD. Since he had not worked with the party as long as I had, and since he did not believe that it had much support among revolutionary workers, he took their actions much more lightly.

The SPD and the USPD even saw advantages in the KPD's position. They hoped that it would strengthen reformist positions in the PCC. At the same time, they used the KPD's refusal to support the council republic to shed responsibility. By claiming that their approval of the council republic had always been based on the proletariat's unity, they no longer felt bound to anything. This was particularly obvious in the case of the SPD, some of whose members already engaged in open

treachery. I am convinced that these men could not have done the damage they were about to do, sabotaging all the resolutions they themselves had supported, if the KPD had taken a different position.

The effects of the KPD's refusal to support the council republic were felt everywhere. The Revolutionary Workers' Council (*Revolutionäre Arbeiterrat*), which had up to that point always been characterized by a strong sense of unity, broke apart, because the KPD demanded that its members resign. Some of them did not comply, which led to major conflicts within the KPD. The same thing occurred among the masses. Many KPD members declared their disapproval of the party's official stance and resigned or acted against the orders of their leaders. Similar news arrived from around the country. For example, the KPD in Nuremberg split into two factions. Particularly devastating was that the lack of unity among the revolutionary proletariat had a negative impact on the soldiers. To give an example (I only learned about this later), in Nuremberg the leader of a corps of two thousand men had offered his unconditional support. A day later, he declared that he and his soldiers had to withdraw their commitment since the KPD opposed the council republic. Schneppenhorst also turned the soldiers against the council republic with the argument that even the party communists did not support such a "swindle." This was characteristic for the way in which this man went about his reactionary business.

However, given all these developments, I at least felt reassured in my decision to keep working for the council republic. I felt that it was my duty to influence its development in a truly communist sense. I also felt that it was still my duty to do everything possible to get the KPD involved. I even played with the thought of forcing them to oust us violently so they could take control of things. As far as the defamation campaign against me was concerned, I chose to clarify matters with a public declaration.⁸⁷

On the evening of April 7, comrade Killer came to a PCC meeting to hand in his resignation as the people's delegate of defense. He saw no possibility to raise Red Guards without, or, in the worst case, against the KPD. It took several days to convince the member of the Central Soldiers' Council, Wilhelm Reichhardt, to replace him. Reichhardt had been a member of the KPD but got expelled due to disciplinary issues. (After the KPD seized power of the council republic, he still kept his post, however.)

There were rifts within the workers not only in Munich but in all of Bavaria. Southern Bavaria supported the council movement almost entirely. From northern Bavaria, however, only a few telegrams of approval arrived. Nuremberg, which had to carry the movement in the north, could not be counted on due to the lack of unity within the KPD. The loss of support from Augsburg after just a few days

was particularly bitter, since the Augsburg workers had been the actual instigators of the council republic.

I was asked by the PCC to assist the people's delegate of foreign affairs and to preside over the office for Russia and Hungary. The first thing I did was order the release of the Russian prisoners of war still kept in a concentration camp in Bavaria. I never got to do anything else. After one day of being around the people's delegate Dr. Lipp, I knew that working with him would be impossible. His post had obviously gotten to his head—to a pathological degree, it seemed. His work ranged from highly compromising to unbelievably ridiculous.⁸⁸ I pointed this out to Landauer, and since others had already noticed the undependable politics of Lipp, the Council of People's Delegates forced Lipp to resign. Under the table, the post was now once again offered to me. I rejected the offer, because I did not want to alienate the comrades of the KPD even more. Ideologically, I still regarded them as my closest allies. The only thing I really wanted to do was settle the prisoners' issue, but I did not have time for that. I received a delegation of the imprisoned Russians in the PCC and we agreed that I would organize a congress for them on April 15. The congress should make it clear that the Russians needed to be treated as guests with proper accommodation and work until their transport back home was possible. Due to my arrest, this congress never took place.

The work of the council government proved extremely difficult. On the one hand, the KPD opposed us rigorously; on the other hand, the SPD pursued the tactics of approving all resolutions while undermining their actual implementation. As Landauer was very busy in his post, the responsibility for formulating and passing the necessary revolutionary resolutions rested almost entirely with me. Only the few RWC members in the PCC stood uncompromisingly behind me. The USPD was entirely passive—to a degree that made one despair.

When the KPD approached the PCC requesting unrestricted use of the radio station for correspondence with Moscow and Budapest, I was glad. It was not easy to get them the permission, but I managed. I hoped that Moscow would now convince the party to become actively involved in the council republic.

The armament of the workers was still a central demand of the RWC. It had gotten delayed again when it took several days to appoint a new people's delegate of defense. When it became known that the former minister president gathered his allies in Bamberg to establish a countergovernment and prepare for military action against Munich, the question became urgent. We were told that there were no guns left in Munich. This was obviously false, which embittered the workers. At the end of the week, I suggested to send a tank platoon to a gun factory in Amberg in Upper Franconia to get the workers their arms by force. The political bodies of the council republic agreed with everything—and did nothing.

After the Palm Sunday Coup of the bourgeoisie,⁸⁹ there were suddenly thousands of guns in Munich. The only redistribution of arms that ever happened was performed by the revolutionary workers themselves with the support of the only few revolutionary members of government.

The case of the revolutionary tribunal was similar. The peasants' councils' delegate Kübler didn't do anything. In his trial, after the end of the council republic, he claimed that he had only accepted the post so it would not be taken by a radical. He was acquitted. Consequently, the RWC installed a revolutionary court of its own. The court did its job, but it was very tame; something that didn't change under the KPD either.

The meetings of the PCC consisted mainly of unnecessary blabber. Most time was spent on the peasants' opposition to Neurath's plans of socialization.

I have to admit that, due to the mess we had gotten ourselves into, only very few positive things were achieved in the six days we governed, despite the goodwill of the revolutionaries and the support of the majority of Munich's workers. The few radical measures that Landauer implemented in the universities counted among the most obvious accomplishments.⁹⁰ The fact that Landauer occupied his post for only six days explains why he never got around to revolutionize the primary and secondary schools as well—in fact, the schools were not revolutionized in the three weeks after Landauer's term either, even though he had presented his successor with an extensive plan on how to do this.

Only after a visit from the comrade Axelrod did I realize what a mistake we had made with our rushed proclamation of the council republic. Axelrod explained to me that he had opposed the proclamation because it had happened without sufficient preparation. There was no proper cabinet and no proper proclamation, and the military was far from effectively organized. However, he insisted, these things needed to be taken care of first. Then one can act, with the exact formalities not really mattering that much.

If someone had presented these arguments on April 4, I am sure that the disaster that followed could have been avoided. When I asked Axelrod if things could be reversed, he said that it was too late. However, he still did not see this as an obligation for the KPD to get involved.

This conversation, as well as the doubts among the workers caused by the KPD's accusation that we had established a "sham council republic," made me turn to the proletariat with a declaration that Landauer released on April 9:

Working Men of the World Unite! *The final words of The Communist Manifesto have become the rallying cry of the International! Now we direct this appeal to the revolutionary people of our own country:* Workers of Bavaria Unite!

The unification of the proletariat must, as the glorious example of the Russian people has shown, be based on a single foundation: the Council Republic!

Bavaria is a Council Republic!

Disregarding the differences of their leaders, the working people have united in their will to realize socialism and communism!

The Landtag has been chased away. The petty-bourgeois SPD cabinet no longer exists. A Provisional Council of People's Delegates and a revolutionary Provisional Central Council are now administering the country's affairs. Since not a single one of the leaders of the war socialists⁹¹ is represented in these bodies, it is guaranteed that they will serve the revolution without considering the interests of the capitalists and the bourgeoisie.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat is a Fact!

A Red Army Will Be Raised Immediately!

Relations with Russia and Hungary Will Be Established at Once!

There will be no union between the socialist Bavaria and the imperial Germany, no matter its republican façade.

A revolutionary court will punish any attempts at reactionary agitation. The newspapers' freedom of lie will be brought to an end. The socialization of the press secures the true freedom of opinion for the revolutionary people.

The Provisional Central Council will schedule reelections of the factory councils on a revolutionary basis as soon as possible. Based on these elections, the council system will be built from the bottom up. Power will be transferred into the hands of the working people themselves, and only the working people! The capitalists will be excluded from participation in the decision-making process.

In the council system, the wealth will finally belong to those who produce it. Socialism will follow. Together with revolutionary Russia and revolutionary Hungary, the new Bavaria will form a revolutionary International, paving the way to world revolution!

Proletarians! Keep the peace among yourselves! We have only common enemies: the reactionary forces, capitalism, exploitation, and privilege. It is against these enemies that all fighters for freedom and socialism must unite.

Get to Work! Each One to His Post!

Long Live the Free Bavarian People! Long Live the Council Republic!

I added the following explanation to the text:

The leadership of the KPD Munich does not support the provisional administration of the council republic for reasons of principle. However, we hope to overcome our differences soon, especially once the factory reelections have taken place, which shall solidify proletarian power once and for all. As far as I am concerned personally, I declare that I will not accept any official post in the council republic before the unification of the workers has been achieved. It is impossible for me to hold such a post without the approval of the comrades who have so far been my closest allies in the struggle, and with whom I still believe I share a common desire.

—April 9, 1919, Erich Mühsam

Facing strong pressure from the workers, the party communists made their first concession on April 9. They had revolutionary spokesmen elected in the factories and sent them with advisory capacity to the PCC. The spokesmen were, as far as I remember, ten men, among them the comrades Leviné and Dietrich. The first PCC meeting they attended was particularly chaotic. Delegations of all possible interest groups came to present trivialities that were endlessly discussed. Instead of actual work, there was only confusion. The party communists criticized the proceedings sharply. However, when I asked them to take on some responsibility and to try bringing order into the chaos, they refused.

The next day, I had a longer conversation with Leviné; it was the first and the last time that we spoke in private. Comrade Leviné assured me that he had absolutely no doubt about the sincerity of my actions. However, he sternly rejected my requests that the KPD become actively involved in the council republic. He said that he was personally convinced of the hopelessness of the government's work. When I said, "But we can't just leave the cart stuck in the mud!" he laconically replied, "Then pull it out." He confirmed, though, that turning the country over to the Hoffmann government was out of the question. I suggested to Leviné that we be removed by force so that the hopeless situation would end and the revolutionary work secured. Leviné did not consider the time right for this but acknowledged that the fight against the bourgeoisie that had to be expected could only be led by his party. Although we had not found common ground, we parted with a handshake that transcended personal differences and that gave me hope that a political agreement was possible.

The news from around Bavaria was very discouraging. While the council republic seemed on the way to establish itself in southern Bavaria, a strong setback occurred in the north. In Würzburg—where the council republic had been proclaimed by the KPD member Waibel⁹² who happened to be there on an agitation

tour, and where the whole movement was under the leadership of the KPD—there had been streetfights ending in the defeat of the revolutionaries. Comrade Waibel, as well as the two comrades who had been sent there on April 5 from Munich, Hagemeister and Sauber, the chairman of the USPD's soldiers' council, had been arrested. We instantly planned to take hostages ourselves in order to guarantee their safety.

The Würzburg success of the counterrevolution was decisive for the situation in northern Bavaria. It strengthened Hoffmann's morale to the point that he could seriously consider an armed attack on Munich. Colonel Epp was very busy raising Free Corps and White Guards, and the SPD republic of Württemberg sent troops. Noske's offer to march into Bavaria in the name of the Reich was rejected due to the hostility toward Prussia among the Bavarian peasants. Allowing Noske to do so would have also meant a violation of Bavaria's military independence. Bavaria had the right to keep its own sovereign army—a right that had remained untouched even during the world war. Noske and his gangs of professional murderers were only asked to interfere once Bavaria's own military forces, despite the support from Württemberg, proved too weak to break the revolutionary workers, who finally stood united and defended the council republic with arms in the second half of April. The price that had to be paid was abolishing Bavaria's independence.

For us, the necessity of raising a Red Army became more urgent than ever. Comrade Reichhardt worked on this feverishly. However, there was treason all around us, as the following example proves: a leading member of the Central Soldiers' Council, the SPD member Simon (not to be confused with the former minister Simon) presented Reichhardt with a full-fledged plan for raising a Red Army. However, rumors began to spread that Simon actually stood in secret contact with Hoffmann's countergovernment. At a meeting of the PCC, Landauer took Simon by surprise when he directly asked him to comment on the allegations. Simon assured us of his honesty—and then declared that he would resign from all posts immediately and return to Nuremberg to resume his former civilian profession. Apparently, this should extinguish all doubts. Landauer and I demanded to take him into preventive custody and to stop him from leaving, but we were outvoted. Simon departed, and a week later his name stood next to those of Schneppenhorst and Hoffmann on the declarations calling for the mass murder of the workers. When Simon appeared in my trial as a witness, he admitted that he was already in touch with Bamberg while he was supposedly raising the Red Army.

Possibly even more drastic is the case of the people's delegate of agriculture, Steiner, who had been appointed by the peasants. This man had secretly informed Hoffmann that he wanted to rejoin his cabinet as the minister of agriculture. Steiner was therefore *at the same time* a people's delegate of the council republic *and* a minister of the countergovernment. This, of course, only came to light later.

The workers knew that the reason for the prevailing confusion and uncertainty lay in the division among the workers and in the non-recognition of the council republic by the party communists. Eventually, the factory councils decided to take things into their own hands. All of Munich's factory councils were summoned to a meeting in the *Hofbräusaal*⁹³ on the evening of Friday, April 11. Also invited were the leaders of the SPD and USPD and the most prominent comrades involved in the council republic without party affiliation. The call included the line, "To remain absent means to confess guilt!"

The meeting was overcrowded. An SPD speaker first declared his commitment to democracy. He earned nothing but laughter from the workers. Then another SPD member brushed his comrade's words aside, and took an uncompromising stance for the council republic. Toller, who had by now replaced Niekisch as chairman of the PCC, spoke for the USPD. He defended the current regime and strongly attacked the KPD. Then Landauer spoke and publicly admitted that he had been deceived by Schneppenhorst. However, he stood by the proclamation of the council republic and called for unity. Then it was my turn. I admitted that I now understood the reservations of the KPD, but that I still questioned the party's continuing non-participation in the council republic because the only ones who would profit from the lack of proletarian unity were the reactionaries—who were already taking advantage of the situation, getting ready to attack. I once more pleaded with the KPD to give up their opposition and to become actively involved. I stressed that this was necessary for giving the dictatorship of the proletariat substance and stability.

The strong applause that Landauer and I received proved that we had put the thoughts of the proletarians into words. The KPD was represented by comrade Levien who wasn't ready to compromise in any way. A minority of his party comrades agreed with him, while a strong majority clearly expressed their will to come to an agreement. Levien found a supporter in a party communist from Berlin who, causing an uproar, dismissed any unification of the proletariat not based on the KPD. A great number of those who spoke demanded that all differences be put aside. Levien responded patiently to each and every one of them, but remained categorically opposed to participating in the council republic.

I got to speak one more time. I declared that the present assembly of revolutionary factory councils was the only legitimate representative body of the proletariat. As such it had to decide whether the current council government truly represented the proletarian dictatorship and had the trust of the proletariat. I said that I would welcome a vote of no-confidence, because it would lift the weight of responsibility for every single question off our shoulders and force the party communists to take action and carry responsibility too. I said that in the case of a no-confidence vote, the factory councils should immediately elect a new PCC and

appoint comrades from its midst to prepare the next measures. However, if the factory councils expressed their confidence in the existing PCC, then we would do our duty according to our possibilities. Most importantly, though, no one could still call us a “sham council republic.”

All the members of the PCC who were present declared to recognize the factory councils as the representative body of the proletariat and to comply with their decision, whatever it might be. The factory councils then brought forward a motion asking to support the existing council government. It was carried by an overwhelming majority and there were only a few dozen “no” votes, my own included. Even after this impressive declaration of confidence, Leviné made it clear that the position of the KPD would not change.

On Saturday, April 12, the situation became very serious. The Hoffmann government incited the rural population against Munich in outrageous ways, spreading the most ludicrous accusations. Among them, the allegation that we had introduced the socialization of women—supposedly, every woman had to be available to any Bolshevik upon request—made a particularly big impression on the naïve population. The military situation, even if it was not directly threatening, seemed far from secure after the loss of Augsburg. The lack of arms among the workers was worrying, even if the disarmament of the bourgeoisie had been fairly successful. There was a serious lack of trust in the SPD, especially since its members and trade union leaders had stopped attending PCC meetings a few days earlier—which, one might add, did at least improve the PCC’s efficiency.

We weren’t sure whether the SPD was already hatching plans at that point. However, the suspicion spread that the party had already made a secret deal with the bourgeoisie, also in Munich. The bourgeoisie was anxious to act. With all the problems of the council republic, it had changed the order of the state. In particular, the occupation of the banks, the rationing of withdrawals, and the suspension of the bank secret worried the capitalists. The disarmament of the police also made them feel insecure, while the revolutionary tribunal posed a threat to their counter-revolutionary aspirations. Wadler’s dedicated work as housing commissioner put their domestic comforts at risk, which they considered a part of their holy property rights. In addition, the measures announced by Gesell against speculative capital as well as Neurath’s announcement to close all unnecessary factories lingered like the sword of Damocles over their existence. These were reasons enough to consider a decisive attack.

The attack, led by the SPD, came in the early morning of April 13, which happened to be Palm Sunday. At 4 a.m., I was arrested in my bedroom by members of the Republican Defense Force, which had assured us of its loyalty only days earlier. I was brought to the Central Railway Station. Twelve other comrades arrived there over the course of the morning, all arrested. Posters were up announcing the

overthrow of the council government in the name of the military and proclaiming the Hoffmann government as the legitimate one. Some comrades, among them the people's delegate Soldmann, had been taken from the Wittelsbach Palace, where they had been working for the people throughout the night. Others, among them comrade Dr. Wadler, had also been arrested at their homes. There were also comrades who had been arrested while trying to take hostages.

We stayed in the station until noon, in constant expectation of a proletarian attack to free us. Instead, we were eventually sent to Northern Bavaria on a special train under heavy military escort. The attack on the Central Railway Station came a few hours after our departure, ending in a triumphant victory for the workers who reestablished the council government under the leadership of the KPD.

I did not witness the further events, so I cannot comment on them. What I do want to mention, though, is that immediately after the dissolution of the former PCC, Landauer published a declaration in which he welcomed the new situation, recognized the KPD's council government, and offered his services.

During the two and a half weeks of their rule, the KPD's problems were very similar to ours. The only difference was that their work was no longer sabotaged by the SPD but by the USPD. The KPD's greatest achievement was to raise an efficient Red Army in a very short time. The necessity of concentrating all energy on the military defense of the council republic explains why the dictatorial suppression of capitalism was not as strong as it should have been, even under the KPD. Many mistakes were also made in choosing the individuals for the most important posts. There was treason everywhere. The mistakes must be explained by the lack of revolutionary experience and by the urgency with which all measures had to be taken. I know very well that many of the problems of the Second Council Republic were due to our rushed actions in early April. I am therefore not in a position to accuse the KPD of any wrongdoings.

The purpose of this report was to explain our actions psychologically, to defend ourselves against the ludicrous accusation that we, especially Landauer and I (against who this attack is mainly directed), had vainly wanted to realize an adventure based on literary musings in cafés, and to explain that many of our actions had been forced upon us by external conditions. I admit that we made mistakes. However, I plead the following as mitigating circumstances: the demands of the workers on general strike in Augsburg; the breach of agreement by the Hoffmann government; the inspiration of the Hungarian example; the hope of serving as an example for Austria and northern Germany; and especially the KPD's secret diplomacy: contrary to the former close collaboration with us (especially with me), the party communists did not invite any of us to their debates during the crucial days, they refused, despite repeated invitations, to delegate someone for the most important meeting on the afternoon of April 4, and they finally let strangers present their decision, employing arguments that were highly dubious.

As openly as I confess that in principle the comrades of the KPD were right and we were wrong, I believe to this day that their tactics at the time of the First Council Republic were tragically mistaken. I also believe to this day that if the KPD had supported the revolutionary elements in the council government early on, the revolution would have taken a much better course (even if it might have been defeated, nonetheless).

The support we received from KPD members in Northern Bavaria proves that by no means all party communists saw our actions as a farce. The confusion that was created by the orders of the party leadership in Munich was one of the main reasons why the counterrevolution was able to strike back so quickly and without meeting much resistance. The participation of the KPD in the first council government (even if they had voiced criticism) would have allowed the revolutionary proletariat to passionately rise in unity. The SPD members would have been removed from all posts on the third day, when Hoffmann formed the countergovernment in Bamberg, and they would have been treated like the bourgeoisie. In short, the uncertainty among the workers and soldiers that made the Palm Sunday Coup possible would have been avoided.

To end this, I want to draw attention to the following:

- ✦ The heroic struggle that Munich's workers engaged in during the first days in May in defense of the council republic, a struggle in which the proletarians who had supported us during the first week of the council republic participated alongside the supporters of the KPD;
- ✦ The terrible blood sacrifices that the proletariat made for the communist idea;
- ✦ The graves of those murdered, with the names of Gustav Landauer and Eugen Leviné remaining engraved in the hearts of Munich's proletariat.

I hope that the facts presented here will keep people who study the Bavarian Revolution from vilifying revolutionaries of pure spirit and will. They should rather turn against the workers' common enemies that betrayed the revolution and caused its premature end.

What led to the Augsburg Resolution?⁹⁴ Who worked behind the scenes? Who laid out the trap and who got caught in it? All these questions have yet to be answered. It is the united effort of all honest communist revolutionaries, regardless of which side they took on April 6, that will eventually enlighten us.



All Power to the Councils!

1. Erich Mühsam, *Standrecht in Bayern* [Martial Law in Bavaria], Berlin: Verein Internationaler Verlagsanstalten, 1923.
2. After the proclamation of the council republic, the Bavarian government led by Johannes Hoffmann and the SPD retreated to Bamberg in northern Bavaria.
3. Several political prisoners were released in late 1924, among them Adolf Hitler, who had been sentenced to five years after his coup attempt in November 1923 ("Beer Hall Putsch"). Hitler merely served six months of his sentence.
4. The text was never published as a book. It can only be found in posthumously published anthologies of Mühsam's writings.
5. Paul Frölich—see "Personalities" in the Glossary.
6. Peter Hille (1854–1904), German writer and bohemian, revered by Mühsam.
7. Silvio Gesell (1862–1930), Belgian-German economist. Gesell was the author of *Die natürliche Wirtschaftsordnung* [The Natural Economic Order], in which he developed the concept of a "free economy" based on "free money."
8. The Bavarian Council Republic was proclaimed on April 7 without the Bavarian KPD. On April 13, the first military attack on the council republicans was repelled by the KPD, which then took over the council republic's administration until its fall on May 1. The period of April 7 to April 13 is often called the "First Council Republic," the period from April 14 to May 1 the "Second Council Republic."
9. Konrad Kübler (1884–1974), printer, publisher, and prominent member of the *Bayerischer Bauernbund* [Bavarian Peasants' League]; "people's delegate of justice" in the First Bavarian Council Republic.
10. Mühsam refers to the situation in Berlin.
11. "Palm Sunday Coup" refers to the attempt of the SPD-led government in Bamberg to overthrow the Bavarian council republic on April 13 (Palm Sunday), 1919. Munich's Central Railway Station was one of the main locations of the struggle.
12. Ernst Müller-Meiningen (1866–1944), jurist and a prominent member of the liberal *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* [German Democratic Party]; Bavarian minister of justice 1919–1920.
13. This has not been confirmed by other sources.
14. The entire episode is documented in Erich Mühsam, *Liberating Society from the State and Other Writings: A Political Reader*.
15. Friedrich Westmeyer (1873–1917), leading social democrat in the left wing of the SPD in Stuttgart, Württemberg.
16. Reference to the 1896 congress of the Second International in London.
17. Jean Jaurès (1859–1914), French historian and socialist leader, worked for French-German reconciliation, and was actively advocating against France's entry into World War I; assassinated by a French nationalist July 31, 1914.
18. Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), SPD-member (he co-founded the USPD in 1917 but returned to the SPD after the war); prominent revisionist theorist.
19. Alexander Kerensky (1881–1970), Russian politician, moderate socialist, head of the provisional Russian government ousted by the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution.
20. In June 1917, then minister of war Kerensky started an offensive against the Germans on the eastern front to take pressure off the Allied forces on the western front, now supported by U.S. troops sent by president Woodrow Wilson.
21. In April 1917, Lenin and fellow Bolsheviks traveled from exile in Switzerland to St. Petersburg. For their passage through Germany, the German government provided a sealed train. The hope of the Germans was that Lenin and his comrades would destabilize the current Russian government and weaken the Russian troops on the eastern front.
22. Reference to the "maximalists" of the Union of Socialists-Revolutionaries Maximalists, a radical offshoot of Russia's Socialist-Revolutionary Party, founded in 1906.

23. See the Timeline.
24. Eisner was arrested on January 18. He was released nine months later, shortly before declaring Bavaria a republic.
25. Mühsam was arrested on April 24 for political agitation and for his refusal to join the *Vaterländische Hilfsdienst* [literally, Aid Service to the Fatherland], a forced labor program for the war industry. He was detained in Traunstein in southeastern Bavaria, close to the Austrian border.
26. On November 1918, the Bolsheviks ousted the Provisional Government that had ruled Russia since the overthrow of the tsarist regime in February 1917.
27. Regarding “social patriot,” see footnote 1 in “Confront the Counterrevolution!”
28. The Theresienwiese is a big square and park in Munich, today mostly known as the location of the Oktoberfest.
29. Hilde Kramer (1900–1974), communist revolutionary. The identities of Jos. Merl and F.A. Fister could not be confirmed.
30. Anton Graf von Arco auf Valley (1897–1945), German aristocrat and reactionary soldier; he spent five years confined in a fortress for the murder of Eisner, with many privileges over the ordinary prison population.
31. This position was later compromised when the IKD united with the Spartacus League to form the KPD.
32. Rudolf Eglhofer (1896–1919) led the Red Army in the final defense of the council republic in May 1919; he was arrested and murdered by White Guards.
33. *Boche* (origins unclear) is an antiquated derogatory French term used for Germans.
34. Mühsam probably means the *Antibolschewistische Liga* [Anti-Bolshevist League], see footnote 26 in “Noske and the Beginning...”
35. Johannes Timm (1866–1945) and Albert Roßhaupter (1878–1949) were SPD delegates to the Bavarian Landtag until 1933; Roßhaupter also held important posts in the Bavarian SPD after World War II.
36. The Wittelsbach family was the ruling dynasty in Bavaria from 1180 to 1918.
37. Reference to the Bavarian SPD party chairman Erhard Auer.
38. August Hagemeister (1879–1923) died in the fortress of Niederschönenfeld, the same place where Mühsam served most of the sentence for his involvement in the Bavarian Council Republic.
39. The League of Nations was an international organization founded after World War I and is the forerunner of today’s United Nations.
40. Pierre Renaudel (1871–1935), French socialist leader.
41. Hans Unterleitner (1890–1971), son-in-law of Kurt Eisner, member of parliament for the USPD and SPD in the Weimar Republic; emigrated to the United States after the Nazis’ rise to power. Edgar Jaffé (1866–1921), socialist economist.
42. In German, using the term *Affe* (ape) with respect to people often suggests imitation.
43. The *Regina-Palast-Hotel* was one of Munich’s noblest hotels.
44. Towia Axelrod, KPD member of Russian descent, people’s delegate of finance during the Second Council Republic.
45. Alois Lindner (1887–?), USPD and KPD member; after spending eight years in prison for the assassination attempt of Erhard Auer (see below), he emigrated to the Soviet Union in the 1930s.
46. Erhard Auer survived, but Major Paul Ritter von Jahreis (1878–1919) and Heinrich Osel (1863–1919), a delegate for the conservative *Bayerische Volkspartei* [Bavarian People’s Party], died in the ensuing shootout.
47. See the “Preface” of this text.
48. After the turbulent events of February 21 (Eisner’s assassination, the shooting in the Landtag), the Landtag members dispersed, many of them leaving Munich.

All Power to the Councils!

49. Luise Zietz (1865–1922), SPD member and the first woman occupying a leading party post in Germany; joined the USPD in 1917.
50. Heinrich Aschenbrenner, commander of the Republican Defense Force (*Republikanische Schutztruppe*).
51. Oskar Dürr (1877–1959).
52. Arnold Wadler (1882–1951), jurist; sentenced to eight years of detention for his involvement in the council republic, released 1924; emigrated to the United States after the Nazis' rise to power.
53. Weimar was the town in which the constitution for the new German Republic was drafted—hence, the “Weimar Republic.”
54. August Hagemeister (1879–1923), SPD, USPD, and KPD member; soldiers' council delegate from Würzburg; died in the Ansbach Fortress, where he was detained for his involvement in the council republic.
55. Hermann Ewinger (1887–?) played an important role in the army and influenced the development of Upper Bavaria after the end of the council republic.
56. Ernst Niekisch (1889–1967), SPD and USPD member (Niekisch joined the USPD after the fall of the Bavarian Council Republic and returned to the SPD with the majority of USPD members in 1922); expelled from the SPD in 1926 for strong nationalist tendencies, he became a prominent advocate for “National Bolshevism” in the 1930s. Incarcerated by the Nazis, he joined the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei, SED*) in East Germany after the war.
57. Martin Segitz (1853–1927), leading Bavarian SPD politician.
58. Fritz Endres (1877–1963), prominent SPD member from Würzburg.
59. Josef Simon (1865–1949), SPD and USPD member; active in the SPD until his death.
60. Richard Scheid (1876–1962), unionist and influential member of the Bavarian Soldiers' Council. In the original, Mühsam wrongly spells his name “Scheidt.”
61. See the Timeline.
62. Franz Ritter von Epp (1868–1946), Bavarian army general, later leading the military attack on the council republic. He has also been made responsible for the murder of Gustav Landauer.
63. Aleksandr Kolchak (1873–1920), leader of the counterrevolutionary White Guards.
64. Otto Neurath (1882–1945), Austrian economist.
65. The council republic in Hungary was proclaimed on March 21, 1919, and was overthrown by Romanian troops on August 1, 1919.
66. Béla Kun (1886–1939), leader of the Hungarian council republic; after the defeat of the council republic, he moved to the Soviet Union where he became a victim of Stalinist purges.
67. Georg Gradnauer (1872–1950), SPD politician, minister president of Saxony in 1919–1920.
68. Sebastian Schlittenbauer (1874–1936), co-founder of the conservative *Bayerische Volkspartei* [Bavarian People's Party] in 1918; the *Bayerische Volkspartei* was the strongest party in the January 1919 elections for the Bavarian Landtag.
69. *Bayerischer Bauernbund*, a political body representing the rural Bavarian population; founded in 1870, it was dissolved in 1933.
70. See footnote 20 in “Letters from Bavaria.”
71. At the time, one of Europe's biggest companies, Krupp, founded in Essen in 1810, specialized in steel, weapons, and ammunition production.
72. The Peasants' Alliance included members with radical tendencies during the revolution. Overall, it was a centrist organization.
73. Otto Bauer (1883–1931) and Victor Adler (1852–1918), prominent Austrian social democrats.
74. Martin Steiner (1864–1950), member of the *Bayerischer Bauernbund* (see footnote 69).

75. Ludwig Gandorfer (1880–1918), left-leaning member of the *Bayerischer Bauernbund* (see footnote 69).
76. Tagwerk, old German scale unit: 1 Bavarian Tagwerk = 3,407.27 square meters or 3,6675.549 square feet.
77. Likely a pseudonym; the speaker's identity could not be verified.
78. Dietrich, real name: Willi Budich (1890–ca. 1942), lifelong communist activist; after the Nazis' rise to power he moved to the Soviet Union where he became a victim of Stalinist purges.
79. See footnote 9.
80. Fritz Sauber (1884–1949), SPD, USPD, and KPD member, lifelong socialist activist.
81. Ernst Toller (1883–1939), who would become a famous German playwright, was one of the leading figures in Bavaria's council republic. Parts of his autobiographical *I Was a German* (*Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, 1933) are dedicated to the experience.
82. See footnote 88.
83. Fritz Soldmann (1878–1945), unionist, SPD and USPD member; died after years in Nazi prisons and concentration camps.
84. Heinrich von Frauendorfer (1855–1921), jurist without party affiliation who started working for the Bavarian government as a transport administrator in 1904.
85. Gesell called his physiocratic concept *Freiwirtschaft* [Free Economy], based on the principles of *Freiland* [Free Land], *Freigeld* [Free Money], and *Freihandel* [Free Trade].
86. A demurrage currency.
87. See the declaration of April 9 below.
88. Franz Lipp had been treated for megalomania before. Lipp's measure to declare war on Switzerland because Switzerland refused to lend the Bavarian Council Republic sixty locomotives is often quoted as a prime example for his eccentric behavior as a people's delegate.
89. See footnote 11.
90. For Landauer's work as a people's delegate of education, see Ulrich Linse, *Gustav Landauer und die Revolutionszeit 1918/19. Die politischen Reden, Schriften, Erlasse und Briefe Landauers aus der Novemberrevolution 1918/19* [Gustav Landauer and the Revolutionary Period of 1918–1919: Landauer's Political Speeches, Writings, Resolutions, and Letters from the November Revolution of 1918–1919] (Berlin: Kramer, 1974).
91. "War socialists" (*Kriegssozialisten*) was a term for the SPD commonly used by radical socialists and communists.
92. Toni Waibel (1889–1969), lifelong communist activist.
93. Famous Munich beer hall.
94. In early December, the Augsburg SPD had asked the central council to proclaim a council republic in Bavaria. Whether this was the genuine wish of the Augsburg SPD or part of a scheme forcing radicals to decisions that would cause their downfall remains unknown.

APPENDIX 1: RUHR VALLEY

THE RUHR VALLEY, GERMANY'S INDUSTRIAL HEARTLAND SINCE the mid-nineteenth century, was in a peculiar situation after World War I. Declared a demilitarized zone by the Western Allies, the area west of the Rhine was occupied by Allied forces, and no German troops were allowed within a fifty-kilometer buffer zone east of the river. Although separatist tendencies never became dominant, there was widespread mistrust of Berlin and the central government.

During the days of the Kapp Putsch in March 1920, the Ruhr Valley proletariat made a huge contribution to turning the coup attempt into a fiasco. A general strike was declared and orders by the putschists ignored. Even when it was clear that the coup had failed, the workers' militias that had formed in the defense of the republic refused to surrender their arms. Instead, they wanted to use the opportunity to finally establish the authority of the workers' and soldiers' councils in the area. For this purpose, the Red Ruhr Army (*Rote Ruhrarmee*) was formed as an umbrella organization for the workers' militias. Apart from the KPD and the USPD, the newly founded anarchosyndicalist *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands* [Free Workers' Union of Germany] (FAUD) played a significant role in the uprising.

For weeks, there was little that the central government could do, since it was not allowed to send troops into the area. Eventually, however, the Western Allies granted the central government troops permission to enter the region, crush the Red Ruhr Army by force, and end the power of the local workers' and soldiers' councils. As usual, the government troops were accompanied by Free Corps units. By April 7, the Ruhr Valley was under government control.

The Red Ruhr Army was long forgotten, even within the German left, although its legacy lived on in the resistance to the Nazis. Historian Erhard Lucas made a huge contribution to uncovering the history in the early 1970s, when he published the monumental study *Märzrevolution 1920* [March Revolution of 1920] in three volumes. At the same time, the name "Red Ruhr Army" was also picked up by young militants in West Berlin, some of whom later joined the *Bewegung 2. Juni* [Movement Second of June].

This chapter includes a number of Red Ruhr Army documents and two of the rare eyewitness reports of the Ruhr Valley fighting of March and April 1920.

DOCUMENTS FROM THE RED RUHR ARMY

The following documents are taken from the book *Die Rote Armee an Ruhr und Rhein: Aus den Kapptagen 1920* [The Red Army at the Ruhr and Rhein] (Berlin: Hobbing, 1930) by Hans Spethmann. Spethmann's book is strongly biased against the revolutionaries but contains a number of valuable documents.

Declaration by the Red Ruhr Army, March 20, 1920

TO EVERYONE!

We hereby declare that the Red Army has not committed any atrocities! It is the Reichswehr troops who have treated their Red Army hostages and prisoners inhumanely. Hostages were forced to stand with spread legs above machine guns, shielding the shooters. Prisoners were put in heaps of straw and burned alive. Others were hung upside down, their bodies opened, and their intestines removed. Before that, they had been brutally mistreated and beaten with rifle butts. This is how the Reichswehr troops have acted against their own people.

We inform the public about these acts committed by the Reichswehr troops (who are in reality nothing but criminals) with feelings of disgust, disdain, and unspeakable horror. However, it is not our intention to engage in acts of revenge or retaliation affecting innocent men.

We guarantee everyone justice and protection by the Red Army, as long as he is loyal and surrenders his arms. The Red Army will not avenge the injustices it has suffered or punish anyone. We only fight for our ideal, which ought to be everyone's ideal: free people on free land.

No atrocities, no revenge, no punishment; only love for humanity and justice!

The Red Army

Declaration by the Red Ruhr Army, March 26, 1920

Yesterday, on March 25, the delegates of the Executive Councils of Rhineland and Westphalia met in Essen in order to discuss the Bielefeld Resolution¹ and whether the fighting should stop or not. A so-called district council was formed—however, it ought to be called a “district grave,” since its sole intention is to sabotage your victory.

Soldiers! Disperse the politicizing fat cats of all shades with your rifle butts! Do not tolerate any more meetings, since this is where your death sentence is signed! The fat cats have nothing to decide. All decisions are yours. You are the heroes of the revolutionary proletariat!

The fat cats and their meetings only want to confuse you. Do you not see this yet? If you do, then act, and do not allow them to act for you!

Your slogan is still *Now or never!* Do not give up the struggle! There will be no truce and peace before victory, since no corrupt truce and peace can be accepted. You would have long taken Wesel² without the treacherous truce and its demoralizing effects. You must understand this!

Kill the defeatists! Your motto must be Schiller’s words: “Rather death than servitude!” Act, fight, win! If you perish, then at least the reactionary forces shall perish, too! All troops that are not at the front, demand an assembly, in which we will speak to you. Hurry!

Notification by Kruschwitz, Director of Medical Services of the Red Army, Marl, March 28, 1920

Allow me to bring the following to your attention: rumors have reached us suggesting that the peasants and the bourgeoisie will side with the reactionary forces should push come to shove. Furthermore, one of our soldiers reported today that the SPD is planning to attack us.

For this reason, I ask you to do the following: collect all arms still in the possession of the peasants, artisans, and the bourgeoisie. Hunting rifles have already been used to shoot at our soldiers. Collect *all* arms! We have our own security forces.

Call by the commander of the Red Army Gelsenkirchen, W. Krischak, Gelsenkirchen, March 28, 1920

There is still time! Workers, comrades, do you want the shackles of slavery finally removed from your hands and feet? Do you want to be freed from the yoke of slavery that you have carried for decades? Do you want to fight for the highest ideals

of humanity: peace, freedom, and justice? In that case, join the Red Army to secure the achievements that your brothers have won until now. Now or never! Workers unite, workers be strong! Only the unity of the proletariat will lead us to victory.

We will only enlist men who have served as frontline soldiers for at least half a year and who belong to one of the three socialist parties or are without party affiliation.

The recruitment office is at the Hotel Monopol.

Order by the commander of the Red Army Unit I and II, Marl, March 28, 1920

Since we have already had to deal with unauthorized acts committed by irresponsible individuals all along the front, I repeat clearly that these individuals have to be arrested *immediately* and punished *severely*. On March 27, 1920, people who have no military authority whatsoever have even sent soldiers home from the front. Everyone has to confront these people with weapons in hand!

Call by the Central Council, March 28, 1920

WORKERS! PUBLIC SERVANTS! EMPLOYEES!

We have fought for our freedom. We have swept away the government Kapp due to our unity and determination. But the danger is not over. The White terror raging in Saxony and in other parts of the country demonstrates the goal of the reactionary officers.³ They have not given up yet. March 13 will be repeated in a few days.⁴

The proletariat of the industrial heartland has shown that it knows how to fight and how to keep exemplary order. But close to victory we are faced with a specific danger. General von Watter,⁵ whose troops gave a damn about the agreement and the truce of Bielefeld, issued an ultimatum: by March 30, 11 a.m., all weapons shall be surrendered and the Executive Council dissolved.

Proletarians! It is impossible to meet this ultimatum in such a short time. Von Watter knows this. Thousands of Reichwehr soldiers and Noske guards are waiting to destroy us. The reactionary forces demand this destruction. The industrial heartland threatens to turn into hell.

Workers! The officers' caste wants blood. Only proletarians will die, on both sides.

Citizens! Shall the dead have died in vain? Shall your best, your leaders be murdered? You cannot want this to happen!

The White terror of Saxony⁶ shall not enter the industrial heartland. We have the power to bring Germany to a halt! We have the means: a general strike! This is the means that the Central Council of the Executive Council has decided to make use of.

Workers, public servants, employees, citizens! On March 30, no wheel must turn! Join the general strike—*everyone*! Hold out until the reactionary forces will be crushed by the granite block of our unity!

Regulations for the Red Army Units West and East, April 1 [?], 1920

For the High Command East and West: Gräf, Karusseit
For the Central Command: Wohlgemuth

To fight the regular troops, we need strict discipline and manly order. Tough battles still lie ahead of us and experience has taught us that we can only succeed if our units are clearly structured. That's why they need to unite under the following principles:

§1

Everyone joining the Red Army joins the revolutionary proletariat. If it is proven that someone has joined with dishonest intentions that can jeopardize our holy cause, he will receive the hardest punishment. (Death penalty.)

§2

The troops must strictly follow the orders of their leaders. Those who do not follow the orders of their leaders will be disarmed and severely punished.

§3

Cowardice before the enemy will be punished by death. The same is true for soldiers caught robbing, stealing, looting, or keeping expropriated possessions for themselves. All expropriated possessions are to be delivered to the Central Command. The soldiers will be paid and the goods will be distributed equally and fairly. We warn you again: do obey these principles and spare yourself punitive measures!

§4

Supplies are provided by the central command. Those who lose their troops have to make their way to Marl immediately. Groups of roaming soldiers will be disarmed by security patrols and sent to the Central Command. If punishable actions can be proven, these men will be sent to the relevant authorities.

Oath: I pledge on the program of the revolutionary proletariat that I will fight and risk my blood for the high and holy ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity. The above articles shall always form the guidelines of my actions.

Long live socialism! Human rights for those who defend human rights!



1. The *Bielefelder Abkommen* [Bielefeld Resolution] was an agreement signed in the town of Bielefeld on March 24, 1920, between government representatives and Red Ruhr Army delegates. In exchange for the Red Ruhr Army handing over their weapons, the government promised no military occupation of the Ruhr Valley, no persecution for any acts committed during the Kapp Putsch conflicts, and increased political influence of workers' organizations, also in matters of defense. The agreement was rejected by many Red Ruhr Army units as well as by wide parts of the German military and never came into effect.
2. Wesel is a town in the Rhine Valley, which was of strategic importance during the struggle of 1920.
3. A reference to the dedicated workers' resistance against the Kapp Putsch in Saxony that was met with strong repression from the police, government troops, and reactionary militias.
4. Reference to the Kapp Putsch.
5. Oskar von Watter (1861–1939), aristocratic German officer leading the government troops and Free Corps units during the campaign against the Red Ruhr Army.
6. Government troops and Free Corps units were violently suppressing workers' uprisings in Saxony following the Kapp Putsch.

DORTMUND AFTER THE BIELEFELD RESOLUTION

ANTON KALT

Eyewitness account from the fighting in the Ruhr Valley, translated from the book *Arbeiterlieder aus dem Ruhrgebiet* [Workers' Songs from the Ruhr Valley], edited by Frank Baier and Detlev Puls (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1981). Anton Kalt (1903–1975) was a miner and lifelong communist from Dortmund.

AT THE TIME, THE EASTERN FRONT STRETCHED FROM Wickedede an der Ruhr until Pelkum, Hamm, and further north. This way we had cordoned off the Ruhr Valley. While we were there, nothing happened. We went on a few patrols, and here and there rang a shot, but that was it.

Out of the blue we were told that the war was over. My brother arrived one morning and said, "They have signed some agreement in Bielefeld. I don't know anything about the details. Go to Aplerbeck and find out!" Well, I got on a horse, rode to Aplerbeck, and met the chairman of the revolutionary council. He handed me a paper and said, "Tell your brother this and that—in any case, his men shall retreat. Everything is sorted now, everything is in order."

We trusted that information and all companies gathered in different villages. I spent one night at a farmhouse and then returned to Aplerbeck where my brother dissolved the armed forces.

However, the agreement wasn't kept, the men of Ehrhardt¹ and all those other folks, the Free Corps leaders, came from Bavaria and all sorts of places. The Reichswehr just watched, not doing anything. Afterward, Mr. Severing, who had signed the Bielefeld Resolution, just shrug his shoulders and said, "We had an agreement, but they didn't keep it." [...]

We lived in a very small cottage up in the Aplerbecker Mark behind the Schwerter Forest. Now, everyone arrived who had not yet surrendered his weapons. My brother was in charge of the war chest and handled the accounts very diligently. When all the Red Guards came, my mother and my grandmother threw their arms up in horror,

screaming, "Oh God, oh God, what will come of this?" You know how women are. My father said, "Don't worry, nothing will happen."

In any case, all these people came to my brother in the middle of the night and he sat up all night writing and doing the accounts. Some soldier still got 120 marks, another 130, and so on. At around 3 a.m. I went outside. There were ninety-eight guns and carbines in the yard. I went back inside and said, "Everyone just left his carbine in the yard!" This was far from ideal. So, my mother, my old grandmother, and I carried carbines for the rest of the night. We hid them in the barn of a farmer who lived nearby, about two hundred meters from us. We buried them underneath the hay. He was very surprised the next time he threshed.



1. Hermann Ehrhardt (1881–1971) was a reactionary officer and Free Corps leader; sometimes, all Free Corps soldiers were referred to as "Ehrhardt's men." It, wrongly, says "Erhard" in the original.

WHAT HAS BEEN REALLY BOTHERING ME ALL THOSE YEARS...

JOHANNES GROHNKE

Eyewitness account from the fighting in the Ruhr Valley, translated from the book *Arbeiterlieder aus dem Ruhrgebiet* [Workers' Songs from the Ruhr Valley], edited by Frank Baier and Detlev Puls (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1981). Johannes Grohnke was a miner, musician, and socialist from the region.

WHAT HAS BEEN REALLY BOTHERING ME ALL THOSE years was that the Red Army has so often been portrayed as a purely communist affair. But it wasn't. Let us use our own neighborhood as an example. There was a well-known officer, Gustav Schroten, who had a Knight's Cross (*Ritterkreuz*) and the Bavarian Pour-le-Merité for sergeants.¹ He joined the Red Army and marched with them to Lippe. He never belonged to any political party in his life. He simply was fed up at the time, saying, "Have they not had enough yet? What are they doing, waving their black-white-and-red flags again? Do they want another war? Not me!"

There were also prominent SPD members who fought in the Ruhr Valley. Anton Menne, who was later employed by the *Volksfürsorge*,² was a very well-known social democrat who fought at the front. Johann Möller³ was an SPD member, too, and there were many who did not belong to any party. There weren't even that many communists at the time.

During the fighting after the Kapp Putsch, three men from our neighborhood died, if I remember correctly. I went to the funeral of Paul Pradella with my father. Red Guards gathered around the grave, raised their rifles, and fired three shots in the air. We children had our fun with the empty shells.

In Eisenheim, at Grafen-Busch, a man called Schöneborn from our neighborhood died. He was no longer armed when he got killed. He had hidden in a toilet. As usual, the Free Corps soldiers had approached

children, and one of them told them about Schöneborn hiding. They got him out and he was executed right there and then.

The third one was a son-in-law of the Kreuzer family who was severely wounded near Hünxe and then beaten to death.

There were also three executions by a firing squad at the Holten Railway Station after a drumhead court-martial. The reason for the execution was simply that the three had belonged to the Workers' Guards (*Arbeiterwehr*)—which, in fact, most probably meant that they had never fought at the Lippe front. But they had been denounced, and that was enough. One of them was one of the best-known people in Holten, the old Muhs. The proletarian poet Johannes Leschinski later wrote a song about the death walk of the old man.⁴



1. High military decorations.
2. The *Volksfürsorge Lebensversicherung AG* [roughly, People's Welfare Life Insurance Inc.] was founded in 1913 as a socialist insurance company by trade unions and cooperatives. After a turbulent history it exists to this day under the name *Volksfürsorge AG Vertriebsgesellschaft für Vorsorge- und Finanzprodukte*.
3. Possibly, Alexander Johann Möller (1903–1985), lifelong SPD member and German Minister of Finance 1969–1971.
4. Commentary by Johannes Leschinski (included in *Arbeiterlieder aus dem Ruhrgebiet*): "The man had ten children and he had been involved in the Kapp Putsch conflicts, but not at the front. He was quite old, and they simply took him and shot him. I watched it all happen from a distance of about two hundred meters. I was seventeen years old and the images really haunted me for a long time; so, eventually, I wrote a song about it."

APPENDIX 2: VOGTLAND

THE VOGTLAND LIES AT THE BORDERS OF SAXONY, THURINGIA, Bavaria, and the Czech Republic. The name refers to *Vogt*, an old German administrative term for areas controlled by aristocratic overlords. The Vogtland consisted of the *Vögte* (plural) of Weida, Gera, Plauen, and Greiz. An industrialized area, it has always been one of the heartlands of the German communist movement. While the KPD gathered around 2 percent nationwide in 1920, it was the strongest party in Halle, just north of the Vogtland, with almost 30 percent. Workers' strikes, uprisings, and rebellions were common in the region. Until 1921, armed workers, sometimes referred to as "communist bandits," roamed the area, expropriating, redistributing, and threatening the rich, while providing social services for the poor and agitating for the revolution. Their most notorious leaders were Karl Plättner and, especially, the Vogtland native Max Hoelz.

Hoelz, the son of a day laborer, was radicalized as a soldier during World War I. He became an uncompromising communist who never allowed party resolutions to dictate his actions. As a consequence, party comrades often denounced him as an anarchist. Meanwhile, he gained a Robin Hood-like status among the Vogtland population.

Hoelz was eventually arrested in Berlin after the workers were defeated in the Central German Uprising of 1921.¹ He was sentenced to life in prison. He was freed by an amnesty in 1928 and moved to the Soviet Union, where he drowned under mysterious circumstances in the Oka River near Nizhny Novgorod (Gorky) in 1933. Even in the Soviet Union, Hoelz's problems with the authorities continued and he was soon considered unreliable by the Stalinist regime. Many assume that this was the reason for his death.

This chapter consists of excerpts from Hoelz's autobiographical account *Vom "Weißen Kreuz" zur Roten Fahne: Jugend-, Kampf- und Zuchthausserlebnisse* [From the "White Cross" to the Red Flag: Youth, Struggle, and Prison Experiences]. The selected passages cover his activities in the Vogtland.



1. See "March–April 1921" in the Timeline.

FROM THE “WHITE CROSS” TO THE RED FLAG YOUTH, STRUGGLE, AND PRISON EXPERIENCES (EXCERPTS)

MAX HOELZ

Max Hoelz's memoirs *Vom “Weißen Kreuz” zur roten Fahne. Jugend-, Kampf- und Zuchthausserlebnisse* [From the “White Cross” to the Red Flag: Youth, Struggle, and Prison Experiences] were published by Malik Verlag in Berlin in 1929. These are excerpts from the first part, “Jugend, Krieg, Revolution” [Youth, War, Revolution]. The inserts in italics indicate longer omissions and provide short summaries.

Toward the end of World War I, Hoelz was working at a reinforced concrete construction company near Mulhouse, in the Alsace region, close to the French front.

ON NOVEMBER 7, I RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM MY FAMILY SAYING that my wife was very sick. I asked for a holiday and left Alsace. On November 8 and 9, I traveled from Strasbourg via Frankfurt, Kassel, Halle, and Chemnitz to the Vogtland. I saw things that I had not deemed possible. The trains were full of troops returning home. In Frankfurt, I only got on the train by climbing through a toilet window. I spent almost the entire journey in this emergency compartment, squeezed in with two others.

I felt the enormous power of the masses who know how to march and act without officers and whose goals differ from those of their leaders. I had known nothing about this power during the previous three decades of my life, and now it seemed able to crush everything in its way. However, at the time, I could only feel this emotionally. I was not able to reflect on my impressions. All I knew was that visiting a sick woman could not be my priority right now. Something more important was happening. It was also during those days that I remembered my encounter with Georg Schumann.¹ I guarded him together with other soldiers in Russia in 1917. He was the first socialist I ever met.

In Frankfurt, Kassel, and Halle, where our train stopped for a long time, I got to know that, following the Russian example, the German workers and soldiers had formed workers' and soldiers' councils. All these experiences were a revelation to me, in the truest sense of the word.

On November 9, I arrived at home in Falkenstein.² My first question was whether there already existed a workers' and soldiers' council. It seemed that the concept hadn't reached the town yet. I called a meeting the same evening with handwritten leaflets, inviting the soldiers on leave and the workers. About thirty people came, among them the leader of Falkenstein's USPD chapter, Storl. When I told him that the purpose of the invitation was to form a workers' and soldiers' council in Falkenstein, we had our first conflict. Storl declared, very categorically, that if this was necessary he was the one to found it.

The Falkenstein Workers' and Soldiers' Council was formed the same evening. Storl and I were elected chairmen. We demanded a room in the Rathaus, in which the administrative affairs of the council should be handled. The mayor explained that he would recognize the council and its resolutions if Storl made sure that I was kicked out.

The next day, I and some other council members traveled to Leipzig to collect weapons from the general army command that was already in the hands of the local USPD leaders, Fleißner, Lipinski, and others.³ After much effort we received a few rifles. When I returned to Falkenstein two days later and handed the weapons to the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, Storl had already fulfilled the mayor's wish. I had been expelled. I proceeded to work for the revolutionary cause in other ways.

The *Leipziger Volkszeitung* had established a printshop in Plauen and founded a USPD journal for the entire Vogtland, the *Vogtländische Volkszeitung*.⁴ I went there to apply for a job. I was hired to sell subscriptions. I learned a lot from going door to door and advertising a cause I had not yet fully understood.

When the preparations for the national assembly elections began, the USPD in Plauen—where I had become a member—sent me to the neighboring towns in order to arrange meetings with comrades and found local party chapters. The USPD chapters in Reichenbach, Netzschkau, and Mühlau were formed as a consequence of this. In Reichenbach, I received my first beating by SPD fanatics while distributing USPD leaflets.

At around this time, I sent a letter to Georg Schumann asking him to speak at a meeting in Falkenstein. I did not only hope that his thoughts would have an impact on the masses in the Vogtland, but also that he would clarify many things for me personally.

Schumann wrote that he would like to come, but that he could no longer speak at a USPD meeting because he now belonged to the recently founded KPD. If I

wanted to organize a KPD meeting, however, he would come. I did, although it wasn't easy.

By the time Schumann spoke, the Falkenstein workers were already aware of the contradictions and inadequacies within the USPD and Schumann's words made a strong impression. Within a few months, the entire Vogtland became a bastion of communism—not least due to the tireless agitation of comrade Eugen Steinert,⁵ who worked in the Vogtland at the time. Together with him and Paul Popp⁶ I founded the Falkenstein chapter of the KPD in the spring of 1919. This meant that I had taken on a prominent political role that created strong tensions with my family and friends.

Soon after the Falkenstein KPD chapter had been founded, the four to five thousand unemployed workers in town began to organize themselves. They presented a number of demands to the reactionary mayor. The economic situation in Falkenstein, with its roughly seventeen thousand inhabitants, was desperate. In the years before the war, the economy was booming. The embroidery, laces, and curtain industry of the Vogtland was well known far beyond Germany's borders, and many goods were exported. The town grew and entire neighborhoods as well as new streets were built, while hundreds of embroidery shops opened within the course of a few months.

The outbreak of the war marked an abrupt end to this development. Neither the embroiderers and weavers who escaped the army nor the women and girls had anything to do. Raw materials could not be imported, finished products could not be exported. Thousands of lives were ruined. Whatever had not been completely destroyed during the war was destroyed after it by the shortsightedness and narrowheartedness of the mayor, Queck. When sick and hungry wives of soldiers complained that in Auerbach, only half an hour away, the economic conditions were significantly better, Queck only grabbed his stick, threatening to beat them or to throw them down the stairs.

Near my flat was the town's soup kitchen where hundreds of women, children, and unemployed men were insufficiently fed. I watched this every day from my window. The poor knew me because of my short activity in the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. They asked me to speak at a meeting of the unemployed. After the meeting, I was voted into their council. As a consequence, more driven by emotion than reflection, I engaged in actions that send me on a path very different to the one laid out for me by the bourgeoisie.

The Falkenstein mayor calls the military into town to suppress unrest, but the Council of the Unemployed, under the leadership of Hoelz, forces the troops to leave. The Council of the Unemployed becomes centrally involved in running the town's affairs.

The Council of the Unemployed worked hand in hand with the authorities to distribute food and fuel. It also implemented measures against the growing black market in town. We began sending two council members together with two policemen to the houses of the factory owners who were known to store huge quantities of foodstuffs acquired in contraband trade. The provisions were confiscated. On certain days, mountains of fat ham and other items filled the Rathaus. In such cases, the Council of the Unemployed published a note in the town's journal and invited war widows, the sick, and women in childbirth to fetch a certain amount of whatever delicacy was available. All this happened in cooperation with the authorities.

One day, there was an old, grieving mother among the hundreds of tired women who regularly came. She wanted to get supplies for her twenty-six-year-old son who had been suffering from scurvy for a year. She was told to come back the next day, when a distribution of supplies was prepared. She came at the hour of the distribution. However, she was visibly shaken and told the authorities that it was now too late—her son had died in the morning.

Another day, a blind man appeared at a meeting of the Council of the Unemployed. He said that he earned a modest living as a basketweaver and asked for a loan of 1,000 marks to buy wicker. I sent a member of the council to a fetch a rich trader who I was certain had no idea what to do with his wealth. I told him to give the blind man what he needed. The trader complied.

At a big meeting in Treuen, an old day laborer spoke with a stutter and in clumsy words. For forty years, he had been working for a manor owner in Pfaffengrün. His son was employed there as well. They received an hourly salary of fifty pfennige, which equaled twenty-five peace pfennige.⁷ The old man had asked his employer for a raise because the money he received was too little to live on but too much to die. Apparently, the manor owner had responded, "Go to Hoelz and let him give you something."

I wrote the manor owner the same evening. I requested him to send a delivery boy with 10,000 marks instantly, so that we could give a raise to his laborers. I told him that if he didn't comply, we would fetch his horses from the stable and sell them. The money was delivered on the spot.

At a time when no potatoes had been seen in Falkenstein for months, a truck driver came to me and said that in Grünbach, only half an hour away, huge amounts of potatoes were being sold. I could hardly believe this and took it upon myself to talk to the Grünbach mayor. He sold two wagons of potatoes to me and said that an hour earlier he could have given me another twenty-five thousand centners⁸—now, however, he had sold them to someone else. He also said that he had reliable contacts and that he had already offered peas, oats, bacon, potatoes, etc. to the mayor of Falkenstein but that the offers had always been refused. Upon my order, the major now sent a telegram ordering foodstuffs for a billion marks for

Falkenstein and other towns in the region. To guarantee the payment, I demanded the towns' capitalists to loan the money to the municipality. The foodstuffs should be sold at low prices to the inhabitants.

The invasion of the government troops thwarted these plans. Neither the mayor nor the USPD leaders Storl and Pöhlmann liked to see us take administrative leadership, since the success of the Council of the Unemployed, whose members were predominantly communists, strengthened the communist idea in Falkenstein and its surroundings.

In a collaborative effort, the mayor, Storl, and Pöhlmann got Dresden's SPD government to send military troops to Falkenstein once more. This time, the Council of the Unemployed was to be dissolved under any circumstances, its members arrested, and I in particular, was to be taken into custody. The mayor declared repeatedly the people would accept the hardships much more patiently if I did not incite them to protest all the time.

On Tuesday, June 3, at 2 a.m., a Regiment Jäger entered Falkenstein under the leadership of an Oberst Berger. The houses of about one hundred comrades and workers were searched immediately.

The house where I was staying was stormed by one hundred men with rifles and hand grenades under the pretense that someone had shot at them from the roof. However, no weapons were found inside the house. The unemployed and the workers had no weapons in general. Nonetheless, Noske's headhunters fired toward the chimney for three to four hours while throwing hand grenades into the yard. An officer yelled, "The fellow has to be killed, even if we have to blow up the whole house!"

I was not in the house, however, because my excellent intelligence service had warned me in time. I observed the pitiful actions of the government troops from the nearby Mühlberg. Although the military remained in Falkenstein for several weeks and did not leave a single house and closet unsearched, I was never found.

Hoelz is on the run for several months, agitating and studying socialism, strongly inspired by the council communist Otto Rühle. Finally, he is arrested in Ilten near Hanover and kept in a prison nearby, in Burgdorf, awaiting transfer to Plauen.

I knew that it would be difficult to get out of the prison in Plauen. Therefore I considered several ways to escape in Burgdorf. At first, I tried to convince the wardens to help me. This failed. Then my wife smuggled a letter I had written out of the prison and delivered it to my friends in the Vogtland. It contained a detailed escape plan.

Five men arrived in Burgdorf after some days. These were reckless comrades who had also brought a poacher, known for his bravery, to help with the difficult

task. At around midnight, three of them were to approach the prison gate, two of them in fine clothes, including one with a military hat, the third with torn clothes, a packed rucksack, and no hat. The third man was to act like a vagabond, the other two as voluntary gendarmes arresting him. Two more comrades were to hide in the dark.

The comrade with the military hat knocked on the prison gate at midnight. When he was asked what the matter was, he said, "I am the voluntary gendarme Müller, I want to hand over a man we have arrested." Two wardens opened the gate to investigate, but only a crack. One of the comrades got a foot in the door, the others managed to tear it open, one grabbed the keys to the prison, the others chained the wardens.

I had waited the entire evening on my bed, fully dressed. My heart was beating loudly as I anticipated the signal. At 9 p.m. I started to hear a sawing noise near my window. I panicked. At first, I thought my comrades had gotten the insane idea to free me that way. This would have spoiled the entire plan. When the noise grew louder, I realized that it was my neighbor. He kept on sawing, tirelessly and determinedly, and the longer he sawed the less worried he seemed about the noise.

I wanted him to succeed. At the same time, I was worried that the noise would alarm the wardens, which might also prevent my escape. The sawing continued until almost midnight, with very brief pauses. Suddenly, all hell broke loose. I heard yelling, the slamming of doors, bursting windows, and finally gunshots. Next thing I knew, the door to my cell flew open and a comrade screamed, "Max, you are free!" I followed him upstairs and saw that a warden had gotten loose, randomly firing his gun in all directions. We ran out onto the street. We caused great confusion among the lovers who were looking for a quiet spot in the dark. When we ran into a group of people, we jumped off the road and landed in a big park-like garden that belonged to Burgdorf Castle. We kept on running but realized soon that the park was surrounded by a deep moat, at least four meters wide. There was no turning back, because by now people were following us. We had to continue. Some of us managed to jump across the moat. Others, me included, fell into the water, which was at least two meters deep. We managed to get out in time, however, and continued on foot to Hanover, a very long walk.

After his escape, Hoelz continues his agitation and, following the Kapp Putsch, forms a Red Army in the Vogtland.

We were not satisfied with what he had achieved, especially when we heard that in the whole country, particularly in the Ruhr Valley, workers fought the troops of Kapp and Lüttwitz. We considered the news about the failure of the Kapp Putsch and the reinstallation of the old government a bluff used to lure and appease the

workers. We all agreed that if hundreds of thousands of workers and comrades fought in the Ruhr Valley we had to do everything to support them. The best we could do right now was to disarm the reactionary Reichswehr and the bourgeois military volunteers of the Vogtland and to arm the workers instead.

We established recruitment offices for a Vogtland Red Army. We armed the workers who came from many parts of the country to join the revolutionary struggle. In order to collect funds for provisions, salaries, etc., we ordered the capitalists and war profiteers to appear at a certain place in Falkenstein at a certain time. I went there unarmed, together with one comrade, and requested a weekly payment of 45,000 marks to the Red Army. Sixty men were assembled. They asked for a few minutes to think things over. My companion and I left.

After our return, the men told us that they would comply given the current situation. They only wanted the Red Army to maintain public order and prevent looting, since the police, the gendarmerie, and all bourgeois authorities had been disarmed. This was only in our interest. We could not tolerate improper elements discrediting the revolutionary cause.

In Plauen, a young Red Guard had been tempted by jewelry during a search for weapons in the house of the factory owner Zöbisch. The factory owner told the Red Army command that some of his jewelry was missing. I ordered a strict search of all soldiers, at first without result. When we asked the proletariat for help, a young female worker came forward with a ring she had received from a Red Guard. This is how we found the perpetrator. The jewelry was returned to the factory owner and the Red Guard detained to avoid harming our reputation.

In another incident, a group leader who had come from some other part of the country took a few silver coins from an innkeeper. This was in Klingenthal at the Czechoslovakian border. The innkeeper approached me when I arrived. He said that one of the Red Guards had taken all of his silver coins, about one and a half thousand marks, an amount that had taken him a very long time to save. Apparently, the townspeople had given the soldiers coffee and other refreshments. He himself had hosted a group and one of them must have taken the money.

I ordered all Red Guards to be searched, even the company commander. Despite full-body searches the money was not found. I got frustrated and wondered whether the innkeeper had invented the story to get compensation.

The same night, however, I went to check on the soldiers keeping guard. At one of the posts furthest away from town, the leader was missing. I was astonished to hear from the guards that he had already been missing for several hours. After a search of almost an hour I found him completely drunk in an inn. His bill was considerable, although alcohol consumption was strictly prohibited for Red Guards. I got the suspicion that such an irresponsible man might also be capable of stealing from his host. When we searched his pockets and the lining of his coat,

we found some silver coins. He could not explain in any satisfying way how he had gotten them. When I pressured him, he finally admitted that he had taken the money and had buried the rest in the forest. I was so furious that I disciplined him right there and then. I beat him with his rifle until he fell down like a brick. I had hit him so hard that I feared he might be dead. My companions carried him to a nearby police station. The next morning, he came to me sober and asked tearfully for forgiveness and to be reaccepted into the fighting unit. This, of course, had to be rejected. Meanwhile, the innkeeper got all his money back.

These were the only cases in which I encountered revolutionary soldiers forgetting what they owed their own class. [...]

Because of the fighting during the spring and summer of 1919, twenty-four workers from Falkenstein had been detained for nine months while awaiting trial in the Plauen District Court. The date of the trial, well guarded by Noske troops, coincided with the Kapp Putsch. The Falkenstein workers hoped that the workers of Plauen would free their comrades. However, the days went by and the rescue never came. Finally, I decided that an act of violence was needed to get the comrades free. In the middle of the night, I marched into Plauen, a town of 130,000 people, accompanied by only fifty men and three machine guns. A bigger contingent would have caused too much attention. The rescue mission could only succeed if it was too surprising for the military, the gendarmerie, and the police to interfere.

The wardens refused to open the gates. We had to force our way in, smashing all the doors. Eventually, we reached a very high and massive iron gate blocking the way to the cells. We were unable to smash this obstacle with our axes, but we didn't have much time—something had to be done before the Reichswehr and the gendarmerie were alarmed. We formed two rows, shoulder-to-shoulder, and started rocking back and forth, steadily increasing speed and pressure. It took only a few seconds and the gate collapsed with a loud boom. Luckily, no one was injured.

The prisoners realized that the hour of freedom was near and began to cause a deafening ruckus, yelling, banging, singing, whistling, cheering—one could not hear his own word. We also, finally, saw the wardens who were completely silent and in shock; they never expected us to crash through the iron gate. They must have reckoned that their last hour had come because many of them had treated our comrades very badly. However, I only demanded the list of political prisoners and ordered, "Open the cells of these twenty-four men immediately, we take them with us to Falkenstein!" Without objection, the wardens went to work.

It was the most beautiful day of my life when the comrades who had languished for nine months in torturous detention were finally free again and able to return to their loved ones.

Hoelz and the freed comrades return to Falkenstein.

In the afternoon of the same day, a comrade and I went to the Falkenstein courthouse. I called all of the public servants together, from the district judge to the marshals and wardens. I told them that power was now in the hands of the proletariat, and that the proletariat didn't need any bourgeois laws, which only existed to keep the workers obedient. Instead, we would make our laws ourselves. I told them to fetch all of the files and books in the courthouse and to pile them up on the square between the courthouse and the school.

At first, the district judge thought that I was joking. When he realized that I wasn't, he started pleading and crying, telling me that his entire life depended on these papers and this work; he was brought up that way and I should try to put myself in his shoes. I replied that this was about bigger things than personal sentiments and that I could not take any consideration for his feelings. I had to think of the workers' liberation, and this was only a small contribution. He had no choice but to get the documents. The courthouse employees worked for hours to pile up all the files and books, while I guarded them. When the last file and the last book—with the exception of custody papers—were taken from the dusty shelves, I gave the two district court judges and a pupil barrister a box of matches each, took a fourth one myself, and upon my command the pile was set on fire at all four corners. The fire burned for three days and three nights.

I knew that it was the historical duty of the revolution to eradicate the old order everywhere. The thousands of articles of the law cement the capitalist property relations that allow a small ruling class to live off the exploitation of the broad masses. One of the revolution's first steps was to destroy the "Tables of the Law" of the old order. The big, general transformation does not happen at once; it is a long process, in which acts like the burning of legal files, which shake the bourgeois order and its "law," have an important symbolic significance.

Hoelz tells about his great frustrations with the non-revolutionary politics of the leading Chemnitz KPD member Heinrich Brandler.

When considering the social conditions of the time, there is no doubt that in the days of the Kapp Putsch the most important requirement for the victory of the revolution in Germany was missing, namely a determined, disciplined, and solid communist party led by revolutionaries. Unfortunately, we did not understand this in the Vogtland. This weakened us tremendously. We were under the illusion that the revolutionary fervor of some spirited leaders sufficed—leaders like Hoelz, who knew how to use the sentiments of the masses at the time to organize direct proletarian action. However, the leadership of the KPD had its own illusions about the role of the KPD. While we overestimated the revolutionary potential of the individual, the central party leadership of Thalheimer and Levi proved

as opportunistic as the communist leader in the district of Chemnitz, Brandler. A revolutionary party can only lead the revolutionary struggle if its position is clear, exemplary, and unambiguous. Then it can guide the working class as its true vanguard, enjoying the trust of the masses. The KPD leaders at the time focused way too much on the SPD and made their politics dependent on the positions of the social democrats.

I assume I don't have to stress that we cannot make the party as a whole responsible for the mistakes that were made. Even at the time, the best and most revolutionary groups among the workers were in the party, including the revolutionary fighters of the Vogtland, but these active and progressive elements lacked clarity and ideological direction. That is why they were not able to change the party's course by replacing the wavering and opportunistic politics of the party leaders with uncompromising Bolshevik positions. Given the opportunistic leadership, it was difficult both for the individual revolutionary workers and for the fighting units to submit themselves unconditionally to party discipline; it would have been much easier had the leadership been clear and determined.

A characteristic example for the opportunistic politics of some party leaders at the time of the Kapp Putsch was the defeatist position described by Brandler in his pamphlet about the Kapp Putsch.⁹ On page 76, he writes: "Abandoned by the country's proletariat, abandoned by the USPD in Saxony, and viciously opposed by the SPD in Chemnitz and in the whole state of Saxony, we could not do anything but accept things as they were..." Brandler could not have made the illusions that his politics were built on more obvious. He seemed surprised that the KPD was opposed by the SPD, and that the USPD betrayed the revolution. Developments that any true communist leader should have seen coming, confused him so much that he had nothing to say except, "We could not do anything but accept things as they were."

The first leaflet published by the KPD in March contained unbelievable passages. I am citing one: "It is not the time yet to fight the military dictatorship. This time will come when the military dictatorship will show its true face. The masses will only understand the military dictatorship when scorpions will descend on their backs instead of whips, when iron oppression rules the country, and when war is raising its ugly head again."

Meanwhile, the proletariat was encouraged to fight under the purely propagandistic slogans, "Down with the military dictatorship!" "For the dictatorship of the proletariat!" and "For the German communist council republic!"

Such a leaflet must appear insane even to the most non-political mind. In each line you find contradictions: "Do not fight the military dictatorship!—It is not the time yet for the dictatorship of the proletariat, but fight for the German communist council republic!—Don't lift a finger for proletarian democracy!" The

party leadership only seemed ready to sound the attack on military dictatorship once all revolutionary soldiers were killed by the monarchist generals.

On March 22, the party's central leadership sent a long, trite letter to all district chapters that no one could make any sense of. Let me quote the final paragraph:

Comrades, you will ask us for direction. We know, and we hope that you agree, that the time for the council republic has not yet come. But we have the duty to use the current struggle for the best of the proletariat. We have the duty to advance as far as possible. The objective of our struggle is determined by the revolutionary maturity of the workers. First and foremost, the workers need to be armed. This can be accomplished and we believe that it must be accomplished. The coming government, no matter its exact form, must rest on the bayonets of the workers, not the bayonets of the bourgeoisie. We must also elect workers' councils everywhere, so that we have the organizational power to oppose the coming government, even if it won't come from the workers' councils. Comrades, we hope that you are all fighting with a glowing heart and we send you revolutionary greetings!

Let us take a note that, on March 22, the party leadership still demanded the armament of the workers. At the very same time, the Chemnitz Workers' Council, with Brandler as chairman, tried to prevent me and Vogtland workers from acquiring arms at the Reichswehr barracks in Frankenberg, where they were stored in abundance. And that was not enough. Pressured by the SPD and USPD, Brandler even demanded that the Vogtland workers and I surrendered the arms we had. Yet, the same Brandler wrote a call to the revolutionary proletariat during the days of the Kapp Putsch, including the following lines: "We can only remove the capitalist order by indiscriminately using all violent means at our disposal. Those who claim to fight for socialism while keeping the proletariat itself from fighting betray the proletariat. This is a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, for communism!"

The publications of our leaders during the Kapp Putsch had neither direction nor program. All they did was cause endless confusion among the workers. [...]

Despite my limited political experience at the time, I already knew during the Kapp days that the opportunistic politics of the party leadership were wrong. The leaders had no idea how to relate the revolutionary sentiment of the masses (which was genuine and not contested by anyone) to what was realistically achievable at the time.

In the industrial centers of the Ruhr Valley, the Vogtland, and central Germany—in short, in all regions where working masses were concentrated—the party should have turned the defense against the Kapp Putsch into an attack against the capitalist order itself. The workers in the Ruhr Valley and in the Vogtland

realized their historical duty. They tried to turn their struggle against the Kapp generals into a struggle for the proletarian dictatorship. They attacked and risked their lives without waiting for a telegram from the party leadership. They acted in the exact way that responsible revolutionaries have to act in such a situation: they must become active themselves, even if an order from above is missing! A revolutionary leadership that evades the struggle—maybe because seizing power does not have a 51 percent probability of succeeding—loses the trust of the masses.

I do not want to claim that the continuation of the struggle at the time would have allowed the workers to seize and defend power. However, it seems evident to me that the outcome would have been very different if the workers in the Vogtland and Saxony had taken pressure off the workers fighting in the Ruhr Valley through a determined uprising at the right time; not least because this would have inspired similar uprisings in other parts of Germany. And even if all these uprisings had been crushed, they would have been struggles led by the Communist Party. The proletariat gains its most valuable experiences in revolutionary struggles. These struggles are necessary lessons for the final battle. [...]

After the movement was clubbed down in the Ruhr Valley, the government proceeded to douse the last revolutionary crater in the Vogtland. Fifty thousand men, equipped with the most advanced weaponry, surrounded the region. I had no intention to engage in any battle under such circumstances. Before the government troops reached us, we left our headquarters in Falkenstein and retreated to Klingenthal at the Czechoslovakian border. I wanted to prevent a chaotic disintegration of the workers' troops and considered it more appropriate to be detained by the Czechoslovakians than to fall into the hands of the Reichswehr.

To warn the government and to deter the Reichswehr from chasing us, we had left posters in Falkenstein threatening to burn down the capitalists' estates should we be followed. In reality, we never had any such intentions. We only wanted to scare the capitalists into pleading with the Reichswehr to end their advance. Unfortunately, the plan wasn't entirely successful. The fact that some of our soldiers did burn down a few of the capitalists' estates was against the orders of our executive council.

Our soldiers found shelter in Klingenthal and in the surrounding towns. The Czechoslovakian authorities had been told that we were planning an attack on their territory. As a result, the Czechoslovakian army command sent soldiers to the border. I negotiated with Czech officers the possibility of crossing the border in closed ranks and be detained on their side.

Over the next few days, there were some skirmishes between our outposts and Reichswehr patrols. When the circle around us got tighter and tighter and an escape impossible, I ordered the destruction of some bridges and roads, so that the Reichswehr could not stop us from crossing the border at the last moment.

On a rainy April evening, I recalled the outposts and patrols, collected all the available troops on the road that led from Klingenthal to Georgenthal, and explained the situation to all of them. We were completely surrounded and only had two options: either we would all cross the border with our weapons and be detained by the Czechoslovakian government; or we would split into several small groups attempting to make it past the Reichswehr posts or to cross the border into Czechoslovakia on our own. The comrades voted for the second option. Resistance had become futile at this point and had only given the Reichswehr a pretext for a bloodbath.

I returned to Klingenthal with a comrade to make sure that none of our troops and, especially, no weapons had been left behind. We almost ran into a Reichswehr patrol—at the last moment, we were able to run up the hills of Untersachsenberg to evade them.

In the morning, we found shelter in the small house of an instrument maker. His wife was just about to make us a cup of coffee when the adult son stormed into the room yelling, “The Reichswehr is coming!” He hurried us into a small hayloft that lay above the goat barn and hid us in a bundle of hay.

We could hear the orders of the patrol commander. The soldiers encircled the house. Some of them searched all the rooms. About four men stuck their bayonets into the hay we were hiding in. They injured my leg and I was just about to cry out, afraid that they might poke out my or my companion’s eyes, when they stopped. Once again, we heard the patrol commander, now gathering his men, moving them to next residence. After a little while, we dared crawl out from underneath the hay and observed through a small roof window how arrested comrades were led out of the neighboring house with government soldiers hitting them on the head and the back with their rifles. It was terrible to watch our comrades being mistreated that way without being able to interfere. We had made many prisoners during the last months, but never treated them inhumanely. It was very difficult to remain in hiding under such circumstances.

I suggested to my companion that we should immediately leave the house because the Reichswehr soldiers would soon return. He refused to go. He considered the house the best hiding place and was certain that the soldiers would not search the hayloft again. I insisted on making a move. I told him that I would leave by myself if he did not follow. Hesitantly, he came along.

The border was only about ten meters from the house. We ran to a building on the other side and were lucky that the Czechoslovakian border guards didn’t see us. From the roof of the building, we saw how Czech border guards arrested many of our comrades in houses nearby. The comrades were immediately handed over to the Reichswehr soldiers waiting at the border. The Czech soldiers seemed to take pleasure in our comrades being beaten by the Reichswehr troops.

Also the instrument maker, his wife, and both of their sons were abused. I had not been wrong: after about half an hour, the Reichswehr soldiers did return to the house. This time, they threw out all the hay and did not leave a single square millimeter unsearched. When the commander intimidated the poor woman, she told him that we had been there. As a result, the entire family was arrested and led to Klingenthal under severe beatings.

My companion and I left the house at the border as soon as we could. We wandered through the woods on the Czechoslovakian side. In the evening—we were tired and exhausted and had not eaten all day—we tried to find shelter in a small village. The night was cold and rainy and it was impossible to stay outside. To continue walking was no option either, our feet would no longer carry us. We tried to get into an isolated barn, but the door was locked. We squeezed ourselves in anyway, through a small gap in the wooden walls, damaging our clothes in the process. There was only very little hay inside. We dug a hole in the ground and tried to get warm lying close to one another. Our clothes were soaking wet and our teeth chattered.

As soon as it got light, we left this inhospitable place and continued to wander without any particular destination. We only tried to get away from the border as far as possible. However, at noon, we found ourselves at the very spot we had left in the morning. We now stuck to the road and tried to reach a railway station to jump on a train to Eger.¹⁰ We saw several army units along the way, including artillery. When we asked some of the soldiers resting at a creek whether they were on their way to field exercises, they said no, their destination was Graschwitz at the border: they had to prevent Hoelz and his men from entering Czechoslovakia.

We reached Eger without any problems and took a train from there to Pilsen. We got off a couple of stations before Pilsen to spend the night in a village inn. We found one, but two gendarmes were looking at us suspiciously, so we decided to try our luck at a private home instead. The residents were afraid of sheltering us, however, since they could hear from our accent that we came from the other side of the border.¹¹ About to leave the premises, we noticed around fifteen civilians and a number of gendarmes looking for us. Apparently, we had already been denounced as Red Guards.

I slammed the gate and ran with my companion across the yard, climbed a ladder up a wall, and jumped into the neighboring property. As we jumped from the top of the ladder, some soldiers were right behind us while others had already entered the neighboring yard. I jumped over yet another wall and landed in manure, about a meter deep, coming from a dung pile. Before I could get up, my companion, who had already been grabbed by a gendarme on top of the wall, landed on my back. Somehow we still managed to climb over another fence, get out of the village, and reach a big flooded meadow with water reaching up to our ankles. The pursuers

were now about thirty meters behind us. As far as I can remember, no one fired a shot. By now, it was dark, which worked to our advantage. We waded through a small river and reached a railroad embankment. Behind us, we could hear the pursuers yelling and dogs barking.

We marched along the railroad embankment for seven hours. The night was freezing and our clothes were wet, dirty, and smelly. My companion had lost his hat in the manure, and at some point also his coat. We did not dare enter a house. Instead, we got on the first train leaving a small railway station at 4 a.m. At 7 a.m., we reached Marienbad. A gendarmerie patrol came onto the train searching all compartments. Two gendarmes looked at us very carefully and checked the luggage racks to find my companion's hat. Finally they told us to step outside. We complained and asked all sorts of questions but received no answer. Later we got to know that we had already been announced by telegram and telephone.

The gendarmes led us through the town to the gendarmerie station. I tried to get rid of an egg hand grenade along the way, but didn't manage to. When we arrived at the station, we had to hand over our identity cards, which carried fake names. We were told to wait until a telegram was answered. We got coffee and were allowed to sit down at the tables where the gendarmes took care of their paper work. It was all rather relaxed. There were carbines, revolvers, and sabers everywhere. The house also served as a gendarmerie barracks.

Suddenly the commander, who was writing at his table, asked us if we had weapons. We said no. He said that it was his duty to search us. At first, my companion was patted down and nothing was found. Then it was my turn. Two gendarmes searched my pockets and my pants with the commander watching. All the while, I held the tiny hand grenade in my closed hand. The gendarmes didn't find anything. Finally, though, the short and fat commander ordered me to open my hands. I did so, raising both arms sideways and turning the palms upside down. When the uniformed rollmop with his spiked helmet saw the innocently looking black-lacquered hen's egg, he started screaming like a madman, "A bomb, a bomb!" He suddenly moved more quickly than I had ever thought possible, turned around, and ran like a pickerel into the next room and from there to the hallway—the four gendarmes followed.

I was left by myself, completely puzzled. My arms were still outstretched, the hand grenade resting peacefully on my palm. I looked at my companion and he looked at me—neither of us knew what to say. I was so perplexed that I didn't even understand how funny this was. Mechanically and slowly, I went to the next room and from there to the hallway. My companion followed a few steps behind. No one was to be seen. We slowly went down the stairs and stepped outside. I started to think that we might be able to escape. But as soon as I was a few meters away from the building, all of the windows opened and helmets appeared everywhere.

Pointing at me, the gendarmes yelled, "Stop him, stop him! Hold him, hold him!" A constable approached from the other side of the street yelling, "Stop!" I retorted, "No, follow me!" But by now the gendarmes had regained their courage. Soon, fourteen of them were on the street, ready to fire their carbines. "Put down the hand grenade!" they yelled at least fifty times. Since I had absolutely no intention to use the hand grenade in Czechoslovakia, I carefully put it down on the sidewalk, next to a tree. After I had moved a few meters away, the gendarmes finally rushed toward me. The short fatso was now incredibly brave. He pushed me around and wanted me to be shot. I finally relaxed and began laughing uncontrollably.

Hoelz is imprisoned in Czechoslovakia and finally deported to Austria. He considers traveling to Russia but decides to return to the Vogtland in late 1920.

Arriving in the Vogtland was a great relief. In Vienna, I had not been able to move in proletarian circles because the bloodhounds were searching for me there. I had fine bourgeois clothes and lived among the upper classes. I went to the opera, theatre, and cabaret, and to posh restaurants. I knew that I would hardly be taken for Hoelz if I moved in these half-feudal circles with my golden glasses and my parted hair.

After my arrival in the Vogtland, I realized that it had really been time to give up my illegal life in bourgeois circles because I had alienated myself from the proletarian world not only on the outside but also on the inside. The workers had always known me as one of them. I dressed like them and spoke a language they understood. Now they were disappointed to see a man who, after merely six months among the upper classes, had apparently found taste in fine clothes and all sorts of bourgeois things. My appearance made them suspicious. It was as if a gap had opened between the Vogtland workers and myself.

I realized there and then that my revolutionary desire wasn't worth anything if my actions were not carried by the trust of the proletariat. I decided that I needed to do everything to regain that trust and that it was therefore necessary to get rid of all the bourgeois airs and graces I had adopted as quickly as possible. [...]

In proletarian circles, especially among comrades near the KPD or KAPD, the general view was that the monarchist reactionaries would not accept the defeat of March and were already preparing a new attack. The workers needed a different approach: instead of simply defending themselves against reactionary attacks, they had to attack first. Furthermore, everything had to be done by the workers, and their political organizations and trade unions, to support Soviet Russia in defending and expanding the power of the soviets. The first workers' state in the world had to be protected against its enemies. This, however, included preventing the resurgence of reactionary forces in Germany and, in the long run, suppressing and eradicating them entirely.

The class-conscious workers knew perfectly well that in this time of continued economic and political tensions—imminent inflation, war in Poland, factory occupations in Italy¹²—an attack similar to that of March 1920 was possible at any moment. The warnings of the KPD found a strong echo among the workers. It was important to be vigilant and to remain on high alert. Many of the most advanced proletarians demanded the political organizations and trade unions to go on the offensive.

I myself had realized that emotional solidarity with the oppressed, unpropertied class was not enough. One also had to fight for the social revolution with means that I had learned to detest in the war. I had returned as a pacifist from the front. However, studying the events in the Vogtland and the theory and praxis of class struggle, I now understood that the liberation of the workers could not come from economic or political reforms but that it required a struggle for political power; a struggle that needs to be fought by all means necessary. The bourgeoisie upholds the economic servitude of the workers with all available means, including means of violence. The more I studied the nature of the proletarian revolution, the more I realized that the social revolution could not come from an armed coup but that it needs to be the result of certain economic conditions and social forces. This, however, does not mean that the revolution cannot be facilitated by direct action.

Had one of the political workers' organizations prepared a mass uprising and armed struggle, I would have certainly supported it without hesitation. Only armed action—at least under certain conditions—can lead to the proletariat seizing and defending power. But I did not see or hear anything about such preparations, and so I focused on supporting the comrades who were incarcerated as a consequence of the fighting after the Kapp Putsch and on trying to free them with violent means. For this purpose I gathered about fifty men in Berlin, Brunswick, and in the Vogtland whom I equipped with arms and bicycles. The money I used still came from the enforced payments from capitalists after the Kapp Putsch. [...]

I did not want my comrades to say that I sent them into the fire while I was safe. So I did the first bombing myself. I ordered the comrades I had chosen for other bombings to watch and learn. I traveled with them to the Vogtland where I intended to blow up the main gate of the Falkenstein Rathaus. The purpose was to remind both the workers and the bourgeoisie that the persecuted communists forced to live illegally had not forgotten their incarcerated comrades and were willing to fight for their liberation with all means. We intended to distribute leaflets to make our intentions clear.

On March 6, 1921, we arrived in Falkenstein on our bicycles at around 11 p.m. The bombing was scheduled for midnight. A few things still needed to be prepared. To maximize the effect of the explosion, I intended to throw the bomb (it was a fairly big bomb) into the building. A couple of minutes before midnight,

I ran with the bomb toward the Rathaus, the comrade Richard Loose on my side—the others were observing from a safe distance. Loose’s task was to throw a hand grenade when I threw the bomb, so that it would explode even if the powder fuse failed to set it off.

I had decided to throw the bomb into the Rathaus’s police post. Just before opening the door, I ignited the fuse with a cigarette. This meant that I had four seconds before the bomb would explode. Comrade Loose had released the hand grenade’s safety lever at the same time. To my horror, I realized that the door to the police post was locked. We were doomed.

There we were, I with an ignited bomb in my hand, my comrade with an ignited hand grenade. Loose threw the hand grenade into a corner, I threw the bomb the same way. The hand grenade detonated first. I got splinters in my face and bled so heavily that I could no longer see. It was Loose who saved my life. When he saw the blood and realized that I had lost my sense of orientation, he pulled me down some stairs and around a corner. At that moment, a terrible explosion made all the buildings in the vicinity shake. Windows burst and bricks fell to the ground. The bomb had gone off.

Richard Loose pulled me into a side street. When I could finally open my eyes again, I realized that we stood right outside the home of the local *Einwohnerwehr*¹³ leader responsible for firing at a workers’ demonstration half a year earlier. Since we had six hand grenades left, I decided to throw them into the house where they exploded with loud bangs. The man deserved punishment. I later learned that he had even more luck than us that day, because he did not get injured at all.

Despite my injury, we cycled as fast as we could all night. At dawn, we arrived at the home of comrades in Werdau where we hid. My wounds were cleaned and treated. Later that day, I took a train to Leipzig where I recovered. Then I traveled to Berlin from where I sent comrades equipped with bombs to Dresden, Freiberg, Leipzig, and several other towns where class justice had been particularly harsh. The bombings targeted courthouses, were all conducted as planned, and got a lot of attention. In the bourgeois and social democratic press, the frightened and alarmed crows made an incredible ruckus. I was satisfied.

At the same time, there were no tangible results. I got more and more convinced that this was not the right way to fight for the communist movement and its revolutionary cause. Of course, great personal courage is required for these acts of terror. But individual acts can never replace the necessary acts of the masses; they cannot even trigger them. In the end, the individual and daring actions I engaged in during the two years I lived and worked underground were but the result of my isolation from the political organizations and trade unions. It is very unfortunate that the lack of experience in parties and trade unions led me to illegal work for years. It was a grave political mistake to endorse, and participate

in, the robberies of banks, post offices, etc. by “expropriation groups.” The money went to the leaders of the KAPD. It fulfilled a political purpose because it was used to print newspapers and leaflets. A small part was used to help the comrades living underground. Unfortunately, the proletarian aid organization *Rote Hilfe*¹⁴ did not yet exist. However, the political gain never outweighed the damage done to the communist cause by the expropriations. One reason was that most of the revolutionary communist workers did not understand and condone them. Another reason was that the actions corrupted the comrades involved in them.

At one point, I was preparing the robbery of a post office in a suburb of Berlin. On a January evening, my friends and I surrounded the place with the intention to rob it. An unexpected incident hindered us to go through with our plans. This was my first and final direct participation in these kinds of activities.

Meanwhile, my plan to free all of the imprisoned comrades after the series of bombings had to be abandoned because of the Central German Uprising.¹⁵

Hoelz tells about the futile struggle of workers' militias during the Central German Uprising of 1921, triggered by the central government sending security forces to the Vogtland and surrounding areas to finally quell the ongoing unrest caused by groups of armed proletarians.

The defeated proletarian troops had, without exception, consisted of passionate comrades who attacked the superior enemy with exemplary courage and selfless dedication. They were only defeated by the force of the artillery they were unable to match.

Otto Rühle, who spent March 1921 at the Wolfsthal estate near Freiberg published a devastating critique of the uprising in Dresden's *Kommunist* and also in *Die Aktion*.¹⁶ At least he signed the texts with his own name. Rühle's assumptions, however, are nothing but intellectual experiments that might make some kind of sense on paper but cause nothing but confusion and harm when put into reality.

I only want to address one of his splendid comments on the March Uprising. He demanded from the workers to occupy and defend factories and workshops during uprisings. My recommendation to him would be to actually participate in such an occupation and defense. I am convinced that if he got his oh-so-clever and critical mind out of the building at all, it would be severely damaged. The enemy can break the workers' resistance with a single mortar or cannon. (Comrade Kempin-Ützelmann from the Leunawerke seems to have listened too much to Otto Rühle. It was, generously put, an irresponsible mistake to keep the armed workers in the Leunawerke and it had tragic consequences.¹⁷)

Shortly after the March Uprising, the KPD leadership under Brandler and Thalheimer published a small pamphlet under the title *Leunawerk*, in which an

anonymous author, apparently suffering from writer’s cramp, presents such a nonsensical critique that, in the name of the truth, I need to reply to it.

It is characteristic that the author doesn’t tell us his name. The pamphlet consists of nothing but believable and unbelievable drivel, lies, and distortions. I owe it to the revolutionary fighters of the March Uprising to at least correct some of the most apparent fabrications and misrepresentations.

With respect to the author’s relation to the uprising, there are two possibilities: 1. He actively partook in it. I consider this unlikely. If he did, he must have been asleep, or he consciously decided to tell us lies. 2. He was in Berlin, far removed from the battleground, and suddenly felt the urge to criticize an event based on hearsay while actually not knowing anything about it. A quick look at some texts on military theory seemed enough to legitimize a grand critique of a struggle and an uprising of which he didn’t even comprehend the most basic things, big or small.

Let me quote but a few sentences from the pamphlet. On page five, it says: “The March Uprising had to fail for the reason alone that there was never a unified military organization and command, and because the many military commands never coordinated their actions with the movement’s political command.”

The first claim completely contradicts the facts. The groups Hoelz, Schneider, Lembke, and Thiemann¹⁸ had a unified military command. KPD, KAPD, and AAU¹⁹ comrades worked together despite all differences. They brought all armed revolutionary workers together.

The second claim purely concerns the political command. Where were all these men? Perhaps, like Rühle, on a spring retreat, or on Halle’s Rabeninsel or in Grunewald near Berlin. In any case, I was looking for them in vain. Every day, I tried to get in touch with them. Does the author of the pamphlet perhaps belong to these men? Then he could at least answer my questions.

There wasn’t a single military commander in the March Uprising who did not know how important it was to coordinate military and political command. Our military actions only had value if they reflected the political options.

On page five of the pamphlet it says: “We saw different small troops—some from the Leunawerke, the Lembke group, the Hoelz group—fighting in isolation and without contact to one another or to the political command. Never was there any sign of a unified command. No one ever thought of combining the forces, recruiting the reserves, liberating the besieged towns, concentrating the troops at one place, forcing a decisive battle, crushing and annihilating the enemy. During the entire fighting, we never saw any traces of even the most fundamental military strategy...”

Oh, my Lord! So much wisdom in five sentences! The pseudo-Moltke²⁰ ignores all facts with characteristic arrogance.

My prison diary²¹ proves beyond doubt that each claim of this anonymous critic is based on a complete lack of knowledge. It was my priority from the very beginning to unite my troops with other proletarian troops! In many cases, I succeeded. I always tried very hard to keep in touch with other groups and always managed to establish and keep contact. The March Uprising did not fail because of the military ineptitude of the fighting workers! It failed due to reasons I do not want to discuss here.

Personally, I am happy when actions I participated in or decisions I was responsible for are being criticized. Healthy critique, constructive and well informed, helps me to see my mistakes. The cited pamphlet, however, has none of these qualities. Therefore I find it very unfortunate that the party published it.

Hoelz is arrested in Könnern at the end of the uprising but manages to hide his identity and is freed after some days. He returns to Berlin, where he is arrested again a few weeks later. Accused of numerous crimes, his trial begins in May 1921.

The state prosecutor and the chairman of the special court argued that it should be easy for us to realize communist ideas by convincing the people of our principles without the use of violence. I used the most basic examples to demonstrate the futility of a non-violent implementation of communist ideas. For example, the people providing the judges' salaries often enough prevent the literary, that is, non-violent distribution of our ideas, and often enough with violent means. I also used the following example: When I stand on the coast of a stormy sea and spot castaways struggling in treacherous waters, it is my duty to organize help. If I do not have my own boat and I see others standing around on a luxury yacht, I have to demand from them to loan me the yacht to rescue the castaways. If they refuse, saying, "What do we care about others? This is our property," then it is my duty to use the yacht nonetheless—even if it means employing violent means.

I emphasized for the judges that it is never enough for me to simply grasp intellectually that something *needs* to be done—I always try to actually do it. I do not fight the revolutionary struggle for the sake of the struggle. There is only one option to overcome the way in which people fight against each other in a class society: the abolition of classes and the creation of socialism. The socialist order can only be realized by the victorious working class in a dictatorship of the proletariat following the bourgeoisie's defeat. This makes the revolutionary class struggle a necessary requirement for ending the private ownership of the means of production.

The judges desperately tried to prove that I used the term "bourgeoisie" for everyone who was not a manual worker, even for everyone who did not share my opinion. All the while, they knew very well who I meant by the "bourgeoisie":

the parasites living off the labor of others, the idlers, the speculators and investors, the drones and shareholders—people who profess that “only work can save us” while doing nothing but killing time. I did not even count the judges among these parasites, I counted them among the degenerate petty-bourgeoisie oppressing the proletariat in the bourgeoisie’s name and renouncing its humanity as the bourgeoisie’s henchmen. However, it was hopeless to discuss ideological problems with the judges. I only continued speaking to them because I wanted to use my appearance in the courtroom to speak to the workers. This was necessary because of the defamations in the social democratic press that had distorted and dishonored my intentions and my actions even among many proletarians.

I was very disappointed when the chairman of the KPD, Heinrich Brandler, who faced the judges at the same time as I, renounced the use of violence in the struggle for the communist cause. Brandler’s non-communist and non-revolutionary statements in court were grist for the mill of the state prosecutor Jäger. Brandler emphasized repeatedly that my actions had nothing to do with communist politics, that the party distanced itself from me, and that he, as the party’s chairman, stated clearly that communist ideas could be realized without violence.

Even if the leaders of the KPD knew that I had acted in their spirit and with their approval, I could understand that they did not want to condone all of my actions, since the KPD was facing strong anti-communist sentiments and persecution. However, no clever words about political tactics can ever justify the pitiful role that Brandler, the chairman of the only revolutionary workers’ party in the country, played in court. Brandler betrayed five thousand revolutionary fighters who were party members and who all faced criminal charges. I felt betrayed and abandoned by Brandler and the party. It needed nerves of steel not to lose one’s head under such circumstances.

Hoelz describes the cruelty of the government troops.

During the March Uprising, the workers’ troops had taken prisoners of the security police, the Reichswehr, and the right-wing militias. They had also taken members of the bourgeoisie as hostages. But no one was executed. We workers despised to mistreat or kill defenseless prisoners. We hit prisoners or hostages only under very special circumstances. I myself have slapped hostages on three occasions.

During the fighting, we had to establish our authority in the region and had to make sure that the citizens followed our instructions. That’s why the command published declarations including stern warnings and the threat of severe punishment, including the death penalty, for everyone disregarding our orders. We still met significant resistance. However, in the end, our punishment never went beyond a few slaps in the face as a means of deterrence.

The workers proved an exemplary sense of humanity during the March Uprising. In many cases—for example in Hettstedt, Helbra, Sangerhausen, and Wettin, where military volunteers and right-wing militias shot at the Red Guards from their homes—the punishment was, once again, nothing more than a few slaps in the face.

I doubt that the workers will show the same humanity in future struggles despite the experiences they have made in the hands of the enemy. The revolutionary workers have gone through tough and painful lessons with their enemies as teachers. To this day, most workers are men of emotion. Their actions are determined by their heart. Their enemies are mostly men of abstract intellect who call emotions feminine and shameful. There are exceptions, but, in general, history since 1918 has clearly shown on which side humanity can be found in the struggle between the classes.

Even though state prosecutor Jäger stated in his final speech at court that the exact circumstances of the killing of the estate owner Heß remained “dubious and in the dark,” he demanded the death penalty.

My lawyer and I were certain that I would be sentenced to death and that the sentence would be executed. I had accepted the fate of dying at the hands of a firing squad and the thought no longer bothered me much. All I was concerned about was to be able to face the firing squad with the same fearlessness I had shown during both the revolutionary struggle and the trial, even after weeks of tiresome court procedures. My hopes and wishes always focused on only one thing: that my death would benefit the communist cause.

Hoelz escapes the death penalty but is sentenced to life in prison for the murder of the estate owner Heß. (The exact circumstances of the case remain unclear, but it is highly unlikely that Hoelz was involved in the shooting that led to Heß's death.)

The remaining chapters of *Vom “Weißen Kreuz” zur roten Fahne* describe Hoelz's incarceration. Hoelz was released in July 1928 and moved to the Soviet Union one year later.



1. Georg Schumann (1886–1945), lifelong German communist and resistance fighter. During the Nazi regime he co-founded one of the most active communist resistance groups together with Otto Engert (1895–1945) and Krut Kresse (1904–1945), the so-called *Schumann-Engert-Kresse-Gruppe*. All three of them were executed by the Nazis on January 11, 1945.
2. Small town in Saxony, near the Czech border and about a hundred kilometers south of Leipzig; known for its textile industry.
3. Hermann Fleißner (1865–1939) and Richard Lipinski (1867–1936), prominent SPD/USPD politicians in Saxony.

From the “White Cross” to the Red Flag

4. *Leipziger Volkszeitung* is a traditionally social democratic daily, founded in 1895; the *Vogtländische Volkszeitung* existed only very briefly.
5. Eugen Steinert was known as a “wandering speaker” for the KPD; with Hoelz the most active KPD member in the region.
6. Paul Popp, bricklayer.
7. A currency used after the war in certain regions of Germany.
8. One centner is 50 kg or 110.23 lb.
9. Heinrich Brandler, *Die Aktion gegen den Kapp-Putsch in Westsachsen* [Fighting the Kapp Putsch in Western Saxony], Berlin: KPD, 1920.
10. Hoelz uses the German names for the following Czech towns: Cheb (Eger), Kraslice (Graslitz), Plzeň (Pilsen), and Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad).
11. At the time, there was still a big German-speaking community in this region of the former Czechoslovakia.
12. In Poland and in the Baltics, there were armed conflicts over post-war territorial divides between Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian forces; these were only settled in the Peace of Riga in March 1921. In Italy, many factories were occupied in 1919–1920, particularly in Turin and Milan; the period is known as the *Biennio rosso*, the “two red years.”
13. Literally, “Citizens’ Army”: local reactionary militias.
14. The *Rote Hilfe Deutschlands* [Red Aid of Germany] was the German branch of the International Red Aid network, commonly known by its Russian acronym MOPR. The Rote Hilfe was officially a non-party organization, but always closely linked to the KPD.
15. See “March–April 1921” in the Timeline.
16. The *Kommunist* was the KPD journal in Dresden; *Die Aktion* was a journal edited by Franz Pfemfert (1879–1954) from 1911 to 1932; before the war, it was mainly an arts journal dedicated to expressionism, after the war, it focused on revolutionary socialism.
17. The Leunawerke [Leuna Factories] were the region’s biggest chemical industry plants. In late March 1921, workers occupied the plants, which was stormed by government troops a few days later—dozens of workers died.
18. Alfred Lembke, Josef Schneider, and Gerhard Thiemann led groups of rebellious workers.
19. The *Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union* [General Workers’ Union] (AAU) was founded in October 1921 in protest against KAPD party interests interfering too much with trade unions close to the party. It soon split into several different factions.
20. Father and son Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (1800–1881) and Helmuth von Moltke the Younger (1848–1916) were both chiefs of the general staff.
21. Note by Max Hoelz: “Because of daily notes during the struggle I have—following the advice of my attorneys—still in 1921 reconstructed the events of the time in prison in diary form.”

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General

English

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German

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Erich Mühsam's eyewitness account of the Bavarian Revolution, *Von Eisner bis Leviné*, is included in this volume. It is also worth reading the parts about the Bavarian Revolution in Ernst Toller's *I Was a German* (German original: *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, 1933, various editions).

The most comprehensive selections of writings by Gustav Landauer and Erich Mühsam in English are *Gustav Landauer: Revolution and Other Writings* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010) and *Erich Mühsam: Liberating Society from the State and Other Writings* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), respectively.

Ruhr Valley

The main historical work on the period is Erhard Lucas's *Märzrevolution 1920* [March Revolution of 1920], containing no less than three volumes (Frankfurt am Main: Roter Stern, 1973–1978). A concise introduction to the Red Ruhr Army is *Die Rote Ruhrarmee März 1920* [The Red Ruhr Army in March 1920] by Diethart Kerbs (Berlin: Nishen, 1985). A social democratic perspective is given in *Der Ruhrkrieg von 1920* [The Ruhr War of 1920] by George Eliasberg (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1974). An early historical account is *Die Rote Armee an Ruhr und Rhein* [The Red Army at the Ruhr and Rhein] by Hans Spethmann (Berlin:

Hobbing, 1930), which is very biased against the rebels but contains a number of valuable documents. An interesting publication is also the collection of essays and speeches by KPD member Adolf Meinberg, *Aufstand an der Ruhr* [Uprising at the Ruhr], edited by Hellmut G. Haasis und Erhard Lucas (Frankfurt: Roter Stern, 1973).

Vogtland

The standard document is Max Hoelz's memoir *Vom "Weißen Kreuz" zur roten Fahne. Jugend-, Kampf- und Zuchthausserlebnisse* [From the "White Cross" to the Red Flag: Youth, Struggle, and Prison Experiences] (Berlin: Malik, 1929), excerpts of which are included in this volume.

In 1927, prison letters by Hoelz were published as *Zuchthausbriefe* [Prison Letters] (Berlin: Reiss). In 2005, diaries and letters from his time in the Soviet Union were published under the title *Ich grüße und küsse Dich—Rot Front! Tagebücher und Briefe, Moskau 1929 bis 1933* ["I Greet and Kiss You, Red Front": Diaries and Letters, Moscow 1929–1933], edited by Ulla Plener (Berlin: Dietz, 2005).

Useful biographical studies about Hoelz are *Max Hoelz—Wege und Irrwege eines Revolutionärs* [Max Hoelz: Right and False Ways of a Revolutionary] by Manfred Gebhardt (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1989), and *Max Hoelz. Man nannte ihn: Brandstifter und Revolutionär, Robin Hood, Che Guevara, einen Anarchisten, den Roten General. Sein Leben und sein Kampf* [Max Hoelz: He Was Called an Arsonist and Revolutionary, Robin Hood, Che Guevara, Anarchist, and Red General: His Life and Struggle] by Peter Giersich and Bernd Kramer (Berlin: Kramer, 2000).

General historical accounts of the period are Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten's *Der Aufstand der Avantgarde. Die Märzaktion der KPD 1921* [The Uprising of the Vanguard: The March Action of the KPD of 1921] (Frankfurt: Campus, 1986), and Stefan Weber's *Ein kommunistischer Putsch? Märzaktion 1921 in Mitteldeutschland* [A Communist Coup? The March Actions in 1921 in Central Germany] (Berlin: Dietz, 1991).

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Index

A

Achim (Lower Saxony) 162
Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union (AAU) xx, 299, 303
 Alsace 280
 America 44, 66, 99, 102, 110, 181, 187
 Anglo-Russian Convention (1907) xxii
 Ansbach (Bavaria) 205, 208, 262
Antibolschewistische Liga 138, 261
 Aplerbeck (North Rhine–Westphalia) 273
 Arco, Anton Graf xviii, 216, 223–224, 261
 Artelt, Karl xvii, 4, 19–30
 Aschenbrenner, Heinrich 225, 261
 Auerbach (Saxony) 282
 Auer, Erhard xvii, 213, 218, 220, 222–224, 261
 Augsburg 237, 240, 250, 257–259, 263
 Auschwitz Concentration Camp 142
 Australia 45
 Austria xix, 173, 176–177, 199–200, 240, 258, 260, 295
 Austria-Hungary xxiv, 141, 204
 Axelrod, Towia 222, 252, 261

B

Baden, Max von xvii, xxv, 39, 59
 Baden (North Rhine–Westphalia) 162
 Baden (region) 129, 175, 177, 184, 196, 223
Badische Zentrumspartei 196
 Bakunin, Mikhail 211
 Balkans 47
 Baltics 83, 117, 128, 140
 Baltic Sea 23
 Bamberg 169, 205–206, 251, 255, 259–260
 Barth, Emil xvii, xxv, 27, 38, 107, 225, 227
 Bauer, Gustav 85–86
 Bauer, Otto 240, 262
 Baumeister, Konstantin 85–86
 Bäumer, Ludwig 157–159
 Bavaria xiv, 50, 58, 169, 171–267, 273
 Bavarian Peasants' League 237, 260, 262
Bayerischer Bauernbund 260, 262
 Becker, Karl Albin 158–159
 Beer Hall Putsch xix, 259

Belgium xxv, 27, 122, 125, 133, 181, 187, 233
 Berlin xiv, xix–xxii, xxv–xxvii, 8, 11–14, 27–142, 145, 153, 170, 171, 173–181, 187–188, 190, 196–197, 200, 210, 212–213, 222, 225, 227, 230, 233, 236, 241, 246, 256, 260, 267, 279, 296–300
Berliner Morgenpost (journal) 125
Berliner Tageblatt (journal) xxi, 84, 140
Berliner Zeitung (BZ) *am Mittag* (journal) xxi, 136, 140
 Bern xxvii, 45, 197, 220
 Berndt, Ludwig 192, 197
 Bernstein, Eduard 212, 260
 Bielefeld Resolution 269–270, 272, 273–274
 Bismarck, Otto von xxiv, 127, 179, 199, 204
 Black Sea Coast 66
 Blanquism 208–209
 Boétie, Étienne de la 203–204
 Bolshevism xiii, 13, 17, 42, 44, 46, 60, 66, 73, 107, 123, 138, 175–176, 182, 187, 192, 209, 212–213, 215, 218, 221–222, 233, 240, 257, 260, 262, 289
 Borchardt, Julian 159
 Brandenburg 42, 176–177, 200
 Brandler, Heinrich xvii, xviii, xxi, 288–290, 299, 301, 303
 Braun, Otto 85–86
 Breitscheid, Rudolf 68, 75
 Bremen xiv, xvi, xxvi–xxvii, 3, 10–11, 14–15, 17, 79, 126, 145, 148, 151–170, 177, 216, 241, 311
 Bremen-Mißler Concentration Camp 159–160
 Bremerhaven 153, 159
 Brest-Litovsk, Treaty of (1918) 128, 196
 Brunswick xiv, xxv–xxvi, xxviii, 11–12, 50, 79, 143–148, 158, 190, 240, 296, 310–311
 Buber, Martin 172, 195–196, 197
 Buchenwald Concentration Camp 75, 160
 Buchholz, Wilhelm 159–160
 Budapest 236, 240, 247, 251
 Budich, Willi 262. *See also* Dietrich
Bund der Deckoffiziere 14
 Burgdorf (Lower Saxony) 284–285

C

Caesarism 177, 190, 200–201
 Caspari, Walter 154–155, 157, 159
 Cavaignac, Louis Eugène 123, 125
 Cavaliers (English Revolution) 47, 102, 113
 Celle 21
 Chemnitz xxvi, 280, 288–290
 Christiania 45. *See also* Oslo
Christlich-Demokratische Volkspartei 72, 75
Christlich-Soziale Partei 72, 75
 Circus Busch xxi, 27, 34, 61, 63, 96
 Clemenceau, Georges xvii, 44, 102, 110, 218
 Cohen, Max 43–44, 50
Communist Manifesto 100, 252
 Compiègne Forest xxv
 Comrade Latzel 151, 161–163
 Cornelius, Hans 183, 192, 196
 Cromwell, Oliver 47, 114
 Cuxhaven xxvi, 161
 Czechoslovakia 279, 286, 291–293, 295, 303

D

Dannat, Adolf 155–156, 159
 Däumig, Ernst xvii, 28–29, 40–58, 61–64, 74, 119–120
 David, Eduard 181, 196
 Deichmann, Karl 157, 159, 162–163
 Delmenhorst (Lower Saxony) 157
 Denikin, Anton 66, 75, 209
Der Kommunist (journal) 161–163
Der Sozialist (journal) xix, 191
 Detmold (North Rhine–Westphalia) 177, 200
Deutsche Demokratische Partei 58, 72, 75, 86, 196, 260
Deutsche Soziale Mittel-Gruppe 72
Deutsche Tageszeitung (journal) xxi, 73, 90
Deutsche Vaterlandspartei 72, 75
Deutsche Volkspartei 72, 75
Deutsche Zentrumspartei xviii, 58, 72, 75, 118, 184
Deutschkonservative Partei 72, 75, 95, 118
Deutschnationale Volkspartei 72, 75
Die Aktion (journal) 298, 303
Die Rote Fahne (journal) xxi, 29–30, 70–71, 81, 84, 87, 90, 93, 96, 99, 109, 113, 116, 122, 139
 Dietrich (pseudonym for Willi Budich) 254, 262, 311

Dittmann, Wilhelm xvii, xxv, 27, 40
 Dorrenbach, Heinrich 11, 17, 141
 Dortmund 273–274
 Dresden 114–115, 235, 284, 297–298, 303
 Drettmann, Johann 157, 159
 Dumont-Lindemann, Louise 171, 195
 Dürr, Oskar 225–226, 228–229, 237–238, 241, 261
 Düsseldorf xxvi, 145

E

East Friesland 10, 152
 Ebert, Friedrich xvii–xviii, xxv, xxvii, 11, 14–17, 27, 35, 37, 59–60, 71, 83, 85–86, 97–98, 106, 107, 109–112, 116–118, 122–124, 127, 129–131, 133–134, 137, 154, 240, 246
 Ebrach (Bavaria) 205
 Ecks, Bernhard 154–157, 159
 Eger (Czech Republic) 293
 Eglhofer, Rudolf 217, 261
 Ehrhardt, Hermann 273–274
 Eichhorn, Emil xxvi, 129, 141
 Einstein, Albert 173, 196
 Einstein, Norbert 199
 Eisenheim (North Rhine–Westphalia) 275
 Eisner, Kurt xviii, xxv–xxvii, 169–170, 172–174, 178–192, 194, 196–197, 205, 207, 212–227, 231–233, 241, 246, 260–261
 Elbe (river) 8, 16
 Endres, Fritz 231, 245, 262
 Engels, Friedrich 208
 Engert, Otto 302
 England 5, 17, 33, 44, 66, 99, 102, 113, 187, 212
 English Revolution 47, 113
 Entente xxii, 45, 66, 110, 129, 173–177, 180–181, 183, 188, 190, 196–197, 200, 212, 218, 220, 238
 Epp, Franz Ritter von 233, 255, 262
 Erfurt 65, 75
 Erfurt program (SPD) 65, 75
 Ernst August, Duke 145–146
 Ernst, Eugen 122, 125, 129, 142
 Erzberger, Matthias xviii, 45, 85, 90, 181, 196
 Essen 145, 262, 268–269
 Etelsen (Lower Saxony) 161–162
 Ewinger, Hermann 227, 262

F

- Falkenstein (Saxony) 281–284, 286–288, 291, 296
Fanal (journal) xx, 205
 February Revolution (Russia) 49
 Finland 11, 83, 117
 Flanders 7
 Fleißner, Hermann 281, 303
 Flensburg (Schleswig-Holstein) xxvi, 79
Fortschrittliche Volkspartei 24, 72, 75, 84
 France xvii, xxii–xxiii, xxv, 41, 44, 66, 75, 78, 85, 99, 114–115, 117, 123, 125, 131, 133, 171, 178, 181, 187, 189, 208, 212, 220, 260, 280
 Franco-Prussian War 77
 Frankenberg (Saxony) 290
 Franke, Otto 139, 142
 Frankfurt xxv, 50, 128–129, 141, 176–177, 183, 200, 273, 275, 280, 280–281
 Frasunkiewicz, Adam 154–156, 159
 Frauendorfer, Heinrich von 246, 263
 Free Corps xxii, xxvii–xxviii, 28, 58, 127–128, 136, 138–140, 142, 151, 157, 169, 233, 255, 267, 273–274, 275
 Freiberg (Saxony) 297–298
Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (FAUD) 267
Freie Volksbühne (Berlin) 178, 196
Freiheit (journal) xxi, 60, 68–69, 71, 83, 90, 116
Freikonservative Partei 72, 75
 Freiligrath, Ferdinand 50
 French Revolution 47, 50, 91, 201, 204
 Friedrichshafen (Baden-Württemberg) 181
 Friedrichshain (Berlin) 49–50
 Friedrich Wilhelm IV 74, 141
 Frölich, Paul xviii, 154, 156, 260, 310. *See also* P. Werner
 Fuhrmann, Paul 117–118

G

- Gallifet, Alexandre-August Marquis de 123, 125
 Gandorfer, Ludwig 240, 243, 262
 Garbe, Gustav 20, 24
Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division 140, 142
 Garnier-Pagès, Étienne Joseph Louis 90, 92
 Gdańsk 17
 Gelsenkirchen 269
 Georgenthal (Thuringia) 292
 Gera (Thuringia) 279

- Gerlach, Hellmut von 43, 50
 Gesell, Silvio 207, 246, 257, 260, 263
 Gradnauer, Georg 235, 262
 Graslitz (Czech Republic) 293
 Great Britain xxii, 3
 Greiz (Thuringia) 279
 Gröber, Adolf 117–118
 Grubusch, Karl 131, 133, 142
 Grünbach (Saxony) 283
 Grunewald (Berlin) 299
Gruppe Internationale xvi, xxiv, 79–80

H

- Haase, Hugo xviii, xxv, 27, 35, 90, 97, 105, 107–108, 110–111, 117, 165, 225, 227
 Habersaath, Erich 49–50
 Hagemeister 219, 227–228, 243, 246, 254, 261–262
Hakatismus 47, 50
 Halle 279–281, 299
 Hamburg xxvi, 3, 7, 79, 111, 145, 148, 152–153, 158, 241
 Hamm (North Rhine–Westphalia) 273
 Hanover xxv–xxvi, 3, 79, 145–146, 148, 152–153, 176–177, 200, 284–285
 Hauschner, Auguste 176, 180, 196
 Haußmann, Conrad 22, 24
 Hecker, Friedrich 128–129, 141
 Heidelberg 223
 Helbra (Saxony-Anhalt) 302
 Henke, Alfred 153, 155, 155–157, 159
 Herero 131
 Hessen 176. *See also* Kurhessen; *See also* Rheinhessen
 Hettstedt (Saxony-Anhalt) 302
 Heucke, Alwin 158, 160
 Heydebrand, Ernst von 94–95, 117–118
 Hilferding, Rudolf 68–69, 72, 75, 90
 Hille, Peter 206, 260
 Hiller, Kurt 172, 196
 Hindenburg, Paul von xviii, xix, 103, 117, 127, 137, 165
 Hirsch, Paul 122, 125
 Hitler, Adolf 128, 137, 141, 259
 Hoelz, Max xiv, xviii, xxviii, 279, 280–303
 Hoffmann, Johannes xviii, 231, 235, 254–255, 257–259

Hoffmann, Max 127, 141
 Hohenzollern, House of xxii, 21, 81–83, 99,
 103, 117
 Holten (North Rhine–Westphalia) 276
 Holy Roman Empire 204
 Hungary 56, 58, 235–236, 238, 240–242,
 246–247, 250, 253, 258, 262
 Hünxe (North Rhine–Westphalia) 276

I

Ilten (Lower Saxony) 284
 India 45
Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands
 (IKD) xii, xvi, xxvi, 3, 13–14, 17, 126,
 151, 153, 159–160, 216, 261
Internationale Sozialisten Deutschlands (ISD) 159
 Ironsides (English Revolution) 47, 114
 Italian Communist Party 135, 142
 Italy 135, 296, 303

J

Jade Bight 15
 Jade (river) 9
 Jaffé, Edgar 220–221, 231–232, 246, 261
 Jahreis, Major Paul Ritter von 261
 Jakob, Mathilde 132, 142
 Jannack, Karl xviii, 151, 152–160
 Jaurèsism 212
 Jaurès, Jean 260
 Jesus 105, 179, 202
 Jogiches, Leo xviii, xxvii, 126–127, 130,
 136–141, 156
 Judas Iscariot 105

K

Kahmann, Hermann 73, 75
Kain (journal) xiii, xx, 211, 216, 226
 Kapp Putsch xiv, xix, xxii, xxviii, 75, 125,
 141–142, 267, 270, 272, 275–276, 285,
 287–291, 296
 Kapp, Wolfgang 75
 Kassel 280–281
 Kautsky, Karl xviii, 69–70, 90, 165, 225, 227
 Kegel, Max 24
 Kestenbergl, Leo 173, 188, 196–197
 Kiel ii, xiv, xxv–xxvi, 3–4, 14, 17, 19–24, 27,
 79, 148, 160

Kléber, Jean Baptise 47, 50
 Klingenthal (Saxony) 286, 291–293
 Knief, Johann 6, 17, 153–154, 156, 159
 Köbis, Albin xxv, 3, 17
 Kolchak, Aleksandr 209, 233, 262
Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands
 (KAPD) xvi, xviii, xx, xxviii, 3, 17, 295,
 298–299, 303
Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD)
 xii, xvi, xvi–xxi, xxvi–xxviii, 3, 13, 17,
 99, 119, 126–127, 130, 137–138, 140,
 151, 152, 154–155, 157–158, 169, 198,
 205–211, 214, 216–217, 219, 221–222,
 226–228, 234, 238–254, 256–261, 267,
 279, 281–282, 288–289, 295–296, 299,
 303. See also *Gruppe Internationale*; See
 also Spartacus League
Kommunistische Partei-Oppeposition (KPD-O) xvii
 Kommunist (journal Dresden) 298, 303
 Könnern (Saxony-Anhalt) 300
 Kramer, Hilde 215, 261
 Krasnov, Pyotr 66, 75
 Kresse, Kurt 302
 Kronstadt 11–13, 17, 209
 Kropotkin, Peter 211
 Krumbach (Swabia) 169–180, 182–184, 189,
 192, 194, 197
 Kübler, Konrad 207, 243, 246, 251, 260
 Kuhnt, Bernhard 152–153, 159
 Kun, Béla 235, 262
 Kurhessen 176–177, 200

L

Lachmann, Hedwig 169, 196
 Lake Constance 181, 196
 Lamartine, Alphonse de 90, 92
 Landauer, Brigitte 182, 196
 Landauer, Charlotte 182, 186, 191, 196
 Landauer, Gustav xii–xiii, xix, xxvi, xxviii, 145,
 169–170, 171–204, 205–206, 208–209,
 211–214, 216, 219–223, 227–229, 232,
 235, 237–240, 242–243, 246–247, 249,
 251–252, 255–256, 258–259, 262–263
 Landauer, Hugo 146, 174, 180, 188–189,
 195, 196
 Landsberg, Otto xix, xxv, 27, 40, 60
 Lassalle, Ferdinand xix, 58, 97–98, 106, 115

- Laufenberg, Heinrich 6, 17
 League of Nations 190, 220, 261
 Ledebour, Georg xix, 119, 121, 130
 Ledru-Rollin, Alexandre Auguste 90, 92
 Legien, Carl xxvi, 11, 18, 85–86
 Leipzig xxvi–xxvii, 145, 158, 204, 234, 281, 297, 303
Leipziger Volkszeitung (journal) 136, 281, 303
 Lembke, Alfred 299, 303
 Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich xx, 138, 205, 209–212, 221, 235, 260
 Leschinski, Johannes 276
 Levien, Max xix, 191, 197, 216–217, 219, 222–223, 226–228, 236, 238–239, 242, 244–245, 247, 249, 256–257
 Leviné, Eugen xix, xxviii, 131–132, 170, 205, 241, 244–245, 249, 254, 259. *See also* Niessen
 Levi, Paul xix, xxviii, 126, 137, 289
Lichtstrahlen (Zeitschrift) 159
 Liebknecht, Karl xii–xiv, xvii–xix, xxiv–xxv, 6, 9, 11–14, 16–17, 27–29, 39, 73, 76, 79–125, 127–128, 130, 132, 135–140, 142, 157, 177, 186, 188, 212, 221
 Lindemann, Gustav 171, 195
 Lindner, Alois 224, 261
 Lipinski, Richard 281, 303
 Lippe (North Rhine–Westphalia) 177, 200, 275–276
 Lipp, Franz 246–247, 250–251, 263
 Lloyd George, David xix, 44, 102, 111
 Loose, Richard 297
 Lübeck xxvi, 79
 Lüdemann, Hermann 45, 49–50, 73, 75
 Ludendorff, Erich xix, 103, 117, 137, 189–190, 200, 212
 Ludwig III xxv, 169–170
 Lüttwitz, Walther von xxii, 122, 125, 141, 285
 Luxemburg, Rosa xii–xv, xvii–xix, xxiv, xxvii, 6–7, 14, 16, 28–30, 70, 72, 79–125, 126–127, 130, 132, 135–142, 157, 186, 188, 221
 Lyon 102
- M**
 Magdeburg xxvii, 79
 Mannheim 223
 Marienbad (Czech Republic) 294
 Marloh, Otto 141–142
 Marut, Ret 169. *See also* B. Traven
 Marxism 13, 69, 90, 189–190, 192, 208
 Marx, Karl 18, 114, 208
 Mauthner, Fritz 178, 194, 196–197
 Mayer, Gustav 186, 197
 Mecklenburg xxii
 Medusa 118
 Mehring, Franz xix, 136, 212
 Menne, Anton 275
 Mirabeau, Honoré Gabriel Riqueti comte de 114
 Misiano, Francesco 135, 142
 Missler, Friedrich 160
 Moabit (Berlin) 138–141
 Molkenbuhr, Brutus 75
 Möller, Johann 275–276
 Möller, Werner 133, 142
 Moltke, Helmuth von 300, 303
 Moscow 127, 135, 210, 247, 251
 Mühlau (Saxony) 281
 Mühlom, Johann Wilhelm 181, 196, 238, 246
 Mühsam, Erich xii–xiii, 169–170, 191, 205–263
 Mülheim an der Ruhr (North Rhine–Westphalia) xxvi
 Mulhouse 280
 Müller, Hermann 62, 75
 Müller-Meiningen, Ernst 208, 260
 Müller, Richard xvii, xx, xxvii, 28–29, 30, 31–39, 59–78, 119, 309
Münchner Rote Fahne (journal) 236
 Munich xiii, xviii–xix, xxv–xxviii, 56, 79, 169–173, 175, 177–179, 182, 185–186, 188, 191–192, 194–195, 198, 205, 207, 210–213, 215–217, 219–221, 223–225, 227–228, 231, 233–234, 236, 238–240, 242, 244–245, 248–255, 257, 259–261, 263
 Murman Coast 66
- N**
 Napoleon 122, 182, 189–190
 Napoleonic Wars 114
 Nassau (Rhineland-Palatinate) 177, 200
Nationalliberale Partei 72, 75, 86, 118
 National Socialism xi, xvi, xviii–xx, 3, 50, 75, 92, 129, 137, 141–142, 159–160, 261–263, 267, 302
 Netzschkau (Saxony) 281
 Neukölln (Berlin) 140–141
 Neumann, Adolf 177, 179, 184, 196

Neurath, Otto 234–237, 252, 257, 262
 Niederbarnim (Brandenburg) 78
 Niederschönenfeld (Bavaria) 206, 208, 261
 Niekisch, Ernst 231, 237–238, 240, 246–247,
 256, 262
 Nienburg (Lower Saxony) 157
 Niessen (pseudonym for Eugen Leviné) 241
 Nizhny Novgorod 279
 Norway 200
 Noske, Gustav xx, xxvi–xxvii, 3, 18, 22–24,
 28, 122–128, 131–134, 140, 151,
 157–158, 169, 220–222, 232, 239–240,
 255, 270, 284, 287
 Nowakowski, Richard 119, 121
 Nuremberg 227, 230–232, 239, 242–245,
 249–250, 255

O

October Revolution (Russia) 49, 260
 Ohrdruf (Thuringia) 233
 Oka (river) xviii, 279
 Oldenburg xxvi, 145, 152–153, 158–159
 Onasch, Jan 153, 159
 Osel, Heinrich 261
 Oslo 50. *See also* Christiania

P

Pannekoek, Antonie xiii, xx, 6
 Paris Commune 125, 208
 Peace of Riga (1921) 303
 Peasants' Wars 140
 Pelkum (North Rhine–Westphalia) 273
 Penzberg (Bavaria) 233
 Petliura, Symon 209
 Pfaffengrün (Saxony) 283
 Pfemfert, Franz 303
 Pieck, Wilhelm xx, 119, 136
 Pilsen (Czech Republic) 293, 303
 Plättner, Karl xiii, xx, xxviii, 151, 157,
 164–166, 279
 Plauen (Saxony) 279, 281, 284, 286–287
 Poland xix, 46–47, 50, 173, 296, 303
Politische Parlamentarische Nachrichten
 (journal) 60
 Popp, Lothar 23–24
 Popp, Paul 282, 303
 Pradella, Paul 275
 Preuß, Hugo 197

Prince Lichnowsky, Karl Max 139, 142, 181, 196
 Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph 207–209, 211
 Prussia xiv, xxii, 36, 74, 78, 99, 127–129, 135,
 140–141, 173–174, 176–177, 189, 197,
 200, 204, 216, 255
 Pufendorf, Samuel Freiherr von 199, 203–204

R

Rabeninsel (Halle) 299
 Radek, Karl xx, 12–13, 126–127, 137, 141, 187
 Ranke, Leopold von 187, 197
 Red Ruhr Army 267, 268–272
 Reichenbach (Saxony) 281
 Reichert, Markus 227
 Reichhardt, Wilhelm 250, 255
 Reichpietsch, Max xxv, 3, 7, 17
 Reinhardt, Walther 122, 125, 141
 Renaudel, Pierre 220, 261
 Retzlaw, Karl xx, 18, 126–142, 310
 Reventlow, Ernst Graf zu 90, 92
 Reventlow, Prince Christian zu 161, 163
 Revolutionary Stewards xii–xiii, xvii, xix–
 xx, xxiv–xxv, xxvii, 27–29, 31–78, 58,
 119–121, 309
 Rheinhessen 176, 177, 200
 Rhineland 269
 Rhine Province 177
 Rhine (river) 180, 200, 267
 Rhine Valley 47, 176, 272
 Roman 102
 Romania 262
 Rosenthal, Helma 185, 191, 197
 Ross, Colin 62, 75
 Roßhaupter, Albert 218–220, 222, 261
 Rostock 79
Rote Hilfe (organization) 298, 303
 Rühle, Otto xiii, xx, 284, 298–299
 Ruhr District 13
 Ruhr Valley xiv, xxvii–xxviii, 50, 267–278,
 285–286, 290–291, 312
 Runge, Otto 139, 142
 Russia xi, xxii, 12, 15, 41, 46, 49–50, 56, 65,
 66, 68–69, 77, 80, 83, 99, 128, 131, 137,
 141–142, 152, 162, 164–165, 174, 187,
 192, 196, 202, 205, 207, 209–211, 212,
 215, 221–222, 226, 235–236, 238, 246,
 250–253, 260, 280–281, 295, 303

Russian Civil War 75
 Russian Revolution xiii, xxii–xxiii, 41, 46, 58,
 76, 137, 164, 209, 212. *See also* February
 Revolution; *See also* October Revolution

S

Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp 160
 Sangerhausen (Saxony-Anhalt) 302
 Sauber, Fritz 243, 254, 262
 Saxony 235, 270, 272, 279, 289, 291, 303
 Saxony-Anhalt xxviii
 Scheidemann, Philipp xx, xxv, xxvii, 16, 27,
 37, 60, 71, 83, 85–86, 87, 90, 97–98,
 105–106, 107, 109–111, 115, 122–124,
 130, 137, 173, 177, 181, 196, 212, 214,
 222, 225, 240
 Scheid, Richard 231–232, 262
 Schiffer, Eugen 173, 196
 Schiller, Friedrich 74, 269
 Schleswig-Holstein 94
 Schlittenbauer, Sebastian 235, 262
 Schneider, Ernst 3, 5–18
 Schneider, Josef 299, 303
 Schneppenhorst, Ernst xx, 227, 231–233,
 237, 239–246, 249–250, 255–256
 Scholze, Paul 130, 142
 Schöneberg (Berlin) 139
 Schroten, Gustav 275
 Schulz, Heinrich 165–166
Schumann-Engert-Kresse-Gruppe 302
 Schumann, Georg 280–282, 302
 Seger, Friedrich 158–160
 Segitz, Martin 231, 237–239, 245, 262
 Senegal River 44
 Serbia 187
 Severing, Carl xx, 73, 141, 273
 Shakespeare, William 125
 Siberia 41, 66, 165
 Simon, Josef 231, 234–235, 237–240, 243,
 255, 262
 Socialist-Revolutionary Party (Russia) 260
 Soldmann, Fritz 246, 257, 263
 Solf, Wilhelm xxi, 45, 173, 181, 196
 Souchon, Wilhelm 19, 22–24
 Soviet Russia 66, 221–222, 295
 Soviet Union xv, xviii, xix, 137, 142, 261–262,
 279, 302

Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)
 xii–xiii, xvi–xvii, xxi–xxii, xxiv–xxvii, 3–4,
 6–7, 20, 22–23, 27–29, 34, 39, 42–44,
 50, 55, 58, 59–60, 62–63, 65–66, 69, 71,
 73–74, 83, 86, 87, 97, 108, 114, 126–127,
 129–130, 137–138, 141, 151, 153,
 158–159, 166, 169, 175, 189–190, 197,
 205, 214, 218, 220–221, 224, 227–232,
 234–235, 237–238, 240–243, 245–249,
 251, 253, 255–263, 269, 275, 281,
 289–290

Sozialistengesetze xxiv

Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAP)
 xvi, xxiv

Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)
 xvi–xvii, 262

Sozialistischer Bund xix

Spandau (Berlin) 84, 133

Spartacus League xii–xiii, xvi–xxi, xxiv,
 xxvi–xxvii, 14, 27–30, 39, 58, 67, 70,
 76, 78, 79–142, 152–153, 161–162,
 182–183, 185, 190–191, 214, 216, 223,
 226, 228, 261, 310. *See also* Gruppe
 Internationale; *See also* Kommunistische
 Partei Deutschlands (KPD)

Spartacus Uprising xx, xxvii, 28

Spinoza, Baruch de 178, 196

Springer, Georg 178, 188, 196

Stalin, Joseph xviii, xix–xx, 12, 137, 142, 262,
 279

Stampfer, Friedrich xxi, 65, 130, 137

Steinert, Eugen 282, 303

Stinnes, Hugo 11, 18

Stirner, Max 211

Strasbourg 280

Struve, Gustav 128–129, 141

Stuart, Maria 113

Stucke, Carl 159–160

Stuttgart xxv, 79, 111, 153–154, 212, 260

Sült, Wilhelm 141–142

Susman, Margarete 171, 175, 182, 184, 195, 197

Swabia 169, 171–180, 182–184, 189, 192

Switzerland 200, 260, 263

T

Tamschick, Ernst 140–142

Thaer, Albrecht von 137, 142

Thalheimer, August xvii–xviii, xxi, 289, 299
 Thälmann, Ernst 158–160
 Thiemann, Gerhard 299, 303
 Thirty Years' War 67, 75
 Thuringia 233, 240, 279
 Timm, Johannes 218–220, 224, 261
 Tirpitz, Alfred von 103, 106
 Toller, Ernst 169, 244–245, 256, 263, 312
 Traunstein (Bavaria) xxv, 212–213, 260
 Traven, B. (pseudonym for Ret Marut) 169
 Treuen (Saxony) 283
 Trotsky, Leon 187, 209, 212, 221, 235

U

Ukraine 12, 83, 117, 209, 303
Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (USPD) xii–xiii, xvi–xvii, xxi, xxv–xxvii, 4, 20, 23, 27–29, 34, 55, 59–60, 62, 67–68, 70–71, 74, 78, 83, 86, 90, 97, 106, 107–108, 121, 124, 129–130, 145, 152–153, 156–158, 197, 205, 212, 214, 216, 220, 222, 225–228, 230–234, 237–240, 243–247, 249, 251, 254–256, 258, 260, 267, 281–282, 284, 289–290
 Unterleitner, Hans 220–221, 231, 237–238, 261
 Uphusen (Lower Saxony) 161
 Upper Slesia xxvii

V

Vendée xxiii, 95, 102, 114, 216
 Verden an der Aller (Lower Saxony) 157
Verein Arbeiterpresse 6
Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (VKPD) xvi
 Versailles, Treaty of (1919) xxviii, 142
 Vienna 295
 Vogtland xiv, xxviii, 280–303
Vogtländische Volkszeitung (journal) 281, 303
Volksfreund (journal) 145, 147–148
Volksmarinedivision xxiii, xxvi, 11, 141
Vorparlament (Frankfurt) 50, 128, 141
Vorwärts (journal) xvii, xxi, xxvi–xxvii, 12, 14, 28, 33, 60, 65, 73, 90, 119, 122, 129–141
Vossische Zeitung (journal) xxi, 60, 73, 90

W

Wadler, Arnold 225, 227–229, 233–234, 243–244, 257, 261
 Waibel, Toni 254, 263
 Wallachia 102
 War of Secession (America) 47
 Weber, Max 197
 Weida (Thuringia) 279
 Weimar 139, 159, 226, 261
 Weimar Republic xi, xviii, xxviii, 86, 137, 197, 261
 Welles, Sumner 137, 142
Welt am Montag (journal) 43
 Werdau (Saxony) 297
 Werner, P. (pseudonym for Paul Frölich) xviii, 206–208, 210–211, 234
 Wesel (North Rhine–Westphalia) 269, 272
 Weser (river) 158–160
 Westmeyer, Friedrich 212, 260
 Westphalia 13, 111, 176–177, 200, 269
 Wettin (Saxony-Anhalt) 302
 Wickede an der Ruhr (North Rhine–Westphalia) 273
 Wilhelm II, Kaiser xxi, xxv, 27, 39, 133, 204
 Wilhelmshaven xiv, xxv, 1–25, 27, 153
 Wilhelmshöhe (Hessen) 180
 Wilson, Woodrow xxi, 102, 181, 187, 212, 218, 260
 Winguth, Willi 141
 Winkelmann, Carl 162–163
 Winning, August 128, 141
 Wissell, Rudolf xxvi
 Wittelsbach, House of 170, 218, 261
 Württemberg xxvii, 177, 255, 260
 Würzburg 243, 246, 254–255, 262

Y

Yudenich, Nikolai 209

Z

Zickler, Arthur 137, 142
 Zietz, Luise 225, 261

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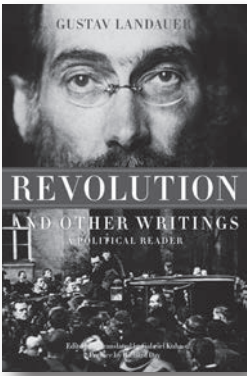
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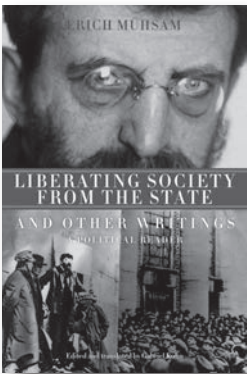
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Erich Mühsam (1878-1934), poet, bohemian, revolutionary, is one of Germany's most renowned and influential anarchists. Born into a middle-class Jewish family, he challenged the conventions of bourgeois society at the turn of the century, engaged in heated debates on the rights of women and homosexuals, and traveled Europe in search of radical communes and artist colonies. He was a primary instigator of the ill-fated

Bavarian Council Republic in 1919, and held the libertarian banner high during a Weimar Republic that came under increasing threat by right-wing forces. In 1933, four weeks after Hitler's ascension to power, Mühsam was arrested in his Berlin home. He spent the last sixteen months of his life in detention and died in the Oranienburg Concentration Camp in July 1934.

Mühsam wrote poetry, plays, essays, articles, and diaries. His work unites a burning desire for individual liberation with anarcho-communist convictions, and bohemian strains with syndicalist tendencies. The body of his writings is immense, yet hardly any English translations exist. This collection presents not only *Liberating Society from the State: What is Communist Anarchism?*, Mühsam's main political pamphlet and one of the key texts in the history of German anarchism, but also some of his best-known poems, unbending defenses of political prisoners, passionate calls for solidarity with the lumpenproletariat, recollections of the utopian community of Monte Verità, debates on the rights of homosexuals and women, excerpts from his journals, and essays contemplating German politics and anarchist theory as much as Jewish identity and the role of intellectuals in the class struggle.

An appendix documents the fate of Zenzl Mühsam, who, after her husband's death, escaped to the Soviet Union where she spent twenty years in Gulag camps.