

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN GERMANY AND THE CRISIS IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY

By KURT LANDAU

I. The Legend of the New Revolutionary Wave.

"Our sister-party has measured up to its tasks. It is our party which is stimulating, promoting, and organizing the grandiose revolutionary revival of the laboring masses. It can be stated that not a single day passes in Germany which is not marked by the mobilization of the masses and street-fighting."

These are the words in which the French Communist organ, *Humanite* describes the situation in an article entitled, "Street-fighting the position in Germany".

How the German Communist Party itself appraises the position is clearly revealed by the illegal leaflet which it distributed on the first of February, proclaiming that "the tottering chariots of capitalism at break-neck speed career towards the abyss and destruction." Every issue of the Berlin *Rote Fahne* purports to represent the workers as engaged in "conquering the streets", in putting the police to flight and here and there in setting up barricades.

But daily the hard language of facts contradicts this legend of the rising revolutionary tide. Of the three million unemployed who with their families compromise some six to eight million proletarians, not one percent heeded the call of the party to join in the hunger demonstrations—the call of this great and powerful party which rallies three million votes.

When the workers of Hartmannsdorf near Chemnitz in red and highly industrialized Saxony were recently shot down like rabbits by the unbridled police fury, the factories were not closed down, the workers did not storm out of the shops to demonstrate against the fearful bloodbath, as was the case last Fall on a hundred different occasions in Austria. No, the wide masses of the proletariat remained as dumb as the red shops of Berlin were the first and second of May when Zoergiebel was shedding the blood of the workers. The workers remained as silent as when in September the party called for the struggle against the worsening of unemployment relief, and later called upon them to fight Hilferding's finance program in December.

The most important symptom of a rising revolutionary wave—the extraordinary rise in the activity and initiative of the masses—is missing.

II. Towards the New 1923?

In the last few weeks and months the analogy of 1923 has been used more and more often in the German party as well as in the entire Comintern press.

The German party leadership and the Comintern regard the present situation of German capitalism hopeless. They point to the extraordinary rise of the index of unemployment, the symptoms of crisis in a section of industry and talk already of the approaching collapse of stabilization. The general social crisis following the collapse of the stabilization will, so the theoreticians of Stalinism think, reach in the immediate future, the intensity and profundity of 1923. The pace of this process, they consider, will be accelerated by the beginning crisis of American capitalism.

There can be no doubt that a series of crucial phenomena are making themselves felt in German capitalism. The closing down of industries, bankruptcies, etc. does not however, signalize the approaching general collapse of German capitalism but the extraordinary degree reached in the process of the concentration of capital. The year 1929 was record-breaking for the number of mergers, cartels—in a word for the gigantic advance on the road of concentration. The enormous increase of unemployment also is intimately bound up with this. The gigantic concentration makes possible the vast extension of the rationalization process. In the most important branches of German industry production in 1929, despite the numerical decrease of the workers employed, actually increased. That is, productivity actually rose. It is just such phenomena that reveal the fundamental contradictions of stabilization. In the same measure that the productive forces develop they come into conflict with the prevailing social order.

In the wake of these processes the social antagonisms have also grown unusually acute. The huge proportions of the

mass unemployment is exciting the unrest of the entire working class. The execution of the Young Plan in the form of imposing its whole burden on the masses, the forced increase of the indirect taxation, the custom duties, and tax-remissions to the bourgeoisie accentuate this unrest.

But it is a long way from the dissatisfaction of the masses to their revolutionary will to struggle. If anything sounds the death-knell of the present policy of the German party it is obviously the fact that in 1929, the year of the most brutal and reactionary offensive of the social democratic government, our Party has not been able to advance the working class a single step forward. The parliamentary and democratic illusions of the masses which a far-seeing Bolshevik leadership could in this stage have surmounted, have instead remained intact, thanks to the adventurist and zig-zag policy of the Thaelmannites. In so far as these democratic illusions were undermined, it was, however, not in favor of Communism but of national socialism (Hitler) which has doubled and tripled its ranks in the industrial centers.

Do we find ourselves then, on the eve of an acute revolutionary situation—of a new 1923? Positively not. But if there were a real Bolshevik party in the leadership, the German working class could indeed organize its effective resistance to the developing capitalist offensive. If, indeed, the German Communist Party organized a systematic struggle against the Young Plan, rallying the workers in the shops and the unemployed about the concrete tasks of the day, it could lend wings to the activity and initiative of the masses and prepare them for the victorious counter-offensive of the morrow.

III. Radicalization of the Workers, Political mass Strike, and Struggle for the Streets.

Something has already been said in the foregoing concerning the radicalization of the masses. It would be ridiculous to deny—as the Rights do—that a certain degree of radicalization of the masses is perceptible. That, despite Thaelmann and Neumann, the German party has remained a mass party with great sympathy in the proletariat and that this is the case despite the sense of shame that these sympathizers feel at the bombastic phrases and systematic self-deception of the Communist leaders and press—is due to the circumstance that great masses of the proletariat want to fight. That they do not fight, that they do not follow the battle-slogans of the party, is not their fault but exclusively that of a leadership which is incompetent to apply the ABC of a bolshevist policy.

The Thaelmann leadership has placed the German party in the state of self-delusion in which the Austrian party has found itself for many years. Since 1919, the Austrian Communist Party has been waiting—except for short intervals—for the revolution. Dedicated to the bold idea of the armed insurrection, the Austrian party has not, by and large, worked in the mass organizations and workshops; and whenever the proletariat begins to move, this party immediately proclaims the general strike and only stops short of talking of soviets.

In the "Third Period" the Austrian school has attained to international ramifications. The theses of the Wedding Congress of the German party explain why the struggle for "every-day demands" has outlived its usefulness in the following terms: "the process of the radicalization of the masses has made rapid progress and is being transformed into open mass action. The balance of forces has undergone a fundamental change... The May-Day struggles in Berlin are a turning point in the political development of Germany. The conditions are maturing for the approach of an immediate revolutionary situation, in the course of the development of which the question of armed insurrection will inevitably arise on the order of the day..."

It is from this appraisal of the situation that the party leadership approaches every question. This fateful over-estimation of the given processes of crisis cripples it in the task of the real systematic organization of the revolution in Germany

The slogan of the political mass strike met with catastrophic failure already the first and second of May; later it met with an even fainter echo. It is the very failure of this watch-word that should have opened the eyes of the Thaelmannites to their exaggerations—if they had eyes to see.

In 1923—which is represented to have so much in common with the present situation—there were no less than 47 political strikes, embracing 3506 shops and 320,000 workers. The number of working days lost through political mass strikes amounted to 1,048,233. What of 1929? Not a dozen shops, fewer than 30,000 workers joined in a political mass strike—despite the events of May First.

The economic struggles, for the year 1929, no less contradict the party thesis of the "stormy will to struggle" and the resolute counter-offensive of the proletariat. The following comparative index figures show this to be the case.

Year	No. of Workshops	No. on strike	No. of work-ing days lost
1929		115,000	1,800,000
1928	5,672	328,529	8,519,713
1927	8,144	232,704	2,945,815

These figures bear an unmistakable meaning. They show that the party leadership has not succeeded in combatting the reformist trade unions' policy. The leaders of the "free" unions, on the other hand, did succeed to a large extent in bolstering up their class-collaborationist policy of "Industrial Peace."

We have the same picture of the "successes" of the struggle for the streets. If the party was yet able, despite all its preceding mistakes, to lead out tens of thousands on to the streets, the position has become considerable worsened since then. The first of February which was to have been the signal for a large scale mass action against unemployment and the rise in the cost of living, resulted, it is generally recognized, in a pitiable fiasco.

If one were to believe the party press, the outlawing of the party is a matter only of days or weeks at the most. The party leadership is daily engaged in preparing the working class for the imminent illegality of the C. P. and proudly proclaims that the Party cannot be proscribed, as little as the Red Front Fighters League.

IV. Is the Party Threatened by Illegality?

It is a fact that the left wing of the bourgeoisie, particularly the Social Democratic party and its press, energetically supported by the Democratic Party, demands exceptional measures against the Communist Party. In this sharpened offensive against the party, the Right press has been left far behind the "Vorwaerts" and the pacifist-democratic "Welt-am-Montag". This remarkable fact naturally has its deeper explanation.

The more the Coalition regime crumbles, the more the heavy-industrialist and right-wing circles of the German bourgeoisie demand the head of the Muller Government,—after Hilferding has already been ignominiously driven from the cabinet—all the more does the Social-Democracy inveigh against the Communist Party, in the hope of impressing its indispensability as a police-guard of the bourgeois republic. The legend of the putschist plans of the Communist Party, which are circulated daily by the capitalist press, is the axis about which revolves the struggle of the S. D. P. to preserve the Coalition. The proletarian dead of Hartmannsdorf, Worms and Hamburg are an integral factor in this struggle.

Apart from this, the Social-Democracy has latterly become confident that the Communist Party is impotent to carry on a successful fight for its existence in a state of outlawry. The inglorious end of the Red Front Fighters League which on its proscription simply disappeared, confirms the Social democracy in this expectation.

The possibility of the suppression of the Communist Party certainly exists.

But the S. D. P. clearly perceives that the banning of the C. P. G. would be anything but popular; granted anywhere near a reasonable policy of the party leadership, the struggle for legality could evoke a deep response from the masses. If this is not

the case to-day, if to-day the wide masses of the revolutionary proletariat stand aside in a waiting attitude, the S. D. P. should be grateful, first and foremost to the "Barricade-philosophy" of the Communist leadership and the methods of pseudo-revolutionary gymnastics that the C. P. daily applies, inasmuch as it proclaims struggle to be an end in itself.

But what the S. D. P. fears and what will probably deter it from driving the Communist Party into a state of illegality after the fascist precedent, is the awakening of the masses, who are sympathetic towards Communism and who would be able better to control the policy of the party than at present. Finally it is precisely in a condition of legality that the contradiction between the policy of the party and the revolutionary necessities becomes more and more crass, so that the outlook for the gradual disintegration of the Communist Party appears more attractive to the social-democrat than the risk of illegality.

But in the last analysis, this question will not be settled by a careful weighing of the pros and cons by Zoergiebel and Grzynski, but by the further development of the class-struggle in Germany. The tragedy of the situation lies in this: that the Thaelmanns and Neumanns objectively play into the hands of the Zoergiebel and Severings, inasmuch as their pseudo-revolutionary gestures push the revolutionary proletariat into passivity.

So for instance, the illegal leaflet of the party on February first called for demonstrations for the slogans—"All Power to Workers! Long live the Struggle for the dictatorship! For Soviet Germany!" Besides this the leaflet contains a long dissertation on the "History, Forms, and Technique of Barricade-Fighting".

The masses responded to these slogans with their feet: they did not appear.

And louder than ever the bourgeois press is calling for exceptional measures against the C. P. G.

V. The Struggle for a New Left Wing in the Party.

Up till now the gainers from the enormous mistakes of the party have been exclusively the Right wing, which has become a serious menace to the Party. They seize hold of the glaring mistakes and defeats of the party leadership to broadcast their own opportunist views of the united front policy, trade union tactics, etc.

The one-time Left Wing in the Party, that had already for the most part been expelled years ago, has up to the present been unable to re-form its ranks. The decisive obstacle to the reorganization of the forces, has become the Leninbund. Of its grave confusion in the fundamental international questions in connection with the Russo-Chinese Conflict, the declaration of Rakovsky, etc., much has been said and written. No less fateful for the Leninbund and through it, for the whole Left movement, has been its sectarian and opportunist policy in all the basic German questions. Above all, its radically false position on the Communist Party, which the Leninbund considers as already lost. This attitude which underlies the organizational form of the Leninbund as an independent organization, has led to the complete isolation of the Leninbund from the party masses and has resulted in a permanent crisis of disintegration, in the course of which a number of good comrades of this organization have separated themselves from the Leninbund and the policy of its leadership and embarked on open opposition.

The Leninbund which, at the time it was founded, was an organization of some thousands of largely active comrades, now ekes out only a shadowy existence. Except for some more active and firmly established groups (Westphalia, Baden, Central Germany) the Leninbund no longer disposes anywhere of strong positions.

The meandering way of the Leninbund has caused the Left groups that had remained in the party, to adopt a waiting attitude, to avoid being overtaken by a like fate. This is particularly true of the so-called Wedding Opposition which dominated Wedding two years ago—the most proletarian and powerful districts of the party in Berlin.

The Wedding Opposition too has many
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