

Thaelmann's Twenty-One Mistakes

AN ANALYSIS OF THE REPLIES MADE BY ERNST THAELMANN TO A SERIES OF QUESTIONS POSED TO HIM BY FORMER SOCIALIST WORKERS ON THE ATTITUDE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY TOWARDS THE PROBLEMS OF THE UNITED FRONT OF ALL WORKERS IN THE PRESENT GERMAN SITUATION

From the Series of Articles in the Forthcoming Book 'The Only Road' :- by Leon Trotsky

IN THE MIDDLE of July appeared a brochure with Thaelmann's answers to twenty-one questions by social democratic workers on how the "Red united front" is to be created. The brochure begins with the words: "Mightily does the anti-Fascist united front rush ahead!" On July 20 the Communist party called upon the workers to come out in a political strike. The appeal met with no response. Thus within five days was the tragic abyss revealed between bureaucratic rhetoric and political reality.

The party received 5,300,000 votes in the elections of July 31. By trumpeting forth this result as a tremendous victory, the party showed how greatly the defeats have diminished its claims and hopes. In the first balloting for the presidential election, on March 13, the party received almost five million votes. In the course of four and a half months—and what months!—it therefore barely gained three hundred thousand votes. The Communist press repeated hundreds of times in March that the number of votes would have been incomparably larger had it been a Reichstag election: in a presidential election, hundreds of thousands of sympathizers deemed it superfluous to lose any time over a "platonic" demonstration. If this March commentary is taken into consideration—and it deserves to be taken into consideration—it follows that the party has practically not grown at all in the last four and a half months.

In April, the social democracy elected Hindenburg, who thereupon carried out a coup d'Etat aimed directly at the former. One would think that this fact alone ought to have sufficed to convulse the structure of reformism to its very foundations. Add to this the further accentuation of the crisis with all its frightful consequences. Finally, on July 20, eleven days before the elections, the social democracy drew its tail miserably between its legs at the coup d'Etat of the federal president it elected. In such periods revolutionary parties grow feverishly. Whatever the social democracy, forced into a steel vise, may yet undertake to do, it must drive the workers away from it to the Left. But instead of striding forward with seven league boots, Communism marks time, vacillates, is on the retreat, and after each step forward it takes half a step backward. To exult over a victory only because the Communist party suffered no loss of votes on July 31, is finally to lose the sense of reality.

In order to understand why and how the revolutionary party condemns itself to a debasing impotence under exceptionally favorable, political conditions, one must read Thaelmann's answers to the social democratic workers. A wearisome and unpleasant job, but it may enlighten one on what is taking place in the minds of the Stalinist leaders.

To the question: "How do the Communists evaluate the character of the Papen government?" Thaelmann gives several, mutually contradictory, replies. He begins with a reference to "the danger of the immediate establishment of the Fascist dictatorship". Then it follows that it does not yet exist? He speaks with complete accuracy of the government members as "representatives of trust capital, of the generals and of Junkerdom". A minute later he says about the same government: "this Fascist cabinet", and concludes his reply with the assertion that "the Papen government . . . has set itself the aim of the immediate establishment of the Fascist dictatorship."

By disregarding the social and political distinctions between Bonapartism, that is, the regime of "civil peace" resting upon military-police dictatorship, and Fascism, that is, the régime of open civil war against the proletariat, Thaelmann deprives himself in advance of the possibility of understanding what is taking place before his very eyes. If Papen's cabinet is a Fascist cabinet then what Fascist "danger" is he talking about? If the workers will believe Thaelmann that Papen sets himself the aim (!) of establishing the Fascist dictatorship, then the probable conflict between Hitler and Papen-Schleicher will catch the party napping just as the conflict between Papen and Otto Braun did in its time.*

To the question, "Is the Communist Party of Germany sincere about the united front?" Thaelmann naturally answers affirmatively, and for proof he refers to the fact that the Communists do not go hat in hand to Hindenburg and Papen. "No, we put the question of the struggle, of the struggle against the whole system, against capitalism. And here lies the kernel of the sincerity of our united front."

Thaelmann manifestly does not understand what it is all about. The social democratic workers remain social democrats precisely because they still believe in the gradual, reformist road to the transformation of capitalism into socialism. Since they know that the Communists stand for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, the social democratic workers ask: Do you sincerely propose the united front to us? To this Thaelmann replies: Naturally, sincerely, for with us it is a question of overthrowing the whole capitalist system.

Of course, it does not occur to us to conceal anything from the social democratic workers. Nevertheless, one must know the measure of things and preserve the political proportions. A skilled propagandist should have answered in the following manner: "You put your stakes on democracy; we believe that the only way out lies in the revolution. Yet we cannot and we do not want to make the revolution without you. Hitler is now the common foe. After the victory over him we shall draw the balance together with you and see whither the further road actually leads."

The auditors, peculiar as this may seem at first

*These lines were written at the beginning of August, before the negotiations between Hindenburg-Papen and Hitler.

sight, not only listen forbearingly to the speaker but even agree with him many times. The secret of their forbearance, however, rests upon the fact that Thaelmann's partners in the conversation not only belong to the Anti-Fascist Action but also call for the casting of votes for the Communist party. They are former social democrats who have gone over to the side of Communism. Such recruits can only be welcomed. But what is deceptive in the whole affair is that a conversation with workers who have broken with the social democracy is palmed off as a conversation with the social democratic mass. This cheap masquerade is highly characteristic of the whole present-day policy of Thaelmann and Co.!

However this may be—the former social democrats put questions which actually agitate the social democratic mass. "Is the Anti-Fascist Action a Communist party business?" they ask. Thaelmann replies: "No!" The proof? The Anti-Fascist Action "is no organization but a mass movement". As if it were not just the task of the Communist party to organize the mass movement. Still better is the second argument: the Anti-Fascist Action is non-partisan, for (!) it directs itself against the capitalist state: "Karl Marx, in dealing with the lessons of the Paris Commune, already placed in the foreground in all sharpness, as the task of the working class, the question of smashing the bourgeois state apparatus." O hapless quotation! For what the social democrats want, regardless of Marx, is to perfect the bourgeois state, but not to smash it. They are not Communists, but reformists. Despite his intentions, Thaelmann proves just the thing he would like to refute—the party character of the "Anti-Fascist Action."

The official leader of the Communist party obviously understands neither the situation nor the political thought of the social democratic workers. He does not understand what purpose the united front serves. With every one of his sentences, he delivers weapons to the reformist leaders and drives the social democratic workers to them.

The impossibility of any kind of joint step with the social democracy is demonstrated by Thaelmann in the following manner: "In this connection we [?] must clearly recognize that the social democracy, even when it today mimics a sham opposition, will at no moment give up its actual thoughts of coalition and its compacts with the Fascist bourgeoisie." Even if this were right, there would nevertheless remain the task of proving it to the social democratic workers through experience. However, it is also false in essence. If the social democratic leaders do not want to abandon compacts with the bourgeoisie, the Fascist bourgeoisie, however, does abandon compacts with the social democracy. And this fact may become decisive for the fate of the social democracy. In the passage of power from Papen to Hitler, the bourgeoisie will in no way be able to spare the social democracy. The civil war has its laws. The reign of the Fascist terror will and can mean only the abolition of the social democracy. Mussolini began with just that, so as to be able all the more unrestrainedly to crush the revolutionary workers. In any event, the "social Fascist" cherishes his hide. The Communist united front policy at the present time must proceed from the concern of the social democracy for its own hide. That will be the most realistic and at the same time, in its results, the most revolutionary policy.

But if the social democracy will "at no moment" separate itself from the Fascist bourgeoisie (although Matteotti "separated" himself from Mussolini), don't the social democratic workers, who want to take part in the Anti-Fascist Action, have to leave their party? Thus runs one question. To this Thaelmann replies: "For us Communists it is a matter of course that social democratic or Reichsbanner workers may take part in the Anti-Fascist Action without having to leave their party." To show himself free from sectarianism, Thaelmann adds: "If you were to stream into it by the millions, in a serried front, we would greet it with joy, even if a lack of clarity still exists in your minds, in our opinion, about certain questions of estimating the Social Democratic Party of Germany." Golden words! We consider your party to be Fascist, you consider it to be democratic, but let's not dispute over petty matters. It suffices for you to come to us "by the millions", without leaving your Fascist party. "Lack of clarity about certain questions" cannot constitute an obstacle. But, O, the lack of clarity in the heads of the all-powerful bureaucrats is an obstacle at every step.

To give depth to the question, Thaelmann proceeds to say: "We do not put the question of party to party, but on a class basis." Like Seydewitz, Thaelmann is prepared to renounce party interests in the interests of the class. The misfortune lies in this, that for a Marxist there cannot be such a contrast. Were not its program the scientific formulation of the interests of the working class, the party would not be worth a penny.

Only, along with the crude mistake in principle, Thaelmann's words contain also a practical absurdity. How is it possible not to put the question "of party to party" when that is just where the very essence of the question lies? Millions of workers follow the social democracy. Other millions—the Communist party. To the question of the social democratic workers: How shall we today achieve joint actions between your party and ours against Fascism, Thaelmann answers: "on a class and not a party basis": stream toward us by the millions. Isn't this the most wretched bombast?

"We Communists," continues Thaelmann, "do not want unity at any price." We cannot, in the interest of unity with the social democracy, "disavow the class content of our policy . . . and renounce strikes, struggles of the unemployed, actions of the tenants and rev-

olutionary mass defense". The agreement on definite practical actions is misconstrued into an absurd unity with the social democracy. Out of the indispensability of the final revolutionary assault of tomorrow, is deduced the impermissibility of harmonized strike or self-defense actions for today. Whoever can see rhyme or reason in Thaelmann's thoughts deserves a prize of distinction.

The auditors press: "Is an alliance of the C. P. G. and the S. D. P. G. possible in the struggle against the Papen government and against Fascism?" Thaelmann mentions two or three facts as evidence that the social democracy does not fight against Fascism and concludes: "Every [!] S. D. P. G. comrade will say we are right [?] when we say that an alliance between the C. P. G. and the S. D. P. G. is impossible on the basis of these facts and also [!] for reasons of principle [!]." The bureaucrat again assumes just the thing that should be proved ultimatum acquires a particularly ludicrous character as soon as Thaelmann replies to the question of the united front with organizations which embrace millions of workers. The social democrats must acknowledge that an agreement with their party is impossible because it is Fascist. Can Wels and Leipart be rendered a better service?

"We Communists, who reject any accord with the S. D. P. G. leaders . . . repeatedly declare that we are at all times ready for the anti-Fascist struggle with the militant social democratic and Reichsbanner comrades and with the lower [?] militant organizations." Where do the lower organizations come to an end? And what is to be done if the lower organizations submit to the discipline of the upper, and propose that the negotiations shall be begun with the latter? Finally, between the lower and the upper there are intermediate storeys. And can one prophecy where the dividing line will be between those who want to fight and those who dodge the struggle? This can be determined only in action and not by anticipatory appraisals. What sense is there in binding oneself hand and foot?

IN DIE ROTTE FÄHRE of July 29, in a report of a Reichsbanner meeting, the noteworthy words of a social democratic company commander are mentioned: "The will to an anti-Fascist united front exists in the masses. If the leaders fail to take it into account, then I will go to the united front over their heads." The Communist paper reproduces these words without comment. Yet they contain the key to the whole tactic of the united front. The social democrat wants to fight against the Fascists in common with the Communists. He is already in doubt about the good will of his leaders. If the leaders refuse, says he, then I shall go over their heads. Social democrats similarly disposed can be counted by the dozens, hundreds, thousands, millions. It is the task of the Communist party really to show them whether or not the social democratic leaders want to fight. This can be demonstrated only through experience, through a new, fresh experience, in a new situation. This experience will not be gained at one blow. The social democratic leaders must be subjected to a test: in the factory and workshop, in town and country, in the whole state, today and tomorrow. We must repeat our proposal, put it in a new form, from a new angle, adapted to the new situation.

But Thaelmann will have none of it. On the ground of the "principle" distinctions shown to exist between the C. P. G. and the S. D. P. G. we reject negotiations from the top with the S. D. P. G.". This shattering argument is repeated by Thaelmann several times. But if there were no "antagonisms in principle" then there would be no two parties. And if there were no two parties, there would be no question of the united front. Thaelmann wants to prove far too much. Less—would be better.

Did not the founding of the Red Trade Union Organization, ask the workers, signify "a splitting of the organized working class"? No, replies Thaelmann, and as proof he cites Engels' letter of 1895 against the aesthetic-sentimental philanthropists. Who is handing Thaelmann such treacherous quotations? The R. T. U. O. is created in the spirit of unity and not of schism. Also, the worker is in no case to leave his trade union organization in order to join the R. T. U. O. On the contrary, it were better if the R. T. U. O. members remained in the trade unions in order to carry on oppositional work therein. Thaelmann's words may sound convincing to Communists who have set themselves the task of fighting against the social democratic leadership. But as an answer to social democratic workers, who are concerned with trade union unity, Thaelmann's words sound like a mockery. Why have you left our trade unions and organized yourselves separately?—asks the social democratic workers. If you want to enter our separate organization in order to fight against the social democratic leadership, we do not demand of you to leave the trade unions, Thaelmann replies. An appropriate reply, right on the head of the nail!

"Is there democracy within the C. P. G.?" ask the

workers, passing over to another theme. Thaelmann replies in the affirmative. And how! But he immediately adds unexpectedly: "In legality as well as in illegality, most particularly in the latter, the party must be on guard against spies, provocateurs and police agents." This interpolation is not made accidentally. The latest doctrine, proclaimed throughout the world in the brochure of a mysterious Buchner, justifies the strangulation of democracy in the interest of the struggle against spies. Whoever protests against the autocracy of the Stalinist bureaucracy must be declared a suspicious character at the very least. The police agents and provocateurs of every country revel with enthusiasm over this theory. They will hound Oppositionists louder than anyone else: this may divert attention from themselves and enable them to fish in troubled waters.

The flourishing of democracy is also demonstrated, according to Thaelmann, by the fact that "the problems are dealt with at World Congresses and Conferences of the E. C. C. I." The speaker fails to report when the last World Congress took place. We will call it to mind: in July 1928, more than four years ago! Apparently no noteworthy questions have arisen since then. Why, be it asked in passing, doesn't Thaelmann himself convoke an extraordinary German party convention to resolve the questions upon which depend the fate of the German proletariat? Certainly not because of an excess of party democracy.

So runs page after page. Thaelmann replies to twenty-one questions. Every reply—a mistake. In sum—twenty-one mistakes, not counting the small and secondary ones. And they are numerous.

Thaelmann relates that the Bolsheviks broke with the Mensheviks in 1903. In reality, the split first took place in 1912. But even that did not prevent the February revolution in 1917 from finding united Bolshevik and Menshevik organizations over a large part of the country. As late as the beginning of April, Stalin came out for the unification of the Bolsheviks with Tseretelli's party—not the united front but the fusion of the parties! This was prevented only by Lenin's arrival.

Thaelmann says that the Bolsheviks dispersed the Constituent Assembly in 1917. In reality this occurred at the beginning of 1918. Thaelmann is not at all familiar with the history of the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik party.

Far worse, however, is the fact that he does not grasp the foundations of the Bolshevik tactic. In his "theoretical" articles, he even dares to dispute the fact that the Bolsheviks concluded an agreement with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists against Kornilov. As proof, he adduces quotations shoved under his door by somebody or other, which have nothing to do with the matter. But he forgets to answer the questions: Were there Committees for the Defense of the People throughout the land during the Kornilov putsch? Did they direct the struggle against Kornilov? Did representatives of the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists belong to these Committees? Yes, yes, yes. Were the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists in power at that time? Did they persecute the Bolsheviks as agents of the German general staff? Were thousands of Bolsheviks confined to prisons? Did Lenin hide in illegality? Yes, yes, yes. What quotations can refute these historical facts?

Let Thaelmann appeal to his heart's content to Manuilsky, Losovsky and Stalin himself (if the latter ever opens his mouth). But let him leave in peace Leninism and the history of the Russian revolution: for him they are books sealed with seven seals.

In conclusion one must throw into relief still another question, which stands by itself: it concerns Versailles. The social democratic workers ask if the Communist party isn't making political concessions to National Socialism. In his reply, Thaelmann continues to defend the slogan of "national emancipation" and to place it on the same plane with the slogan of social emancipation. The reparations—what is left of them now—are just as important to Thaelmann as private ownership of the means of production. This policy is as if contrived uniquely to divert the attention of the worker from the basic problem, to weaken the blow against capitalism and to compel one to seek the principal foe and author of poverty on the other side of the frontier. However, now more than ever before, "the main enemy is at home!" Von Schleicher expressed this idea even more coarsely: before anything else, he declared on the radio on July 26, we must "put an end to the dirty swine at home"! This soldier's formula is very good. We pick it up willingly. Every Communist must firmly adopt it as his own. While the Nazis divert attention to Versailles, the Communist workers must retort to them with Schleicher's words: no, before anything else we must put an end to the dirty swine at home! Prinkipo, August 17, 1932. —L. TROTSKY.

New Sub Drive Launched for Militant

(Continued from page 1)

Leninist propaganda. In these years we have made clear to a number of workers the ideas of the Left Opposition. We have firmly established the foundation of our future work. It is time to build higher. On the order of the day—the first storey! In Illinois we are taking a direct part in one of the greatest fights the miners have waged against their cap-

italist masters. Elsewhere we are active in the struggles of the workers, or are preparing to apply the principles and ideas of Marxism. In this work our central organ must play a leading role. It must become our best organizer. To fulfill this role it must increase its circulation many times. Build the first storey—get subs; use the club plan; spread the MILITANT far and wide. Every

A \$1 HALF YEAR SUB OF 26 ISSUES for 50c in CLUBS of FOUR or MORE. THE MILITANT, 84 E. 10th Street, New York City.

Enclosed find \$2 for which send the MILITANT for 26 weeks to the following:

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Help Circulate a Marxian Paper for Class Conscious Workers

sub from now on is a brick in the building of the first storey. Build it well! Build it quickly!

YOUNG SPARTACUS AID IN PICKETING OF REX STRIKE

More than 200 workers, mostly young, have struck against the attempt of the Rex Products Corporation, to put over the four wage cut in recent times, sometimes amounting to sixty percent of the wages. The workers, in a highly militant mood, applied for aid to the Metal Workers Industrial Union which is now directing the strike.

Members of the Spartacus Youth Club voted to participate every morning in the picket line of the strikers and have been down every morning since the decision was adopted. In spite of this demonstration of solidarity with the striking young workers, one of the bureaucrats of the M. W. I. U., one Steuben, has sought to forbid our young comrades from participating in the picket lines and fraternizing with the strikers, giving as his "reason" that "we don't work with people we don't know."