

# After the German Catastrophe

### An Historical Evaluation of the Events by Leon Trotsky

The imperialist epoch, in Europe at least, has been one of sharp turns, in which politics has acquired an extremely mobile character. At each turn the stakes have been, not some partial reform or other, but the fate of the regime. On this fact the exceptional role of the revolutionary party and of its leadership is based. If, in the good old days when the social democracy grew regularly and uninterruptedly, like the capitalism which nurtured it, the leadership of the party resembled a general staff tranquilly elaborating plans for a war in the indefinite future (a war that perhaps might not come after all), under present conditions the Central Committee of a revolutionary party resembles the field headquarters of an army in action. The strategy of the study has been replaced by the strategy of the battle field.

The struggle against a centralized enemy demands centralization. Trained in a spirit of strict discipline, the German workers assimilated this idea with renewed vigor during the War and the political convulsions which followed it. The workers are not blind to the defects of their leadership, but none of them as an individual is able to shake off the grip of the organization. The workers as a whole consider it better to have a strong leader, even if a faulty one, than to pull in different directions or to resort to "free-lance" activities. Never before in the history of humanity has a political staff played so important a role or borne such responsibility as in the present epoch.

The unparalleled defeat of the German proletariat is the most important event since the conquest of power by the Russian proletariat. The first task on the morrow of the defeat is to analyze the policy of the leadership. The most responsible leaders (who are, however, praised, safe and sound) head with paths to the imprisoned rank and file executors of their policies in order to suppress all criticism. We can only meet such a spuriously sentimental argument with contempt. Our solidarity with those whom Hitler has imprisoned is unassailable, but this solidarity does not extend to accepting the mistakes of the leaders. The losses sustained will be justified only if the ideas of the vanquished are advanced. The preliminary condition for this is courageous criticism.

For a whole month not a single Communist organ, the Moscow Pravda not excepted, uttered a word on the catastrophe of March 5. They all waited to hear what the Praesidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International would say. For its part the Praesidium oscillated between two contradictory variants: "The German Central Committee led us astray," and "the German Central Committee pursued a correct policy." The first variant was ruled out: the preparation of the catastrophe had taken place under the eyes of everybody, and the controversy with the Left Opposition that preceded the catastrophe had too clearly committed the leaders of the Communist International. At last, on April 7, the decision was announced: "The political line... of the Central Committee, with Thälmann at its head, was completely correct up to and during Hitler's coup d'Etat." It is only to be regretted that all those who were dispatched into the beyond by the Fascists did not learn of this consoling affirmation before they died.

The resolution of the Praesidium does not attempt to analyze the policy of the German Communist party—which was, above all else, to have been expected—but constitutes another in the long series of indictments against the social democracy. It preferred, we are told, a coalition with the bourgeoisie; it evaded a real struggle against Fascism; it fettered the initiative of the masses; and as it had in its hands the leadership of the mass labor organizations, it succeeded in preventing a general strike. All this is true. But it is nothing new. The social democracy, as the party of social reform, exhausted the progressiveness of its mission, as capitalism was transforming itself into imperialism. During the war the social democracy functioned as a direct instrument of imperialism. After the War it fired itself out officially as the hired doctor of capitalism. The Communist party strove to be its grave-digger. On whose side was the whole course of international relations, the collapse of pacifist illusions, the unparalleled crisis which is tantamount to a great war with its aftermath of epidemics—all this, it would seem, revealed the decadent character of European capitalism and the hopelessness of reformism.

Then what happened to the Communist party? In reality the Communist International is ignoring one of its own sections, even though that section rallied some 6 million votes in the election. That is no longer a mere vanguard; it is a great independent army. Why, then, did it take part in the events only as a victim of repression and pogroms? Why, at the decisive hour, did it prove to be slack with paralysis? There are circumstances under which one cannot withdraw without giving battle. A defeat may result from the superiority of the enemy forces; after defeat one may recover. The passive surrender of all the decisive positions reveals an organic incapacity to fight which does not go un punished. The Praesidium tells us that the

policy of the Communist International was correct "before as well as during the coup d'Etat." A correct policy, however, begins with a correct appraisal of the situation. Yet, for the last four years, in fact up to March 5, 1933, we heard day in and day out that a mighty anti-Fascist front was growing uninterceptedly in Germany, that National Socialism was retreating and disintegrating, and that the whole situation was under the aegis of the revolutionary offensive. How could a policy have been correct when the whole analysis on which it was based was knocked over like a house of cards?

The Praesidium justifies the passive retreat by the fact that the Communist party, "lacking the support of the majority of the working class," could not engage in a decisive battle without committing a crime. Nevertheless, the same resolution considers the July 20 call for a general political strike as deserving special praise, though for some unknown reason it neglects to mention an identical call of March 5. Is not the general strike a "decisive struggle"? The two strike calls wholly corresponded to the obligations of a "leading role" in the anti-Fascist united front under the conditions of the "revolutionary offensive." Unfortunately, the strike calls fell on deaf ears; nobody came out and answered them. But if, between the official interpretation of events and the strike calls on the one hand, and the facts and deeds on the other, there arises such a crying contradiction, it is hard to understand wherein a correct policy can be distinguished from a disastrous one. In any case, the Praesidium has forgotten to explain which was correct—the two strike calls or the indifference of the workers to them.

But perhaps the division in the ranks of the proletariat was the cause for the defeat? Such an explanation is created especially for lazy minds. The unity of the proletariat, as a universal slogan, is a myth. The proletariat is not homogeneous. The split begins with the political awakening of the proletariat, and constitutes the mechanics of its growth. Only under the conditions of a ripened social crisis, when it is faced with the seizure of power as an immediate task, can the vanguard of the proletariat, provided with a correct

## News from Workers in Naziland

LETTER FROM HAMBURG

Our groups show good advances here for the past few months. Few connections with C. P. G. and S. P. G. units have been established. There has not been any loss in numbers. Illegal work has been carried on smoothly, with only one comrade arrested for our special work. All other arrests have taken place on account of work in the party and the mass organizations. Our group is publishing its organs regularly. The composition of our group has been improved considerably in the last months by a growth in the number of factory workers.

Insofar as the party work is concerned, it must be said that its disintegration is being hastened by heavy blows dealt through spies. The most notorious of these cases is the case of a certain Kaiser. Kaiser was a leading functionary among the unemployed on the waterfront. A member of the District leadership of the party and of the defense organizations, he always kowtowed to the top leadership. Today Kaiser is a leading collaborator of the state police. Recently he declared on oath before a court that he had been for two years a functionary of the information department of the National Socialist German Labor Party (Fascists). Further, that he carried out the orders of the party exclusively within the ranks of the Communist party. It is also possible for a healthy party to contain within its ranks a number of spies and for these spies to attain positions within it. But this Kaiser is a lumpen-proletarian type, with whom any decent worker will have nothing to do. Only the inner-party regime brought him to the top. This skunk is responsible for hundreds of arrests and raids. Rumors are spreading in the party ranks that other leading functionaries are spies. It is rarely possible to test out these rumors, but they cause terrible confusion. In the last days of April the party was dealt a particularly heavy blow. In two days, 6 big printshops were discovered and material worth several hundred thousand marks confiscated. The whole manner of the action showed that it was the work of a spy in the apparatus.

About the "Revolutionary" Storm Troopers

There is a wide-spread conception among party members here that the S. A. men (Hitlerite Storm Troopers) are revolutionary. The comrades are of the opinion that in the future struggles it will not be the masses organized in the present labor organizations that will play the decisive role, but the disillusioned S. A. men, who will put the rope around the neck of

workers and consolidated their reformist leaders. Worse yet: in every case where, despite the obstacles presented by the leadership, local unity committees for workers' defense were created, the bureaucracy forced its representatives to withdraw under threat of expulsion. It displayed persistency and perseverance only in sabotaging the united front, from above as well as from below. All this it did, to be sure, with the best of intentions.

No policy of the Communist party could, of course, have transformed the social democracy into a party of the revolution. But neither was that the aim. It was necessary to exploit to the limit the contradiction between reformism and Fascism—in order to weaken Fascism, at the same time weakening reformism by exposing to the workers the incapacity of the Social Democratic leadership. These two tasks fused naturally into one. The policy of the Communist International bureaucracy led to the opposite result: the capitulation of the reformists served the interests of Fascism and not of Communism; the Social Democratic workers remained with their leaders; the Communist workers lost faith in themselves and in the leadership.

The masses wanted to fight, but they were obstinately prevented from doing so by the leaders. Tension, uneasiness and finally disorientation disrupted the proletariat from within. It is dangerous to keep molten metal too long on the fire; it is still more dangerous to keep society too long in a state of revolutionary crisis. The petty bourgeoisie swung over in its overwhelming majority to the side of National Socialism only because the proletariat, paralyzed from above, proved powerless to lead it along a different road. The absence of resistance on the part of the workers heightened the self-assurance of Fascism and diminished the fear of the big bourgeoisie confronted by the risk of civil war. The inevitable demoralization of the Communist detachment, increasingly isolated from the proletariat, rendered impossible even a partial resistance. Thus the triumphal procession of Hitler over the bones of the proletarian organizations was assured.

The false strategic conceptions of the Communist International was false from beginning to end. The point of departure of the German Communist party was that there is nothing but a mere division of labor between the social democracy and Fascism, that their interests are similar if not identical. Instead of helping to aggravate the discord between Communism and the political adversary and its mortal foe—for which it would have been sufficient to proclaim—the truth aloud instead of violating it—the Communist International convinced the reformists and the Fascists that they were twins, and predicted their conciliation, embittered and repulsed the Social Democratic

Fascism. There are united front formations here with the Black Front, some collaboration has already taken place.

In the transport concerns the "equalization" action brought within it a mass discharge of R. G. O. (Red Trade Union Opposition) members. Some 4 weeks later a great many of those discharged were rehired. In some concerns (e. g., the stockyards), R. G. O. functionaries were made commissary factory councilors, naturally after the inevitable "equalization".

The confusion in the party is increased by all sorts of clique fights among the D. E. C. leadership. The confidence of the membership in the top leaders is very low. Many units refuse to remit dues up higher. In many cases, comrades who formerly shunned the sight of "Trotskyists", come to us for advice. It is also not unusual for functionaries to request the collaboration of our comrades. The party comrades come to our discussions and ask us for material. All this forces the bureaucracy to call meetings at which they aim to "deal a final blow against Trotskyism".

The S. P. G.

The disintegration of the S. P. G. proceeds apace. The workers and officials of the state concerns hastened to leave it so as not to lose out by equalization. The trade union bureaucracy acted especially shamefully in this town. After some releases on May 2, they were soon released on pledges to cooperate. All trade union functionaries left the socialist party in a body. If they are not yet members of the Nazi party, that is not their fault.

But in spite of its capitulation, the S. P. G. still attracts many good proletarians. This has been expressed in 10 May Day meetings attended by 100 to 150 men on an average. At the funeral of the deputy Biedermann, who was murdered by Fascists, about 2000 social democratic workers gathered. As we have heard from S. P. G. circles, a left wing is soon to split away under the leadership of several functionaries with the perspective of the creation of a new independent Social Democratic Party. Whatever leaflets have been put out by the S. P. G. recently came through the initiative of this group. Our comrades have established connections with it.

All comrades sending in news accounts and articles for publication in the Militant are requested to prepare typed copy, triple spaced.

# The Labor Movement in Greece

### Economic and Political Acts of Capitalism and the Working Class

The national revolution of 1821-1829 against Turkish domination was carried through under the influence of the ideas of the French Revolution and financed by the island bourgeoisie, which made its fortune in the Napoleonic wars and by foreign commerce, particularly with Russia. However the long duration of the struggle and the intervention of the Holy Alliance which prevented the extension of the frontiers of free Greece so weakened the Greek bourgeoisie that for the whole period up till the beginning of the 20th century Greek capitalism was unable to make any signal advances in its development. Manufacture had practically been ruined by the war and the merchant marine which constituted the principal basis of the Greek bourgeoisie transformed into a war fleet for the exigencies of the revolution was also badly crippled. The bourgeoisie was replaced by landlord elements who governed the country until the last years prior to the war.

In 1860 small scale industry began to spring up in Greece, trade grew and the merchant marine became more and more important. Weak bourgeois democratic tendencies began to assert themselves in the political movement and the bourgeoisie showed some signs of life.

The rise of the bourgeoisie began to take on an accelerated rhythm at the opening of this century. It made headway against the landed proprietors who lost in influence and in economic strength. In 1909 the bourgeoisie gave a demonstration of its strength. A military coup d'etat took place in Athens and the trusted man of the bourgeoisie came to power without great struggle. With Venizelos as its political leader the Greek bourgeoisie led the Greek army to victory and to the annexation of new, rich and economically well developed territories (Macedonia, Aegean Isles, etc.).

The Balkan wars and the great war which ended for Greece till 1922 and lasted in the Asia Minor catastrophe helped the Greek bourgeoisie to amass a fortune, to centralize the wealth by the expropriation of the peasantry which bore the brunt of the war, and which had to support almost 1,500,000 refugees who returned without any material resources to the country.

Through the wealth accumulated during the war, particularly by the munition manufacturers Greek capitalism began to boom. It established industries which now employ 200,000 workers. Hundreds of thousands of expropriated refugees supply the cheap manual labor so necessary to capitalism. The concentration of industry has progressed and now the industrial magnates

ful they were as servants, and mutter impotent threats against their successor, Hitler. These men who were glad in 1914 to support the Kaiser in the war, now call for a war against Hitler. Says Scheidemann: "It must be the task of the entire civilized world to paralyze these adventurers. That this may not exclude a bloody war is self-evident."

After a lifetime of pussyfooting with the bourgeoisie in Germany proper, Herr Scheidemann makes bold—in his Karlsbad exile. And even this Karlsbad boldness is characteristic of the social democratic bureaucracy, though it is only a deathbed snort: Herr Scheidemann calls for war against Hitler—not, god forbid, by a mobilization of the world working class—but as the "task of the entire civilized world". In this appeal he summed up the beginning and the end of the bureaucratic physiology: "Too weak, too scared of itself to call upon the workers to struggle in time, the bureaucracy to the very last trust in every other quick salvation. And when everything is all over, when the enemy is firmly entrenched, it takes an order depriving them of their pens so bold as to shake off their social-chauvinism in favor of salvation "by the entire civilized world".

The example of Scheidemann is a deep, though tragic, lesson in the logic of bureaucratic degeneration. It is necessary once more to recall that this degeneration began by the substitution of social-chauvinist reformism for the Marxist conception of the Permanent Revolution. The Stalinist bureaucracy too, within its own limits and in its own special circumstances, has already gone a long stretch of the road along this same line of degeneration. The fate of Scheidemann should serve as a warning to the Stalinists, lest they too have to resort to "Karlsbad Boldness". Communists everywhere must work with all forces to prevent this and for the reestablishment of the conception of Permanent Revolution in the Communist International and in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union —P. M.

are seated in the Council of Banks and vice versa.

We have in Greece side by side with backward forms of production the most developed type of finance capital. Save two banks, which are greatly dependent upon foreign capitalist groups, the whole banking system is bound up with the National Bank of Greece. But the National Bank also collaborates with the Bank of England and with English capital as did the Hlabros during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. It shares the surplus value of the country with them. Through its collaboration with Greek capital, English capital exploits the huge transport and industrial concessions, etc.

The Greek proletariat, created together with capitalism, has courageously struggled against the bourgeoisie. The arrival of the refugees in 1922-1923 changed the composition of the working class and its conditions of struggle. They were utilized from the very beginning by Greek capitalism to cut wages and to beat down the demands of the other workers whose unparalleled suffering and wretched conditions were no better than theirs. But these young elements, of a higher cultural formation, who fell into the vise of capitalism, soon became the most aggressive elements and they have conducted severe battles together with the Greek proletariat.

The political and trade union organizations of the Greek proletariat were immensely influenced by the Russian revolution until 1923. All the sincere and even carceral elements took on a red coloration. After the reaction and aided by Stalinism, the revolutionary ferment dying down, the reformist leaders took control of the party and the C. G. T. (trade union center) was abandoned in 1925 to conservative elements by its leaders who as members of the party are now the leaders of the reaction in the proletarian movement.

### The Communist Party

The Communist party was founded in 1918 by reformist elements who baphtized themselves Communists under the influence of the Russian revolution and the sentiment of an imminently approaching revolution in Europe. Adventurism came to the fore in the party after 1922. It formed the basis of Stalinism. The Greek Communist party without ever having been a Communist party passed from the stage

## Last Whimpers from Scheidemann

Philip Scheidemann, the German social-chauvinist, now safely buried in Karlsbad, reappeared for a minute—to offer his apologies in the N. Y. Times of July 9th. It seems the Nazis and that dreadful Adolph have been very nasty—in fact they have been slanderous. One of the Nazi lies is the claim that Herr Scheidemann and the other social democrats stabbed the army in the back with a revolution. Instead, on September 29, 1918, the army leaders demanded peace because the army had completely broken down. On October 16, Wilson made it clear that he would treat only with a democratic government, never with the Kaiser. Only then did Scheidemann, a member of the Kaiser's last cabinet, and Ebert, Kaiser to take the power handed to them both by the old government and the revolution. With these facts Scheidemann defends himself against "the agitator, Hitler," who "has continued for fifteen years to peddle the legend of the stab in the back by the November criminals."

But to whom is Scheidemann apologizing? Is it to the workers whom he and the other social democratic leaders betrayed on August 4, 1914 into the slaughter and starvation of the imperialist war? Is it to the Spartacists whom the Council of Commissioners made up of Ebert, Scheidemann, Landsberg, Noske, and Wissel, all Social Democrats, killed in December 1918 and January 1919? Is it to Liebknecht and Luxemburg who were killed in cold blood at Noske's orders? Not at all. Scheidemann is apologizing to the same bourgeoisie whom he served so faithfully during the war, whom again and again he saved from the proletariat during the years of revolution, whose final triumph he made possible by disarming the proletariat with parliamentary lies.

But now Scheidemann and all the boot-lickers of his type are cast out as useless tools. No longer is the Social Democracy able to accomplish its task of supporting bourgeois democracy by holding back the workers. Instead the bourgeoisie are using the reactionary storekeepers, white-collar slaves, students, and peasants as a Fascist fist to crush the workers, destroy all traces of democratic rights, demolish all workers organizations—including the happy hunting ground of the Scheidemann bureaucracy the social democracy.

Now the social democrats, who have been fortunate enough to save their hides, fall the places of exile, whimper to their master how faith-

of social democracy to Stalinism. Its most noteworthy adventurist acts are the following: in 1922 they were utilized by the militarists to explain the shooting of the royalist ministers. This was also stated at the League of Nations by the Greek ambassador at Gen'va who used them as an excuse to the imperialists (the will of the workers). In 1923 at the time of the royalist rising the party allied itself with the military government and appealed to the workers to enlist as volunteers under the bourgeois flag to save democracy. In 1925 they collaborated with the dictator Pangalos. In 1926 with the enemies of Pangalos, and formulated the slogan of a "Left republic" and "pure democracy" which provided a shield for the militarist elements. Then came the third period. A logical chain.

Although the party led many workers struggles during this long period it could bring none of them to a successful conclusion, it could not crystallize a new leadership. Now the party is a shell of an organization without a spinal column. It has influence over the radicalized masses who are coming towards Communism only because it is the official and exclusive representative of the C. I. and the Russian revolution. By maintaining the apparatus of the party Stalinism only compromises the struggles of the Greek proletariat by its militarist slogans which have no basis in actual facts and are purely scholastic.

The present Left Opposition, the Communist Organization of Bolshevik-Leninists (Archimarchists) has its roots in the origins of the party. At the foundation congress of the party in 1918 the Left wing clearly distinguished itself from the reformists, and after some time it broke from it, formed the "Communist Union", published the weekly magazine *Communist*, organized its educational, agitation and propaganda courses, etc. It progressed. But after the adoption of the 21 points by the party and the persistent recommendation of the representative of the C. I. it fused with the party.

These comrades occupied the highest posts in the party. A number of them understood that it was necessary to work for the formation of cadres and to help the formation of the Communist party by its publications and by its activities inside the party and in the working class. It was in this sense that the first group met in a program along these lines. Educational work among the proletariat began and was carried on systematically. This activity was combined with the issuance of the magazine *Archives of Marxism* which published the classical works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky in the Greek language. Up till that time no Communist publication existed in Greece.

The appearance of the magazine so disturbed the bureaucracy that the first numbers sold at the 1st of May meetings in 1923 were torn up by gangs organized by them. This was the first hostile act against this tendency. The movement progressed. After ignoring it silently expulsions began. They kept discovering Archimarchists in the party till 1925 and expelled them. The years of 1926 to 1928 were years of bitter struggle in which the Stalinists took recourse to terrorist acts to exterminate the Archimarchists. The present leaders of the Spartacos group were the organizers of these attempts. In this way the cowardly murders of comrades Georgopoulos, a bakery worker and Ladadas, a woodworker, took place. These workers were among the best in the cadre of militants in our times. That we did not have more victims is only because we had comrades in the party who warned us. In Kavilla powder and revolver cartridges, meant for us, were seized. Then came the third period. While the party was busy with the conquest of the streets, there was free ground for the rebuilding of the trade unions, so that in 1930 two revolutionary trade unions in Salonica, Athens and Piraeus were under our influence. On the eve of our first national conference there were scarcely any trade union organizations but ours and the reformists'.

(from La Verite),

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