

ON THE COMMUNIST LEFT IN GERMANY

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ON THE COMMUNIST LEFT IN GERMANY

The history of “western” left communism is practically unknown in Hungary and other countries integrated by force in the former state capitalist Soviet empire. This Left was sometimes mentioned under the infamous label of an “infantile disease”, in reference to Lenin’s polemical pamphlet (“a Left-wing disorder”...) or thrown into the dustbin of the history of “the workers’ movement” as a “syndicalist” or “anarcho-syndicalist” current. This “infantile” Left, and particularly the K.A.P.D. in Germany, who has fought against the Leninist idea that a monolithic party and a party-state could lead the proletariat to victory.

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE GERMAN COMMUNIST LEFT

a) Ideological origins

The history of the K.A.P.D. cannot be separated from the history of the internationalist Communist Left before 1914, essentially the radical Dutch (Gorter and Pannekoek) and German lefts (Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht). The latter seized around 1903-1905 the historic importance of the mass strikes against State power as well as the importance of the appearance of the workers’ councils (*Arbeiterräte*) as collective mass organs of all proletarian power.

Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek already strongly underline the reversal of perspectives within the workers’ movement: the end of a (relatively) peaceful era of reforms, the opening up of a historic course in the struggle for power aiming at overthrowing capitalist domination. This historic struggle pulled a total upheaval of class consciousness. Hence the importance of the subjective factor next to the objective factor in the revolutionary process: the crisis and the world war. The bankruptcy of Social Democracy on August 4th, 1914, the internationalist struggle of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany against the “sacred union” and the war, and especially the “sunrise” [dawning] of the revolution in the East, in Russia, profoundly accelerated the revolutionary explosion in the West.

As the K.A.P.D. underlined - just after its split from the Comintern (August 1921) - the Workers’ councils that had seized power in Russia 1917 had opened up the road for a revolutionary “tsunami” in the whole world:

“The revolutionary proletariat of the entire world owes the Russian proletariat an infinite debt. The Russian proletariat has shown it the ways and the methods (mass strike and insurrection) that open up the road to political power; at the same time, it has shown the form of the proletarian state: the workers’ councils. That is the great action, that is the incommensurable success of the Russian Revolution!” ⁽¹⁾

1 Adolf Dethmann, *Die Sowjetregierung und die 3. Internationale im Schlepptau der internationalen Bourgeoisie*, K.A.P.D., Berlin, July 1921, p. 28. <http://www.left-dis.nl/d/schlepptau.pdf>) - “The Soviet government and the 3rd International in tow of the international bourgeoisie” .

b) The political indecision of the party during the war and in the Revolution of November 1918

Unfortunately, the K.A.P.D. was born late, among strong confusions, the German revolutionaries having long hesitated to break with Social Democracy which had adhered to the “sacred union.”

When *Die Internationale* was born, the core of the later *Spartacists*, created by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the group was at first acting secretly within the S.P.D., but was finally excluded and subjected to police persecution. When the pacifist left (Kautsky, Bernstein) was excluded from the S.P.D. in its turn in 1916 and founded the U.S.P.D. (“independent socialists”) in April 1917, the majority of the Spartacists adhered to the U.S.P.D.. Only the *Linksradikale* (“left radical”), International Socialists refused every “centrist” position, and consequently stayed out of the U.S.P.D.. Otto Rühle suggested in a letter of 12 January 1916, published in the radical newspapers, to break completely with social-democracy. Such was also the position of of the Bremen Left (*Bremer Linke*) around Johann Knief, strongly influenced by Pannekoek. (2)

In November 1918 the German revolution broke out. As the revolt of the Kiel sailors unleashed, and soldiers’ and workers’ councils suddenly emerged like mushrooms, the bourgeoisie gave the power to social-democracy in order to extinguish quickly all ebullition of radicalism, like the rejection of the Constituent Assembly, the appeal for the destruction of the trade unions and, finally, the seizure of power.

A succession of bloody defeats for the councils took place rapidly: following the “suicide” of the councils at Berlin in December 1918, who gave all power to the S.P.D. government of Noske, Ebert and Scheidemann, the road was open to crush the attempts of insurrection, that were adventurously led by the K.P.D. (*Spartakusbund*) in January and March 1919, by military force.

The K.P.D. payed the heavy price for its unpreparedness (the assassination of its recognized leaders like Liebknecht and Luxemburg), for being moved by alternating pushes of insurrectionist and parliamentarist fevers.

c) The birth of the Comintern in March 1919

Adolf Dethmann (1896–1979) was born at Heikendorf (Kiel). In March 1919 he published *Spartakus*, organ of the K.P.D., for the province of Schleswig-Holstein. Excluded from the K.P.D. (S) after the Heidelberg congress, he became one of the founders of the K.A.P.D.. [On December 17, 1920] He was a doctor in social sciences. The title of his thesis: “The council idea as a theory of the state and its germs in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.” Dethmann was in charge of the “scientific section” of the K.A.P.D. at Kiel.

2 Gerhard Engel, *Johann Knief - ein unvollendetes Leben*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 2011.

Conscious of the fact that it would be artificial to precociously build a new International, Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches decided not to adhere, not to give too much ideological and organizational impact to Bolshevism, which they criticized for its despotism, Jacobinism, its terrorism and the dictatorship of the party. Eberlein had an imperative mandate to vote against its foundation, but abstained under pressure of the Bolsheviks.

Very quickly the Comintern managed the whole policy of the K.P.D. using the presence of Radek in Germany and his influence within the party in order to fight the Communist Left and to establish diplomatic relationship between Soviet Russia and Germany. This included some leaders of the Reichswehr fighting against their “hereditary” enemy: Poland... The Comintern in Germany even tried to use the Turkish nationalists in the interest of the Russian policy as well. We mention Ismael Enver Pasha. After having escaped from Constantinople, he arrived in Berlin at the end of 1919 in order to get to Moscow. This former war minister had participated in the planning of the genocide of the Armenians: he was considered a war criminal. ⁽³⁾ With the help of the Comintern and Radek, who provided him with an airplane, he could reach Moscow. He payed himself the luxury of an inflammatory declaration at the Baku Congress of the People of the East (July 1920), calling for the “holy war” against the Entente, just like his “friend” Karl Radek! ⁽⁴⁾

It is significant that the Western European bureau led by Radek (as long as he stayed in Germany), Paul Levi, Thalheimer, Bronsky and Willi Münzenberg developed reformist positions: to conquer the “*organized*” masses of social-democracy, build “*communist cells*” within the social-democratic trade unions, and to participate in the game of bourgeois elections.

2. THE BUILDING UP OF THE K.A.P.D.

3 The genocide against the Armenians had begun on April 24, 1915 with organized assassination of Armenian leaders and intellectuals in Istanbul. The Armenian civilian population in Eastern Anatolia was then subjected to massacres and deportations that cost 1 to 1.5 million lives. Within the Ministry of War, Ismail Enver Pasha gave entire responsibility to a Special Organization (Teshkilâti Mahsusa) to kill the Armenians. On November 23, 1918, an Ottoman Parliamentary Commission had started an inquiry into the massacres, which led to the indictment of Enver Pasha and others. Pursuant to Article 230 of the Treaty of Sèvres (10 August 1920) between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire, Turkish officers and politicians responsible for the genocide of non-Turkish populations (Armenians, Assyrians, and Orthodox Greeks) were to be tried by an international criminal tribunal.

4 See Radek’s speech on September 2, at the Baku Congress: “... *the masses of the people in the East the representatives of those masses here present, all moved by the same emotion, have risen and **have sworn an oath to wage a holy war, shoulder to shoulder with the workers of Europe, against the oppressors of the world of labour.***” Enver Pasha had read in Baku a very “revolutionary” Declaration: “*Comrades, on my own behalf and on that of my comrades, I thank the Third International and its Presidium who have enabled us **fighters against world imperialism and capitalism** to assemble in Baku today.*” (Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, Fourth Session, September 4).

a) The split at the Heidelberg congress

The K.A.P.D. can be considered as the son of the factory organizations, the *Unionen* movement (A.A.U.D.) that, in the beginning bundled political tendencies who violently opposed the trades unions (“anarcho-syndicalists”, left communist, left Independents). After the crushing of the workers’ councils in January – March 1919, the *Unionen* had spread everywhere. They were revolutionary workers’ organizations who wanted to seize power everywhere in the country, firstly in the factories.

The second cause of the birth of the K.A.P.D. was the brutal split at the Heidelberg party congress in October 1919, following the maneuvers by Paul Levi: From the opening of the congress, Paul Levi submitted theses to the vote that characterized the views of the Left as “*syndicalist*”, “*anarchist*” and as “*anti-party*”, in order to avoid crucial debates on the parliamentary and trade-unions’ “questions”. These theses, presented by surprise at the first day of the congress, in the form of an edict, were in fact the new program of the K.P.D.. The last thesis affirmed: “**Whomever has acted against (the program) or is acting against it will be excluded [immediately] from the party**”.⁵) In this way the Levi leadership could exclude the Left, who was then divided into fractions: Bremen (Fröhlich), Hamburg (Laufenberg and Wolffheim), Berlin (Karl Schröder, Schwab, Rasch, etc.), Dresden (Rühle).

The aim of the leadership by Paul Levi, Clara Zetkin, Wilhelm Pieck, Heinrich Brandler and Fritz Heckert was to hunt down and destroy all anti-syndicalist and anti-parliamentarian tendencies within the party in order to follow the new policy propagated by the Comintern and executive secretary Radek. The latter wished by all means to develop mass organizations that were dedicated more to the defense of soviet Russia than to the development of the world revolution.

b) The birth of the K.A.P.D.: the Ruhr uprising.

During the suppression of the Kapp putsch of 13 March 1920, organs of a unified workers’ front sprang up in the Ruhr under the leadership of left-wing members of the Communist Party, anarcho-syndicalists and left-wing members of the Independent social-democratic party (U.S.P.D.); a Red army whose strength was estimated at approximately 50,000 surged spontaneously. It fought and rapidly disarmed the putschists. By March 22 the red army had taken over the largest cities in the Ruhr, power passed into the hands of revolutionary executive committees (*Vollzugsräte*).

The left wing of the K.P.D., like the “syndicalists” of the F.A.U., during the Ruhr uprising, stood in the first ranks to fight the Freikorps, the Reichswehr (the German army) and the social-democratic party. In Central Germany, elements like Max Hölz had broken with the K.P.D. in order to sympathize arms in hand with the insurgent workers in the Ruhr.

During these events, the K.P.D. remained totally passive and called to support the new social democratic government, formed after the flight from Berlin by Kapp and Lüttwitz. When

5 Report on the 2nd Party Congress of the K.P.D. (Spartacus league) October 20 - 24, 1919 [Heidelberg/Mannheim].

the latter had given up their project of militarily directing the country, Paul Levi, chairman of the K.P.D., suggested that the communists should form a *'loyal opposition'* in the event that the S.P.D. and U.S.P.D. would form a government. But the U.S.P.D. rejected such a coalition. The social-democrats commissioned Hermann Müller as head of government. The worst came to bear very rapidly. The final stab in the back of the insurgent workers was the *Bielefeld Agreement* signed on 24 March 1920 by the bourgeois parties, the trade-unions, both social-democratic parties S.P.D. and U.S.P.D. and two representatives of the K.P.D., with the agreement of Wilhelm Pieck. ⁽⁶⁾ The Red Army had to give up its weapons, except for some workers who would have to integrate themselves into the local police. In exchange, the Reichswehr was supposed to keep its arms at the order outside of the Ruhr area. But as the workers had surrendered their arms, government forces marched into the area, supported by units of the Freikorps — that had first been dissolved and subsequently had been integrated into the army! White Terror extended throughout Rhineland-Westphalia; the working-class neighborhoods were pillaged and burned out and entire workers' families were massacred.

c) The activity of the party. The Program

The K.A.P.D. was built up immediately after the Ruhr uprising in April 1920, as the party was sending delegates to Moscow to obtain an urgent help and to demand from the Comintern the exclusion of the party of Levi and Pieck and the immediate admission of the K.A.P.D.. But, as it appears, the K.A.P.D.'s program was completely opposed to that of the Comintern:

- Rejection of the trade unions and constitution of revolutionary factory committees (*Betriebsorganisationen*), in order to set up workers' councils, true organs of the proletarian power;
- Rejection of parliamentarianism and of every electoralist activity;
- Rejection of the dictatorship of any party over the class: the party is not a general staff residing above the working class;
- Importance of the subjective factor (class consciousness). As the German Left underlined: "The principal problem of the German revolution was the problem of the **development of the self-consciousness** of the German proletariat." ⁽⁷⁾

d) The elimination of National-Bolshevism and of the localist tendencies

Founded in great haste, the K.A.P.D. had to get rid of two wings that refused any idea of party, asserting that the "*revolution was not a question of party*" or that by definition "*all the parties*

6 Erhart Lucas, *Märzrevolution 1920*, Band 3: *Die Niederlage* (Verlag Roter Stern, Frankfurt am Main, 1978) - The March revolution of 1920, Volume 3: The defeat.

7 Program of the Communist Workers Party of Germany (K. A. P. D.), Berlin, May 1920 (<http://www.marxists.org/subject/left-wing/kapd/1920/programme.htm>).

were bourgeois by nature” (Otto Rühle)⁽⁸⁾, because they represent the idea of the bourgeois revolution. Against these tendencies which sprang inside the German proletariat from a general hatred against trade unions bosses and S.P.D. leaders, the centralist current of Berlin defended the idea of a centralized organization, with real leaders selected by the class struggle and nothing else.

Led by Wolffheim and Laufenberg, [this] tendency detained the majority in Hamburg. It advocated a revolutionary war against the Entente, waged by a Red Army. Wolffheim and Laufenberg, theoreticians of the *Unionen*, were however spreading nationalist conceptions, foreign to Marxism, as early as 1919: “*The enterprise-councils become the element of national regroupment, of the national organization, of national unity, because they are the basic element, the original cell of socialism.*”⁽⁹⁾

Worst of all, the Hamburg tendency saw nationalism, not internationalism, as a weapon of the proletariat:

“The national idea has ceased to be a means of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, and is turning against the former ... The great dialectic of history makes the national idea an instrument of proletarian power against the bourgeoisie.”⁽¹⁰⁾

But after a report of Arthur Goldstein at the August 1920 party congress, and interventions of militants saying that the K.A.P.D. was by nature **anti-national** and **non-national**, the congress expelled the National-Bolsheviks:

“The Congress of the K.A.P.D. declares that it cannot agree with the nationalist teaching of Laufenberg and Wolffheim. The workers organized in the K.A.P.D. recognize themselves without reservation as international socialists and, as such, reject all propaganda for the revival of nationalist thought in the ranks of the working class.”⁽¹¹⁾

The national-bolshevik tendency, excluded from the party, decomposed very rapidly and fell quickly into oblivion. By contrast, its torch was taken over in 1923 by Radek and the K.P.D. Who, during the Ruhr occupation by the French army, undertook to enlist the “real German patriots”, including former members of the *Freikorps*, in order to establish a united front against “*the real enemies of the German worker: the Entente capitalists.*”

8 Rühle, *Die Revolution ist keine Parteisache!*, ‘Die Aktion’, Berlin-Wilmersdorf 1920 - The Revolution is not a party affair! : “*The epoch of the foundation of parties is over, because the epoch of political parties in general is over. The KPD is the last party. Its bankruptcy is the most shameful; its end is without dignity or glory.*” (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/ruhle/1920/ruhle02.htm>)

9 Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung (KAZ), Hamburg, June 3, 1919.

10 KAZ (Hamburg), No. 19, January 1920, “*Volkskrieg und Volksorganisation*”, article by Erler (Laufenberg) - “Popular war and popular organization” .

11 *Protokoll des 1. ordentlichen Parteitages der Kommunistischen Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, vom 1. bis 4. August 1920, in Berlin-Weißensee, im Restaurant „Zum Prälaten* (<http://www.left-dis.nl/d/kapd0820.pdf>) .

Otto Rühle, however, was an ideological founder of the Communist Workers Party of Germany and attended the second congress of the Comintern as a K.A.P.D. delegate. Hostile to the dictatorship of Bolshevism over the international working class, he declared: "*We decline your offer to participate at this Congress with all our thanks. We have decided to travel home, to recommend to the K.A.P.D. a 'wait and see' attitude, until a truly revolutionary International has come into being, that it could join.*"⁽¹²⁾

Hostile to any idea of a centralized party, he dedicated his activity to the building of *Unionen*, localist and federalist revolutionary factory organizations. Rühle was finally excluded from the K.A.P.D. in October 1920, enjoying however all the sympathies of the majority of the militants.⁽¹³⁾

e) The future of the new society: not a federation of "socialist nations"

Very quickly it turned out that the Comintern did not defend any more the interests of the international proletariat, but those of the Russian national State, that tried to reform the former tsarist empire by adhering to wars of national and social liberation. In this sense Radek wrote during the Russian-Polish war of May 1920: "*The social war of the proletariat... is also a national war, quite like the fight of the bourgeoisie against the foreign yoke is a national war ...*". Consequently, the workers should everywhere be "**true patriots**" to defend the "socialist fatherland": "*At the present moment all workers of the whole world have to be Russian patriots, because Russia is the only country in which the working class is detaining the power.*"⁽¹⁴⁾

In a pamphlet of the K.A.P.D., written by Karl Schröder, on the future of the new society it was clearly asserted that a socialist society would never be a "*federation of national soviet republics*" - such as proclaimed in the Constitution of the Federation of Socialist Soviet Republics of Russia of July 10th, 1918. For the K.A.P.D., the ultimate purpose of the Revolution in Germany was the creation of a world Commune associating the workers' councils of the whole world which would inevitably be created on a factories' territorial base and never on a national base.⁽¹⁵⁾

3. THE K.A.P.D. AND THE COMINTERN

12 Rühle, *Bericht über Moskau* (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/ruhle/1920/ruhle01.htm>).

13 Even as he ceased radical activity between 1925 and 1929, Otto Rühle remained a symbol of the resolute struggle against imperialist war. As depute of Pirna (Saxony) in the Reichstag he had been, with Karl Liebknecht, one of the two deputies of the S.P.D. group who had voted against the war credits on March 20, 1915.

14 Karl Radek, "*Zur Charakteristik des Krieges mit Polen*", Russische Korrespondenz, n° 10, July 1920, p. 48-53.

15 Karl Schröder, *Vom Werden der neuen Gesellschaft (Alte und neue Organisationsformen)*, KAPD, Berlin, July 1920 (<http://www.left-dis.nl/d/schroeder20.pdf>) - On the genesis of the new society (Old and new forms of organization).

The K.A.P.D. – accepted as a sympathizing party in December 1920 – was invited to commit suicide in order to stay within a Comintern requiring a rapid dissolution of the party in Levi's and Pieck K.P.D. as well as the abolition of the *Arbeiterunionen* (AAU). For the K.A.P.D. The bankruptcy of the Comintern was effected in several stages, the most notable of which was the annihilation of the proletarian fortress of Kronstadt, whose historical importance it did not seize at once.

a) Kronstadt and the liquidation of the Workers' opposition

In fact the K.A.P.D. proclaimed in its newspaper (*KAZ*) that: “*The counter-revolutionary Russian emigrants are returning to Russia, and Count Wrangel is preparing to provide military support*”.⁽¹⁶⁾ But in contact with the Workers' Opposition through Arthur Goldstein in Moscow, delegate of the K.A.P.D. at the Comintern's Executive, it became clear that the situation was born from the counter-revolutionary action of the Bolshevik state: “*...the Kronstadt uprising has to be interpreted as a symptom of the antagonism between the proletariat and the Soviet government... it is not only foreign capital that played as a factor against the Soviet government, but also the fact that the large majority of the Russian proletariat was, from the bottom of their hearts, on the side of the Kronstadt insurgents*”.⁽¹⁷⁾

Gorter, after having denounced the NEP and a “*peasants counter-revolution*” in Russia, wrote that after the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (R.C.P.-b) had banned the Workers' Opposition as an organized fraction, and all fractions in general, the workers' democracy in the Bolshevik party was quite dead: “*After the last congress in the Russian Soviet Republic, there can be no doubt that in Russia there does not exist a dictatorship of the class, but a dictatorship of the party*”.⁽¹⁸⁾

Immediately the K.A.P.D. translated Kollontai's text on the Workers' Opposition, which she had discretely given to the former's delegation, into German.

b) The March 1921 actions in central Germany. The road of putschism. Max Hölz vs. Otto Rühle.

It was in a context of persecution of the opposition in Russia, with the German proletariat on the defense, that the Executive of the Comintern started to develop the theory of ‘forcing the revolution’. Men like Bela Kun were sent to Germany to incite the V.K.P.D. to immediately take up the offensive, including armed actions. The Executive of the Comintern abruptly changed its tactic of the “open letter” to the trade unions and the “workers' parties” for a “united front in the struggles”. It proposed to transform the “united front” into

16 KAZ Berlin, 1921, n° 177.

17 Intervention at the extraordinary congress of the KAPD in Berlin, 11-14 September 1921. Reproduced in the proceedings: Klockner (ed.) 1981, pp. 58-59. (<http://www.left-dis.nl/d/Kapdsept21.pdf>)

18 Gorter, *Partei, Klasse und Masse*, in *Proletarier*, organ of the KAPD, No. 4, Berlin, March 1921 - Party, Class and Mass.

common actions of armed struggles. It formed a military committee with the K.A.P.D. – who had to flex itself to the discipline of the Comintern and with more or less conviction – in order to launch insurrectionist actions in central Germany, particularly in the chemical factories of Leuna. The K.A.P.D. thereby succumbed to adventurism as well. As the workers of central Germany, and those of the Leuna factories in particular, hesitated to engage in an armed struggle against the social-democratic police, it pushed for insurrection, with the help of some newly integrated elements, such as Max Hölz.

In fact, the K.A.P.D. was divided, especially in central Germany. On the one hand, two leaders of the K.A.P.D., Franz Jung and Fritz Rasch, were sent by the party-center to coordinate strikes and actions together with the V.K.P.D., but without any orders to launch armed actions. On the other hand, Max Hölz, arriving from Berlin, organized his own commandos in central Germany, but without any liaison to the K.A.P.D.. These units conducted a guerrilla-struggle against the police in the mining-district of Eisleben. It was the same for Karl Plättner and a throng of other anonymous leaders who threw in their militias in the armed struggle.

A heavy price was paid for the March Actions: a hundred killed amongst the workers', thousands arrested, thousands condemned to the fortress. As Paul Levi denounced a "Bakuninist putsch" he was excluded from the K.P.D.. Gorter and the K.A.P.D. did not engage in self-criticism but pleaded for a defense of the minority-movement of workers in central Germany, forced to defend itself against the military offensive by the S.P.D. in government. With more lucidity, Rühle emphasized that *'the revolution in Germany has been lost for a long time'*.⁽¹⁹⁾

c) The last fight of left communism within the Comintern: the Third world congress (22 June – 12 July 1921)

In fact, the German and Dutch left-communist current found itself completely isolated within the Comintern, even before making its voice heard for the last time at a congress of the International. There were only few reactions within the International against the politics of the Russian state; and the Comintern's leaders, who defended Levi's reformist orientation, found a major support in Lenin. But for the communist Left it was a question of fighting without mercy to save the Russian Revolution and the world-revolution by detaching the Third International from the grips of the Russian state:

*"We must act by every means so that Russia remains a proletarian power. **Detaching the Third International politically and organizationally from the system of the politics of the Russian state** is the aim that one has to set, if we are to take account of the conditions of the Western-European revolution. The next step that leads to this aim seems to us the building up of a political organ in Western Europe, which allows us – in*

19 Otto Rühle, "Das Ende der mitteldeutschen Kämpfe", Die Aktion, n° 15-16, avril 1921 - The end of the struggles in central Germany. See Henry Jacoby/Ingrid Herbst: *Otto Rühle*, Junius Verlag. Hamburg 1985.

closest contact with Moscow – to obtain a continual independence in all political and tactical questions that affect Western Europe".⁽²⁰⁾

At the Third congress of the Comintern the K.A.P.D. struggled with great courage to defend its positions on each of the themes on the agenda (economic crisis and the historic course; the Russian question; the March Actions). The interventions of everyone of its four delegates, limited to only ten minutes, were greeted with laughter, gross interruptions or, worse, by indifference. The agenda was manipulated against them: their theses could not be discussed at the congress. Contrary to a tradition of the workers' movement, they were refused to present the alternative reports from the opposition. Lastly, they were posed an ultimatum: the party had three months to merge with the V.K.P.D. on sanction of exclusion from the Comintern. The K.A.P.D. Delegates⁽²¹⁾ rejected the ultimatum. But they did not proclaim they were leaving the International, since they wanted the whole party to pronounce on the question in full awareness of the facts.

On 31 July the leadership of the party, led by Karl Schröder, accepted a resolution proclaiming the break with the Third International and announced "*the construction of a Communist Workers' International (K.A.I.) as the most urgent task for the revolutionary world-proletariat.*"⁽²²⁾ Its attitude towards soviet Russia remained nevertheless "open":

"As long as the Soviet government acts as a factor of the proletarian revolution, the K.A.P.D. has the duty to support it with an active solidarity. If it leaves this terrain and behaves as an agent of the bourgeois revolution, it must be firmly combated by the K.A.P.D."⁽²³⁾

On 16th August, Gorter spoke energetically in favor of the formation of a new communist international at a session of the enlarged central committee of the K.A.P.D.. The Berlin section pronounced itself resolutely against.

After the congress of September 1921 and the proclamation of the KAI a process of disintegration started that culminated in the split of March 1922 between an Essen tendency and a Berlin Tendency. Despite the formation of "ultra-left" tendencies within the K.P.D. After 1925, and a small revival in 1926-27, the K.A.P.D. and the A.A.U. remained totally isolated, enclosed within small organizations. The triumph of Stalinism and Nazism demonstrated in blood that the international proletariat henceforth followed the road of counter-revolution that lead towards the abyss.

20 KAZ (Berlin), 1st of May, 1921.

21 Jan Appel (Hempel), Alexander Schwab (Sachs), Bernard Reichenbach (Seemann), Ludwig Meyer (Bergmann); another delegate, Käthe Friedländer (Anna Classe), did not intervene in the discussion, by elementary security concern, her husband being a Russian living in Berlin.

22 KAZ (Berlin), n° 219.

23 Ibid.

4. THE LEGACY OF THE GERMAN-DUTCH COMMUNIST LEFT: POSITIONS ON THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE COMINTERN

The theoretical reflection was pursued within the movement of the workers' councils in Germany until in 1933; subsequently it was continued within the Dutch communist Left after this date. It is during this last period that the German-Dutch communist Left acquired its final shape.

a) Russia: a state capitalism; a “bourgeois revolution”

Very rapidly the K.A.P.D., and subsequently the whole German and Dutch communist Left, developed the idea that both the Russian Revolution and the Comintern were lost for the proletarian revolution. In an anonymous pamphlet (written by Adolf Dethmann) *The Soviet government and the Third International in tow of the international bourgeoisie* (July-August 1921) ⁽²⁴⁾, just before the K.A.P.D.'s fourth congress, it was affirmed that the Russian revolution had a double character: a bourgeois, peasants' revolution, and a proletarian one: “*The large towns have passed from capitalism to socialism, the open countryside from feudalism to capitalism. In the large towns, a proletarian revolution was accomplished; in the countryside, a bourgeois revolution*”. ⁽²⁵⁾

More and more, the Comintern marched towards the abyss in order to fall in the claws of a Russian bourgeois state that advanced under the guise of the former “soviet power”:

“The Third International is lost for the world-proletarian revolution. It finds itself, like the Second International, in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The entire difference between the two consists only of this: the Second International's particular national parties depended on their particular bourgeois states. On the contrary, the Third International in its totality depends on a single bourgeois state.” ⁽²⁶⁾

b) The struggle against fascism and anti-fascism. The Civil war in Spain

The K.A.P.D. and subsequently the Dutch G.I.C. have always been coherent with their position of 1921. They refused the trotskyist position of an “unconditional defense” of the USSR in front of the “capitalist states”, according to which the Russian state capitalism was more progressive than private capitalism. The communist left has always refused to choose one camp or another: democratic or fascist or Stalinist. They fought against fascism as well as against anti-fascism, against Nazism as well as against Stalinism.

During the Spanish civil war, whereas it supported the revolutionary struggle of the Spanish workers, the G.I.C. asserted that the struggle had to be turned against Franco as well as against the Popular Front and Stalin, by establishing the power of the Workers' councils:

24 See footnote 1

25 Dethmann 1921, p. 7.

26

Dethmann 1921, p. 30.

“The defense of the revolution is only possible on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat by means of the workers’ councils, and not on the basis of the collaboration of all anti-fascist parties ... The destruction of the old state-apparatus and the exercise of the central functions of power by the workers themselves are the axis of the proletarian revolution”.
(October 1936, G.I.C.) ⁽²⁷⁾

c) The struggle against the second imperialist war (1939 - 1945). The *Workers’ Councils*

The groups forthcoming from the German-Dutch Left who subsisted in illegality in the Netherlands struggled intransigently against all camps engaged in the imperialist war. Some of them, like those from the MLL-front, who rallied subsequently to council communist conceptions, paid this with their lives.

During the war, Pannekoek edited his book on the workers’ councils. ⁽²⁸⁾ With lucidity he drew out the perspectives and stakes still up to date for future revolutionary struggles. He did not consider that a revolution would come out of the inevitable Nazi-fascist defeat. History could not repeat itself and the allied forces would do everything to prevent a new revolution of November 1918:

“...contrary to the historical precedent of the Germany of 1918, the political power will not automatically fall into the hands of the working class. The victorious powers will not permit it: all their forces will serve to the repression, if need be.”

The military defeat of national-socialism would clean the place for the domination of American capital in Europe: *“The allied armies will liberate Europe in order to permit its exploitation by American capitalism.”*

In fact, for the German-Dutch communist Left, it’s in the USA that the final act of the world revolution will be ultimately played out:

“The American working class will have to engage the most difficult wart against worldwide capitalism. This war will be the decisive combat for its liberation and for that of the whole world.”

Without doubt one could underline at present the decisive role of the working class in Asia, in particular in China, who presently disputes the world hegemony of American capital.

27 *“Het anarcho-syndicalisme in de Spaansche revolutie”*, PIC, No. 16, October 1936 - Anarcho-syndicalism in the Spanish revolution.

28 *Workers’ Councils*: <http://libcom.org/library/workers-councils-book-pannekoek.htm>

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The German communist Left has always tried to fight against sectarianism and monolithism within the revolutionary milieu. It has fought on the sides of the anarcho-communists and the syndicalists during the German revolution, such as the F.A.U.D. of Rocker, as far as they accepted the armed struggle against bourgeois power. ⁽²⁹⁾ But the German Left was neither syndicalist nor an anarcho-communist Left. In opposition with Lenin, it defended the principles of the emancipation of the proletariat **from below** for a totally free and egalitarian society. The seizure of power, the collectivization of the means of production were the true “work” of the workers’ councils, totally independent of any State or of any monolithic party, working only to establish its own domination over society.

The road taken by the K.A.P.D. was not to establish a dictatorship of a Party-State over the proletariat, based on a national frame, but to set up a veritable collective democracy based on workers’ councils independent from the states and from every national framework.

December 2012,
Ph. BOURRINET

29 There were many defenders of non-violence within the F.A.U.D. (the Free Union). We mention Fritz Oerter (1869–1935), lithographer, former militant of the S.P.D.. As an anarchist he was active in the council of Fürth (Northern Bavaria) in November 1918. In 1920 he was editor of the F.A.U.D.’s daily newspaper *Der Syndikalist* and defended the doctrine of passive resistance. According to him, the application of the principle of the General Strike, the boycott and the passive resistance to the violence by the army and the *Freikorps* are the best defensive arms. This position that one has to respond to the violence of the dominant class by abstaining from any violence whatsoever was strongly criticized by the majority of the F.A.U.D.’s sections. In the Ruhr area these constituted 45% of the militants of the Ruhr’s Red Army.