

THE GERMAN COMMUNIST RESISTANCE

1933-1945

T. DERBENT



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To my mother,
an antifascist
To my father,
an antifascist
Each in their own way
T. D.

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Preface

From German Communist Antifascism to a Contemporary United Front

Devin Zane Shaw

Reconstructing a Communist Antifascist History

T. Derbent is a communist theorist of military strategy, whose research and writing focus on the influence of Clausewitz's theories on revolutionary thought. His *Categories of Revolutionary Military Policy* (Kersplebedeb, 2006) already circulates within militant circles due to its concise taxonomy of different types of revolutionary struggle. Soon two other works will join that work and the present volume in English translation, to be published by Foreign Languages Press: *Clausewitz et la guerre Populaire* (2004) and *De Foucault aux Brigades rouges: misère du retournement de la formule de Clausewitz* (2018).

The German Communist Resistance 1933–1945 is to some degree an outlier in Derbent's work, if not a detour. It was first published in 2008 and then reprinted in 2012 with the addition of two interviews with the author as appendices. In those interviews, he explains how he discovered unpublished archival materials documenting widespread clandestine resistance on the part of the German Communist Party (KPD), which is typically minimized or omitted from Western historiography. After failing to persuade others to follow up on this line of research, Derbent finally decided to take on the project himself, thus correcting a glaring historical omission in Western historiography—including antifascist historiography, no less—of the history of German communist resistance in Nazi Germany.

In broad outline, the received history of Nazi Germany holds that Nazi repression of socialist and communist opposition was swift. The main Communist Party leaders were arrested and detained in concentration camps while many thousands of cadres went into exile to fight fascism from abroad. A viable resistance only begins in the late 1930s, organized by anti-Hitler factions of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy (the Kreisau Circle or their "heirs," the conspirators who carried out an assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944) or among small networks of heroic dissidents

such as the White Rose group (whose best-known members are Hans and Sophie Scholl). Communist resistance is not entirely omitted from this received history, but it is said to re-enter near the end of the war and it is grouped with socialist and Christian resistance. However, grouping these forms of resistance together is, in Derbent's terms, a "sham": Christian and socialist resistance was carried out by individuals or small networks; by comparison,

only the communist resistance embraced all possible forms of struggle (propaganda, sabotage, guerrilla warfare, espionage, union struggle, etc.). It is the only one to have fought from the first to the last day of the Third Reich, and to have extended its action to the whole of Germany (even in the camps and in the army). Finally, it is the only one to have really weakened the Nazi war machine.

Furthermore, although antifascist historiography acknowledges the role that the KPD played in numerous antifascist organizations, such as *Antifaschistische Aktion*, the discussion typically ends where Derbent's account takes off, with the Nazi repression of the Communist Party in 1933. While clandestine work lacks the organizing capacity that open resistance has available to it, that does not nullify its impacts. The reader notes a certain amount of repetition as repression fails to stop resistance: KPD organizations carry out clandestine action, they are dismantled by the Gestapo, dozens if not hundreds of militants are rounded up and imprisoned or executed, the organizations are reconstituted and return to action. In the midst of this repression, communist resistance carried out propaganda campaigns, supported strikes and sabotage of the war industry, and organized resistance in the army and in concentration camps. Derbent also catalogues communist involvement in exile, in the Spanish Civil War and in other occupied countries.

Derbent's short intervention is admittedly not exhaustive; it only aims to give a representative picture of the scope and importance of communist resistance. By focusing almost exclusively on the KPD, he shows that the communist resistance followed in practice a remarkably consistent clandestine policy of opposition to Nazism even as the Soviet Union's and Comintern's political line shifts over time. Indeed, Derbent presents

some evidence that the Soviet-aligned militants of the KPD continued to carry out clandestine actions against the Nazis during the period of the nonaggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union. I would conclude on this basis that when Derbent contends that German communist resistance maintained a continuous opposition to Nazism, this continuity was one of military policy rather than political policy, a continuity that is perhaps legible only when we focus, as Derbent's analysis frequently does, on the former rather than the latter. There's a relationship between the two that Derbent could have developed further.¹

In any case, the clandestine resistance he describes dwarfs that of the individuals and groups typically celebrated in popular Western historiography; and yet, today the reader will be surprised to discover the quantity of munitions and planes rendered inoperable by communist sabotage. These historical omissions are the result of a Western, anti-communist political consensus, which continues to treat communism and fascism two sides of the same totalitarian coin. And yet, today just as yesterday, supposedly liberal and progressive but anticommunist blocs attempt to make peace with far-right and fascist political tendencies in order to shore up capitalist hegemony.

* * *

Antifascist historiography, at least in the English-speaking world, tends to date the emergence of modern militant antifascism around 1946 with the formation of the 43 Group in England.² The 43 Group, which was comprised mainly, but not exclusively, of Jewish veterans of World War II, used physical confrontation to break up public meetings and rallies of a variety of fascist groups. They used direct action to undermine fascist organizing because the typical liberal mechanisms of social mediation—a combination of the inculcation of liberal norms, the so-called marketplace of ideas, and law enforcement—do not. Indeed, liberal norms and legisla-

¹ In *Categories of Revolutionary Military Policy*, Derbent argues that European communist parties failed to defeat Nazi invasion due to their organization as “primarily legal parties supplemented by clandestine military structures” (5); on his account, they were more effective when improvising practices of protracted people's war. It would have been interesting to see this argument integrated in the present volume.

² See, for example, Mark Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook* (New York: Melville House, 2017), 39 ff.

tion tend to permit far-right or fascist organizing on the basis of freedom of speech and association while police are sympathetic to far-right groups for a variety of reasons, reasons we will return to below. In light of the failures of liberal mechanisms to halt fascist organizing, the 43 Group carried out its actions as a form of “communal defense.”³ M. Testa summarizes this period of antifascist struggle in terms which are contemporary enough: “militant anti-fascists found themselves in a ‘three-cornered fight’ against both fascists and the police... anti-fascists were statistically three times more likely to be arrested than fascists. The police justified this by interpreting anti-fascist activity as aggressive and thus, wittingly or not, acted as stewards for fascist meetings to ‘preserve the peace.’”⁴ While antisemitism, and even fascist sympathies, among law enforcement certainly played a part in police actions, “the police were never convinced that the Group was apolitical and not secretly communist. Consequently, like their communist allies, the anti-fascist ex-servicemen were seen as radical agitators desperate to overturn the status quo.”⁵

If the modern history of militant antifascism typically takes the 43 Group as its point of departure, it is because the Group took on the three-way fight against both system-oppositional far-right and fascist groups and law enforcement (or more broadly, the repressive apparatus of bourgeois class rule). This three-way fight would be familiar to antifascists out in the streets of North America (and elsewhere) over the last five years, but the volatile events of the last year during the pandemic show that the political co-ordinates of struggle are both volatile and subject to rapid change. In my view, Derbent offers us a window into a particularly important moment—the struggle between the KPD and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) during the rise of the Nazi Party—from a theoretically fruitful angle.

There is a temptation when revisiting the failures of the KPD and SPD as the Nazis ascended to political power to relitigate their ideological debates in order to settle political scores. It may be impossible not to belie

³ This specific phrasing is from one of the Group’s pamphlets, quoted in Daniel Sonabend, *We Fight Fascists: The 43 Group and Their Forgotten Battle for Post-war Britain* (London: Verso, 2019), 72.

⁴ M. Testa, *Militant Anti-fascism: A Hundred Years of Resistance* (Oakland: AK Press, 2015), 150.

⁵ Sonabend, *We Fight Fascists*, 119.

one's commitments when analyzing these failures. Derbent, for his part, takes a critical approach to the KPD's political line by contextualizing it via social antagonism. He writes:

The communist leadership believed that the antifascist struggle involved the elimination of social-democratic influence in the proletariat, because this influence distanced the class from a genuine antifascist and anti-capitalist struggle. This analysis had two premises. The first—erroneous—was the widespread idea at the time that the Nazi movement would not withstand the test of power, that it would crack both because of the workers' opposition and because of its internal contradictions. But the second premise of the KPD's analysis was correct: the will to fight Hitlerism was totally lacking in social democracy. The SPD's legalism led it to fight the communists rather than the Nazis.

On this basis, Derbent analyzes two related political lines held by the KPD in the run up to the Nazis taking power in 1933: first, the "third period" policy which held that socialists were "social fascists," that is, social democrats functioned as a moderate wing of fascism, allied with the bourgeoisie against communism; and second, the two-front struggle of the "united front at the base," which consisted of fighting socialist leadership and organizations while building alliances with SPD rank and file.

We will begin with the latter: as Derbent notes, the united front at the base policy resulted in an ambivalent political position: "The KPD could do or not do anything; it served 'objectively' either the Social Democrats or the Nazis." It led, infamously, to the KPD's participation in a Nazi-inspired referendum against the social-democratic government in Prussia in 1931. Derbent hints at the internal struggles within the KPD when deciding these policies, but does not underline the policies that resulted in the failures of the united front at the base. Here, I find Nicos Poulantzas's verdict persuasive: the KPD relied on "electoral struggle as the favoured form of 'mass action.'"⁶ At the same time, he adduces evidence that the KPD

⁶ Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*. Trans. Judith White (London: Verso, 1979), 184.

failed to set up united front organizations which could cement alliances between communists and the rank and file of the social democrats.⁷

Part of the failure of the united front from the base policy can be placed on the line that socialists were social fascists. Derbent departs from the typical reception of this part of the third period line. Some critics relegate the third period to the Stalinization of the Comintern, where “Moscow politics often influenced continental anti-fascist strategy more than Italian or German realities”—but this emphasizes external factors over contradictions internal to these “German realities.”⁸ By contrast, Derbent argues that the social fascist line was validated by the fact that social democrats repeatedly used the repressive state apparatus to quell communist organizing. The failure of the KPD and the SPD to align against the Nazis was not merely ideological, but also driven by antagonism between communist insurrectionism and the SPD, which presided at the helm of the repressive state apparatus. The socialist adherence of legalism, which brought repressive state power to bear on communist organizing also put them at odds with cadre on the ground who sought a more militant line for the Iron Front, the SPD’s antifascist fighting organization.⁹ Yet communists failed to seize the opportunity. As Poulantzas writes:

As far as the line itself is concerned, the inclusive designation of social democracy and the social-democratic trade unions as social fascist and as the main enemy, bore heavy responsibility for the failure of the united front. This was not so much because of the refusal of all contact between the leaderships, and even between the secondary ranks; *it was particularly because of the policy toward the social-democratic masses, considered ‘lost’ as long as they were under the influence of social democracy...* Even apart from the fact that the KPD’s main activity was still directed against social democracy, this activity was conceived of as a struggle between ‘organizations,’ not as mass struggle on a mass line.¹⁰

⁷ Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, 182.

⁸ Bray, *Antifa*, 20.

⁹ Bray, *Antifa*, 23–24.

¹⁰ Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, 182 (my emphasis).

Though the KPD sought to form a united front with social-democratic workers in principle, they failed to translate this into practice. The “social fascist” label, in my view, is a symbol of this failure to build a mass struggle around a united front, and it lives on as an inflammatory epithet, largely doing the same work today. Nonetheless, what I have tried to excavate, via Derbent, is how, at the time, this misguided terminology reflected—in a partial way—social realities on the ground. While socialists and communists had a common enemy, organizationally they occupied structurally different social positions: one commanded state power and the other’s insurrectionary strategy was repeatedly quashed by the repressive state apparatus. But the KPD also failed to focus on the struggle beyond these organizational parameters. We must underline this kernel of truth while dispensing with the husk, which belies how communists underestimated the strength of emerging threat of fascism.

Toward a Contemporary United Front

It might seem that we are far from discussing the praxis of a contemporary united front. On the contrary. I have attempted to outline—and have perhaps belabored—the various points of antagonism between the SPD and the KPD in order to anticipate a series of ideological and structural pressures that militant antifascists could face during the Biden administration.

If we remove the historical labels and replace them with contemporary terms, these pressures will become more obvious. Given that militant antifascist groups today tend to organize around a united front policy, the differences between socialists, anarchists or Marxists is not nearly as profound as the split between militant antifascism and liberal antifascism.

- *Militant antifascism* upholds the diversity of tactics to combat far-right and fascist organizing, organizes as a form of community self-defense which (at least ideally) builds reciprocal relationships with marginalized and oppressed communities, while recognizing the “revolutionary horizon” of antifascist struggle: fascism cannot be permanently defeated until the conditions which give rise to fascism are overthrown. (Depending on the

context, as we will see below, other conditions might be present, such as settler colonialism).

- *Liberal antifascism*, in Mark Bray's concise definition, entails "a faith in the inherent power of the public sphere to filter out fascist ideas, and in the institutions of government to forestall the advancement of fascist politics."¹¹ Liberal antifascists appeal to the democratic norms of these institutions, but also assume that law enforcement will apply force to repress the fascism when it constitutes a legitimate threat; they also often appeal to the converse of this position: if law enforcement doesn't intervene, then no legitimate threat is present.

While militant antifascism is best known for the embrace of the diversity of tactics, over the past several years many antifascists have worked to create a broader social atmosphere of everyday antifascism. Fostering everyday antifascism makes it possible to organize a broader movement which would challenge far-right groups when they mobilized in various cities across North America. Everyday antifascism could, under the right conditions, bring larger crowds to counter-protests; it also provides political education on how the seemingly small things, like seating far-right groups at restaurants or providing lodging, enabled the far-right threat to communities. With Trump in office there was no chance that antifascism could be funneled back toward an affirmation of American civic participation.

A Biden administration poses different problems. In August 2017, only a few weeks after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Biden published an editorial in *The Atlantic* denouncing Trump's equivocations about the far right; he also referenced Charlottesville repeatedly during his campaign. In and of themselves, these denunciations didn't drive his electoral messaging. But in light of the far-right raid on the Capitol,¹² and the popular outrage which also accompanied this action, Biden is positioned to siphon parts of the broader atmosphere of everyday antifascism—which previously made it possible to organize militant antifascist actions rela-

¹¹ Bray, *Antifa*, 172.

¹² In January 2021, supporters of US president Donald Trump broke into the US Capitol building, resulting in several deaths and members of Congress fleeing the building.—*Ed.*

tively openly—to fortify Democratic voting coalitions. This co-optation of a weak sense of even liberal antifascist sentiment will drive the narrative that fascism, encapsulated and isolated as so-called “Trumpism,” was defeated with the victory and inauguration of the Biden administration, when in fact the far-right was diverted from system-loyal tendencies aligning with Trump and the Republican Party back toward system-oppositional forms of organization.

If this occurs, the Biden administration can work to legitimate liberal currents of antifascism while delegitimizing—while applying the force of the repressive state apparatus toward—militant currents. If liberal antifascism succeeds in pulling everyday antifascism back toward forms of bourgeois forms of institutional cultural power, it will effectively empty everyday antifascism of any concrete political and organizational content, while setting the stage for state repression of militant antifascists.¹³ Any extension of law enforcement powers that follow in the wake of far-right actions related to the Capitol riot will redound against left-wing militants. What liberals will portray as the intransigence of militant antifascists will appear to them as an ideological victory, but it will be won with repressive state violence, dismantling militant antifascist organizations and undermining community self-defense.

The foregoing scenario is far from a *fait accompli*. It can be forestalled by renewed efforts at militant political education and organizing around a united front policy. The defeat of the Trump administration has untethered far-right organizing from its system-loyal pretensions, though without necessarily undermining alliances forged by the mutual opposition of some far-right groups and police departments to the antipolice uprising of 2020. I will conclude by proposing a series of theses concerning a united front policy for militant antifascists in North America, though I believe some points would also hold in other situations. I defend them in more detail elsewhere.¹⁴ We will begin with defining two terms: fascism and the far right.

¹³ As Matthew N. Lyons, notes, “repression...can even come in the name of antifascism, as when the Roosevelt administration used the war against the Axis powers to justify strike-breaking and the mass imprisonment of Japanese Americans.” See *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right’s Challenge to State and Empire*. Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2018), ix.

¹⁴ See *Philosophy of Antifascism: Punching Nazis and Fighting White Supremacy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2020); “Between System-Loyal Vigilantism and

1. *Fascism is a social movement involving a relatively autonomous and insurgent (potentially) mass base, driven by an authoritarian vision of collective rebirth, that challenges bourgeois institutional and cultural power, while re-entrenching economic and social hierarchies.*

This definition of fascism—adapted from the work of Matthew N. Lyons and drawing from the discussion between Don Hamerquist and J. Sakai in *Confronting Fascism* (2002)—is a marked departure from the most common Marxist definition, which holds that fascism is “the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.”¹⁵ Whereas Dimitrov’s formulation, as it is typically applied, treats fascists in the streets as instruments of the most reactionary faction of capital, the definition I offer asserts that fascist social movements are relatively autonomous formations that challenge bourgeois institutional and cultural power. This autonomy does not preclude hegemonic formations between fascists and the bourgeoisie. As Hamerquist argues, the Nazis’ seizure of power united factions of the ruling-class interested in imposing fascism “from above” with non-socialist factions (and I’m using the term “socialist” as loosely as possible here) of the fascist movement *and* “nazi political structure had a clear and substantial autonomy from the capitalist class and the strength to impose certain positions on that class.”¹⁶

As to the class composition of fascism, Derbent comments that “workers were the only social group whose percentage of Nazi party members was lower than its percentage in the total population.”¹⁷ Closer to the

System-Oppositional Violence,” *Three Way Fight* (October 25, 2020) [<http://threewayfight.blogspot.com/2020/10/between-system-loyal-vigilantism-and.html>]

¹⁵ George Dimitrov, *The Fascist Offensive & Unity of the Working Class* (Paris: FLP, 2020), 4.

¹⁶ Hamerquist, Don. [2002]. “Fascism and Anti-Fascism,” in Hamerquist et al. *Confronting Fascism: Discussion Documents for a Militant Movement*. 2nd edition. (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2017), 41. Hamerquist argues, for example, that Fascist labor policy under the Nazis extended beyond “the genocidal aspect of continuing primitive accumulation that is part of ‘normal’ capitalist development...The German policy was the genocidal obliteration of already developed sections of the European working classes and the deliberate disruption of the social reproduction of labor in those sectors—all in the interests of a racialist demand for ‘living space’” (43).

¹⁷ Despite the repeated assertions by paternalistic liberals that fascism is a working class movement, even liberal historians acknowledge that workers “were always proportionally fewer than their share in the population.” See Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 50.

present, an examination of 49 of 107 persons arrested for participation in the Capitol riot indicates the generally petty bourgeois character of participants.¹⁸ Both observations affirm that the class composition of the far right and fascism is more complex than the most reactionary faction(s) of the bourgeoisie. In North America, the far right draws from elements of the white petty bourgeoisie who are seeking to protect their social status—purchased, as W. E. B. Du Bois argues, through the wages of whiteness—and/or their class position. Fascism is, in my view, relatively autonomous because it is anti-bourgeois, but anti-capitalist only to the degree that it seeks to reorganize capital accumulation on terms conducive to its base.

2. Fascist ideology and organizing develops within a broader far-right ecological niche.

Lyons defines the far-right as inclusive of “political forces that (a) regard human inequality as natural, inevitable, or desirable and (b) reject the legitimacy of the established political system.”¹⁹ Lyons’ definition focuses our attention on two key features of the far-right milieu, within which fascists organize. First, far-right groups seek to re-entrench social and economic inequalities, but the social hierarchies they advocate aren’t necessarily drawn along racial lines. Lyons gives the example of the Christian far right, which advocates for a theocratic state that centers heterosexual male dominance. In general, this movement has embraced Islamophobia and “promotes policies that implicitly bolster racial oppression,” but some groups have conducted outreach to conservative Christians of color while others have formed alliances with white supremacist groups.²⁰ Fascist movements emerge within a broader milieu of rightwing social movements and these various groups sometimes establish alliances and sometimes conflict. In fact, one purpose of antifascist counter-protesting when these groups rally is to put pressure on their organizing; when these rallies are disrupted or dispersed through antifascist action, far-right alli-

¹⁸ Lambert Strether, “The Class Composition of the Capitol Rioters (First Cut), *Naked Capitalism*, January 18, 2021 [<https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2021/01/the-class-composition-of-the-capitol-rioters-first-cut.html>]

¹⁹ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, ii.

²⁰ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 28.

ances often rapidly splinter as prominent figures and groups within the far right trade accusations and recriminations.

Second, far-right groups reject the legitimacy of, as I would phrase it, bourgeois-democratic institutions of political and cultural power. Though mainstream conservatism has been pulled toward the far-right in ideological terms, organizational differences between “oppositional and system-loyal rightists is more significant than ideological differences about race, religion, economics, or other factors.”²¹

3. Militant antifascism is involved in a three-way fight against insurgent far-right movements and bourgeois democracy (or, in ideological terms, liberalism).

More precisely, each “corner” of the three-way fight struggles against the other two at the same time this struggle offers lines of adjacency against a common enemy. The first and most fundamental lesson of the three-way fight is that while both revolutionary movements and far-right movements are insurgent forms of opposition against bourgeois democracy, “my enemy’s enemy is not my friend.” Given that far-right groups also aim to recruit or ally with some revolutionary leftist groups, it is all the more important to root out all forms of chauvinism within our practices and organizations. Second, we must recognize the line of adjacency between militant antifascism and the egalitarian aspirations of bourgeois democracy. It is the shared appeal to egalitarianism which makes fostering a broader sense of everyday antifascism possible. But it also means, as I will argue in thesis six, that militants must uphold a revolutionary horizon to keep the limitations of liberal antifascism in focus.

We will deal with the line of adjacency between the far right and bourgeois democracy (or liberalism) in the next two theses. But before moving on, we must examine the relationship between far-right groups and law enforcement. The slogan that “cops and klan go hand-in-hand” expresses two fundamental aspects of this relationship. First, it acknowledges the systemic role of law enforcement: that is, law enforcement protects the systemic white supremacy of North American settler-colonial states. Second, it also emphasizes not only common membership between

²¹ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, ii.

the two groups (when police, for example, are also members of the KKK), but also the ideological bases, through which police and system-loyal vigilante groups find common cause in opposition to leftist movements. However, it would be incorrect to assume that there are no antagonisms between law enforcement and far-right groups. In my view, it is more accurate to differentiate between what I would call system-loyal vigilantism and system-oppositional armed organization. On the terms established by Lyons, all far-right groups are ideologically system-oppositional, but not all of them are organized in system-oppositional forms. Over the last few years, many framed their actions as system-loyal vigilantism, which I would define as the use of violent tactics to harass, intimidate, or physically harm individuals or groups participating in transformative egalitarian movements. While some levels of law enforcement tend to be permissive or deferential toward system-loyal rightwing vigilantism, at least at the federal level, law enforcement has moved to repress system-oppositional groups organized around armed insurgency. In 2020 alone, police moved to incapacitate numerous far-right armed accelerationist groups, including members of The Base, Atomwaffen, and the more loosely-affiliated boogaloo movement. We must not mistake law enforcement repression to signal an unequivocal antagonism between police and the far right or any degree of common cause between these targeted far-right groups and militant and revolutionary leftist movements.

4. The particularity of the three-way fight is dependent on concrete social relations. Far-right and fascist groups draw on and respond differently to different social contexts. For example, during the interwar period, fascist movements drew from the imperialist aspirations of European nationalisms. In North America, far-right movements emerge in relation to broader ideological and material forms of settler-colonialism (which includes—meaning that capital accumulation is imbricated in—elements of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, ableism, and Indigenous dispossession).

In North America, the historical development of liberal political and cultural institutions is inseparable from the development of settler-colonialism. Nonetheless it would be undialectical to treat them uncritically as the same thing. Instead, in my view, it is more precise to contend that settler-state hegemony is formed by the mediation of bourgeois liberalism

and white supremacist settlerism. I would define white supremacist settlerism as an ideological framework which privileges both white entitlement to land (possession or dominion) over the colonized's right to sovereignty and autonomy and entitlements encapsulated in what W. E. B. Du Bois called the "public and psychological wage of whiteness." Examining the end of the Reconstruction period in the southern United States after the Civil War, Du Bois argues that the potential for the formation of abolition democracy, built on the solidarity between the black and white proletariat, was defeated by the hegemonic reorganization of settler-state hegemony which ensured forms of deference and the institutionalization of racial control as well as opening institutional access to education and social mobility to poor whites, drawing them, even if only aspirationally, into the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy.²²

Du Bois' analysis remains the prototype—though it must be theoretically corrected by incorporating the role that the settlement of the western frontier played in this dynamic—for conceptualizing settler-state hegemony and the role that whiteness plays within it. The presidential campaigns of 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and then the widespread antipolice uprising, offered two competing visions of reorganizing American settler-state hegemony—one which attempted to pull some system-oppositional far-right movements into system-loyalty and the other which took on a form of superficial antifascism—but it also demonstrated that a common interest in maintaining settler-state hegemony against challenges from the revolutionary left and the liberation struggles of oppressed peoples forms the basis of the line of adjacency between bourgeois liberalism and white supremacist settlerism.

5. Far-right movements are system-loyal when they perceive that the entitlements of white supremacy can be advanced within bourgeois or democratic institutions and they become insurgent when they perceive that these entitlements cannot.

In the first thesis, I stated that fascist groups appeal to an authoritarian vision of collective rebirth. In North American settler-colonial societies,

²² W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 573–574.

far-right and fascist groups demand the re-entrenchment of the social and economic hierarchies which enabled white social and economic mobility; they perceive that their social standing is in jeopardy and demand that settler-state hegemony be tilted “back” toward their advantage. In sum, far right movements assert supposed “rights” of white settlerism which supersede the formal guarantees and protections granted through the liberal institutions of settler-state hegemony.

I would suggest that liberalism and white settlerism were historically able to coexist because the latter’s interests did not interfere with the former’s. Fascism failed to emerge as a profound challenge to American political hegemony in the 1930s and 1940s because, as Sakai notes, “white settler colonialism and fascism occupy the same ecological niche. Having one, capitalist society didn’t yet need the other.”²³ In the 1950s to the 1970s, a variety of civil rights and liberation movements levelled a profound challenge to settler-state hegemony. Liberalism accommodated challenges from social justice movements by extending formal legal protections to marginalized groups and introducing new patterns of economic redistribution (social welfare). This did not overturn the expectations and entitlements of the wages of whiteness. As Cheryl Harris contends, “after legalized segregation was overturned, whiteness as property evolved into a more modern form through the law’s ratification of the settled expectations of relative white privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline.”²⁴ In other words, white entitlements would be codified into law as long as they could be framed in supposedly color blind terms—but these color-blind terms would also contribute to the (incorrect) perception that systematic white supremacy has been pushed to the margins of American society.

As recent events reveal, settler-state hegemony is not immune to crisis. As Marx and Engels argue in *The Communist Manifesto*, the social position of the petty bourgeoisie is always tenuous because “their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on.”²⁵ While the white petty bourgeoisie has repeatedly been “bought off”

²³ Sakai, “The Shock of Recognition,” in *Confronting Fascism*, 130.

²⁴ Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993), 1714.

²⁵ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party & Principles of Communism*, (Paris: FLP, 2020), 41.

by social mobility or access to land (available due to Indigenous dispossession), even during the period of neoliberal policy, that does not mean that settler-state hegemony will continue to reorganize future hegemonic blocs successfully. The threat remains that an insurgent fascist movement, organized around the rebirth of the settler-colonial project, will fill that hegemonic vacuum.

6. A revolutionary horizon is a necessary component to antifascist organizing; that is, there is no meaningful way in which fascism can be permanently defeated without overthrowing the conditions which give rise to it: capitalism and white supremacy, and in North America, settler-colonialism.

Militant antifascism is organized in order to meet the imminent threat of fascist organizing; it is an instantiation of community self-defense. A united front is necessary in situations where the revolutionary left is present but lacks a mass base, but it is always caught in a contradiction: the major leftist ideological currents—socialism, anarchism, and communism—converge in a united front but diverge around the particulars of the revolutionary horizon. While combatting fascism is the immediate task of militant antifascism, antifascists must maintain a revolutionary horizon, even if only in broad outline, in order to avoid being absorbed within the ideological parameters of liberal antifascism. At the same time, militants must also recognize that antifascist work cannot merely be absorbed into revolutionary work; antifascism is community self-defense.

7. Militant antifascism must uphold the diversity of tactics.

From a practical perspective, militant antifascism is distinguished from liberal antifascism by a willingness to use the diversity of tactics, up to and including physical confrontation, to disrupt far-right organizing. Effective militant organizing, though, must not transform the diversity of tactics into *merely* physical confrontation.²⁶ Antifascism seeks to raise

²⁶ Indeed, Petronella Lee contends, in a point that applies both to the creation of a broader antifascist culture and to the use of the diversity of tactics, that “we cannot focus almost exclusively on physical activities and/or traditionally male-dominated spaces. It’s important to have spaces, roles, and activities that account for the variety of diversity of social life—for example considering things like ability and age.” Nor should we perpetuate gender stereotypes in organizing community self-defense. See *Anti-Fascism against Machismo* (Hamilton: The Tower In Print, 2019), 36.

the cost of fascist organizing and that is the most obvious reason that the diversity of tactics plays an important role in organizing. As Robert F. Williams observed in 1962, racists “are most vicious and violent when they can practice violence with impunity.”²⁷ Physical confrontation raises the stakes of fascist attempts to harass and intimidate communities as they organize. But it is important to emphasize that physical confrontation still tends to come late in practice: antifascists conduct research and publicize the fascist threat and dox fascists, we put pressure on supposedly community-accountable institutions to deplatform or no-platform far-right groups, when fascists rally we meet them in the streets to disrupt their actions. Militants uphold the importance of the diversity of tactics but that doesn’t mean, against popular conceptions, that violence is necessary. The critical question is always: which tactic can cause the greatest disruption to far-right movements at each stage of organizing?

Events of the last year especially have revealed the weaknesses of liberal mechanisms to stem far-right organizing. For years, liberal antifascists interpreted the lack of law enforcement pressure against the far-right as a lack of urgent threat, and when the potential scope far-right violence erupted into popular consciousness on January 6th, 2021, it was years too late. The failure of far-right and fascist groups to undermine the transition of government power was due not to police repression (in fact, there was a distinct absence of police repression on that particular day), but primarily to internal organizational weaknesses, which I would attribute in part to pressure brought to bear on these groups over the last five years of antifascist organizing.

When confronted with emerging far-right movements, and unlike liberal antifascists, militant antifascists act sooner so that we don’t have to take greater risks later. Antifascists must maintain a revolutionary horizon, but at the same time remain focused on the immediate threat of fascist organizing. A world where fascists can openly organize is worse than one where they cannot.

Derbent’s book testifies to the contributions and sacrifices made by German communist antifascists until a much more overwhelming military response deposed fascism from political power. Though German fascism

²⁷ Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 4.

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and Italian fascism were historically defeated in 1945, it will take a greater effort to defeat fascism once and for all. Part of that work must be done now by a united front of militant antifascists.

Introduction

A Resistance that Cannot be Found

According to Claude David, “until 1938, there was no organized resistance in Germany.”¹ This is also the opinion of Alain Desroches, who attributes its birth in 1939 to aristocrats and the big bourgeoisie:

The first desire to oppose Hitler’s ideology and the Führer’s policies... had originated on the eve of the Second World War in a seigneurial estate in Kreisau.... The estate belonged to Count Helmuth James von Moltke, founder of the “Kreisau Circle,” which became the first nucleus of the opposition to Nazism.... Among them were liberals and conservatives, aristocrats and clergymen, landowners and industrialists, lawyers and professors.²

As for the workers, according to David Schoenbaum:

They failed, in any effective sense, to produce resistance. Their marginal protest in the years 1933–39 was economic, not political, a matter of wages and hours and not, it seems, of fundamental opposition.³

In his monumental study on the Third Reich, William Shirer devotes more than one hundred pages to the anti-Hitler resistance: they are all entirely devoted to the plotters of July 20, 1944 (heirs of the “Kreisau Circle”) and to the Catholic “White Rose” of Hans and Sophie Scholl. The communist resistance merits only a footnote.⁴ In the 800 pages that Peter Hoffmann devoted to the German resistance against Hitler, only a few dozen lines are devoted to the communist resistance.⁵ In the chapter on resistance to Nazism in the book by Mau and Kreisnick,⁶ only the

¹ Claude David: *L’Allemagne de Hitler*, Presses Universitaires de France, collection *Que sais-je?*, Paris, 1954, p. 103.

² Alain Desroches: *La Gestapo*, Éditions De Vecchi, Paris, 1977, pp. 680, 683.

³ David Schoenbaum: *Hitler’s Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939*, Garden City, NY Doubleday, 1966.

⁴ William L. Shirer: *Le troisième Reich des origines à la chute*, Éditions Stock, Paris, 1960, tome 2, p. 416.

⁵ Peter Hoffmann: *La résistance allemande contre Hitler*, Éditions Balland, Paris, 1984, pp. 22 and 45-46.

⁶ Hermann Mau and Helmut Kreisnick: *Le national-socialisme: Allemagne 1933-1945*, Éditions Casterman, collection *Années tournantes*, Paris-Tournai, 1962, pp. 146-159.

plotters of July 20 and the Scholls are mentioned, without even a mention of communist resistance. The same absence is present in Peter Rassow's summation⁷ and in Alfred Grosser's study:

The 1940s and 1941 saw opposition at its lowest point.... After the defeat of Stalingrad, the atmosphere changed. From then on, the resistance was to be composed of two very different yet inextricably intertwined currents. One included those who wanted to defeat Hitler in order to make Nazi barbarism disappear. It was embodied in the admirable figures of the students Hans and Sophie Scholl, executed in Munich in the spring of 1943 after a sham trial.... The other tendency also wanted to rid Germany of Hitler, but only because he was leading it to disaster.... This tendency was to be particularly popular among the senior officers of the army and in certain leading circles.⁸

The non-existence of communist resistance seems to be so unanimously accepted that, far from discussing it, François-Georges Dreyfus proposes instead to explain it:

The first resistance to Nazism could have come from the socialist or communist left. Now, let us recall that as early as February 1933, the main leaders of the KPD were arrested and sent to Dachau and Oranienburg... [and] about 15 to 20,000 left-wing leaders went into exile abroad.... Their resistance was thus carried out outside the Reich and their impact, reduced from the outset, very quickly weakened.... [T]he grassroots militants, with the exception of a few particularly courageous ones, hid or rallied by joining the S.A. or the N.S.K.K.⁹ or the Labor Front, not hesitating to militate there to make people

⁷ Peter Rassow: *Histoire de l'Allemagne des origines à nos jours*, Éditions Horvath, Lyon, 1963. Chapter on the antifascist resistance can be found in volume 2, pp. 254-263.

⁸ Alfred Grosser: *10 leçons sur le nazisme*, Éditions Complexe, Bruxelles 1984, pp. 245-246.

⁹ The Storm Detachment (*Sturmabteilung* – S.A.) and the National Socialist Motor Corps (*Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps* – N.S.K.K.) were both paramilitary wings of the NSDAP.—Ed.

forget their past.¹⁰

This analysis is also that of Gerhard Ritter¹¹ and Kurt Zentner.¹²

Henry Bogdan is one of the rare authors who acknowledges communist activity—but he traces it back to the declaration of war against the USSR in June 1941:

The second resistance [the first being that of exiled politicians and intellectuals]—the real one—the one that was on the ground and under the constant threat of incurring the wrath of the regime, came from three different milieus: the churches, the conservative movements and the army.... The communist militants, for a long time passive and somewhat confused by the German-Soviet pact, organized their resistance from the summer of 1941 onwards with leafleting and sabotage.¹³

Allen Dulles proposes the same vision: “It was not until Russia was invaded that the communist underground revived.”¹⁴

What is surprising in this beautiful unanimity (we do not consider the nuances between these points of view as differences) is not that these assertions are false: it is the extreme abundance of the evidence of their falsehood. This effort did not require a lot of hard work on the part of the author: it was enough for him to have access to East German historiography and to cross-check the information with Western historiography.¹⁵ It will therefore be less a question of establishing than of “introducing” a

¹⁰ François-Georges Dreyfus: *Le IIIe Reich*, Le Livre de Poche, collection *Référence*, Paris, 1998, pp. 241-242. François-Georges Dreyfus reoffends in his *Histoire des Allemagnes* (Éditions Armand Colin): after the burning of the Reichstag, “the left is dislocated and no reaction occurs” (p. 371). He can therefore speak only of the resistance of the Churches and the conspirators of July 20th...

¹¹ Gerhard Ritter: *Échec au dictateur – Histoire de la Résistance allemande*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1956, pp. 14-15.

¹² Kurt Zentner: *La résistance allemande 1933-1945*, Stock, collection *Témoins de notre Temps*, Paris, 1968, which recognizes only the Red Orchestra, to which it devotes an entire page, p. 167.

¹³ Henry Bogdan: *Histoire de l'Allemagne de la Germanie à nos jours*, Éditions Perrin, collection *Tempus*, Paris, 2003, pp. 395 and 415.

¹⁴ Allen W. Dulles: *Germany's Underground*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1947.

¹⁵ This refers to francophone Western historiography; the main East German works consulted are listed in the bibliography at the end of the book.

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historical truth, and thus unmasking the falsifiers of history, as a tribute to those they have murdered a second time.

Chapter 1

The KPD in the Face of the Rise of Hitlerism

In the 1930s, the KPD and its mass organizations had organized up to one million people and collected up to six million votes. By the 1920s, it had developed an impressive political-military apparatus for proletarian revolution under the leadership of the Militär-Apparat, which performed the functions of staff, security and intelligence service. This secret organization was in close contact with the state security services of the Soviet Union (the GPU, then the NKVD) and with the clandestine apparatus of the Communist International (more precisely the Westeuropäisches Büro der Komintern, or “West Büro,” led by Georges Dimitrov). The basis of the communist political-military apparatus was a mass paramilitary organization: the League of Red Front Fighters (Roten Frontkämpferbund). This organization (and its youth organization, the Roter Jungsturm), which had more than 100,000 members, provided military training for the militants, ensured the protection of demonstrations and picket lines, forcibly prevented bailiffs from expropriating working-class families, and disputed the streets with Nazi militiamen. Banned in 1929, the Roten Frontkämpferbund acted under the cover of the Kampfbund gegen den Fachismus (Kampfbund gegen den Fachismus), known as the “Antifa League,” which organized 250,000 militants. Between 1928 and 1933, the SA increased the number of Sturmlokalen in working-class neighbourhoods, which served as meeting places, propaganda centers and bistros. The KPD decided on an offensive to eliminate these sites and launched the shock groups of the “Antifa League” against them. From December 1930 to December 1931, this offensive resulted in 79 Nazi and 103 Communist deaths. Of the latter, 51 were killed by the Nazis and almost all the others by the police of the social-democratic government who, in the name of maintaining law and order, flew to the rescue of the Nazi sites. The offensive against the Sturmlokalen SA was halted to prevent the KPD from being banned like the Roten Frontkämpferbund.¹⁶

¹⁶ Cf. Nicos Poulantzas: *Fascisme et dictature: la troisième internationale face au fascisme*, Éditions François Maspero, collection *Les textes à l'appui*, Paris, 1970, pp. 201-203. This concern to preserve the legal/electoral terrain was in line with the Komintern's “legalistic” line of the 1930s and was not subject to re-evaluation? . At the XIIIth Plenum of the Komintern, in November-December 1933, Manouilsky again replied to foreign Communists who criticized the KPD for its lack of resistance: “If the KPD had undertaken armed struggle against Hitler, it would have fallen into provocation.”



Annual rally of Berlin militiamen of the Roten Frontkämpferbund, the KPD's paramilitary organization (1926).



Communist militants arrested by the SA at the Columbia-Haus in Berlin (March 1933).

One reads endlessly that the KPD, through its excessive struggle against the Social Democrats, paved the way for Hitler. The communist leadership believed that the antifascist struggle involved the elimination of social-democratic influence in the proletariat, because this influence distanced the class from a genuine antifascist and anti-capitalist struggle. This analysis had two premises. The first—erroneous—was the widespread idea at the time that the Nazi movement would not withstand the test of power, that it would crack both because of the workers’ opposition and because of its internal contradictions.¹⁷ But the second premise of the KPD’s analysis was correct: the will to fight Hitlerism was totally lacking in social democracy. The SPD’s legalism led it to fight the communists rather than the Nazis. It was a socialist police prefect, Zörgiebel, who on May 1, 1929 opened fire on the Communist procession in Berlin, killing 33 demonstrators. It was the Prussian Socialist Interior Minister, Severing, who then had the Rote Frontkämpferbund banned. The following year, the Socialists allowed the adoption of the very repressive “Law For the Protection of the Republic”: the communist mayors were no longer confirmed in office and the police closed the KPD headquarters. The SPD voted for Article 48 (which would give full powers to Hitler) and was the main architect of the re-election in 1932 of Marshal Hindenburg, who would choose Hitler as chancellor a few months later. The same policy was followed in the large ADGB trade union, where the social-democratic leadership proceeded with massive exclusions of communists. On July 17, 1932, in Altona, a working-class district of Hamburg, the machine-gunners of the police force led by the Social Democrat Eggerstädt came to the rescue of a Nazi parade threatened by Communist counter-demonstrators: 17 counter-demonstrators were killed. These facts gave particular weight to Stalin’s 1924 analysis that “Social-Democracy is objectively the moderate wing of fascism... These organisations do not negate, but supplement each other.”¹⁸

¹⁷These contradictions would indeed erupt. The SA, which spoke of a “second revolution” (anti-capitalist), was purged in the summer of 1933 and, since these purges were not enough, Hitler ordered the “Night of the Long Knives”: the SS massacred hundreds of SA, starting with their leaders (Roehm, Gregor Strasser, Ernst, etc.).

¹⁸In a September 1924 article entitled “On the International Situation,” Stalin challenged social democracy as the “moderate wing of fascism” and launched the famous formula: “Social democracy is the twin brother of fascism.” This analysis is generally presented as

In summary, the KPD leadership rejected the idea of fighting exclusively against the Nazis, and considered the idea of a “top-down” alliance between the KPD and the SPD to be a right-wing deviation. The KPD line thus envisaged a two-front struggle, constantly revolving around a central principle, that of the “united front at the base.” This principle consisted of allying itself with the social-democratic workers in the factories and neighborhoods while fighting against the social-democratic leadership and organizations. It was a difficult exercise. The KPD could do or not do anything; it served “objectively” either the Social Democrats or the Nazis. The latter represented the blackest of reactions, but the SPD was infinitely more powerful and above all it was in power: it was the manager of German capitalism. Issues such as whether to participate in a (Nazi-inspired) referendum against the SPD government of the Prussian state, which were easy to decide after the event, were such complex and high-stakes problems at the time that they gave rise to terrible conflicts at the head of the party.¹⁹

In January 1933, the Nazis came to power: the Communists reacted in several large cities with strikes and savagely-repressed demonstrations. In February, the police invaded the headquarters of the KPD, the “Karl-Liebkecht-Haus,” and outlawed the party.

On the night of February 27-28 alone, after the burning of the Reichstag, 10,000 Communists were arrested, including the main members of the Central Committee and two-thirds of the middle cadres. A few weeks later, there were 20,000. Sixty camps, thirty special quarters in state prisons and sixty detention centers were opened to accommodate them. In each neighborhood, in each locality, the little Nazi chiefs set up their private prisons and torture centers in cellars or empty factories. The chaos and abuses were such (500 to 600 people shot or tortured to death, families upended, civil servants refused to participate in the parish priest’s work,

one of the pearls of Stalinism, yet it predates Lenin’s death (by a small margin). As early as January 9, 1924, according to a motion of the Presidium of the Executive of the Komintern: “The leaders of the Social Democracy are only a fraction of fascism that is hidden under the mask of socialism” [in *The Lessons of the Events in Germany*]. This was developed by Zinoviev in the part of his report to the Fifth Congress entitled “Social Democracy, a Wing of Fascism.”

¹⁹Cf. Pierre Broué: *Histoire de l’Internationale Communiste 1919-1943*, Librairie Arthèmes Fayard, Paris, 1997, pp. 530-531. Ernst Thälmann and Heinz Neumann apparently came to blows in the middle of the political bureau meeting! The exclusion of the Neumann Group (late 1932) did not put an end to the “dances” of hesitation.

themselves sequestered, beaten and humiliated, etc.), that they become the stakes in the struggle for influence among the Nazis. In April, the SA were ordered to hand over their prisoners to the SS, which was developing a network of concentration camps throughout Germany on the Dachau model. Terror was applied methodically and rationally. In June, the SS introduced the practice, which was to become systematic, of hanging rebel prisoners on the roll-call square in front of the camp population standing at attention. The first victim was the communist worker, Emil Bargatzky.

In spite of the waves of arrests (Ernst Thälmann, KPD's general secretary, was arrested on March 3 in Berlin, in a clandestine party apartment), the Communists continued to openly confront the SA, which had the status of auxiliary police. The *Gazette de Lausanne* of March 2 wrote: "Only the Communists resist... Obviously the struggle is not equal, they have all the forces of the State against them. But, for lack of numbers, they have ardor, fanaticism: they fought for the street." In one month, according to official statistics, there were 62 deaths in street battles, including 29 communists, 14 Nazis and 8 socialists.²⁰ These figures are much lower than the reality. One only has to read the pages that Richard Krebs (under the pseudonym Jan Valtin) devoted to the street battles in Hamburg to realize the incredible violence of the confrontations.²¹

As it became clearer every day that the KPD would have the underbelly, the Party prepared for a long period of clandestinity. It was at this point that many experienced as well as little-known activists were instructed to pretend to join the Nazi party NSDAP in order to carry out undermining and intelligence work.

²⁰ Cf. Gilbert Badia: *Histoire de l'Allemagne contemporaine – Tome 2: 1933-1962*, Éditions sociales, Paris, 1962, p. 14. Badia's works are the only ones that reserve a decent place for communist resistance.

²¹ Cf. Jan Valtin: *Sans patrie ni frontières*, Éditions Actes Sud, collection Babel, Arles, 1997, pp. 478 ff. This book must be read with caution; its author did belong to the clandestine Komintern apparatus, with which he came into conflict when he received the order to return to Hamburg to reconstitute the networks of the International Seamen and Dockers' International (ISH). Arrested, tortured, he denounced the comrades who were housing him and became an agent of the Gestapo (without an order from the Komintern, which is what he claimed to try to clear himself). Having become a man to be shot by the NKVD and the security service ("S-Apparat") of the Komintern, Krebs fled to the United States in 1937. A biography of Richard Krebs was published, Ernst Von Waldenfels: *Der Spion, der aus Deutschland kam: Das geheime Leben des Seemans Richard Krebs*, Aufbau Verlag, Berlin, 2002.

When the Nazis came to power, the SPD continued to validate the KPD's analysis, preferring conciliation to confrontation. The socialists refused to participate in the anti-Hitler general strike in the aftermath of the Reichstag coup. This was a critical decision, because the proletariat believed that the general strike could defeat the Nazi coup de force, just as it had defeated the Kapp putsch in March 1920.

Goebbels' diary shows that the Nazis feared this general strike more than anything else; the first meeting of Hitler's cabinet was entirely devoted to this eventuality. The SPD had been powerless to prevent the right-wing deputies from granting Hitler the benefit of Article 48. The elected representatives of the SPD and the KPD together would have reached the required quorum, but the communist representatives were hunted down, arrested and tortured (on the basis of police lists drawn up by the SPD prefects) while the SPD representatives continued the parliamentary routine. In order to avoid the Nazi criticism of being a "party from abroad," the SPD left the Socialist International and even approved the Nazi foreign policy program in May 1933!²² While several Social Democratic leaders went into camps or exile, many others collaborated or remained in the Reich without further concern. Minister Severing, for example, withdrew from business but remained in Germany, receiving his pension under the new regime. This was also the case with Noske, the socialist leader who had led the crushing of the Spartakists and the massacre of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The Social Democratic leadership in Württemberg decided to dissolve itself by calling on the SPD municipalities to "support the new order and the national revolution." When the Berlin section of the Young Socialist Workers organized clandestine work and protected the organization's money from the Nazis, its leader demanded an end to "these small illegal schemes." In the Berlin-Brandenburg district, sections of the SPD's order service (the Reichsbanner, which had 160,000 militiamen) received this circular:

We are left with three possibilities:

The use of the violent methods of the communists. But it is

²² The SPD parliamentary fraction was reduced to 60 seats (out of 129) at this vote. Eighteen of the elected representatives were in prison, while the others were in exile or in voluntary political retirement.

clear to every one of our comrades that these methods are criminal and must be left aside;

Abstention;

The search for collaboration within the framework of practical life.

For years we have carried in our hearts, faith in Germany and in the future of Germany. That is why we will claim our place in the new life of the German state and do for Germany what it expects of us: our duty. The executive committee negotiates with the competent authorities about the activity of our association. The following points are fundamental: culture of friendship; assistance to veterans; youth education; military preparation; voluntary work service.

All the testimonies attest both to the communist resistance and to the social-democratic debacle, from press articles (“the attitude of the communists in front of bloody and implacable judges was so exemplary that one had the impression that they alone had been given the mandate to maintain the resistance”)²³ to secret service reports:

First of all, let us note that no Communist Party leader bowed to the national revolution.²⁴ All of them are in prison, on the run or in hiding. It is mainly Communists who have gone to populate the concentration camps.... Others have gone abroad.... The need for the leaders who have remained at their posts to hide and work clandestinely reduces their action to very little, and it is even doubtful that their work can be prolonged for long in the presence of searches by a police force

²³ Cited by Gilbert Badia, *Histoire de l'Allemagne contemporaine*, (op. cit.) p. 59.

²⁴ Only one of the 422 KPD leaders went over: Ernst Torgler had been Dimitrov's co-defendant in the famous Leipzig trial. He suffered a deep depression during the trial and adopted an individual defense, refusing the Party's instruction to accuse the Nazis of burning down the Reichstag as “suicidal.” Expelled from the KPD in 1935, liberated in 1936, he was a salesman until the war and accepted a post in a ministry during the war. He ended his life in the FRG... as a member of the SPD. Cf. Gilbert Badia: *Feu au Reichstag – L'acte de naissance du régime nazi*, Éditions sociales, collection *Problèmes*, Paris, 1983 pp. 245-248.



Ernst Thälmann, general secretary of the KPD, secretly photographed in Berlin-Moabit prison (1933).

developed to the extreme.... If the communists, who, it must be repeated, showed an indisputable nerve until last March, are at this point, it is easy to imagine how far the socialists have gone.... They have only known how to bow or flee like Braun, Grzesinski, Breitscheid, Dittman, Crispren, Noske, Bergemann, unless they bring to the new regime a more or less veiled adherence like Leipart, Grassman, Tarnow, Wels, Stampfer, Hilferding.²⁵

The social-democratic union leadership also gave in very quickly to the Nazis: its president wrote to Hitler to inform him that the ADGB had broken with the SPD. On March 20, the ADGB published a damning manifesto:

The trade union organisations are the expression of an irrefutable social necessity, an indispensable part of the social order itself... according to the natural order of things, they have become more and more integrated into the state. The social function of the trade unions must be fulfilled whatever the nature of the regime of the state.... The trade union organizations do not claim to directly influence State policy. Their task in this sense can only be to place at the disposal of the government and parliament the knowledge and experience they have acquired in this field.

On April 22, 1933, the ADGB announced that it was leaving the International Federation of Trade Union. The ADGB undertook to unite with the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization (NSBO) to form a single trade union and participated on Nazi commemoration of May 1st. But these capitulations did not save it from the ban.

The NSDAP remained in a minority in the March 1933 elections, but it enjoyed the support of the right-wing parties in parliament to grant Hitler the full powers provided for in Article 48. Repression gradually extended to trade unionists (the SA occupied the trade union building on May 2, 1933 and arrests began the next day), the Social Democrats

²⁵ Report of the Renseignements généraux of May 18, 1933 (J.C. 5. A. 4509) exhumed by the historian Annie Lacroix-Riz.

(the SPD disbanded on June 22, 1933), and Christians opposed to Nazi warmongering and racism. By July 1933, tens of thousands of people had been interned and there were 27,000 political prisoners in the concentration camps. In November, 60,000 communist militants were arrested and 2,000 murdered. Trials were held in a chain reaction: on May 23, two communist activists were the first to be sentenced to death by the new regime.

Nazi repression left activists who had been unable or unwilling to leave Germany with a choice between three mindsets. Some, discouraged by the terrible defeat of the communist movement, deprived of leadership and intimidated by state terror, abandoned the struggle. Among them were a handful of leaders, because not all of them were up to the dizzying height of events. At the end of April 1933, for example, the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, an organ of the KPD in Saarland, the German region occupied by France from 1919 to 1935, published this opinion:

The district [of the KPD] Baden-Palatinate asks us to publish the following exclusion: the deputy to the Reichstag Benndom-Kusel, who has been living in Saarland for several weeks and who had received orders from the district to return to Germany, did not respond to this invitation. He was expelled from the German Communist Party for cowardice in the face of the class enemy.

A small number of KPD members collaborated with the regime—simple grassroots activists and most often new party members.²⁶ But tens of thousands of communists adopted a position of resistance. Often there was a long way from this position to organized and effective clandestine action. Party structures crumbled, cadres were imprisoned or exiled, sympathizers were watched. But clandestine Party organizations were reconstituted very quickly, to be generally just as quickly dismantled... and rebuilt again.

²⁶ The KPD was emerging from a period of purges in 1932. Four or five percent of its members had been in the party since its founding twelve years earlier and more than 40 percent had been in the party for less than a year.

Chapter 2

In Exile, in Spain

If half of the KPD leaders had been arrested and imprisoned in February-March 1933, several dozen leaders and several thousand militants and middle-ranking cadres had been able to escape the round-ups and go abroad. France took in the largest number of German political refugees (30,000 in the summer of 1933). It was in France that the external leadership of the Party settled in mid-May 1933, followed in 1936 by its reconstituted Political Bureau. Some worked there in semi-clandestinity, such as Wilhelm Pieck, Wilhelm Florin or Franz Dahlem; others openly and successfully organized antifascist propaganda for capitalist Europe, such as former KPD deputies Paul Schwenk and Willy Münzenberg. The latter was also secretary of the International Red Aid, the Komintern organization that organized solidarity with political prisoners. Helping anti-Hitler political refugees was the largest campaign of the International Red Aid since the Sacco-Vanzetti affair. The most important campaigns were the Leipzig trial against Dimitrov (accused of burning the Reichstag), the campaign demanding the release of Thälmann, and the campaign denouncing the death of Albert Funk. Albert Funk had succeeded in reconstituting the KPD organization in Dortmund, which the Gestapo had dismantled at the end of March by arresting nearly 300 communist militants in the city. Funk was in turn arrested on April 16, 1933. He was tortured for ten days without betraying anything and finally, fearing that he could not take any more, took advantage of the executioners' distractions to throw himself out of an 18-metre high window. A few weeks later, the Ruhr area was flooded with thousands of KPD leaflets with Funk's photo, and his case was highlighted in anti-Hitler campaigns abroad. The Thälmann Committee, founded in Paris in March 1934, published in its first year of activity 20,000 brochures, 10,000 sheets of the *Thälmann's Song*, 30,000 badges, 32,000 postcards, three publications with a total print run of 150,000 copies, 260,000 leaflets, 15,600 posters, etc. The Thälmann Committee also put out a number of other publications. In addition, it organized a large number of meetings (gathering more than 100,000 people in 1935 alone!), released hundreds of balloons over Germany on which was written *Freiheit für Thälmann*, sent delegations, organized a counter-court with 300 jurists, etc.²⁷ The Nazis announced his trial publicly several times,

²⁷ Cf. Gilbert Badia, Jean Baptiste Joly, Jean Philippe Mathieu, Jacques Omnes, Jean Michel Palmier and Hélène Roussel: *Les Bannis de Hitler – Accueil et lutte des exilés alle-*

but their propaganda suffered a terrible fiasco at the Leipzig trial. In this trial, which has remained a model of its kind, the accused had become an accuser. In front of the international press, Dimitrov succeeded in dismantling the Nazi machinations and unmasking Goering, who had come to testify in court. Thälmann's inflexible resistance left the Nazis fearing a new Leipzig, and they abandoned their plan for a show trial.

Escape routes were set up, and the KPD organized large and effective underground operations in Belgium, France, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and Luxembourg. These centers sent delegates to reconstitute Party organizations and to provide these organizations with the means of political work (leaflets, brochures and especially in the form of Tarnschriften, i.e., publications with an innocuous or fake cover). The Belgian center, for example, had one of the editions of the KPD organ, the *Rote Fahne*, printed in Brussels and used the sea channels between Antwerp and Germany to infiltrate delegates and material into the Reich.²⁸ This was a relentless and extremely costly activity for the cadres, because the repression did not weaken and hundreds of delegates fell into Gestapo traps.

A few months after the big roundup, the Party had already managed to break out dozens of imprisoned activists. Thus, on May 9, 1933, it brought a file for sawing through bars and planks for crossing the barbed wire into the cell of KPD deputy Hans Beimler, in the death-row block at Dachau. Beimler was taken by an exfiltration line and went to France. The communist escapees brought the first information about the Nazi camps to the West very early on (for example, the testimony of Egon Erwin, published in *l'Humanité* on March 23, 1933).

It was the KPD militants in exile who also constituted the first international antifascist unit in Spain: the Centuria (or column) "Thälmann." The German battalion "Edgar André" (of the 11th Brigade)²⁹ was the first

mands en France 1933-1939, Études et Documentation Internationales, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, Paris, 1984, p. 218.

²⁸ Cf. José Gotovitch: *Du rouge au tricolore – Résistance et Parti communiste*, Éditions Labor, Bruxelles, 1992, pp. 61 and 80.

²⁹ Six months later in June 1937, this unit regrouped all the German inter-brigadists ("Thälmann," "André" and "Beimler" battalions). It was then commanded by Richard Staimer (alias "Colonel Richard"), a KPD official who had led the woodworkers' union in Germany. After the war, Staimer held important posts in the GDR People's Police.



“The World in Combat for Thälmann,” photomontage on the cover of the Thälmann Committee brochure.



*Konspiration.
Einige Lehren aus Erfahrungen und
Beispielen.*

Die „Ausrottung des revolutionären Marxismus“, dieses von den Machthabern des 3. Reiches zum Hauptprogramm erhabene Schlagwort erweist sich jetzt schon vor der ganzen Welt als ein gescheitertes Prinzip. An Stelle triumphaler Berichte über die „Liquidierung“ der KPD müssen die Göbbels, Himmler und Halunken verkünden, daß die unterirdische Arbeit der Kommune unentwegt weiter geht, schlauer geworden ist und an Gefährlichkeit für die Hitlerclique im täglichen Zunehmen begriffen ist. Der „Jahresplan“ der Geheimen Staatspolizei, in welchem sie ihren schwerkapitalistischen Brotgebern zusicherte, bis spätestens März 1934, dem Jahrestag des Hitlerfaschismus, die Kommune restlos beseitigt zu haben, blieb unerfüllt.

Trotz beispielloser Provokationen, trotz Konzentrationslagern, überfüllten Gefängnissen, schrecklichen Folterun-

Two different KPD Tarnschriften, each with a different cover, were smuggled into Germany. These were textbooks on underground work.



The first German volunteers of the “Thälmann” Centurion in the summer of 1936.



A few months later: the “Thälmann” battalion, the shock unit of Republican Spain.

international unit to be committed to the front. In October 1936, this battalion took the name of a KPD M-Apparate leader who had been imprisoned and tortured since 1933. Within a few days, the battalion lost a third of its men in Madrid, and two weeks later, on November 4, 1936, Edgar André was beheaded in Berlin. The German “Thälmann” battalion, commanded by the communist writer Ludwig Renn,³⁰ formed the solid core of the 12th Brigade, which was engaged a few days later, first at the Cerro de los Angeles, then in the university campus of Madrid. The political commissioner of the Brigade was the communist writer Gustav Regler.³¹ There was also the escaped deputy Hans Beimler, who became both political commissioner of the “Thälmann” battalion and general political commissioner for all the Germans fighting in Spain. He was killed in action in Madrid in December 1936 and replaced by Franz Dahlem, another KPD deputy. Wilhelm Zaisser, a leader of the M-Apparat who had studied at the Moscow Military Academy, commanded the 13th Brigade under the pseudonym “General Gómez.”³² A total of 5,000 Germans fought in the International Brigades. Among them were 1,700 or 1,800 members of the KPD, 1,000 members of the small leftist parties SAP and KPD(O), and 700 or 800 members of the SPD. 2,000 of them were killed.³³

These figures, which only concern the International Brigades, do not do justice to the commitment of the German communists to Spain. They were numerous in the networks supplying arms to the Republic and sabotaging weapons intended for the fascists in the security services (the Spanish SIM and the Soviet NKVD). **Agitators achieved remarkable results in their work with the crews of the German merchant navy at the risk (and sometimes at the cost) of their lives.** **The crews of six ships (the**

³⁰ Captain in active service in 1914–18, Ludwig Renn wrote a famous anti-militarist novel, *Krieg*. Arrested in 1933 by the Nazis, he took advantage of his detention to perfect his military knowledge, and on his liberation in 1936, he reached Spain via Switzerland. He made the “Thälmann” Centurion, then the “Thälmann” Battalion, a model of efficiency. Cf. *Les écrivains et la guerre d'Espagne*, Les dossiers H, Pantheon Press France, Paris, 1975, pp. 24–25.

³¹ Gustav Regler was wounded in May 1937, at the Battle of Huesca, in the shell explosion that killed the commander and doctor of the 12th Brigade (General Lukacs and Dr Heilbrunn) and wounded Soviet General Batov. Regler was replaced by Heinrich Rau who later became Deputy Prime Minister of the GDR.

³² Wilhelm Zaisser later became Minister of State Security of the GDR.

³³ Hugh Thomas: *La guerre d'Espagne – juillet 1936-mars 1939*, édition définitive, Éditions Robert Laffont, 1985, p. 754.



Brochure published in Paris in 1933 by Hans Beimler, KPD deputy in Bavaria, following his escape from Dachau.

Henrika, the Koenigstein, the Melilla, the Lasbek, the Poseidon and the Preussen) refused outright to transport arms shipments to Franco's ports!³⁴

The German communists were also active in the Corps of the partisans of the People's Army. This Corps infiltrated commandos behind fascist lines for occasional sabotage and intelligence operations. Soviet adviser Vaupchassov, sent as an instructor to the partisans, spoke in his memoirs of a commando unit composed exclusively of German communists, led by a steelworker who had survived the Gestapo raids. In a single mission, at the beginning of December 1937, this group, led by a local Spaniard, blew up six trucks loaded with troops on the Huesca-Jaca road, killed many fascists, and brought back prisoners and documents.³⁵ In addition to all these commitments, there was the political work carried out within the Reich on the Spanish question; clandestine collections for Spain were organized as early as 1936 in Bavaria, Silesia and the Rhineland. 1,500 Germans left the Reich during the Spanish Civil War to fight fascism in Spain. The Gestapo arrested and deported 3,000 Germans (communists and socialists) for hostile demonstrations and sent the "Condor Legion" to Franco's side.

In January 1937, a KPD shortwave broadcasting station was heard throughout the Third Reich. It was designated by its wavelength: 29.8. Its broadcasts denounced the degradation of the working class, corruption, warmongering, anti-Semitism and intervention in Spain, denounced by name the Gestapo snitches, reported on the struggles and broadcast the declarations of prestigious antifascists. This station acquired a level of popularity that was reported by a Norwegian government newspaper correspondent:

All over Germany—in workshops, stores, liquor stores and large buildings—the mysterious figure of 29.8 is now being talked about. This figure can be read on walls and fences. On the walls of houses it is written in chalk, and people look at each other when they find this curious decimal fraction. You

³⁴ Cf. Georges Soria: *Guerre et révolution en Espagne 1935-1939 – Tome 3: Le tournant*, Robert Laffont, Livre Club Diderot, Paris, 1976, p. 309.

³⁵ Cf. Stanislav Vaupchassov: *Quarante ans dans les services secrets soviétiques*, Éditions du Progrès, Moscou, 1978, pp. 182-183 and 190-191. Vaupchassov was one of those NKVD officers specializing in guerrilla warfare; he had the rank of commander in the Spanish Republican Army.

blink your eyes and you understand each other.... Although it is the Communist Party's position, it deliberately avoids everything that comes out of narrow party politics. Thus the post becomes the mouthpiece of the German opposition.

Thus, priests in Cologne shorthanded Heinrich Mann's speech on 29.8 and distributed it to their parishioners. The content of a 29.8 program about Thälmann was reproduced in the form of leaflets in Berlin factories. The Gestapo undertook an audit of listeners, identifying the owners of radios capable of receiving shortwave, and the press announced several arrests for listening to 29.8. The Nazis installed a powerful transmitter in East Prussia to jam the broadcasts, but the radio started broadcasting slightly below or above 29.8, and it was still possible to hear it. Eventually, the Nazis had to install three more transmitters to jam the KPD's clandestine broadcasts.³⁶

The KPD's organization abroad suffered a blow in September 1939. Following the declaration of war, the French police intercepted all German and Austrian citizens—18,000 people, the vast majority Jewish and anti-fascist refugees. The main leaders of the KPD were locked up, including Franz Dahlem, Paul Merker, Georg Stibi and Adolf Deter. The KPD leadership was reconstituted again in 1939, this time in Moscow, by Wilhelm Pieck³⁷ and Walter Ulbricht³⁸, but the party was still in the process of reorganization when Hitler's *Blitzkrieg* struck Western Europe.

³⁶ Cf. *Le poste émetteur clandestin allemand 29,8 – Son combat – Son succès*, Comité allemand de liaison du poste émetteur de la Liberté 29,8. L. Vannier, Paris, 1938, p. 6. According to Gilbert Merlio (*Les résistances allemandes à Hitler*, Éditions Talladier, Paris, 2006), the transmitter was installed in republican Spain.

³⁷ Wilhelm Pieck first went into exile in Prague. He joined Walter Ulbricht in Paris in 1936. Pieck would become the first head of GDR state.

³⁸ Walter Ulbricht was a KPD deputy in the Reichstag, he represented the party on the Executive Committee of the Komintern. Secretary of the Central Committee, he went into exile in Paris, then in Prague. He held important positions in the NKVD in Spain during the Civil War. After the founding of the GDR on October 7, 1949, he became the President's representative in the Council of Ministers. In 1950, he became General Secretary of the Party Central Committee and in 1953, First Secretary of the Central Committee. In 1960, he became Chairman of the National Defense Council and Chairman of the Council of State; he was thus GDR Head of State after the death of Wilhelm Pieck.



Honor Guard of the People's Army and International Brigades around the remains of Hans Beimler (Madrid, December 1936).

Chapter 3

KPD Clandestine Organizations in Germany

A police report from Wiesbaden in 1935 noted that “it is confirmed that the Communist Party has a staff of collaborators endowed with remarkable organizational and tactical abilities, who, despite the most rigorous surveillance, have recreated illegal organizations in some regions with some success.”

As early as March 1933, the Communist press reappeared clandestinely in Germany and abroad: *Das Ruhr-Echo*, *Die Hamburger Volkszeitung* and *Die Rote Fahne* were printed in tens of thousands of copies, while the *Roter Jungsturm* distributed 20,000 brochures in Saxony alone. When Daniel Guérin visited the working-class districts of Hamburg and Altona in May 1933, networks distributed the party press there, and one could see, freshly painted on the walls and sidewalks, “Long live communism!,” “Hitler should die!” and “Long live the revolution!”³⁹

In 1934 the Gestapo noted in its reports that despite the arrests and sentences imposed on the Communists, “there are still people who engage in clandestine work,” and that “the KPD has an enormous apparatus of remarkable permanent staff who succeed, in the provinces, in reconstituting the party apparatus.” In that year, 10,000 to 12,000 copies of the *Rote Fahne* came out three times a month from an underground printing house in Solingen. But rebuilding the Party was a long and costly process and often, as we have said, a local or regional organization that had barely been rebuilt was dismantled by the Gestapo with an upsurge of brutality and efficiency. In October 1935, according to Wilhelm Pieck, out of the 422 leaders of January 1933: 219 were imprisoned, 24 were executed, 125 emigrated (including Pieck himself, who at that time headed the KPD center in Prague), 41 left the Party, and 13 led the resistance within the Reich.⁴⁰

In 1936, the Gestapo arrested 11,678 Communists, among them Wilhelm Firl, who coordinated the Party’s activity inside the country.⁴¹ At the same time, the police arrested 1,374 Socialists. The Gestapo archives reveal that its agents seized 1,643,200 communist newspapers, leaflets and brochures that year! And this is only the material seized. The quantity of

³⁹ Cf. Daniel Guérin: *Sur le fascisme I: La peste brune*, François Maspero, Petite collection, Paris, 1971, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁰ Cf. Gilbert Badia: *Ces Allemands qui ont défié Hitler*, Éditions de l’Atelier, Paris, 2000, p. 52.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Firl was executed in August 1937.

material produced was naturally even greater... The regime was particularly sensitive to revelations about the corruption of Nazi leaders “who make [—acknowledged a 1935 Berlin Gestapo report—] communist writings much more interesting to readers than the legal press.” In Dortmund, for example, where August Stötzel and Wilhelm Sand had replaced Albert Funk, the local KPD organization distributed two newspapers printed abroad and smuggled into the Reich and two newspapers printed locally. The Stötzel/Sand organization was dismantled in January 1934 (with more than two hundred arrests). In 1935, the organization was reconstituted for the third time and the communist underground press once again circulated in the city.

To show that the whole of Germany was not behind Hitler, the KPD planned a campaign of unrest and strikes for the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The Gestapo was expecting this offensive, as a report found in its archives indicates.

Since there is still a strong illegal KPD organization in Berlin, the Communist Central Office will try to provide the various subordinate organizations with suitable propaganda material and effective slogans.⁴²

The Gestapo therefore carried out roundups, particularly targeting workers who had been members of KPD sports organizations. Despite these preventive measures, the testimonies of foreign tourists and police reports describe numerous incidents: Nazi flags torn and burned, communist slogans chanted in the crowd or painted on the walls, distribution of leaflets, strikes in workplaces. Thus the communists put the large automobile factory “Auto-Union” in Berlin on strike. Concerned about its Olympic propaganda, the regime granted the strikers a wage increase, but repression then fell on them.

From 1933 to 1939, one million Germans were apprehended and 275,000 sentenced to 600,000 total years in prison for anti-fascist activity; there were between 150,000 and 300,000 Germans permanently in concentration camps—not counting those detained for racist reasons. In 1939, for example, there were 112,000 people in prison after a politi-

⁴² Cf. Jean-Marie Brohm: *1936 Jeux olympiques à Berlin*, Éditions Complexe, Bruxelles, 1983, p. 99.

Die Rote Fahne

Zentralorgan der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Einzelheft: Kommunistischen Jugendzeitung)
Gesamt-Verlag der Partei
Rechts-Angebot
Präsident: Prof. Dr. Carl Lohmann
und Frau Lohmann
Nr. 3

Auf die eigene Kraft kommt es an!

Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

Kleinste deutsche Arbeiterpartei, weg von Hitler mit allen Führern...
Kriegsverbrecher und Volkverderber...
Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...

Die kleine deutsche Arbeiterpartei...
Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...
Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...
Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

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Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

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Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...
Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...
Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...
Weg mit Hitler - dann erst werden Friede, und Freiheit gesichert sein!

Die Rote Fahne, organ of the KPD Central Committee (No. 3 of the year 1938).

Nach den Juden die Katholiken

Nach den jüdischen...
Die katholischen...
Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...

Nach den jüdischen...
Die katholischen...
Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...

Nach den jüdischen...
Die katholischen...
Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...

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Die katholischen...
Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...

Nach den jüdischen...
Die katholischen...
Die allgemeine Volkserhebung...

Advertisement for 'Die junge Garde' (The Young Guard), organ of the Communist Youth. Includes text: 'Lesen und weitergeben!', 'Ende Januar 1936', 'Preis 15 Pf.', 'LEITUNG DER SCHREIFENDEN DEUTSCHEN JUGEND', 'Herausgegeben vom Kommunistischen Jugendverband Deutschlands', 'Für gute-Berufsausbildung! Für Jugendschutz!', 'Vor dem Reichsberufswettbewerb'. Features a portrait of a man and a cartoon illustration of a worker with a banner.

Die junge Garde, organ of the Communist Youth (January 1936 issue).



“Down with Hitler,” “Overthrow Hitler and his famine regime,” “Against Hitler, for freedom and peace,” slogans painted in various German cities in 1941 (photos taken by the Gestapo).

cal conviction, 27,000 “politicians” awaiting trial, and another 160,000 locked up without trial in the concentration camps. Repression became more radical. The first official execution of a woman took place in 1938. She was Liselotte Herrmann, a communist student from Stuttgart, mother of two young children. At that time, official executions of communist militants totaled 95 and extrajudicial executions several thousand. Of course, the concept of “extrajudicial” did not mean much for the Third Reich, since the eminent Nazi jurist Theodor Maunz, (professor of public law in Freiburg) had given this definition of the law: “The law is the plan formed by the Führer and thus the expression of the order of life of the German race. The plan formed by the Führer is the supreme law of law.”⁴³

But the work of reconstruction did not cease, and in 1939 the KPD counted 3,000 active and organized clandestine workers within the Reich, supported by thousands of sympathizers and accomplices. The reports found in the Gestapo archives bear witness to this:

Communist activity is carried out, as we have noted on several occasions, in the companies.... The observations made previously on communist activity in places where large masses of workers are gathered (car sites and temporary Volkswagen factories) are currently of interest to the Westwall sites⁴⁴ and, on the one hand, to the mines.

The Berlin KPD organization led by Willi Gall was dismantled by the Gestapo in January 1940 (Willi Gall was executed on July 25, 1941). It was rebuilt by Rudolf Halle Meyer, and in 1941 *Die Rote Fahne*, the party organ, clandestinely reappeared in Berlin. This new organization was in turn dismantled after two years of intense activity. Its leaders were executed shortly after their arrest—Halle Meyer himself, but also Heinz Kapelle, Erich Ziegler, Robert Uhrig, and other group and network leaders.⁴⁵ A

⁴³ This master of law that Dr. Maunz was, continued his brilliant career after the war in the FRG: Professor of Public Law in Munich, member of the presidency of the Institute for Politics and Public Law, and even, from 1957 to 1964, Minister of Culture of the State of Bavaria.

⁴⁴ The Westwall is the official name of the fortified line known in France as the “Siegfried Line.”

⁴⁵ A member of the Communist Youth, Heinz Kapelle contributed to the reconstitution of the party organization after the Nazi takeover; he was arrested in 1934 and imprisoned

new organization was then reconstituted by Wilhelm Knochen and Alfred Kowalke, which was dismantled in January 1943. In practice, the subversive work never ceased.

In 1942, during the great anti-communist exhibition “Soviet Paradise” at the Lustgarten in Berlin, teams of poster painters⁴⁶ under armed protection covered the city walls with this answer: “Nazi Paradise: War—Hunger—Lies—Gestapo. For how much longer?” Parallel to this initiative, a group of young Jewish communist workers at Siemens led by Herbert Baum, exploded two incendiary devices in the exhibition pavilion, which the Berlin fire department managed to save *in extremis*. This group had existed as early as 1933 and had resisted two waves of arrests (in 1935 and 1938) before organizing a hundred resistance fighters in 1941. After its dismantling, 22 members of this group were beheaded—the others died in concentration camps. Also in Berlin, Wilhelm Beuttel, leader of the Red Aid (Rote Hilfe), who returned to Germany in 1942, reconstituted this organization to support the victims of repression. He was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 and executed in 1944.

In 1943-44, the Berlin KPD organization benefited from the exceptional militant qualities of Anton Saefkow. Saefkow was the former leader of the KPD in Dresden and later in the Ruhr. He had been arrested in 1933 and severely tortured. After ten years in a concentration camp, he escaped and resumed the underground struggle. In the summer of 1944, the Saefkow organization in Berlin was running clandestine cells in thirty companies, including the largest war factories: Osram, Telefunken, AEG, Hasse und Wrede, Argus-Motoren, Siemens, etc. In the summer of 1944, the Saefkow organization ran clandestine cells in Berlin. It was in con-

for two years. Upon his release, he re-formed a group of sixty young communists attached to the Berlin Party organization. Robert Uhrig, for example, had been arrested for the first time in 1934 for organizing the communist cell at the Osram factory. Released after 21 months of forced labor, he went to Prague, where he received the instructions and the means (material, contacts) to re-form cells in several Berlin companies from the KPD headquarters. He returned to Germany to carry out this task, and managed to create an organization with about twenty company units. In February 1942, this network, which had linked up with the Hallemeyer organization in 1941, was badly hit: 200 militants were arrested, more than 50 of whom were beheaded, but certain sections of the network remained intact and continued to work clandestinely.

⁴⁶ Twenty according to Gilbert Badia (*Ces Allemands qui ont défié Hitler*, op. cit. p.106), sixty according to Gilles Perrault (*L'Orchestre rouge*, op. cit. p. 296). They belonged to the Harnack/Schulze-Boysen network, cf. *infra*.

Arbeiter und Arbeiterinnen der Berliner Betriebe!

Hier und hier treffen die Schläge des Krieges auch die Betriebsarbeit. Tag und Nacht, in den Betrieben und in den Wohnungen, seid ihr den Luftangriffen fast schon ausgeliefert. In den Betrieben wird die Arbeitszeit verlängert. Der 12 Stunden Tag wird eingeführt, der Sonntag endgültig abgeschafft. Mit

häßlichen Sonderausgaben soll die Munition und die Unionsbedarfsmittel ersetzt werden. Die Schiffe werden zertrümmert bis abends 8 Uhr 30 Minuten zu halten, um Euch heidner in den Betrieben feilschen zu können.

Und warum?

Um einen bereits endgültig verlorenen Krieg im Interesse unserer Arbeiter noch einige Monate weiterführen zu können. Die deutsche Kriegsmaschine bracht in allen Fugen. Die Risse, die durch die großen russischen Siege im Osten und durch die Wunde der Luftangriffe entstanden sind, sollen durch Eure Mehrarbeit - Überleistung und getriggt werden. Niemand glaubt mehr, daß die Spione, aber die Spione, die die Heile erziehen, wenn sie die auch noch für kurze Zeit vor dem Galgen, der sie erwartet. Die

das Alles? Unwissenheit über die Welt und das was Eurem Ansehen herabzusetzen ist. Unwissenheit um

Darum soll die 12 Stunden arbeiten. Ferner stellt ihr bei Luftangriffen die Betriebe nicht verlassen. Darum müßt ihr bis zu dem Ende bis Mitternacht arbeiten oder so bis zur „Heimfront“ kommen.

Ihr aber laßt vor der Beendigung des zweiten Krieges wieder die Nationen den Galgen, nach wie die Unterliegend der Verlust ihrer wirtschaftlichen Existenz zu erwarten.

Wenn der Krieg zu Ende ist, ist auch die zehnmal von Euch verführte Naziherrschaft mit all ihrem Terror und aller Unterdrückung zu Ende. Ihr Frauen braucht nicht mehr schaffen zu gehen. Eure Männer und Kinder kehren zurück. Ihr sollt wieder ein Teil der Familie und keine Arbeitsklauen mehr. Ihr Männer habt nicht mehr nötig, vor jedem Meister den Mund zu halten, oder vor jedem Spitzel und Werkpolizisten Fuch in Acht zu nehmen, um nicht als Karrenfütter an die Front zu kommen.

Ihr alle müßt helfen, daß ihr schneller verschwindet, und nicht noch in letzter Stunde neues, graues Unheil erleben können. Ihr Arbeiter, Arbeiterinnen und Arbeiterinnen müßt dem ganzen deutschen Volk beweisen, daß der gesunde Menschenverstand in Deutschland sich nicht gebrochen ist.

Es gibt keine Luftangriffe mehr. Die tägliche Angst und Sorge um Leben und Gesundheit der Familie hören endlich wieder auf. Die Nazis haben den Krieg begonnen. Mit Hitler und Goebbels schließt hinter in der Welt Frieden. Sie müßten verschwinden, wenn Euer Schicksal sich wieder zum besseren wenden soll.

Setzt Euch gegen die Weiterführung des Krieges zur Wehr! Verweigert die 12 stündige Arbeitszeit! Verlangt Euren freien Sonntag und den freien Sonnabendnachmittag! Fordert die Erhöhung der Lebensmittelpreise! Ordnet Euch mit allen Mitteln vor der Verlängerung der Arbeitszeit und sabotier Maßnahmen, die höhere Arbeitsleistungen aus Euch herauspressen soll!

Schützt Euch gegen die Luftangriffe!

Verlaßt die Betriebe wenn die Sirenen heulen! Sucht Eure Wohnungen und Familien auf, wenn die Angriffe vorüber sind. Laßt Betriebe brennen, aber rettet Eure Wohnungen!

Arbeiter und Arbeiterinnen Berlins! Vor allem aber seid einig! Wenn ihr geschlossen zusammensteht, seid ihr auch heute eine Macht, vor der alle Eure Feinde zurückweichen müssen. Sammelt Euch um die tapfersten und besten, klarenkenden und revolutionären Arbeiter Eures Betriebes ohne Unterschied der früheren Parteizugehörigkeit und betrachtet sie als Eure Obleute. Schafft Euch in Euren gewerkschaftlichen Kampfgruppen die Waffe, die Eurem Widerstand volle Sicherheit und klare Führung gibt.

Die Arbeiter beendeten den ersten Weltkrieg! Sie müssen auch den Schluß des zweiten erzwingen!

**Kommunistische Partei
Berlin**

Leaflet of the KPD's Saefkow organization (Berlin, 1944).



Anti-war leaflets.

tact with several circles of the social-democratic and bourgeois antifascist opposition, but also with groups of war prisoners (especially Soviet) put to work and with the clandestine organization of communist prisoners in the Sachsenhausen camp. Qualified militants printed leaflets and posters, provided liaison, stored weapons and ammunition, carried out counter-espionage and sabotaged war production.

There were several clandestine KPD organizations in the Ruhr, notably the one led by Franz Zielasko. This miner from the Ruhr was parachuted into the Reich by the Soviet air force. On his return to his region, he renewed his old contacts and rebuilt a KPD organization camouflaged behind a Cycling Sports Union, which the Gestapo dismantled in 1943. The Bielefeld organization was taken over by Otto Giesseman after his liberation in January 1936 (he was arrested after the Reichstag fire). Particularly active in the important Dürkopp arms factories, it was dismantled in 1942 (twelve executions). In 1941, the communist resistance in the Ruhr was reorganized by Wilhelm Knöchel. A former member of the Central Committee, he headed the KPD headquarters in Amsterdam before returning to Germany with five cadres specialized in clandestine struggle. He was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 with 200 militants of his organization and executed in 1944 with about 50 of his comrades. In Mannheim, the organization led by Georg Lechleiter led an active resistance for years until it was dismantled at the end of 1942: Georg Leichester and thirty members of his organization were executed. It was also in 1942 that the Gestapo dismantled the communist organization in Duisburg: about a hundred militants were arrested and several were executed, among them Luise Rieke, Willi Seng, Anton Stupp, Albert Kamradt, Friedrich Kamleiter, Ferdinand Jahny, Paul Wondzinski, etc.⁴⁷ But despite the repression in the Ruhr as in Berlin, the resistance never ceased.

Other organizations were active in Hamburg, Bavaria, Hannover, Breslau (Wrocław), Koenigsberg, Schleswig-Holstein, etc. By 1939, the KPD was able to rebuild two large underground organizations in Thuringia.

⁴⁷ Cf. Gerard Sandoz: *Ces Allemands qui ont défié Hitler, 1933-1945*, Éditions Pygmalion/Gérard Watelet, Paris, 1980, p. 67. Sandoz devotes twenty pages (out of 250) to the communist resistance.

One was led by Theodor Neubauer,⁴⁸ a former Communist member of the Reichstag, and the other by Magnus Poser, a carpenter working for Zeiss in Jena. In 1943, the two organizations united and expanded to form a large organization that carried out its work along five main lines: antifascist propaganda directed towards the German proletariat, sabotage of war production, solidarity with the anti-fascists imprisoned in Buchenwald, organizational development in companies, and contacts with deported foreign workers and prisoners of war. As a practical application of this last alliance, an International Antifascist Committee was formed in Leipzig, which united German workers with the deported Soviet workers. The leader of the latter was Nikolai Rumiansev, a communist miner from the Don basin, the KPD delegate was Max Haucke. This committee prepared the liberation of the Soviet prisoners of war and their organization into battle groups, as part of a general insurrection plan. Rumiantsev and Haucke were arrested and executed in 1944.⁴⁹

The clandestine communist organization of Hamburg, active in thirty factories and shipyards, was led from 1941 to '42 by Bernhard Bästlein (a former KPD deputy), Oskar Reincke and Franz Jacob, who had just been liberated from a concentration camp. Arrested again by the Gestapo in 1943, they were able to take advantage of the destruction of the prison by an Allied bombardment to escape. Arrested a third time in 1944, they were executed with about sixty members of their organization after terrible torture.⁵⁰

In Saxony, the clandestine organization was led by Georg Schumann, an old fellow fighter of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. It was a powerful organization that had clandestine groups in seventeen companies and in several localities. The Schumann organization linked up with other clandestine KPD organizations in Central Germany, such as the organiza-

⁴⁸Theodor Neubauer was arrested in 1944 and hanged on February 5, 1945 in the Brandenburg-Görden penitentiary. It was in this penitentiary that Erich Honnecker, who led the Party and the GDR from 1971 to 1989, was detained for ten years, from 1935 until his liberation by the Soviet army.

⁴⁹Cf. G. Rozanov: *L'Agonie du Troisième Reich*, Éditions du Progrès, collection *Essais et Documents*, Moscou, s.d., pp. 16 and following. See also Badia: *Histoire de l'Allemagne contemporaine*, (op. cit.), pp. 202 and following.

⁵⁰Confronted by the Gestapo with Jacob, one activist said, "His face was unrecognizable. I identified him only by the shape of the skull and his hair." Cf. Gilbert Badia: *Ces Allemands qui ont défié Hitler*, (op. cit.), p. 135.

tion led by Otto König, active in the Mansfeld mines and the giant Leuna-Werke and Buna-Werke factories.⁵¹

Several clandestine KPD organizations opened up to non-communists: the organization led by Robert Havemann and Georg Groscurth, which helped prisoners, escapees and Jews by printing food cards, and Werner Scharff's organization, which also helped Jews.⁵²

The KPD leadership in Moscow decided to regroup all these organizations (which in 1944 had 10,000 active underground workers in about 100 cities) and to strengthen ties with non-communist antifascists. In the spring of 1944, Saefkow organized a conference in Engelsdorf, which was attended by delegates from all the clandestine antifascist groups in the Leipzig region. The document developed at this conference was taken over by the Central Committee of the KPD and became the Party's program text. It was widely distributed in the Reich, including as a leaflet, on May 1, 1944. It endorsed an already perceptible change of line, which advocated an antifascist front for the construction of a German democratic republic, rather than pursuing a "class against class" policy for the construction of a German Soviet republic.

The impact of communist subversive labor on war production is certain. Apart from direct sabotage (for example, the communist cell at the Hasag-Werke factory replaced the explosive charge of the Panzerfaust anti-tank rocket launchers with sand), the effect of leaflets calling for bad and slow work to hasten the end of the war is difficult to measure. But the productivity of the war factories was everywhere lower than the calculations of the Nazi engineers. Calls for strikes were increasingly widely heeded. The Nazi Minister of Justice acknowledged (in a newspaper intended for a restricted circle of high-ranking civil servants) that in the first half of 1944 there had been 200,000 strikers (of all nationalities) in Germany! And this in a climate of unheard-of terror: the Nazi police had arrested 177,000 men and women inside the Reich during the same six-month period. At that time, an estimated 125,000 German workers were linked to the antifascist resistance. As the Reich had to devote more and more resources to its internal security, the 40,000 Gestapo agents in charge of the fight

⁵¹ Georg Schumann was arrested and executed on January 11, 1945.

⁵² Organization dismantled in 1944, Scharff was executed in Sachsenhausen in March 1945.

against the resistance were no longer sufficient: thirty new SS police battalions were formed, as well as detachments of armed Nazi militants.

The KPD still suffered numerous blows in Germany, particularly in Autumn 1944, when Saefkow was arrested along with other leaders and 300 militants. Saefkow was executed along with 71 members of his organization (three detainees had already died under torture, three others had been gassed as Jews). The verdict of September 5, 1944, said in particular:

Saefkow, Jacob, Bästlein are old permanent communist officials, deeply animated by an unbounded hatred against our Führer and our State, and they did not hide it during the hearings. They are hardened and incorrigible. The punishments they have already endured made no more impression on them than their stay in the concentration camps. Especially in the fifth year of the war, they were so successful in reconstituting the German Communist Party and working for the disintegration of the Wehrmacht that it resulted in the most serious perils for the Reich.

About 100 members of the Saefkow organization escaped the blow and went back to work. All over Germany, other organizations were reconstituted, such as in Ruppenthal (Kapp organization), Gotha (Bush organization), Pomerania (Empacher/Krause organization), Thuringia, Central Germany (Büchner organization), Dresden, Cologne, Dortmund and, of course, Berlin (Fischer organization).

Chapter 4

KPD in Occupied Countries

While the Social Democratic leaders Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler spoke of “historical necessity” in connection with the Third Reich’s annexation of Austria, the KPD clearly denounced the Anschluss: “The German working class, the German people repel Hitler’s monstrous act against Austria with all their might. The workers and the German people want nothing to do with this oppression of the Austrian people.”⁵³ Moreover, at its 14th Congress, held at Draveil near Juvisy on January 30 and February 1, 1939 (to bewilder the Gestapo, it was referred as the “Berne Congress”), the KPD declared that “if war were to break out, the German antifascists would side with the peoples under attack... and would do everything to bring about the rapid defeat of fascism.”

That’s what they did. Everywhere, German communists united with the resistance fighters of the occupied countries. In general, this engagement was so diluted that it might appear anecdotal if it is noticed at all. But examination reveals it to be omnipresent and systematic. The communist parties in the occupied countries organized a “TA” (“German Labor”) section to make propaganda to the occupation troops. The “TA” was carried out by militants belonging to the KPD (and/or the Austrian Communist Party, KPÖ) and the Communist Party of the country concerned—often immigrants who knew the German language, often Jews from Central Europe.

In Paris, the “TA” was started as early as July 1940 by two young KPD members, Sally Grünvogel and Roman Rubinstein,⁵⁴ who put up posters on barracks walls and in places frequented by soldiers. Very quickly, they assembled a solid group of clandestine KPD who came into contact with the PCF. By 1941, the “TA” network of the KPD and KPÖ had already succeeded in forming 27 committees of soldiers in the occupation troops in France.

In Belgium, the KPD appointed Hermann Geisen, a party official and former inter-brigadist, as head of the “TA.” From May 1941 onwards, the German military police reports showed they were worried about the

⁵³ *Die Internationale*, a magazine edited by the KPD Central Committee, No. 3/4, 1938, p. 139.

⁵⁴ Roman Rubinstein had spy experience, having carried out some clandestine missions in Germany. At the end of the war, he commanded an entire battalion of partisans in the Saône-et-Loire. After the war he became director of broadcasting programs in the GDR.

TA's work to demoralize occupation soldiers.⁵⁵ In Belgium, too, this activity relied on many sacrifices, including the lives of Wilhelm Katz, Siegfried Feur and Werner Blank, who were caught distributing communist leaflets to soldiers at the Antwerp Sports Palace on January 1, 1942. They were tried and shot in Essen in 1943. Geisen was arrested at the end of 1941 and beheaded in Berlin on April 21, 1943. His successors were Max Stoye (beheaded in Berlin in May 1943) and Otto Abel, who was wounded by a revolver on August 15, 1943 while trying to escape from the SS "anti-Jewish section." The SS deported him to Auschwitz as a Jew, without having learned anything about his activities in the "TA." The other leaders of the "TA" in Belgium were Frieda Gincburg, (who was arrested and murdered in Ravensbrück), and the Austrian Gehrard Paul Herrenstadt.

This work gradually gained momentum: newspapers were created (*Soldat im Westen* and *Soldat am Mittelmeer*) and German and Austrian communists infiltrated the German administration under false French identities. Young activists got to know German soldiers and tried to make them understand the criminal nature of Hitler's war. This work sometimes had appreciable results, especially with Austrian or Volksdeutsche soldiers. The Volksdeutsche were members of the German minorities in Poland, the Czech Republic (Sudetenland), Hungary, Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Vojvodina), etc., and they were mobilized as citizens of the greater German Reich. A group of Polish Volksdeutsche of the Wehrmacht, who worked in France with the "TA," provided weapons and uniforms for the *maquis*,⁵⁶ and deserted their barracks.⁵⁷ The Austrians were targeted because many of them felt unwillingly drawn into Hitler's war.⁵⁸ The "TA" sometimes cleverly used legal channels. Thus, in 1944, antifascists were circulating a copy of the October 1941 edition of the Nazi newspaper *Brüsseler Zeitung*

⁵⁵ Cf. Jean-Léon Charles et Philippe Dasnoy: *Les dossiers secrets de la police allemande en Belgique – Tome 1: 1940-1942*, Éditions Arts & Voyages, Lucien de Meyer éditeur, collection *Inédits*, Bruxelles, 1972, pp. 124, 128, 144, 194 (copies of *Die Wahrheit*, edited by the National Committee for a Free Germany, found in the Wehrmacht Commissariat), 203, 207 (discussing the *Rote Fahne*).

⁵⁶ In France, *maquis* was the name given to rural base areas for guerrilla resistance fighters, known as *maquisards*.—Ed.

⁵⁷ Cf. Jacques Ravine: *La résistance organisée des juifs en France (1940-1944)*, Éditions Julliard, Paris, 1973, pp. 198-199.

⁵⁸ Cf. F. R. Reiter: *Notre combat – Interviews de Résistants autrichiens en France*, Le Temps des Cerises, Pantin, 1998, pp. 109-111.



German and Slovak partisans during the great Slovak antifascist uprising of 1944.



German and Greek partisans of the National Liberation Army of Greece, August 1944.

with an article entitled *Russia has lost the war and the war will be over in 1941* in the occupation units in Belgium. Putting this edition back into circulation in 1944, one year after the Stalingrad disaster, had a definite effect on morale. And when a Nazi tried to oppose the collective reading of this article, he was asked if he believed that the Nazi newspaper was lying?

Many Germans, communist militants in exile, young soldiers or workers of the Todt organization joined the *maquis*. They were most numerous in the USSR (particularly in Belarus, but also in Crimea, Moldavia, Ukraine, etc.), in Slovakia (where, in 1944, 80,000 partisans fought under the supervision of parachuted-in Soviet officers), in Greece (there were German or Greek-German partisan units in the 2nd, 3rd and 11th divisions of the guerrilla army founded by the Greek Communist Party, the ELAS, the National Liberation Army of Greece) and in Yugoslavia (German antifascists, deserters of the Wehrmacht or members of the German national minority in Yugoslavia, formed the “Thälmann” detachment in Tito’s Yugoslav People’s Liberation Army).⁵⁹

But there were some everywhere: in Poland, Albania, Denmark, Italy, and of course in France: in the Alps, Lozere, the Cevennes, Limousin, etc. The best known of these *maquisards* is Léo Gerhard. This young German antifascist was under the leadership of Werner Schwartze—a touring worker who first worked in a clandestine KPD organization in Germany; Schwartze was an inter-brigadist, who escaped from a French concentration camp and later became head of the “TA” in Toulouse. Schwartze sent Gerhard to infiltrate the Toulouse Transportkommandantur under a false French identity. Later, Gerhard was arrested in Castres for distributing leaflets of the National Committee for a Free Germany to German soldiers. He was freed during a transfer to the military court by the attack on his train by a *maquis* of Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP, communists). He himself became an FTP *maquis* and participated in the hard fighting for the liberation of Tulle.⁶⁰ In France, the German *maquisards* fought either

⁵⁹ Cf. Donlagic Ahmet, Zarko Atanackovic and Plenca Dusan: *La Yougoslavie dans la Seconde guerre mondiale*, Interpress Medunarodna Stampa, Belgrade, 1967, p. 164.

⁶⁰ Cf. Léo Gerhard: *Un Allemand dans la Résistance – Un train pour Toulouse*, Édition Tirésias, Paris, 1997. Gerhard also participated in writing *Maquis de Corrèze par cent vingt témoins et combattants*, Éditions sociales, Paris, 1971, pp. 397-398, 617. His story is also evoked by Gilles Perrault (*Taupes rouges contre SS*, Éditions Messidor, Paris, 1986, pp. 193-205), Florimond Bonte (*Les Antifascistes allemands dans la Résistance française*,



German and Austrian anti-fascists fighting in a unit of Soviet partisans in 1944.



German and Austrian partisans of the 104th Company of the 5th FTP Battalion, Cévennes 1944.

directly in the FTP units or in the FTP units that organized the fighters of foreign origin by nationality: the FTP-MOI (Immigrant Labor). Some *maquis* were even 100% German! This was the case of the FTP *maquis* of Bonnetombe, which was commanded in April 1943 by former KPD deputy Otto Kühne.⁶¹ The German partisans engaged the SS, who wanted to attack villages in the departments of Gard and Lozère, in many battles and thus saved their inhabitants from fierce punitive actions. Many died in battle, and those that the German army managed to take alive were tortured to death; their remains were found with their sexual parts mutilated, their tongues torn out, and their feet and hands deeply burned. At the end of August 1944, the French *maquisards* who took part in the victory challenge in Nîmes decided that the German partisans would march at their head and carry the flag of victory. Even the Brussels Corps of the Belgian Partisan Army (the guerrilla organization founded by the Communist Party) had a German-Austrian company of about twenty fighters, commanded by Otto Spitz.⁶²

Some militants joined the urban guerrillas, and several of them, such as Leo Kneler, Alfred Wosnik or “Richard Hugo,” achieved real feats there. A communist militant in Berlin in the 1920s, Leo Kneler was forced into exile for the first time in 1929. He returned to Germany in 1932, was arrested by the Nazis, escaped to France, fought in Spain, was locked up in a French concentration camp, escaped from there, and entered Germany once again (under the identity of a volunteer foreign worker) to organize a clandestine KPD group in the Ruhr. He escaped from the Gestapo when his organization was dismantled and returned to France, where he joined the FTP-MOI task force in Paris (the famous “Red Poster”).⁶³ There he commanded the “Stalingrad” detachment. It is Kneler who, protected by

Éditions sociales, Paris, 1969, pp. 233-263), and Gilbert Badia (*Ces Allemands qui ont défié Hitler*, op. cit., p. 189-190).

⁶¹ Otto Kühne had been the secretary of the KPD parliamentary group in the Reichstag and had fought in Spain. In France, at the time of the fighting for liberation, Kühne had 2,500 combatants under his command as lieutenant-colonel of the FTP-MOI. After the war, he became governor of the Brandenburg region in the GDR.

⁶² Maxime Steinberg: *L'Étoile et le fusil, livre trois: La traque des Juifs 1942-1944, volume II*, Vie Ouvrière, collection *Condition humaine*, Bruxelles, 1986, pp. 176 and 188 (note 87).

⁶³ Cf. Stéphane Courtois, Denis Peschanski and Adam Rayski: *Le sang de l'étranger – Les immigrés de la M.O.I. dans la Résistance*, Fayard, Paris, 1989, p. 265. Kneler escaped the waves of arrests and spent the rest of his life in the GDR.



German and Austrian anti-fascists who fought in the Belgian Partisan Army, Brussels 1944.



German partisans of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army on the road from Semlin to Belgrade (February 1945).

the other fighters of the special team, on July 28, 1943, blew up the car of Lieutenant Colonel Prince Moritz von Ratibor with a grenade, giving birth to the legend of the execution of General von Schaumburg, military governor of Gross Paris.⁶⁴ Moritz von Ratibor escaped the special team, but two months later, SS General Julius Ritter was shot in the middle of Paris by the same team. Ritter was in charge of the deportation of French workers to the Reich as part of the Service du Travail Obligatoire. The Third Reich organized a state funeral for him. What Kneler did not know was that the weapons of his group had been supplied to the Parisian FTPs by a KPD cell active in the heart of the Kriegsmarine HQ in Paris. Chief Petty Officer Hans Heisel and two sailors who had joined the clandestine KPD in 1942 had stolen about twenty pistols from the changing rooms of a pool reserved for German soldiers. These weapons were handed over to their “TA” contact of the French resistance and ended up in the hands of Kneler and his comrades.⁶⁵

Another great German figure of urban guerrilla warfare in France was Alfred Woznik who, disguised as an officer, placed the bomb that devastated the mess hall of the Kommandantur in Nice. Later, disguised as a German policeman, he broke into the Gestapo office in Aix, stunned the platoon and left with the secret documents contained in the safe. “Richard Hugo” was a former German inter-brigadist, member of the Mobile Corps of the Belgian Partisan Army (a shock unit, directly dependent on the national staff). On July 25, 1942, with about fifteen Resistance fighters, he occupied the headquarters of the Association of Jews in Belgium and set fire to the files to prevent deportations. “Richard Hugo” was a pseudonym.

⁶⁴ Cf. Boris Holban: *Testament – Après 45 ans de silence, le chef militaire des FTP-MOI de Paris parle...* Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1989. The legend of the execution can be found in Bonte (*Les Antifascistes allemands dans la Résistance française*, op. cit., p. 319), and in *Manouchian* (Les Éditeurs français réunis, Paris, 1974, pp. 109-110) by Mélinée Manouchian, who goes so far as to attribute this action to her husband. Let us recall that Boris Holban's book is by far the most complete and precise on the FTP-MOI, and does justice to the various anti-communist myths relating to the “Red Poster” (the PCF allegedly “sacrificed” the Parisian FTP-MOI, etc.).

⁶⁵ Cf. Gilles Perrault: *Taupes rouges contre SS*, (op. cit.), pp. 77-78. These communist sailors deserted without looking back during the Paris uprising and fought (along with a hundred other German antifascists) for the liberation of the city.

He was shot shortly afterwards by Nazi police officers, and his true identity could never be established.⁶⁶

From 1943 onwards, KPD militants in the West (and thus the thousands of Germans who had joined the French resistance) organized themselves within the framework of the National Committee for a Free Germany, which developed, as will be seen below, its own political and military structures.

⁶⁶ Cf. Maxime Steinberg, *L'Étoile et le fusil, livre deux: Les cent jours de la déportation des juifs de Belgique*, Vie Ouvrière, collection *Condition humaine*, Bruxelles, 1984, pp. 173-177.

Chapter 5

The Special Networks, Espionage and Sabotage

Even before 1933, the KPD had sent numerous seasoned militants to the Red Army intelligence services (the GRU) and the Soviet security services (the GPU, then the NKVD). The main mission of the latter was to ensure the internal security of the USSR, but this mission involved external operations such as the liquidation of anti-Soviet exile organizations maintaining networks in the USSR, the infiltration of the secret services of countries hostile to the USSR, etc. The services rendered to the antifascist cause by the German communists linked to the Soviet secret services were literally invaluable. Alongside well-known examples such as the Sorge network and the Harnack/Schulze-Boysen network (the Berlin hub of the organization called by Nazi counter-espionage “the Red Orchestra”), how many examples have remained in the shadows, such as that of the brigade of the NKVD Department of Special Missions or that of the Wollweber organization?

Richard Sorge has been described as “the spy of the century” for having set up the “Ramsay” network in Tokyo which, from September 1933 to October 1941, informed the USSR precisely of Japan’s political intentions and military potential. Sorge thus alerted the USSR that Japan would not attack in 1941, which made it possible to send the divisions defending the Soviet Far East against the German army. This network benefited from the valuable collaboration of clandestine Japanese communist militants, but also included other German communists. Sorge himself had been a member of the KPD since its foundation in 1919. Specialized in agit-prop until the first banning of the Party in 1922, he was then assigned to the liaison and security apparatus.⁶⁷ In 1924 he went to Moscow, where he adopted Soviet nationality and joined the intelligence service of the Komintern (for which he completed several missions in Scandinavia, Germany, Great Britain), then the GRU. His first mission for the GRU was to organize a network in Shanghai in 1929 with two other German communists. In Tokyo, Sorge’s radio technician was Bruno Wendt, a KPD activist trained

⁶⁷ He was the bodyguard of such important personalities as Pinatnisky, Manouilsky, Kuusinen and Lozovosky, who had arrived illegally in Germany for the 1924 KPD Congress, and ensured the security of the KPD’s archives and collections in Frankfurt. Cf. S. Goliakov and V. Ponizovsky: *Le vrai Sorge*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, collection *La guerre secrète*, Paris, 1967, p. 111, and Nicole Chatel and Alain Guérin: *Camarade Sorge*, Julliard, Paris, p. 221.

by the GRU in Moscow,⁶⁸ and Max Klausen, a communist sailor from Hamburg who, like Sorge, but in a different network, had worked as an intelligence officer for the GRU in Shanghai.⁶⁹ Sorge also benefited from the collaboration of Günther Stein, a German antifascist correspondent in Tokyo for an English newspaper.

Arvid Harnack, a clandestine KPD activist who had worked for the GRU since 1932, was a senior official in the Reich Ministry of Economics. Harro Schulze-Boysen was an anti-fascist officer recruited by Harnack, who worked at Luftwaffe headquarters.⁷⁰ The Harnack/Schulze-Boysen network numbered about 100 people. The network was so integrated into the “All-Berlin” that it was able to provide the GRU with information of the highest importance for many years: technical information on weapons, schedules and plans of offensives, Hitler’s army’s order of battle, etc. One of its members, Horst Heilmann, a communist youth activist who had pretended to go over to the Nazis, even worked in the decryption service of the Abwehr, the secret service of the German army. “This network cost Germany the lives of 200,000 soldiers,” wrote the head of the Abwehr, Admiral Canaris, while an SS report dated December 22, 1942, stated that:

The danger of this group is proved by the fact that it had agents in the Ministries of Air, Economics, Propaganda and Foreign Affairs, the Supreme Command, the Naval Staff, the University of Berlin, the Political-Racial Office, the Berlin City Administration and the National Labor Defense Service.... The arrested persons were ready to help, by all means

⁶⁸ Cf. Gordon W. Prague: *Le réseau Sorge*, Éditions Pygmalion/Gérard Watelet, Paris, 1987 pp. 79 and 105.

⁶⁹ Klausen became a communist after having been a trade union activist in the Seafarers’ and Dockers’ International. The only survivors of the “Ramsay” cadres at liberation, Max Klausen and his wife (who had been a courier and had also been imprisoned) spent the rest of their lives in the GDR, first under the name Christiansen (the GDR had asked them to keep their involvement in the GRU secret) and then by taking their name back when the East German authorities lifted the secrecy of their past. Cf. Chatel and Guérin: *Comrade Sorge*, (op. cit.), pp. 65 ff. This work is much more documented on the itinerary of Klausen (whom the authors met in the GDR) than the works of Prague or Goliakov-Ponizovsky.

⁷⁰ The biographies of Harnack and Schulze-Boysen can be found in Gilles Perrault’s *L’Orchestre rouge*, Édition Fayard, Paris, 1967, pp. 224 ff.

at their disposal, the Soviet Union in its struggle against Germany.⁷¹

The information from the network was so valuable to the GRU that the Soviet air force dropped five German communists, who had been trained as radio technicians to facilitate communications with Moscow, into the middle of the Reich between October 1941 and July 1942.⁷² The Gestapo arrested 126 members of the network. 49 were tortured, sentenced to death and hung from butchers' hooks (including Harnack, Schulze-Boysen and Heilmann), 5 died under torture during interrogations (burns, arms and legs crushed in vises...), 2 committed suicide (including John Sieg, a former editor of the *Rote Fahne* who wrote the network's bulletin *The Home Front*), and nearly 80 were sent to concentration camps where 40 died.

Many German communists exiled in the USSR were part of the NKVD's Special Missions Department brigade, which brought together 20,000 elite fighters, men and women, Soviet and foreign. As a measure of the degree of confidence in this international brigade, it was entrusted with the defense of the Kremlin when Hitler's armies arrived at the edge of Moscow...⁷³

Erich Wollweber was one of the sailors whose mutiny was the spark of the German revolution of 1918. He was the military leader of the communist uprising of May 1923 in Bochum, and then in charge of the "West Büro" in the Komintern. He headed the clandestine apparatus of the International Seamen's and Dockers' International (Internationale der Seeleute und Hafenarbeiter or ISH), founded in 1930 in Hamburg by the Profintern—the Red Trade Union International. Established in 22 countries and

⁷¹ Quoted in the interview between the Soviet journalist Lev Besimenskij and one of the rare survivors of the Harnack/Schulze-Boysen network: Greta Kuckhoff, who spent the rest of her life in the GDR. See *L'URSS dans la seconde guerre mondiale*, volume 3, Témoignages—Editions-Diffusions, Paris, 1967, p. 536.

⁷² In Belgium, the radio technician of the Trepper/Gourevitch network was also a veteran KPD clandestine activist: Johan Wenzel. Arrested by the Gestapo, tortured, he pretended to collaborate in a black propaganda program, but knew how to warn the GRU by means of an agreed signal. Wenzel escaped and rejoined the network in the Netherlands. See Leopold Trepper: *Le grand jeu*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1965, p. 174.

⁷³ See Pavel and Anatoli Soudoplatov (with Jerrold and Leona Schecter): *Missions spéciales*, Seuil, Paris, 1994, pp. 167 ff. Pavel Soudoplatov was head of the NKVD Department of Special Missions. This brigade was disbanded in 1946.

19 colonies, the ISH was led by Albert Walter, who was arrested the night the Reichstag was burned down and assassinated by the Nazis. The Wollweber organization carried out sabotage before and during the war, either on goods transported by Axis ships or on the ships themselves. One of the techniques used consisted of mixing a block of explosives, which had the appearance of coal, with the fuel. On the open sea, it was thrown into the boiler and exploded there, cutting the ship in two. The Wollweber organization sent many German, Italian, Japanese and Polish ships to the bottom of the ocean in this way. It should be remembered that Poland in the 1930s was a fascist dictatorship allied to Hitler (Hitler gave it his share of Czechoslovakia: the 1,700 km² of the Teschen region). That is why in 1938 the Bergen (Norway) group of the Wollweber organization sank, among others, the Polish cargo ship *Stefan Batory* with its cargo of strategic materials destined for Franco in the North Sea. During the trial of the Copenhagen group in July 1941, the court accused Wollweber's saboteurs of having blown up 16 German, 3 Italian and 2 Japanese ships.⁷⁴ The hundreds of German soldiers drowned in the sinking of a troop transports sailing from Denmark to Norway were allegedly the victims of Wollweber's saboteurs. The organization was mainly based in Germany, Scandinavia, Dunkirk, Le Havre, Rotterdam and Antwerp. The Wollweber organization's Antwerp group sank the Italian freighter *Boccacio* in November 1937, and in June 1938 set fire to the Japanese freighter *Kasji Maru*, which was on its way to Franco's Spain. When the Nazis invaded Belgium, it was the files of the Belgian police that allowed the Gestapo to arrest, torture and murder Antwerp dockers of the Wollweber organization. The Belgian police transmitted its information to the Gestapo before the war within the framework of Interpol (from 1938 to 1945, SS generals presided over Interpol).⁷⁵ The Commissioner General of the Belgian Judicial Police responsible for this collaboration, Florent Louwage, was the Belgian delegate at the Interpol

⁷⁴ Information on the Wollweber organization is rare and always present in books that are subject to doubt. Cf. the very dubious *Omnibus pour l'espionnage* by Kurt Singer, Éditions Marabout, Verviers, 1963, pp. 7-23.

⁷⁵ First Otto Steinhäusl, then Reinhard Heinrich, "the Butcher of Prague," until his execution by Czech resistance fighters, and finally Ernst Kaltenbrunner, who was sentenced to death at the Nuremberg court.

headquarters in Berlin during the war, and after the war... president of Interpol.⁷⁶

From 1933 onwards, it was often through the sailors, dockers and boatmen of the Wollweber organization that the KPD ensured its links with its organizations in Germany, and it was this organization that succeeded in the feat of removing all the archives of the Komintern from the Reich. The organization also had a network of informers in Swedish ports who communicated the movements of German ships coming to load iron ore and precious SKF ball bearings by radio to the Soviet Navy. This supply was vital for the Reich, and was the privileged target of the Soviet submarines for ambush offshore: more than thirty German transports were thus sunk.⁷⁷ Erich Wollweber was arrested in Sweden. His extradition was immediately requested by the Nazis, but he declared that he had acquired Soviet citizenship, which was confirmed by Alexandra Kollontai, ambassador of the USSR in Stockholm. Wollweber was deported to the USSR a few months later.⁷⁸

These lines give only an imperfect idea of the role of German communists in Soviet and Komintern secret organizations. The history of several of these organizations remains to be written, as their members kept their involvement secret and continued to operate after the victory over Hitler within the framework of the Cold War. This was the case of the Hamburg branch and the Czechoslovak branch of the Harnack/Schulze-Boysen network, which escaped the Gestapo until the end and were reactivated after the war by the GRU.⁷⁹ This was also the case for whole sections of the Wollweber organization, and thus Kurt Wissel, a former assistant to Wollweber, played an important role in the network formed by William Fisher (alias Rudolf Abel) in the US. In 1949-1950, Wissel set up a dormant network of dockers on the East coast of the US who could carry out sabotage in the event of war against the USSR.

⁷⁶ Cf. *L'Allemagne nazie, la police belge et l'anticommunisme en Belgique (1936-1944) – un aspect des relations belgo-allemandes*, a study by Rudi Van Doorslaer and Etienne Verhoveven for the Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale (1986).

⁷⁷ Cf. Nikolai Kouznetsov: *La marine soviétique en guerre (1941/1945)*, Editions du Progrès, Moscou, 1979, p. 162.

⁷⁸ After the war, he was Minister of State Security of the GDR.

⁷⁹ Thus Frantizcek Klecka, who was captured by American counter-espionage in Germany in 1948.

Chapter 6

The National Committee for a Free Germany

On June 10, 1941, a mobilized German communist, Rudolf Richter, joined the Soviet outposts and warned them of an imminent attack by Hitler's troops against the USSR. On the evening of June 21, soldier Alfred Liskow swam across the Bug River and gave the Soviets new details: the attack was the next day. During the night, NCO Wilhelm Shutz, deserted his regiment in which the invasion order had just been read. Wounded by German sentries, he was picked up by Soviet soldiers and, half unconscious, he told them: "I am a communist; in an hour, it will be war; they will attack you, be careful, comrades!" In the days that followed, several mobilized Communists took advantage of the war against the Soviet Union to desert and join the Red Army. Making this choice at a time when the German army was going from victory to victory could only be made by staunch communists.⁸⁰

On the proposal of Dimitrov, who had become secretary general of the Komintern, a statement made by 158 German prisoners was broadcast by radio Moscow and dropped in the form of a leaflet over the Hitler lines. It was a new step towards the foundation in Krasnogorsk in July 1943 of the National Committee for a Free Germany (Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland). Its program was to fight for the end of the war (with Germany renouncing all conquered territories), for the formation of a democratic republic and for the judgment of the Hitlerians. When it was founded, the Committee was led by 13 communist exiles (8 KPD cadres, including Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht, and five intellectuals) and 25 anti-fascist Wehrmacht soldiers who had been captured by the Red Army.

Delegates of the National Committee for a Free Germany gave lectures in the prison camps, and as rallies led to further rallies, the Committee grew rapidly. From Stalingrad, the movement became massive, rallying thousands of soldiers, hundreds of officers, 63 generals, and even the Field Marshall von Paulus, who had surrendered at Stalingrad despite Hitler's order to fight to the last soldier.

The Committee engaged massively to precipitate the disintegration of Hitler's armies. By 1944, 1,500 delegates of the Committee who had

⁸⁰ For example, the communist youth activist Heinz Kessler, who later became a general in the GDR People's Police. Cf. Marcel Veyrier: *La Wehrmacht rouge – Moscou 1943-1945 – 'Allemagne libre' contre Allemagne nazie*, Editions Julliard, Paris, 1970, pp. 9-10.

received general ideological training at the Krasnogorsk antifascist school, were on the front. Using loudspeakers, they called on the soldiers to end the war. Information about the unit to “work on” was collected in advance, a delegate from the recruiting area was sent to the unit, and the delegate addressed the soldiers in the regional dialect, etc. The results of this activity were disappointing, with a few exceptions, such as the surrender on July 8, 1944 of the commander and many soldiers of the XIIth Corps dispersed in the vicinity of Minsk. Sometimes members of the Committee (such as Heinz Kessler, who later became Deputy Minister of Defense of the GDR) even infiltrated German lines or parachuted behind them. One of them, Hans Jahn, disguised as an officer, one day took command of a company cut off from his regiment and led it to the Soviets.⁸¹ Hans Jahn was killed shortly after this exploit. Action groups of up to 60 volunteers parachuted far behind the lines to assist the partisans, such as Felix Scheffler’s Group 117, which contributed greatly to the surrender of a division of 12,000 men. Scheffler himself, disguised as a military policeman, regulated the traffic in such a way that an entire convoy was ambushed by the partisans...

Committee leaflets were dropped en masse over the German lines, and radio broadcasts were made to Germany and the Wehrmacht. This activity gave rise to some clandestine groups at the heart of the German army (in a security battalion in Frankfurt-am-Oder, in the Panzer School Division in Bergen-Belsen, and in several units stationed in Bavaria and abroad). This led the Wehrmacht high command to create on May 30, 1944 a special counter-propaganda staff, and to assign to each division an SS officer in charge of this work. A special order signed by Keitel, commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht, indicated that the relatives of the prisoners of war would be held responsible for their defections and would pay “with their property, freedom and life.” Beginning in December 1944, all German soldiers were required to sign a circular that said: “The command has informed me that if I surrender to the Russians, my entire family, father, mother, wife, children and grandchildren, will be shot.” The Gestapo added the usual procedures of secret warfare: Nazi agents pretended to be deserters in order to unmask the Committee’s action groups.

⁸¹ Cf. Marcel Veyrier, *La Wehrmacht rouge* (op. cit.), p. 131.



Constituent Conference of the National Committee for a Free Germany in Moscow, July 1943.



Walter Ulbricht and Erich Weinert, leaders of the KPD and the National Committee for a Free Germany, call on the Wehrmacht soldiers surrounded in Stalingrad to lay down their arms.

The courts-martial sentenced 24,500 German soldiers to be shot for anti-fascist activity—and thousands more to be imprisoned.

The Free Germany Movement for the West (France, Belgium and Luxembourg) was formed under the leadership of Otto Niebergall. Niebergall was head of the KPD in Saarland from 1926 to 1935. He left Saarbrücken where he had been elected when Saarland was annexed to the Reich. From the French-Belgian border, he was in charge of the KPD's clandestine power station for the Saarland and the Pfalz, and from Forbach he was in charge of the power station for the Rhineland. Arrested by the Belgian police at the beginning of 1940, he escaped and took charge of the KPD for France, Belgium and Luxembourg. He formed the Free Germany Movement for the West, bringing together KPD militants, militants assigned to the "TA," anti-fascist soldiers, German socialist and Catholic political émigrés and workers from the Todt organization. Responsible for the Southern Zone was Heinz Pries, former political commissioner of the "Hans Beimler" battalion in Spain, who had escaped from a French concentration camp and became head of the KPD in Lyon, and by Walter Vesper, the former head of the "TA" of the FTP-MOI in the Southern Zone.⁸² At the end of 1943, Harald Hauser, also an old KPD militant, took responsibility over the Northern zone. Two weeklies were created in France by the Committee which succeeded the publications produced by the KPD within the framework of the "TA." In the Southern zone the Committee published 25 issues of *Unser Vaterland*, and in the Northern zone, 63 issues (each with a circulation of 200,000 copies!) of *Volk und Vaterland*.

Richard Gladewitz's organization infiltrated the Wehrmacht and engaged in sabotage and the detour of arms and money for the *maquis*. The massive sending of foreign workers to Germany within the framework of the STO allowed the Committee to send emissaries to the Reich under the cover of false French identities. In addition to its newspapers, the Committee clandestinely published 109 different leaflets, 5 brochures and a large number of circulars in France.

The National Committee for a Free Germany formed fighting units in 25 departments that fought in the FTP *maquis* or practiced urban guer-

⁸² After the war, Vesper became ambassador of the GDR in Hungary and then in Czechoslovakia.

**NATIONALKOMITEE
„FREIES DEUTSCHLAND“**

SOLDATEN! MÄNNER DES OSTPREUSSISCHEN VOLKSSTURMS!

Welche Wahnvorstellung begehrt ihr?
Wollt ihr Euch auf vornehmerm Posten bis zum letzten Haopfer lassen? Das ist Selbstmord – Massenselbstmord!
Glaubt ihr, daß Euer Widerstand wert ist, die Front des Vormarsch der Roten Armee zur Erde aufhalten kann?
Das kann man doch dem Unfähigkeiten nicht mehr einreden.

Jeder Kessel wird liquidiert.

Wie bedröht, Gasse, Post, Schenkeln! Hier, so hier auch Chüßig, in Kessel weiter abwärts stellt vorher ohne Sie.

Oder hofft ihr noch auszubrechen? Wohl!

Selbst wenn es Euch gelingt, kommt ihr aus einem Kessel in den anderen, also aus einer Höhle in die andere, und werdet bis zum letzten aufgerieben. Fast ganz Pommern ist schon besetzt, Ostpreußen ist besetzt, das Wartheland, fast ganz Schlesien ist besetzt.

DIE ROTE ARMEE STEHT VOR BERLIN UND DRESDEN.

Tausende deutsche Städte und Dörfer, hunderttausende Deutsche sind schon aus dem Krieg heraus. Sie wollen Euch lebend zurückhaben. Aber drüben geht ihr zugrunde.

Je näher das Ende des Krieges rückt, umso leidenschaftlicher klammert sich jeder Überlebende an die Hoffnung, lebendig durchzukommen, seine Lieben, sein Haus wiederzusehen und in Frieden leben und schaffen zu können.

Keiner von Euch will jetzt noch sterben!

Aber das können Hitler und Himmler nicht. Sie haben ihren verböhrten Krieg verloren und ihr Leben verliert. Deshalb wollen sie unser Volk mit in ihren Untergang reißen. Jeder von Euch weiß, daß die Niederlage Hitlers längst festliegt ist. Jeder von Euch weiß also, daß jedes weitere Opfer sinnlos ist. Wozum sollt ihr noch? Wozu schlägt ihr Euch noch für eure Henker? Wozu müssen jetzt, wo der Friede vor der Tür steht, noch tausende Männer, Frauen und Kinder im Feuer des Krieges umkommen?

Warum gebt ihr nicht das Signal zum Einstellen des Kampfes?

Die Hitlerbanden halten Euch mit Drohungen und Versprechungen hin. Wie sie Euch von Anfang an betrogen haben, so betrügen sie Euch bis zum letzten Tag. Sie sagen: Wenn Deutschland kapituliert, müßt ihr alle mit Vernichtung oder Versklavung büßen. Sie sagen: Haltet aus! Bei den Östern kommt es bald zum Bruch, daher werden die Chancen Deutschlands immer günstiger. Das sind sie mit so schamloser Bogen wie das andere. Die Deklaration der drei Großmächte auf der Krimkonferenz hat diesen Schwindst entlarvt. Deshalb unterschlagen Euch Hitler Propagandaschreiber die wichtigsten Sätze.

Wie genau sie die Bedeutung der deutschen Fülle. Die Deklaration aber sagt:

„ZU UNSEREN ZIELEN GEHÖRT NICHT DIE VERNICHTUNG DES DEUTSCHEN VOLKES.“

Wie genau sie die Forderung der letzten Mille. Die Deklaration aber sagt:

„Erst wenn der Nazismus und der Militarismus ausgerottet sein werden, besteht für das deutsche Volk die Hoffnung auf eine würdige Existenz und einen Platz in der Gemeinschaft der Nationen.“

Wie genau sie sagt, nicht in Schluß, nur genau ist sie nicht wahr. Die Deklaration aber fordert nur, „alle Kriegsverbrecher sind gesondert und schneller Strafe zu unterziehen.“

Wie genau sie die unbestimmte Bedingung sehr ohne Inhalt. Sie sagt: „Die Deklaration sagt unbestimmte Bedingung: „Unsere Beratung in der Krim hat erneut unsere gemeinsame Entschlossenheit bekräftigt, in der bevorstehenden Friedenszeit eine Einheit der Ziele und des Handelns zu wählen und zu verstärken, die den Sieg im gegenwärtigen Krieg für die Verbündeten Nationen möglich und unbestreitbar gemacht hat.“

DAS IST DIE WAHRHEIT.

Diese Wahrheit aber haben die Hitlerbanden Euch wohlweislich unterschlagen. Um Euch in Schrecken zu versetzen, verbreiten sie die unvorhergesehenen Lügen über die Unmöglichkeit der russischen Soldaten. Damit wollen sie Euch alle, unser ganzes Volk, zur Verzweiflung zum Selbstmord treiben. Aber sie wollen auch ganz sicher gehen, daß ihr nicht im letzten Augenblick ausbrecht. Sie stellen ihre SS- und Parteibanner hinter Euch, die den Befehl haben, auf jeden zu schießen, der nicht bis zum Tode durchhalten will.

SOLDATEN!

Wie viel Opfer habt ihr gebracht, als ihr Euch noch in fremden Ländern für Hitlers schändliche Sache schlugt?
Ihr se nicht ihr jetzt gegen die letzte Lasten des letzten Kampfes, so ist es die Stellung im Falle ein für alle Mal?

SOLDATEN MÄNNER DES OSTPREUSSISCHEN VOLKSSTURMS!

Ihr habt für Deutschland zu leben und nicht für den Bekehrten Hitler zu sterben! Stellt den sinnlosen Kampf ein! Entwaffnet und schlagt nieder, die Euch daran hindern wollen, zu leben! Haltet alle mit, schnell zum Frieden zu kommen! Kein Opfer an Gut und Blut mehr für die Gallenfrat der Hitlerbande!

**NIEDER MIT DEN KRIEGSVERBRECHERN UND KRIEGSVERLÄNGERERN! SCHLUSS MIT IHREN!
WER FÜR HITLER KÄMPFT, KÄMPFT GEGEN DEUTSCHLAND!**

Frontseite des Nationalkomitees
„Freies Deutschland“


Call of the National Committee for a Free Germany to sabotage the raising of the Volkssturm in East Prussia (mid-March 1945).

BERLINER ZUM KAMPF

Rettet was uns noch verbleiben ist!

Rettet Berlin! Tod den Hitlerbanditen!

Unser das Leben,



The KPD's motto against Hitler's plans for extreme defenses. These leaflets were passed out in Berlin as the Soviet army approached the city.

rilla warfare by attacking officers' clubs, Gestapo and military police posts. Max Lingner and Ernst Scholz, among others, distinguished themselves in these battles.⁸³ In Brive, 350 soldiers and officers, partisans of the National Committee for a Free Germany, led by their colonel, joined the Resistance. Several KPD *maquisards* continued the war in the ranks of Colonel Fabien's regiment and participated in the liberation of Alsace.

In Belgium, where the Committee edited *Freies Deutschland* and the *Freiheitbriefe an die Deutsche Wehrmacht*, German antifascists participated in the armed struggle in the ranks of the Belgian Army of Partisans (ABP, communist) in Brussels, Walloon Brabant and Antwerp. Thus, in Antwerp, two German fighters from an ABP shock group were killed in a fight with Gestapoists and others were captured and transferred to Germany to be beheaded.⁸⁴ More than 20 KPD militants died as a result of their involvement in the Belgian Resistance.

As Allied troops entered Germany, several clandestine organizations of the KPD and the National Committee for a Free Germany moved into open combat—not without casualties. The Free Germany committee in Cologne, which had been founded in 1943 on the initiative of communist militants, had a core of more than 200 members and set out to bring together resistance fighters from all political and ideological backgrounds. Leaflets inciting the German population to commit sabotage in order to stop the Nazi war machine and encouraging soldiers to desert were distributed, and resistance fighters helped foreign forced laborers. In November 1944, the Cologne Gestapo arrested 1,800 members and sympathizers of the group, murdered the main perpetrators, and thus succeeded in permanently dismantling the group in the city.

On February 4, Walter Ulbricht called for a popular uprising against Hitler on the Committee's radio station. In the Kiel region, KPD shock troops boldly attacked D.C.A. batteries and police stations. In Wrocław

⁸³ Cf. Alain Guérin, *La Résistance 1930-1950*, Tome 5: *Le combat total*, Livre Club Didierot, Paris, 1976, pp. 366-367. Lingner was a famous communist illustrator who drew for *L'Humanité* during his exile in Paris. He fought in the *maquis* of the Gers and died in 1949 after receiving the National Prize for Painting in the GDR. Scholz was a KPD executive and former inter-brigadist. He fought in the *maquis* of Savoy and was the first post-war ambassador of the GDR in France.

⁸⁴ Cf. Henri Bernard, *L'Autre Allemagne, la résistance allemande à Hitler 1933-1945*, La Renaissance du Livre, Bruxelles, 1976, pp. 290-291. Bernard claims to do justice to the German communist resistance: he devotes half a dozen of the 300 pages of his book to it...

(Breslau) a KPD militant, Hermann Hartmann, organized about 100 militants in groups of three.⁸⁵ Hartmann's organization began urban guerrilla warfare (a grenade attack on a Nazi local), and the National Committee for a Free Germany sent him a reinforcement of 80 fighters from Soviet lines.

The enlistment of all those who had not been mobilized in the army (teenagers, the elderly, the sick, the handicapped) into the ranks of the Volkssturm, and the extreme defenses around the cities were, in many places, if not prevented, at least weakened by the members and sympathizers of the Committee. In Leipzig, Jena, Cologne, Gotha, Chemnitz (Karl-Marx-Stadt), Rostock, Stalsund, Grimmen, Greifswald, Borzow, Belzig, Freiberg, etc., several local committees arose at the time of liberation and established counterpowers. In Leipzig the local Free Germany committee had 4,500 members. On the arrival of the American forces, it had undertaken the first work of cleaning up the city and started denazification. Upon its arrival, the American army refused the anti-fascist candidate for mayor, appointed a conservative politician and banned the Committee.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Hermann Hartmann was a communist tile worker. Arrested and tortured in 1933, detained in Sachsenhausen, he was released in 1940 by the triumphant Nazi regime as a reward for his brother who had shown himself to be a good soldier during the invasion of Norway. Hartmann resumed his clandestine activity after his liberation. He survived the Battle of Breslau and spent the rest of his life in the GDR.

⁸⁶ Cf. Gilbert Badia: *Ces Allemands qui ont défié Hitler*, (op. cit.), p. 62.

Chapter 7

Up to the Camps

In the concentration and extermination camps, the SS employed a large number of prisoners as auxiliaries: chamber chiefs, barrack chiefs, office workers, team leaders in the construction sites and workshops, maintenance personnel, etc. Occupying one of these positions considerably increased the chances of escaping the appalling mortality rate in the camps (in 1941, 76% of Mauthausen's inmates died of malnutrition and ill-treatment). Different networks fought against them by means of direct or indirect assassinations (denunciation to the SS, transfer to a particularly murderous construction site, etc.). The SS initially entrusted these posts to ordinary German prisoners, but their theft and trafficking disrupted the order of the camps. KPD militants (identified as such or not) gradually overwhelmed the administration of the camps. They managed, through a centralized and rational use of the possibilities thus offered, to give the SS the appearance of "good administration" while developing a vast network of solidarity and struggle. Wherever the KPD was able to infiltrate the camp apparatus, the condition of the deportees improved, while ordinary German prisoners stole food from the prisoners and Polish and Ukrainian chauvinist organizations competed with the SS in the persecution of Jews and Russians.

Wrong about the apparent "good will" of German political prisoners, Himmler offered them freedom in October 1944 in exchange for an engagement in General Dirlewanger's SS Brigade. Dirlewanger found the idea of "fighting the Soviets with communists" ridiculous, and experience showed that he was right. Only 800 political prisoners agreed to join, and the result was catastrophic. In whole sections, 400 of them deserted a few months later, in the middle of the battle, putting the entire brigade in danger; a hundred of them managed to join the Red Army.⁸⁷ The affair had a precedent: earlier, prisoners who had finished their sentences (political and common rights) were transferred to the Wehrmacht's 999th disciplinary Division and assigned to the occupation of Greece. The Communists reconstituted the party organization there and plundered the division's stocks for the benefit of the communist *maquis* of the ELAS, the National Liberation Army of Greece. Several deserted without looking back and became partisans, like Gerhard Reinhardt, who was a captain in the ELAS.

⁸⁷ Cf. Christian Ingrao: *Les chasseurs noirs – La brigade Dirlewanger*, Édition Perrin, Paris, 2006, pp. 57 and 113.

The German communists established a clandestine organization in all camps. In Mauthausen, it was led by KPD deputy Franz Dahlem.⁸⁸ In Sachsenhausen in 1942, the Gestapoists attempted to strike the clandestine organization “blindly”: all prisoners who were members of the KPD and who held “civilian” positions were arrested, interrogated and sent to particularly deadly building sites. But they revealed nothing under torture, and the organization survived their loss. It was not until 1944 that the 200 snitches kept in the camp by the Gestapo enabled it to identify 160 members of the organization. Some of them were so tortured that they were carried on stretchers to the crematorium. On October 11, the 27 main defendants (including 3 KPD deputies) were shot, but by this date the organization had already been reorganized. In November 1944, the clandestine organization in Dora was affected: the SS arrested, tortured and murdered many communist cadres. Friedrich Pröll, who actually belonged to the leadership of the clandestine organization, was thrown into the dungeon. While waiting for torture; he got his last words out: “Don’t be afraid, tomorrow I will be dead and the dead no longer speak,” and committed suicide.⁸⁹ Dora’s organization was reorganized by Albert Kuntz. Arrested on March 6, 1933, he was sentenced to three years of forced labor but had never left the concentration camps. He was assassinated in 1945, along with Georg Thomas and Ludwig Szyczak, two other German Communists who had refused to hang escaped Soviet soldiers and were recaptured.

The communist underground organization in Buchenwald was the most developed and effective. By the spring of 1942, it had taken control of almost all the “civilian” functions of the camp. It saved the lives of many condemned to death. One of the procedures consisted of exchanging the identity of the condemned prisoner with that of an ordinary prisoner who had just died: the piece of skin tattooed with his number was removed from the condemned prisoner and the number of the deceased prisoner

⁸⁸ He had been political commissioner of the “Thälmann” Battalion and general political commissioner for all Germans fighting in Spain. He was also interned by the French and delivered by Vichy to the Gestapo. Dahlem survived the camp, becoming secretary (and head of the cadres) of the Party and responsible for the armed formations of the GDR (workers’ militia and people’s police) before the foundation of the National People’s Army (NVA).

⁸⁹ Cf. Hermann Langbein: *La Résistance dans les camps de concentration nationaux-socialistes 1938-1945*, Éditions Fayard, collection *Les nouvelles études historiques*, Paris, 1981, p. 151

was tattooed back on him. The clandestine organizations of Auschwitz and Mauthausen also succeeded in making such substitutions. Another procedure consisted in declaring the convict to be suffering from typhus and assigning him to the quarantine premises where the SS did not dare to enter. The Buchenwald organization succeeded in setting up the most highly developed medical system in the concentration camp world, fully equipped with equipment stolen from the SS; it ensured food solidarity for the sick and the Soviet prisoners of war deprived of food; it preserved the lives of party cadres. It set up an information service fed by a clandestine radio station that broadcast 26 issues of an information sheet and provided political-theoretical training for the militants.⁹⁰ It was at the origin of the creation of an International Committee (ILK) by helping to set up a clandestine organization by nationality (eleven national organizations were eventually members of the ILK). It achieved remarkable success in sabotaging the war production of factories employing deported labor. In Dora (which depended on Buchenwald and where the “V2” rockets were produced), 80 percent of the production was scrapped; at the Gustloff factory, production fell from 55,000 rifles to a few thousand with the beginning of concentration labor, and three quarters of the production was sent back by the Wehrmacht as unusable. The plan was to produce 10,000 pistols per month, but production remained “on trial” for two years, and in the meantime an incredible amount of raw materials and energy was deliberately wasted.⁹¹ The clandestine organization set up a military branch, the International Military Organization (IMO), with the prospect of an armed insurgency. At the time of the insurgency, the IMO had 91 rifles with 2,500 rounds of ammunition, a machine gun with 2,000 rounds of ammunition, 20 handguns, 200 Molotov cocktails, hand grenades, knives, shears, etc. In order to protect the secrecy of all this activity, it developed espionage of the SS authorities to the highest degree and discreetly liquidated many snitches.

⁹⁰ Cf. Hermann Langbein: *La résistance dans les camps de concentration nationaux-socialistes* (op. cit.), pp. 144-145. This activity occurred in all the camps: at Ravensbrück, they collectively studied *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik)*; at Sachsenhausen, it was notably Stalin’s work, *Principles of Leninism*, and so on.

⁹¹ Cf. *Sur la résistance dans les KZs et les camps d’extermination du fascisme nazi*, special number (no. 62) of *Gegen die Strömung*, May 1993.

The clandestine organizations in the camps were in contact with the Party. Organizations from neighboring towns sent political material, food and sometimes weapons to the camps. In Dachau, former camp inmate, Georg Scherer, headed a local KPD organization that prepared the armed release of prisoners. In Sachsenhausen, the escape of cadres was organized for the benefit of the KPD organization in Berlin. This was the case of the inter-brigadist Herbert Tschäpe, who escaped in April 1944, and Rudi Wunderlich and Richard Schmeink, who escaped in June 1944. The proximity of the Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen concentration complex to Berlin offered numerous possibilities for connections with the clandestine KPD. The 300 testimonies of French deportees collected by the *Amicale d'Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen* evoke on numerous occasions the complicity of Berlin workers with the deportees put to work in their factories.⁹² While the simple act of sharing a snack led German civilians into concentration camps, several of them passed on not only food but also the Communist underground press to the prisoners. In addition, they turned a blind eye to the sabotage of German and foreign deportees, or even sabotaged themselves. They were a minority, of course, but a sufficiently representative minority to have marked the memory of many French deportees, and to have contributed to the failure of the production of the Heinkel 177 bomber. Out of the 120 planes built in 1943, none was usable...

The KPD organized several ceremonies in the camps to honor its assassinated leaders. On two occasions, these ceremonies had tragic consequences. On August 18, 1944, after eleven years of torture, the SS murdered Ernst Thälmann in the basement of the Buchenwald crematorium.⁹³ His prestige was such that they blamed his death on an American bombing raid in the hope of provoking dissension between communists

⁹² Cf. *Amicale d'Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen*, *Sachso*, Éditions Terre humaine, Paris, 1982.

⁹³ In 1947, an American military tribunal sentenced SS non-commissioned officer Wolfgang Otto to 20 years of hard labor for having killed Ernst Thälmann and fifty other detainees with his own hands, for having tortured many detainees, and for having been part of the Kommando 99 that murdered thousands of Soviet prisoners of war in Buchenwald with bullets to the head. Five years later, Wolfgang Otto was free and became a teacher in a private school in the FRG. The 2nd chamber of the Cologne regional court made any new proceedings against him impossible by denying the status of murder for Thälmann's execution: "the leader of the KPD being able to expect the end that was his, ordered by reasons of the state."

and pro-Western opponents. A secret ceremony of homage was organized in Buchenwald itself. A snitch managed to catch it by surprise and the Gestapo arrested several leaders of the organization, including KPD leader Robert Siewert. All of them resisted terrible torture and the secrets of the clandestine organization were preserved. Another informer denounced the ceremony of homage to KPD deputy Lambert Horn, who died in Saschenhausen on June 2, 1939 (the communists of the camp had marched in front of his body one after the other), and there too, the repression was bloody.

In the last days of the camp, the Buchenwald organization succeeded in preventing the departure of 21,000 prisoners on the “death marches” and finally, on April 11, 1945, triggered an armed insurrection. By the time the soldiers of the US Third Army arrived in Buchenwald, the 850 IMO fighters had already liberated the camp in a brief but violent fight against the demoralized and rapidly disbanded SS. 150 SS guards had been captured, 1,500 rifles, 180 Panzerfaust and 20 machine guns recovered. The first Allied officer to enter Buchenwald testified:

We enter the camp: no trace of fighting; there is practically no SS resistance.... Here and there, in the camp, we see some men who have already lost the appearance of political deportees. They carry grenades hanging from their belts, rifles, Panzerfaust; they give the impression of wanting to constitute a revolutionary force in the camp.⁹⁴

An insurrection plan had also been drawn up at Mauthausen: the clandestine organization had prepared its shock groups armed with a machine pistol, twenty handguns, a few dozen grenades, Molotov cocktails, truncheons and knives. The escape of the SS guards rendered the plan null and void. However, the combat groups of the clandestine organization recovered other weapons and for a few days they fired against Hitler’s troops retreating in the region.

⁹⁴ Cf. David Rousset: *Les jours de notre mort*, Union Générale d’Édition, collection 10/18, tome 3, Paris, 1974, p. 423. Testimony of Jean Baptiste Lefebvre, liaison officer at the 76th US Infantry Division.



The punishment of political prisoners in Buchenwald by SS executioner Martin Sommer.



The Buchenwald insurgents (with American soldiers and SS prisoners) after the camp's self-liberation.

Chapter 8

Lessons of Resistance, Reasons for Denial

*Show yourselves
Just for an instant, you
Unknown men; you can cover your face while we
Utter our thanks.*⁹⁵

The value of the alleged denazification of the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany) can be measured by the fact that, after the war, none of the judges had to account for a single one of the thousands of death sentences for opponents they had pronounced between 1933 and 1945... Whereas any jurist who had collaborated in the elaboration or application of the Third Reich legislation was excluded from the judiciary in East Germany, by 1955, 1,310 lawyers from the Nazi “special courts” had returned to service in the West German courts. These “special courts” alone had handed down more than 50,000 death sentences. Set up in March 1933, they were placed outside public jurisdiction in order to “totally exterminate the opponents of the Third Reich.” This complacency of the FRG went very far. For example, Dr. Erich Anger, former prosecutor at the Leipzig “special court,” had been found guilty of multiple legal assassinations and sentenced by an East German court in 1945. When he was released from prison, he fled to the FRG and was appointed... prosecutor in Essen.⁹⁶ One can imagine how these magistrates judged their former accomplices: they transformed the denazification of the FRG into a masquerade. There were only 5,234 convictions of Nazi murderers in the FRG, and these convictions were equivalent to an average of ten minutes in prison per person murdered. In 1965, the FRG passed an outright amnesty law. It was announced by Federal President Heinrich Lübke. Heinrich Lübke was a former employee of the Gestapo in Stettin and the former boss of the concentration labor in Peenemünde and Leau, a dependency of Buchenwald.

⁹⁵ Bertolt Brecht: excerpt from the “Praise of Illegal Activity,” from the play *The Decision* (translation by John Willett).

⁹⁶ Cf. *Le Livre brun: Les criminels de guerre et nazis en Allemagne occidentale*, published by the National Council of the National Democratic Front of Germany and the Documentation Center of the National Archives of the GDR, Zeit im Bild Verlag, Dresden, 1965. This dossier contains hundreds of biographies of FRG leaders with particularly busy Nazi pasts.

Reporters and historians as well as military personnel and jurists benefited from this same treatment. All of them remained at their posts. It is not surprising that West German historiography has tried hard to conceal the communist resistance in order to nourish the thesis that “we were all abused by Hitler/were victims of Hitler.”⁹⁷ While several recent papers describe this resistance facet by facet, region by region, the general tone is one of denial. For example, the catalog of the exhibition organized by the Bundestag in the Reichstag on the history of Germany devotes thirty lines to the conspirators of July 20 and a single line to the resistance: “social democratic and communist cells and clergymen.”⁹⁸

Putting these three resistances on the same level is already a sham: only the communist resistance embraced all possible forms of struggle (propaganda, sabotage, guerrilla warfare, espionage, union struggle, etc.). It is the only one to have fought from the first to the last day of the Third Reich, and to have extended its action to the whole of Germany (even in the camps and in the army). Finally, it is the only one to have really weakened the Nazi war machine. Christians and socialists most often opposed individually or within a small circle of close relatives. As for the famous conspiracy of July 20, 1944, it was ambiguous to say the least. Behind the handsome figure of Colonel von Stauffenberg, the conspirator who placed the bomb against Hitler, who was a true anti-fascist patriot, there were soldiers, reactionary politicians and capitalists who until then had faithfully followed Hitler, and who had sometimes directly contributed to putting him in power. Half of the July 20 conspirators were closely associated with the Nazi project, and what they ultimately blamed Hitler for was failure, and leading Germany to defeat and a Soviet revolution. Their documents explicitly mention this fear: “The time has come to carry out this project [the coup] because the supreme moments are coming to an end. Otherwise, we will have to face a second November 1918 revolution.” The

⁹⁷ Detlev Peukert: *Die KPD im Widerstand: Verfolgung und Untergrundarbeit an Rhein und Ruhr 1933 bis 1945*, Peter Hammer Verlag, Wuppertal, 1980; Bernd Kaufmann, Eckhard Reisener, Dieter Schwips, Henri Walther: *Der Nachrichtendienst der KPD 1919-1937*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1993; Nikolaus Brauns: *Schaffi Rote Hilfe ! Geschichte und Aktivitäten der proletarischen Hilfsorganisation für politische Gefangene in Deutschland (1919-1938)*, Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, Bonn, 2003; and some others.

⁹⁸ *Interrogeons l'histoire de l'Allemagne – Les idées, les forces, les décisions de la fin du 18e siècle à nos jours. Une exposition d'histoire dans l'édifice du Reichstag, à Berlin*, 4th french edition, Deutsche Bundestag, Referat Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Bonn 1992, p. 362.

emissaries of the conspirators promised the Westerners that they would withdraw all their units from the West and send them to the Eastern front. They had even planned to welcome American airborne divisions to Berlin as soon as they had succeeded in their coup, so that the city would not be taken by the Soviet Army. These proposals were made directly in Switzerland to Allen Dulles, head of the US secret service in Europe. In this way the plotters hoped to achieve a separate peace with the Western capitalist powers and thus save what could be saved from imperialist and militaristic Germany. The writings of the head of the conspiracy, Carl Goerdeler, are revealing. In 1943, he still claimed the 1914 borders (including Alsace, Lorraine, Silesia, etc.) “increased by the integration of Austria and the Sudetenland.” The anti-communist crusade was at the heart of the project:

I can predict that a Germany which, in addition to an honest and competent military leadership, will have given itself [with the coup] a suitable—let’s just say it—political leadership, will see the end of the air war [i.e., the Anglo-American bombings] within 48 hours. The efforts that will follow can be devoted to the realization of a détente with the West, which will make possible the concentration of all the warlike power of the German people in the East.

Goerdeler considered that by allying itself with Japan, Germany committed “a betrayal of the interests of the peoples of the white race.”⁹⁹ The selfish motives of these “resistance fighters” cherished by Western historiography were manifested one last time in the spirit with which the majority of them denounced each other in the hope of saving their own skins.

The obscuration of the German communist resistance is found in the French-language bibliography: there has never been a paper in French on the subject, except for a brochure once published... in the GDR. There are only a handful of books in French focusing on particular aspects of German antifascist resistance in France and Belgium, and a few books dealing with German resistance “in general,” which reserve the corresponding

⁹⁹ Cf. the appendices of Gerhard Ritter’s book: *Échec au dictateur – Histoire de la Résistance allemande* (op. cit.) pp. 309, 324-325, and 327-328.

portion for communists.¹⁰⁰ For the rest, one will find mention of communist resistance only in books dealing with related subjects (Soviet espionage, concentration camps, Jewish resistance, the Gestapo, the Spanish War, etc.). Against this scarcity, one can contrast the incredible number of books, articles, television programs and even films devoted to the plotters of July 20, 1944, and to the small group of the “White Rose” composed, it must be recalled, of a handful of students and their philosophy teacher.

Contemporary ideological stakes must be important if the resistance of tens of thousands of communists to Hitlerism is to be concealed in this way.

This issue is not mysterious: not a day goes by without an article or a program attempting to substantiate the myth of the “twin brothers” communism-fascism.¹⁰¹ Even perceived as a distant threat, communism remains the Enemy for a bourgeoisie that yesterday put Hitler in power to protect itself from “Bolshevism” and today stands as the champion of anti-fascism. In order to arrange things this way in the social consciousness, a vast undertaking of historical revisionism was necessary: to make the bourgeoisie look like antifascists and the communists look like the Nazis’ alter ego. The success of the ideological concept of “totalitarianism,” forged for the occasion, gives the measure of this propaganda, as does the success of anti-communist myths repeated ad nauseam.

¹⁰⁰ The works of Gilbert Badia, as we have seen, are the only exception. Among the recent works are Gilbert Merlio’s *Les Résistance allemandes à Hitler* (op. cit.), which devotes twenty pages out of 453 to the communist resistance (pp. 49-69) and 25 pages to the “White Rose” (pp. 214-238), and Barabar Koehn’s *La résistance allemande contre Hitler 1933-1945*, Presses Universitaires de France, collection Politique d’aujourd’hui, Paris, 2003, p. 59. Barbara Koehn’s absurd segmentation into sociological chapters (“the resistance of the workers,” “the resistance of the youth,” etc.) allows her to dispense with the KPD resistance in less than 10 pages (from page 50 to page 60) and as much for the “White Rose” (from page 82 to page 92). In her 398-page book, Barbara Koehn concedes two more pages to the Young Communists and six to the National Committee for a Free Germany... She cheerfully peddles the most improbable gossip since it serves her militant anticommunism (Münzenberg eliminated by the NVKD, John Scheer denounced to the Gestapo by Ulbricht, Stalin ready for an armistice with Hitler in 1943, etc.). When it stopped denouncing the misdeeds of Stalin and the “Soviet soldier” (sic), it was to ascribe to the conspirators of July 20, the objective of “the re-establishment of the supremacy of the law...”

¹⁰¹ To this we owe this pearl of François-Georges Dreyfus: “Resistance to Nazism was limited, just as resistance to communism was weak in the GDR from 1953 to 1989, and for practically the same reasons,” *Le IIIe Reich* (op. cit.), p. 241. Unsurprisingly, this book is dedicated to François Furet...

Take, for example, the myth of the “transition” from the KPD to the NSDAP. The election results prior to Hitler’s seizure of power show that, despite the Nazi attempts to mobilize the industrial proletariat, the NSDAP’s progress was achieved by absorbing the electorate of the two liberal parties representing the peasantry and the middle class, by mobilizing the regular abstainers and the new voters—and not at the expense of the KPD.¹⁰² The KPD even grew to the point of having a record 100 deputies in the November 1932 elections.

The failure of the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization (NSBO) testifies to the lack of Nazi presence in the German working class; in the spring of 1933, elections to the work councils gave the Nazis only 11.7 percent of the vote. Workers were the only social group whose percentage of Nazi party members was lower than its percentage in the total population. The NSBO was paralyzed by the privileged links between the Nazi party leadership and German big capital: in April 1933, Rudolf Hess had forbidden any NSBO demonstration against a private company, industrial firm or bank without the authorization of the NSDAP.

The Confidential Guidelines for the Fulfillment of our Struggle in the Decisive Year 1932 against Corporate Marxism insist that the NSBO is not a trade union, that it does not give any financial support to the strikers. It reads:

The noblest task of the National Socialists in the factories is the struggle for our movement and for the annihilation of the enemy. No matter in what form the enemy comes to us—whether it is the KPD, the RGO [Communist Trade Union] or the Social Democratic and Christian Semi-Marxist Trade Unions that follow them—our struggle concerns all these formations.... [E]very National Socialist is furthermore obliged to establish the identity of every Marxist delegate in the company, regardless of its nuance, and to provide his or her exact address. Whenever possible, he must try to obtain a photograph of these people.... If the boss is a member of our party, he has the right to be constantly informed.... **It is also import-**

¹⁰² Cf. Georges Goriely, *1933: Hitler prend le pouvoir*, Éditions Complexe, Bruxelles, 1982, (and particularly the picture of the election results, p. 198).

ant to point out to our fellow bosses that, in the face of possible indispensable wage cuts, the National Socialist personnel will show a completely different understanding of the economic situation than personnel excited by Marxists.¹⁰³

After the burning of the Reichstag, the regime satisfied all the demands of the capitalists: any incitement to strike was punishable by one month to three years in prison; employees were not allowed to change employers, but the authorities could move them without taking into account their wishes and without them keeping the wages of their previous jobs, the old collective agreements were replaced by wages fixed by the company managers, etc. The NSBO's role was to supervise the German worker and, at no time, to represent his interests. Those who wanted to do some semblance of union work were thrown into concentration camps for "seeking to perpetuate the class struggle under the auspices of National Socialism." Goering instructed the police "to act energetically against those members of the enterprise cells who have not yet understood the true character of the Third Reich." It could not have been put better.¹⁰⁴

The resistance of the German people to Hitlerism was less than the KPD had hoped for. The hope for a general anti-Hitler insurrection was very high among the Communists, especially when the defeat of the Third Reich was evident. This hope was based on the bankruptcy of the regime, the vertiginous degradation of the living conditions of the masses (bombed cities, 60-hour minimum work week, famine), and the historical precedent of 1918. The military dispositions of the KPD organizations (even those operating in the concentration camps) were conceived in the perspective of this popular uprising that never took place.

The fault certainly does not lie with the communist resistance, which was vast, deep and heroic.

This resistance demonstrates that, whatever the scale and ferocity of the repression, the experience of struggle and organization of the commu-

¹⁰³ Cf. Kurt Gossweiler, *Hitler, l'irrésistible ascension – Essais sur le fascisme*, Éditions Aden, Bruxelles, 2006, pp. 130-131. Kurt Gossweiler deserted the Wehrmacht in March '43 to join the Soviet ranks. At the end of the war, he began a scientific career in the GDR at the Institute for German History.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Daniel Guérin: *Sur le fascisme II: Fascisme et grand capital*, François Maspero, Petite collection, Paris, 1971, p. 182.

nist movement gives revolutionaries the methods to get through the worst ordeals—provided they show sufficient determination. “The worst enemy of the Party is not the Gestapo, it is panic,” Erich Wollweber used to say. The worst chains are those which the oppressor forges in the heads of the oppressed. The anti-Nazi resistance of the KPD, carried out in inconceivable difficulties and at the cost of unheard-of sacrifices, is not only a page of glory but also a valuable experience for the communist movement. This is more than enough to explain the wretched lies of official history written about it.

East German Bibliography

All the iconography (and much of the documentation) in this book comes from the following memorial books, all published in the German Democratic Republic:

- *Zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands—Ein Auswahl von Materialien und Dokumenten aus den Jahren 1914-1946*, Herausgegeben von Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Institut beim Zentralkomitee der SED, Dietz Verlag, Berlin (DDR), 1955.
- *Zur Geschichte der deutschen antifaschistischen Widerstandsbewegung 1933 bis 1945, Ein Auswahl von Materialien, Berichten und Dokumenten*, Verlag des Ministeriums für Nationale Verteidigung, Berlin (DDR), 1957.
- Schaul Dora (Zusammengestellt und bearbeitet von): *Résistance—Erinnerungen deutscher Antifaschisten*, Herausgegeben von Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der SED, Dietz Verlag, Berlin (DDR), 1973.
- Pech Karlheinz: *An der Seite der Résistance—Die Bewegung “Freies Deutschland” für den Westen in Frankreich (1943-1945)*, Militärverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin (DDR), 1974.
- *Geschichte der Militärpolitik der KPD (1918-1945)*, Militärverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin (DDR), 1987.

Appendix 1

Conversation Between M.
Abramowicz and T. Derbent
on *The German Communist
Resistance*

This interview between Manuel Abramowicz and T. Derbent was published in the Belgian monthly *Le Journal du Mardi* of June 2008 and on *RésistanceS*, web-journal of the Belgian *Observatory of the Extreme Right*, on February 7, 2009.

According to you, the communist resistance was the broadest, most powerful and most effective German resistance against the Nazi dictatorship.

Without a doubt. The other resistances could at best only make propaganda and hide outlaws, and this within small circles of close relatives. The resistance organized by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) organized the sabotage of the war economy in a big way. Communist dockworkers mined and sank dozens of ships! This resistance gave anti-fascist propaganda an unprecedented scale; in 1936, for example, the Gestapo, the political police of the Nazi regime, seized more than one and a half million communist newspapers, leaflets and brochures. And that was just the material seized. The material produced was even more important! The KPD ensured the escape and exfiltration of wanted antifascists, its militants fought by the thousands in the *maquis* of the occupied countries, its clandestine agents provided invaluable strategic information to the Soviet intelligence services, its deportees organized and, in the case of the Buchenwald concentration camp, succeeded in an armed uprising, etc. The KPD was the only one to have been involved in the war.

Several books and academic seminars have examined the German anti-Nazi resistance. Why did you focus your research on communist resistance, for which you do not hide your admiration?

It was a kind of accident! It was while collecting material for another subject—the influence of the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz on the leadership of the underground military apparatus of the KPD—that I discovered a research center in Zurich that had unpublished documents on this resistance. I was struck by the discrepancy between the importance of this resistance and its absence, or even its negation, in Western historiography. For example, countless books, articles and films have been devoted to the handful of Catholic students who made up the “White Rose,” but the tens of thousands of communists who resisted, most

often at the cost of an atrocious death, have been wiped off the shelves of history. Yesterday they were sacrificed to the anti-communist propaganda of the Cold War, today to the fetish thesis of the dominant ideology: “communism = fascism.” In order to do so, French-speaking authors had only to recycle the production of a West German university body composed, in its immense majority, of the minions of the Nazi university.

German communist resistance would thus have been a taboo subject in Western Europe. But you refer to East German sources. These could just as easily be questioned, considered “ideologically marked.”

I have cross-checked these sources, as far as possible, with Western historiography, and they have never proved to be dubious. The sources of East German works do not pose a real problem. They are direct sources. In the early 1960s, the USSR handed over to the GDR the bulk of the archives seized by the Red Army during the capture of Berlin in 1945. These archives are very rich: reports of the Gestapo, files of the Nazi emergency courts....

What is sometimes problematic is the work that East German historians have done on the basis of these sources. They wanted to demonstrate that the KPD continued to function as a clandestine party directly led by its central committee. However, this is only partially true: many cells were reconstituted without any link to the party apparatus, let alone to the central committee in exile. And while the German communist resistance is very diverse in its forms of action, it is remarkably coherent from a political point of view. The Leninist-Stalinist functioning of the KPD meant that the cells cut off from the party did not try to develop their own political and strategic line, but worked to apply the party line. This induced a lack of flexibility but allowed the communist movement to get through this terrible ordeal while maintaining its coherence.

East German historians are also too discreet about the “line struggles” that emerged in the Party. It is known that the militants sometimes found the material and directives sent to the Reich by the KPD’s exiled apparatus to be unsuitable, because they were based on the conviction that the Nazi regime would soon collapse under the weight of popular discontent. This contradiction has been widely dealt with—and sometimes exaggerated—by militant anti-Stalinists, be they historians, such as Pierre

Broué in his *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste*, or novelists, such as Arthur Koestler in his book *Le Zéro et l'infini* (*Darkness at Noon*). It is less well known that the transition from the “class against class” line to the “popular front” line was not made without reluctance, so great was the resentment of the communist militants towards the social democrats who had totally capitulated to the Hitlerite force. But these contradictions should not be overestimated. The dominant note remains the remarkable coherence of this resistance.

After the Nazis came to power in January 1933, the KPD sent party cadres to infiltrate various state bodies. Was the “communist infiltration” real, or were some of these “spies” ultimately defectors, adhering to Nazism out of conviction? Did the KPD measure this risk?

There were two types of infiltration. The KPD was for a time tempted by the “mass” infiltration of basic organs of the new regime to subvert them. For example, since the unions were banned, it was a question of joining and being active in the Labor Front, the unique professional organization set up by the Nazis, to carry out crypto-union work. This so-called “Trojan Horse” tactic was justified from a doctrinal point of view by referring to Lenin’s instructions on the use of tsarist unions. But this tactic—which had not been adopted without discussion—failed due to the repression and was quickly abandoned.

For the second type of infiltration, the one you mention, I have not found any document relating to a “risk analysis” or dealing with pseudo infiltrations that would have proved to be real. On the other hand, I did find several examples of the remarkable work done by these false defectors. For example, Horst Heilmann, who was able to infiltrate even the decryption service of the Nazi intelligence services and communicated crucial information to the Soviet General Staff.

To finish with the question of defectors, it is known that of the 422 principal leaders of the KPD, only one gave up the struggle and accepted a position in the new regime. This happened after his exclusion from the KPD for, as the formula of the time was, “cowardice before the class enemy.” This is to be compared with the very numerous adhesions of right-wing, center and social-democratic politicians to Hitler’s “new order.” This also shows who was really close to fascism and who was its irreducible enemy.

Do you have other study projects?

My real research topic is the influence of Clausewitz's theories on revolutionary strategies from Engels to Giap to Lenin. I've been working on it again because it's far from being exhausted. The Yugoslav communist leader Tito studied Clausewitz in Moscow in 1934. I am looking for material that will allow me to examine the influence of this study on the partisan war in Yugoslavia during the last World War.

Appendix 2

Interview Between J. Kmiecik
and T. Derbent on *The German
Communist Resistance*

This interview between Jacques Kmieciak and T. Derbent was published in No. 947 of the French northern weekly *Liberté 62* on January 7, 2011.

How did the idea of writing on the subject come about? To make up for a historiographical deficiency? To fight a voluntary obscuration? To produce a tool for the ideological struggle?

I have been working for years on the influence of Clausewitz's theories on revolutionary thinkers and strategists such as Lenin and Giap. While researching Clausewitz's influence on the KPD paramilitary apparatus in the 1920s and 1930s, I came across an archive in Switzerland that contained documents on the clandestine struggle of the German communists. Dealing with the German anti-Nazi resistance was not one of my projects (it rather distracted me from it) so I approached others with the idea. Nobody gave me a concrete answer, so I set to work on it, motivated by the desire to repair the oblivion—worse still, the denial—from which this resistance suffers.

You rely on bibliographical sources that you synthesize. Have you consulted archives or collected testimonies?

My work is not exhaustive, I just wanted to give a good idea of the extent and value of this resistance. To do this, I just had to dig into the archive collection I was telling you about. As it contained a lot of East German research, in order to prevent [the allegation of] “bad trials,” I only retained the facts corroborated by Western historiography. For if Western historiography denies the existence of a true German communist resistance, this same historiography conceals, in the form of elemental dust scattered over hundreds of books, all evidence to the contrary.

Talk about denial. In what way did Western historiography have (an) interest in minimizing or obscuring communist resistance to Hitler?

Western historiography in general had no interest in the subject. It did not do any research. It simply re-submitted the West German works, which were very interested in the wrong sense of the word. The FRG was never denazified. If the direct participants and promoters of the Holocaust were judged, all the Nazi framing of German society remained in place.

The post-war West German university consisted of the minions of the Nazi university, and for them denying or disqualifying resistance was a means of justifying their complicity. It had to be implied that there was no other choice. The communist resistance fighters were not the only ones under attack. Willy Brandt, a member of a left-wing socialist party (the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei), had to flee the Third Reich and was granted political asylum in Norway, then Norwegian nationality. It was under Norwegian uniform that he returned to Berlin in 1945, where he regained German nationality and began a career in social democracy that would lead him to the Berlin City Hall, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and finally to the Chancellery. Well, this return to Berlin under the Norwegian uniform was often and harshly criticized. If a Willy Brandt could have been called a “traitor to the German homeland” in the middle of the Cold War, you can imagine how people talked about the communist resistance fighters... Günther Weisenborn explains this very well, his book on the anti-Nazi resistance, *Der lautlose Aufstand (The Silent Rebellion)*, published in 1953, appeared in an incredibly hostile environment.

You are quoting from Swiss archives. Can you tell me more? What are they? Where do they come from?

It's a lot of East German material saved from oblivion and from being crushed by activists running a non-institutional documentation center.

What was the state of historiography in the GDR on the subject?

Very precise, very meticulous. East German historiography cannot be taken to be at fault on one fact. It is only problematic in its “reading,” in its interpretation of the facts it describes, in the way it puts one fact in the foreground and another in the background, etc. It thus has a clear tendency to overestimate the organizational coherence of the communist resistance, whereas in reality many party organizations were rebuilt clandestinely and functioned without any direct link to the Central Committee in exile.

Anti-communist repression survived the fall of Hitler. Can you say a few words on the subject?

It starts early! In April-June 1945, all over Germany, popular anti-fascist committees arose, sometimes obtaining the capitulation of the military in their localities. There were at least 130 of them, mainly communists, but also other democrats. They arrested the notorious Nazis, took care of the supply, etc. In the East, they served as a base for the new municipalities, while in the West, all political activity was quickly prohibited.... The KPD was reconstituted and soon had 350,000 members in the western zone. In the first elections, it had directly elected representatives and ministries in several Länder!¹⁰⁵ But it was confronted with an anti-communist offensive of unprecedented strength, benefiting from circumstances such as the Berlin blockade and the Marshall Plan. And the persecutions began: **In 1948, a campaign against the constitution of a separate state in West Germany (which would collect one million signatures in the West) was banned.**

In 1949, the KPD was already very weakened, but it remained influential in business and was successful in its mobilization against the rearmament of Germany. **The government prohibited a petition calling for a referendum on rearmament: 7,000 West German communists are arrested in 1951 for having signed this petition. In 1951, a law criminalized a large part of communist activities, and in 1956 the Federal Constitutional Court declared the KPD “unconstitutional” and ordered its dissolution. In 1968, the ban was lifted and the DKP was founded, but the FRG then banned members of a party “hostile to the constitution” from becoming civil servants: communists were directly targeted.**

Let's go back to your book. How was it received?

The book was very well received. A historian reproached me for not having followed all the rules of the art, but without questioning what I wrote. Well, then I'm not a historian and I don't pretend to be one. If I wrote this book, it is precisely because historians had not done their job by doing it themselves. The only negative criticism was written by a French academic who writes often for the *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, Georges Ubbiali.

¹⁰⁵ A Länder is a German State in the FRG.—Ed.

What were his criticisms about?

Again, not on the content of my book. Ubbiali doesn't really account for my work in his criticism: he seized an opportunity to pronounce the classic indictment of Stalin. When I speak of the German Communists who warned the Soviets of the imminent attack on the USSR, Ubbiali reproaches me for not stressing that Stalin did not take these warnings into account, just as he reproaches me for considering the German Communists who worked with the Soviet intelligence services as "resistant."

During a meeting in a bookstore, the moderator reproached me (amicably this time) for having announced by my title a "communist resistance" when it was only a question of the resistance of the "Stalinist KPD."

Was there communist resistance outside the KPD?

There certainly was. Much more tenuous, much less effective, but real. The KPDO (the KPD/Opposition), which had split from the KPD in 1928, after '33, had a leadership in exile and an internal leadership: the Berlin Committee, which managed to maintain activity until 1937. In 1936-37, the Gestapo completed the liquidation of the last opposition communist, anarcho-syndicalist and Trotskyist groups.

How can this work of "rehabilitating" communist resistance in Germany serve the labor movement today?

The workers' movement is confronted with the dominant discourse which asserts that the present system is the only possible one. The regime's intelligentsia must therefore disqualify other experiences, and to do so it is struggling to impose as a received idea the equivalence "communism = Nazism." However, the book shows that the KPD is the only political party to have resisted: all the other parties capitulated or integrated into the Hitler regime. Another thing: since the Leninist type of organization experienced many dysfunctions (starting with a lack of internal democracy), some would like to make it an absolute counter-model. However, the KPD's experience shows that when faced with an enemy determined to break up the workers' movement, (that is, whenever the class struggle reaches a certain level of development), this type of organization is the only one that can withstand the shock.

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