

# NATIONAL BOLSHEVISM IN WEIMAR GERMANY

*Alliance of Political Extremes Against Democracy*

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THE share which both the nationalist right and the Communist left had in bringing about the downfall of Weimar democracy has been generally recognized by students of German history. But the equally common view that these forces of extremism independently carried on their agitation against the Republic needs revision. While these movements seemingly represented the two poles of the political spectrum, in actuality they had considerable attraction for each other. As a matter of fact, at certain crucial moments during the 1920s this attraction culminated in serious attempts to achieve a working alliance and an ideological synthesis. This startling rapprochement between right and left, known in Germany as National Bolshevism, was facilitated by the friendly relations between democratic Germany and Communist Russia after World War I.

Since National Bolshevism had adherents among both extremes of the German political scene, it never really emerged as one well defined doctrine with the same meaning for all its advocates. It always remained a series of nebulous generalities to which each side gave its own interpretation, designed to serve its particular interests. The Communists resorted to National Bolshevism in order to exploit the nationalistic sentiment so widespread in Germany; nationalists espoused it to enlist the socialist masses for their program of liberation from Versailles and imperialist expansion. The common ground was their conviction that each stood to benefit from an alliance between the two "proletarian nations," Russia and Germany, against the capitalist West.

## I

The sense of outrage against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles gave rise to the first phase of National Bolshevism. It appeared within Communist ranks primarily because of Soviet Russia's fear that the Versailles settlement would enable the West to extend its supremacy over Germany. In Moscow in March 1919 the First Congress of the Communist International denounced the Allies for planning to turn the Germans into "miserable starving slaves of Entente capital." The design of the "allied imperialists," the Comintern announced, was to force Germany into "a kind of Holy Alliance of capitalists against the workers' revolution." To arouse mass sentiment against these plans, the Communist International coined the slogans: "Long live the revolt of the workers against their oppressors! Down with the Versailles peace, down with the new Brest!"<sup>1</sup> In Germany this vehement rejection of Versailles formed the cornerstone of the Communist party's struggle against the West and its advocacy of an alliance with Soviet Russia—a constant theme throughout the life of the Weimar Republic.

A small group of militants within the German Communist Party (KPD) soon expressed the anti-Western line in distinctly nationalistic terms. The leading spokesmen for this faction were two Hamburg intellectuals, Heinrich Laufenberg and Fritz Wolffheim (both were subsequently expelled from the party for their syndicalist views, and in April 1920 were instrumental in forming the German Communist Workers Party, or KAPD). In a pamphlet written in November 1919<sup>2</sup> they held "blatant treason" responsible for Germany's disaster. Resorting to the "stab in the back" charge, later a prominent feature of Nazi propaganda, they argued that Germany had not really been completely crushed on the battlefield. Rather, Germany's defeat had been sealed by "politicians" who, fearful above all of an armed proletariat, had

<sup>1</sup> *The Communist International*, vol. 1 (1919) pp. 118, 121, 162.

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Laufenberg and Fritz Wolffheim, *Revolutionärer Volkskrieg oder konterrevolutionärer Bürgerkrieg?* (Hamburg 1920).

succumbed to the West. Traitors had accepted the dishonorable terms of the Allies, surrendered German territory to the "merciless imperialists," and brought about the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent victims by starvation. Germany's economy now faced the danger of being transformed into an object of exploitation by international finance capital. Her workers were on the verge of being converted into coolies and slaves.

Germany could be extricated from her overpowering misery, thought Laufenberg and Wolffheim, only if through revolution she were converted into a proletarian state—for bourgeois society had proved itself incapable of coping with the national question. "The smashing of the capitalist state and its ruling class is the precondition for the marshaling of all national energies against the imperialism of the foreign enemy" (p. 10). Such a total mobilization of the German people, adopted earlier, might well have enabled Germany to resist the imposition of the Versailles Treaty. Now it would result in national solidarity, the necessary condition for "the breaking of Germany's chains and the creation of a new society. Only the proletarian dictatorship, the soviet rule . . . can achieve this goal" (p. 9). In addition, the workers' state would need an alliance with Russia to wage a successful struggle of liberation against Western imperialism. Such collaboration they considered eminently feasible, since Russia needed German technical skills to establish socialism fully.

For the purpose of defending the victorious revolution, of regaining the lost territories, and of eliminating all "imperialist buffer states," Germany, they urged, ought to create a new People's Army. "The classless nation has no interest in imperialist conquest, since it cannot tolerate the exploitation of foreign countries. Politically it will therefore always remain on the defensive, but, of course, this does not rule out the use of a military offensive for purposes of protection."<sup>3</sup>

The official Communist leadership rejected the National Bol-

<sup>3</sup> Otto Lindemann, with the collaboration of Heinrich Laufenberg and Fritz Wolffheim, *Das revolutionäre Heer* (Hamburg 1920) p. 27.

shevism of Laufenberg and Wolffheim. In an ambiguously phrased statement Lenin, writing on "left-wing Communism,"<sup>4</sup> referred to their views as "preposterous absurdities," and called it "stupidity and not revolutionariness" to advocate "absolutely, unconditionally and immediately . . . liberation from the Versailles Peace." The demands of the world revolution must be the primary consideration in determining the strategy against Western imperialism. In view of Germany's military collapse, actual warfare against the Entente would endanger not only the revolution in Germany but also the "international Soviet movement." It was a crime to "accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy and not to us." Implicit in his argument was the fear that a further defeat of Germany would bring "the imperialists of France, England, etc." to the very borders of Russia.

Karl Radek, Russia's foremost expert on German affairs, leveled a more forthright attack on the two Hamburg National Bolsheviks.<sup>5</sup> He bluntly admitted that the security of Soviet Russia had to be the paramount concern in the formulation of Communist foreign policy. As a devastated country, Russia, the isolated bastion of socialism, had to be given a breathing spell. Furthermore, both Germany and Russia had a vital interest in initiating trade relations with the Anglo-Saxon countries, rather than in waging war against them. Should war break out, however, the German workers, Radek argued, would surely be betrayed by their own ruling class. The German bourgeoisie, interested primarily in maintaining its class privileges, undoubtedly preferred occupation by the Entente to a soviet dictatorship. The invaders might confiscate part of their profits, the revolution everything. The successful conduct of hostilities would therefore require the complete suppression of the treacherous bourgeoisie instead of the proclamation of a *Burgfrieden* (suspension of party

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "'Left Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder," in *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow 1947) p. 614.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Radek, *Die auswärtige Politik des deutschen Kommunismus und der Hamburger Nationale Bolschewismus* (Vienna n.d.).

strife), as Laufenberg and Wolffheim so naively advocated. The German working class would have to fight against "Entente capital" in alliance with the international proletariat and not with the German bourgeoisie. In these circumstances, Radek thought, the demand for a "revolutionary war" emanated not from considerations of genuine radicalism but from "nationalistic impatience"—to him a characteristic feature of petty-bourgeois thinking.

Radek's sharp attack on Laufenberg and Wolffheim did not constitute a categorical rejection of their views. He insisted that the party could not tolerate elements with "petty-bourgeois prejudices" within its ranks. "But under certain future conditions," said Radek (p. 3), "the Communist Party can establish contact with National Bolshevism." It was the party's duty to "proffer a hand" to those sincere bourgeois elements, intellectuals and officers who had the courage to forgo their class privileges and turn to the KPD to save the nation. "Concern for the national question can also be one of the paths leading to Communism" (p. 2).

Radek's hesitation to close the door on all cooperation with the nationalists was well grounded. In 1919, while in a Berlin prison for alleged participation in the January uprising of the German Communists, Radek had actually come into contact with several such "sincere nationalists." One of them, General Eugen Freiherr von Reibnitz, Radek described as the "first representative of the species labeled 'National Bolsheviks.'" <sup>6</sup> This former intimate of Ludendorff agitated within the officer corps not only for an alliance with Soviet Russia but also for a so-called "peaceful revolution." For a revival of Germany's economy Reibnitz considered it essential to give the workers a dominant position by nationalizing industry and setting up factory committees. Similar ideas were voiced by Rear Admiral Hintze who, deeply

<sup>6</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, "Radek's 'Political Salon' in Berlin 1919," in *Soviet Studies*, vol. 3 (1952) p. 427. This article is a partial translation of Radek's reminiscences, which appeared in *Krasnaya Nov* of October 1926.

shaken by Germany's fate, insisted on "a change of regime" as the *sine qua non* of her restoration to greatness.

A more comprehensive theory of National Bolshevism, developed on the right, was that of Paul Eltzbacher, professor of economics in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> So distressed was he by Germany's sad plight that he was willing to throw himself into the arms of Bolshevism. The Bolshevization of Germany seemed to him the only course of action that could save the country from an infinitely worse calamity, domination by "American and English capital." "Even if the dictatorship of the proletariat were far more dreadful than it is in reality," he wrote (p. 28), "it means at least that Germany will be ruled by Germans. Who would not prefer to submit to the dictation of his German brothers rather than let himself be enslaved and exploited by cold-blooded Englishmen and vengeful Frenchmen?"

Eltzbacher did not suggest that in adopting the dictatorship of the proletariat the German people should blindly imitate the Russian example, particularly the violent form it had assumed there. At the same time he could not but be fascinated by the energy and ruthlessness displayed by Bolshevism. It was entirely free from "exaggerated regard for the liberty of the individual and sentimental tenderness," and fully recognized that the "state represents coercion" (p. 21). Animated by "powerful idealistic ardor," it constituted a comforting contrast to Social Democracy and democracy in general. "With merciless determination [Bolshevism] compels the individual to subordinate his interests to those of the community. It has the courage to act and therefore possesses creative power" (p. 38).

Eltzbacher believed that the adoption of Bolshevism would pave the way for a Russo-German alliance, thus securing Germany against the Polish danger and enabling her to keep the left bank of the Rhine. Since, according to Article VI of the first Soviet Constitution, Bolshevism opposed the exploitation of weak nations, he deemed completely unfounded the fear that "once

<sup>7</sup> Paul Eltzbacher, *Der Bolschewismus und die deutsche Zukunft* (Jena 1919).

Germany has accepted Bolshevism Russia will attempt to dominate her" (p. 26). Indeed, only prosperous capitalist nations had to fear Bolshevism; Germany "had nothing to lose but her chains."

Perhaps even more desperate in its tone and in its hostility to Western institutions and ideals was the "German Manifesto," which resulted from discussions between several small nationalist groups. It denounced political parties as "hotbeds of professional quarrelsomeness" imported from France. Democracy, the legacy of Versailles, should be replaced, it stated, by a system of government in which "the decisive voice is exercised not by votes, money, and idle talk, but by vigorous action." Germany could be saved only if her youth joined the ranks of a radical labor movement and stood ready to attack Germany's and Russia's mortal enemy, French capitalism and militarism. To succeed in this program the anonymous author urged: "We must adopt any and all means which serve the struggle for liberation. And I insist: all means!"<sup>8</sup>

Despite these rousing calls to action, National Bolshevism in this first phase essentially remained a movement of leaders without followers. Weary of war and preoccupied with satisfying their most elementary needs, the mass of German people were unwilling to risk another holocaust. The isolation of those who propounded National Bolshevik views was intensified by the suspicion with which both Communists and many nationalists regarded this new doctrine. By September 1920 Laufenberg and Wolffheim had been expelled from both the KPD and the KAPD; a month earlier General Weygand had defeated the Red Army before Warsaw, and its declining prestige resulted in disillusionment in nationalist circles with Russia as a potential savior.

## II

1923 was a critical year for the Weimar Republic. Germany's very existence as a sovereign power seemed to be at stake, while

<sup>8</sup> See Karl Otto Paetel, ed., *Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalismus* (Flarchheim 1930) pp. 28, 27.

internally the country faced economic collapse. On January 11 French and Belgian troops had begun to occupy the Ruhr, the heart of industrial Germany, in order to collect the reparations that had not been fully forthcoming. Too weak to meet the invasion with force, the German government supported passive resistance. Production in the Ruhr came to a standstill, violence flared up sporadically. In addition, inflation shook the entire nation, ruining the middle class and throwing the workers into a destitute state. The reaction in Germany to these events was threefold: strong patriotic protest against the seizure of German territory swept the country; within the working class growing numbers turned to radicalism on the left; and for the first time extremism on the right assumed the character of a mass movement. This coincidence of a national and a social emergency produced the second phase of National Bolshevism.

To exploit the critical situation the KPD, despite hesitation on the part of some leaders, joined the "struggle for national liberation," a policy it had shunned only three years earlier. A few days after the occupation of the Ruhr the Communists appealed to the German proletariat to "fight against the French imperialist invasion."<sup>9</sup> Parroting the rightists, the party called for "the overthrow of the government of national dishonor and treason."<sup>10</sup> The change in attitude was motivated by a desire to capitalize on the deep-seated nationalistic feeling. "It is essential," urged the theoretical organ of the KPD, "that we exploit this sentiment to avoid it being used against us."<sup>11</sup>

The party also hoped to weaken the growing *Völkische* movement, consisting of numerous, widely scattered extremist groups whose political views were rather nebulous and whose actual strength it is difficult accurately to ascertain. Basically, they espoused vehement nationalism and racial antisemitism, and were

<sup>9</sup> *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz*, vol. 3 (1923) p. 153.

<sup>10</sup> *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des IX. Parteitags der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands, Frankfurt a.M., April 7-10, 1924* (Berlin 1924) p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Leonid and A. Friedrich, "Der Mittelstand, Nationalbolschewismus und die Partei," in *Die Internationale*, vol. 6 (1923) p. 115.



therefore ideologically closely linked to the young National Socialist movement, which most of them ultimately joined. For the Communists the new line assumed particular importance in view of the growing support that the party was gaining among the workers during the first half of 1923;<sup>12</sup> the KPD therefore felt that if only it could win over the petty bourgeois elements swelling the ranks of the nationalists, or at the very least neutralize them, its chances in the struggle for power would improve considerably.

Such a course fitted in well with Russian foreign policy, which ever since 1918 had counted on Germany to serve as a bulwark against the West. The Soviet leaders had always regarded France as one of their most dangerous enemies, and the specter of a French advance into Germany heightened their fears. *Izvestia* gave expression to this alarm when it declared on January 21: "The complete domination of Germany is a serious threat to Soviet Russia. It would make French imperialism our immediate neighbor." The Russians even opposed any attempt at a Communist revolution in Germany, since such a disturbance might weaken that country's ability to resist France.<sup>13</sup> The Comintern therefore decided that Germany's struggle against France was that of an "enslaved country" defending herself against "Western imperialism," and deserved the wholehearted support of the revolutionary international proletariat. "Our sympathy," said Litvinov on January 27, "is with Germany, as it is with any oppressed nation."<sup>14</sup>

In developing the thesis of Germany's "progressive role" the Communists manipulated traditional Marxist categories.<sup>15</sup> The

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Rosenberg, *A History of the German Republic*, tr. by Jan F. D. Morrow and Marie Sieveking (London 1936) p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> See W. G. Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service* (New York and London 1939) p. 43, and Trotsky's comments on March 1, 1923, in Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 1, 1917-24 (London 1951) p. 376.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, vol. 1 (New York 1930) p. 450.

<sup>15</sup> Quotations in this and the two following paragraphs are from *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz*, vol. 3 (1923), as follows: E. Varga, "Wirtschaft und Wirt-

concept of the class struggle was transposed to the level of international conflict. At its Second Congress in 1920 the Comintern had already drawn a distinction between two types of states, "exploiters" and "exploited nations." The world proletariat, the Congress had urged, must conclude a united front with the subjugated peoples in order to destroy "international imperialism." As a result of the imposition of the Versailles Treaty, Germany now was classified an exploited nation, and the same tactic was therefore employed in her case. The noted Russian economic analyst, Eugen Varga, pointed out that Germany's economy had become so weak and fallen so completely under the domination of England and France that Germany could "no longer continue to exist as an independent power"; in fact, she had been reduced to the status of a colony. The occupation of the Ruhr seemed final proof of Germany's plight as "an object of French imperialist policy."

The French invasion, argued the Communists, not merely represented a simple act of aggression but, as Frölich wrote, pointed up France's role as the "most powerful agent of the counter-revolution." Still thriving, French capitalism had at its disposal a highly efficient and reliable state apparatus and a mighty army with which it aimed to subjugate the entire continent. France had organized and financed numerous expeditions in order to crush the Bolsheviks, and had taken the lead in the establishment of the *Cordon Sanitaire* surrounding Russia. France therefore constituted the greatest danger to the world revolutionary movement, greater even than Mussolini and Noske, the "butcher of the German proletariat."

In these circumstances, declared the KPD, the party's historical task was to assume leadership in Germany's "social and national struggle for liberation." "Poincaré's threat to the German

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schaftspolitik im vierten Vierteljahr 1922," p. 129; Paul Frölich, "Der Ruhrkrieg und die deutschen Kommunisten," p. 214; Karl Radek, "Das machtlose Deutschland," p. 389, and "Der Faschismus, wir und die deutsche Sozialdemokratie," p. 649; Neurath, "Fünfter Verhandlungstag der Erweiterten Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale," p. 900.

nation," warned Radek, "is in effect a threat to the German revolution." The working class must therefore have the courage, he said, "to put itself at the head of the nation, to accept the burden and honor of leading the people and fuse the class struggle with the quest for national emancipation"; a workers' government would not even shrink from waging war against the Versailles victors. In short, exhorted Neurath, a leading Communist, instead of "intransigent internationalism we need flexible internationalism."

The situation in 1923, the Communist theorist Thalheimer asserted, must not be confused with that of 1914. At that time the German left had rightly condemned the Social Democrats—the so-called "Social patriots"—for participation in an imperialist war fought in the interest of a reactionary bourgeoisie. The war on the Ruhr, on the other hand, was "objectively revolutionary," despite the leading role played by such capitalists as Cuno and Stinnes. "The German bourgeoisie, however counterrevolutionary it may be internally, has, owing to the cowardice of the petty-bourgeois democrats (above all the Social Democrats) taken up a position which makes it appear externally revolutionary. Like Bismarck in 1864–70 and for similar historical reasons, it has assumed this external revolutionary character against its own will." <sup>16</sup>

Troubled lest these strange pronouncements give the impression that nationalism had been unquestioningly embraced and had made superfluous the class war against the internal enemy, the party hastened to affirm its opposition to the German bourgeoisie. It issued the double-edged slogan: "Beat Poincaré in the Ruhr and Cuno at the Spree." The proletariat had to maintain the vigorous fight against the ruling circles, which continued to exploit the workers and which could not be trusted to remain faithful to the national cause. Only after the defeat of the bourgeoisie could genuine national liberation be attained. In theory

<sup>16</sup> August Thalheimer, "Some Tactical Problems of the War in the Ruhr," in *The Communist International*, no. 25 (n.d.) p. 101.

such a "war on two fronts" was possible; in practice, however, the party, by so strongly emphasizing resistance to France, could not but moderate somewhat its traditionally fierce hostility toward its own government and the bourgeoisie. Increasingly, in party pronouncements, the term *Volk* appeared alongside that of "proletariat."<sup>17</sup>

By midyear 1923 Russia's world position had deteriorated to such an extent that the Communists could no longer afford their moderation. The sharpening tensions between Soviet Russia and England over influence in the Near East and India had brought the two countries to the brink of diplomatic rupture. Fearful of the Kremlin's designs on the Dardanelles, Turkey had abandoned her hitherto friendly attitude toward Russia and aligned herself with Britain. In Persia, Afghanistan, and India British authorities claimed to have discovered a network of Soviet agents fomenting revolutionary activities. The series of crises in Anglo-Russian relations culminated in May in the Curzon ultimatum, which threatened the cancelation of all trade agreements unless the Communists ceased their "pernicious activities." Russia's fears of the West now gave way to panic. Already frightened by France's advance into Germany, the Soviet government viewed the English ultimatum as another move toward a new intervention.<sup>18</sup> "Soviet Russia and the German workers," warned *Inprekorr* (vol. 3, p. 682), "are to be strangled together. A new world war is being prepared." The formation of a Russian-German bloc seemed imperative. At the initiative of the Comintern, therefore, the KPD's coy flirtation with nationalism turned into ardent wooing of nationalist extremists.

The inauguration of this campaign was assigned to Karl Radek, who enjoyed a reputation for ideological versatility. As already mentioned, Radek had toyed with National Bolshevik ideas for a number of years, and he was convinced that such a position did

<sup>17</sup> Heinz Schürer, *Die politische Arbeiterbewegung Deutschlands in der Nachkriegszeit* (Leipzig 1933) p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Fischer (cited above, note 14) vol. 1, p. 443.

not imply a concession to nationalism. In fact, on June 16 he noted to the Enlarged Executive of the Comintern in Moscow that Communists "must condemn nationalism in all its forms."<sup>19</sup> Four days later the same Radek, again addressing that group, delivered a startling speech, glorifying the heroism of Leo Schlageter, who had been executed in May by the French for acts of sabotage in the Ruhr.<sup>20</sup> A member of the Freikorps and an organizer for the Nazi party, he had gone to the Ruhr early in 1923 to fight the invaders. Friends betrayed him to the French authorities, and during his trial he in turn revealed the names of several of his accomplices.<sup>21</sup> The condemnation of Schlageter created a stir throughout Germany; rightists raised him to the status of a national hero, and the Nazis revered him as one of their early martyrs. It was this man who inspired Radek to tender an olive branch to the nationalists by inviting them to coordinate their efforts with those of the Communists.

Schlageter, Radek contended in this speech (p. 153), was a "martyr of German nationalism" whom Communists ought to hold in high regard: as "a courageous soldier of the counter-revolution, he deserves to be sincerely honored by us, the soldiers of the revolution." True, Schlageter had fired on German workers, but, as Radek hastened to add, he had not acted "from selfish motives"; he had been "convinced he was serving the German people."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz*, vol. 3 (1923) p. 902.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Radek, "Leo Schlageter—The Wanderer into the Void," in *Labour Monthly* (London) vol. 5 (1923) pp. 152-57. *Der Wanderer ins Nichts* (The Wanderer into the Void) was a novel that appeared in 1920, relating the story of a Freikorps officer who died fighting against Spartakus.

<sup>21</sup> Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918-1923* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952) pp. 236-37.

<sup>22</sup> In answer to a reproach for these compliments, Radek later offered an explanation: "I always have high regard for those who are willing to risk their lives for their ideals, even though they are class enemies against whom I shall fight to the limit. On the other hand, I have nothing but scorn for people who dare not put themselves into jeopardy for either the revolution or the counter-revolution and who can do nothing but wail like old women." See Karl Radek, "Der Faschismus, wir und die deutschen Sozialdemokraten," in *Schlageter: Eine Auseinandersetzung zwischen Karl Radek, Paul Frölich, Graf Ernst Reventlow, Moeller van den Bruck* (Berlin n.d.) p. 6, hereafter cited as *Schlageter Auseinandersetzung*.

Idealistic nationalists such as Schlageter had to be given credit for realizing that deep social cleavages within Germany prevented the attainment of national emancipation. They appreciated the fact that an exploited, wretched working class could not be relied on to defend the nation. Yet, Radek pointed out, they failed to perceive the only effective remedy. Just as the emancipation of the peasants had been necessary in order to win the battle against Napoleon after Prussia's shattering defeat at Jena, so now the workers had to be freed once more from their fetters in order to expel the French invaders.

Perhaps the most serious shortcoming of the nationalists, Radek maintained in this speech, was their failure to detect the betrayal of those who posed as the champions of the national cause. Sincere patriots must break with the profiteers, speculators, and industrial magnates who were enslaving the German people and sending "securities abroad so that they may be enriched and the country impoverished." They must make common cause with the vast majority of the German people, they "must create a united front of brain and hand workers . . . Only old prejudices stand in the way." Thus united, "Germany will be able to draw upon a vast potential of resistance which in turn will overcome all obstacles. If the cause of the people is made the cause of the nation, then the cause of the nation will become the cause of the people" (p. 156). Then Germany will find the way toward an alliance with the "Russian workers and peasants in order to throw off the yoke of Entente capital."

Radek concluded his speech with an emotional appeal (p. 157): ". . . we believe that the great majority of the nationalist-minded masses belong not to the camp of the capitalists but to the camp of the workers. We want to find, and we shall find, the path to those masses. We shall see to it that men like Schlageter, who are prepared to die for a common cause, will become not wanderers into the void, but wanderers into a better future for the whole of mankind; we shall make sure that they will not spill their blood for the profit of the coal and iron barons, but in the cause of the great

toiling German people, who are a part of the family of peoples fighting for their emancipation . . . Schlageter himself cannot now hear this declaration, but we are convinced that there are hundreds of Schlageters who will hear it and understand it."

Radek's "Schlageter Speech" was publicized throughout Germany. As the statement of a leading figure of the Communist International, it clearly revealed that National Bolshevism had finally won the official endorsement of the Communist leadership. The Politburo of the Russian Bolshevik party had concurred in the enunciation of the Schlageter line, and Zinoviev, as head of the Comintern, had given his written consent to the speech, after its delivery describing it as "correct and good."<sup>23</sup> Though the National Bolshevism in the Schlageter speech did not constitute a radical innovation, the fact that it bore this stamp of approval indicated the seriousness of the Communists' intentions. Russia's plight, it seemed, required daring remedies. In pronouncements still permeated with Marxist terminology the party now declared that it must welcome aid from any quarter. "Whoever is sincere in his intentions of marching with us part of the way (*ein Stück Wegs*) will find us willing," said Paul Frölich in the *Schlageter Auseinandersetzung* (p. 23). By mid-1923, then, the KPD's "flexibility" had reached a point where the party could call for revolutionary action against the class enemy and at the same time eulogize a man who had taken pride in massacring proletarians.

The clarion call of Radek struck a responsive chord among rightist elements. In July *Rote Fahne*, the KPD's leading daily newspaper, brought out a special issue entitled "Germany's Way." It carried the Schlageter speech on the front page. On Radek's suggestion two nationalists, Graf Ernst Reventlow and Moeller van den Bruck, submitted their replies to the Communist paper, which

<sup>23</sup> See Zinoviev, Address to the Thirteenth Party Conference, in *Pravda*, January 25, 1924, quoted in Seymour Rotter, *Soviet and Comintern Policy toward Germany, 1919-1923: A Case Study of Strategy and Tactics*, unpublished dissertation (Columbia, 1954) pp. 374-75; also *Protokoll: Fünfter Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale*, quoted in Edward Hallett Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-1924* (New York 1954) p. 180.

displayed them prominently in the same issue. Both were important right-wing publicists with considerable influence. Reventlow, editor of the notoriously antisemitic weekly *Reichswart*, later became a full-fledged Nazi; Moeller van den Bruck ardently advocated imperialist expansion and is regarded as a precursor of National Socialism.<sup>24</sup> Like all nationalists, they were deeply concerned with the elimination of class antagonisms. It was their fear that a divided nation precluded the pursuit of an aggressive foreign policy by Germany. They were therefore particularly pleased to witness the Communists' apparent conversion from defenders of the proletariat to champions of the nation. Eager to establish contact with these potential allies, Reventlow and Moeller clasped the hand Radek extended. To write in *Rote Fahne* appeared to them a unique opportunity "to disseminate *völkisch-soziale* ideas among young Communist idealists and to enlist their support."<sup>25</sup> Could it be that Radek, the arch manipulator, was being manipulated?

The admiration Radek had expressed for the "heroic nationalists" found its counterpart in the respect Reventlow and Moeller felt for the dynamic qualities supposedly displayed by the Communists. They regarded them as determined idealists who "possess genuine patriotic feelings." Furthermore, Reventlow contended, *Völkische* and Communists were drawn together by certain common interests. Both held the new democracy responsible for an inept, vacillating, and spineless foreign policy. Both *Völkische* and Communists strove for radical change by recourse to extreme measures, and shared an eagerness to destroy the "Weimar system." All other parties, committed to parliamentarism, wasted their time talking in the Reichstag and "promoting their selfish interests." Conservative and Communist revolutionaries, on the other hand, loathed democracy and liberalism, which emanated

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent exposition of Moeller's ideas see Fritz R. Stern, *Cultural Despair and the Politics of Discontent: A Study of the Rise of the "Germanic" Ideology*, unpublished dissertation (Columbia, 1953) pp. 147-209.

<sup>25</sup> Graf Ernst Reventlow, "'Ein Stück Wegs?'" in *Die Tat*, vol. 23 (1931-32) p. 991.



from an individualistic and egotistical conception of life.<sup>26</sup> They shared a bitter hatred for capitalism, which was characterized by exploitation, stress on materialistic values, and class conflict. They sought "an abandonment of the institutions of private property, the nationalization of banks, trusts and state control over land etc."<sup>27</sup> Finally, Reventlow and Moeller argued, both *Völkische* and Communists put their trust in Russia, which, as an oppressed and "proletarian nation," was the natural ally of "proletarian Germany" against the West and all it stood for.

Despite these affinities, Reventlow and Moeller also saw serious obstacles in the way of any real cooperation. Important ideological barriers still separated the two groups. The *Völkische*, they counseled, must insist on a German type of socialism, one free from the destructive notions of class struggle, proletarian dictatorship, and an enervating internationalism. Germany had to create her own socialism, based on the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community), which would lead to an "organic unity" grounded on the "cooperation of all estates."<sup>28</sup> Such a new order, they maintained, could be realized only with the elimination of all Jewish influence, a step that the Communists, both in Germany and in Russia, would have to take to prove themselves acceptable allies. Vituperative attacks on the *Völkische* by the Communists must cease. And, of course, Russia would have to forgo any attempt to dominate Germany. If these conditions were met, Reventlow concluded, the *Völkische* would not be averse to the proposal to march together *ein Stück Wegs*. As he put it in the *Schlageter Auseinandersetzung* (p. 19): "Should Mr. Radek and the Communist International, for which he spoke, be ready for such cooperation, let them follow words by deeds. We *Völkische* are not prejudiced, and are willing to accept support from anyone.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich*, 3rd ed. (Hamburg 1931) p. 201.

<sup>27</sup> Graf Ernst Reventlow, *Völkisch-kommunistische Einigung?* (Leipzig 1924) pp. 43-44.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Recht der jungen Völker: Sammlung politischer Aufsätze* (Berlin 1932) p. 66.

But we will not consider sacrificing the 'substance' of our *völkische* ideals or having them infringed upon."

From its very inception early in 1923 National Bolshevism was not limited to mere theoretical disputations on the highest levels. Frequent discussions took place between individual *Völkische* and Communists, and sometimes even between Nazis and Communists, about the need for a united front against France. Speakers from all these movements shared the same platforms and carefully adjusted the contents of their addresses so as to win applause from mixed audiences.<sup>29</sup> The Communists asserted that fascism—a term used by them indiscriminately to describe all extreme rightist groups—was a political movement with a definite social content that had to be fought not simply by force but primarily with ideas. The crucial task of the party was to wean the *Mittelstand* from the clutches of fascists. This could be accomplished only by putting "the strongest emphasis on nationalism in our propaganda."<sup>30</sup> It could not be done "if, as hitherto, our press restricts itself to ranting about fascist stormtroopers, about heroes of the rubber cudgel, their stores of arms and the financial backing of the National Socialists [by big business]."<sup>31</sup> In fact, as a KPD circular for organizers among nationalist officers exhorted: "One has to speak with officers very courteously and amiably, to address them by the title 'Your Excellency.' References to Marx and party jargon are to be avoided."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See Carr, *Interregnum* (cited above, note 23) p. 182. The Communists, clamoring for nationalist support, are said to have resorted to antisemitism. Ruth Fischer, in particular, has been charged with attacking "Jewish capitalists." She herself denies that this implied antisemitism. In a letter of May 30, 1955, she pointed out to the present writers that she "tried to explain to National Socialist students the need to fight not only Jewish but also Gentile capitalists." See also Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948) p. 283.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Böttcher, "Der Weg und Wille zur Macht: Ergebnisse der Erweiterten Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale," in *Die Internationale*, vol. 6 (1923) p. 426.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich (cited above, note 11) p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> Reported in *Vorwärts*, evening ed., August 8, 1923. See also Ruth Fischer (cited above, note 29) p. 282. In the light of such pronouncements one reads with

When the Nazi party invited a Communist speaker to a public debate, the party sent Hermann Remmele, who tried to minimize the differences between the two groups by the following remarks: "At the very beginning, I wish to make one thing clear. The National Socialist Party, like all other socialist organizations, has within its ranks a number of convinced and honest people. Dedicated to a cause we reject, they pledge to it their lives. This courage and bravery we honor and respect."<sup>33</sup> Another Communist speaker at a political rally organized by Reventlow declared that "The time is not far off when *Völkische* and Communists will be able to unite" (*Berliner Tageblatt*, February 9, 1924). And a Nazi agitator publicly expressed the hope that "despite deep-seated differences it will be possible to act together against the common enemy" (*Die Rote Fahne*, August 4, 1923).

There is evidence of actual military cooperation between *Völkische* and Communists during the critical year 1923. They aided each other in the procurement of arms; in numerous acts of sabotage, committed in the Ruhr against the French, members of the two groups worked hand in hand; they fought together against separatists in the Rhineland, and were usually "led by nationalist Prussian officers."<sup>34</sup> *Völkische* and Communists also joined hands in Upper Silesia, the scene of protracted fighting between Poles and Germans over the disposition of that area, and of repeated strike waves.

Extensive Communist agitation among Freikorps units, veiled in nationalistic terminology, succeeded in persuading some of them to support a Communist-led strike. Freikorps men marched at the head of demonstrations and participated in attacks on the police.

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amazement Mr. Carr's statement in *Interregnum* (cited above, note 23) that "the 'Schlageter line' represented no sort of compromise with Fascist doctrine or Fascist policy" (p. 184).

<sup>33</sup> "Rede des Genossen Remmele in der Faschistenversammlung in Stuttgart," in *Die Rote Fahne* (Berlin), August 10, 1923.

<sup>34</sup> Erich Müller, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalbolschewismus," in *Deutsches Volkstum*, vol. 34 (1932) p. 788. See also Erwin Barth, "Die Abwehrkämpfe an der Ruhr," in *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. 41, part 1 (1923) p. 464. On armament aid see Ruth Fischer (cited above, note 29) p. 286.

In the view of one Communist writer, the fact that both the party of the proletariat and the Freikorps now were concerned with the fate of the nation opened the way to the conversion of the Freikorps "from supporters and defenders of capitalism . . . into defenders of the working class."<sup>35</sup> A Freikorps leader in Upper Silesia relates that many Communists used to greet him as "Herr Chef." When apprised of the error, they would retort: "Once the bullets start flying, we will fight together." Repeatedly, he points out, Communists expressed the wish to "join forces under my leadership."<sup>36</sup> From these incidents it is not to be inferred that the Freikorps as a whole accepted National Bolshevism. Yet there can be little doubt that there existed a strong mutual attraction. To many of the Freebooters Bolshevism had become the symbol of activism and of opposition to liberalism and bourgeois complacency.<sup>37</sup> This fascination with the Bolshevik mentality led a Freikorps officer to refer to his men as *Rechtsbolschewisten* (Bolsheviks of the right).<sup>38</sup>

Neither the theory nor the practice of National Bolshevism in its second phase found universal approval within the ranks of the German Communist party or the camp of the nationalists. The Communist left wing feared that the Schlageter line would divert the party from its revolutionary role and weaken its resistance to fascism. The right wing favored a united front with the Social Democrats rather than with the nationalists. Pressured from both sides and embarrassed by the appearance of KPD posters on which the Soviet star found itself next to the swastika, the KPD stepped up its antifascist agitation, which had never been fully abandoned.<sup>39</sup> The Central Committee called for antifascist demonstrations on July 29. When the police forbade public meetings, the KPD ex-

<sup>35</sup> Felix Schmidt, "Betrachtungen zum oberschlesischen Streik," in *Die Internationale*, vol. 6 (1923) p. 411.

<sup>36</sup> Peter von Heydebreck, *Wir Wehr-Wölfe: Erinnerungen eines Freikorps-Führers* (Leipzig 1931) pp. 189-90.

<sup>37</sup> Waite (cited above, note 21) pp. 271-72.

<sup>38</sup> Manfred von Killinger, *Kampf um Oberschlesien* (Leipzig 1934) p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik* (Offenbach 1948) p. 89.

ecutive asked Moscow for advice. In the absence of Zinoviev and Bukharin, Radek, fearful for the Schlageter policy, was able to persuade the Comintern to advise against the demonstration.<sup>40</sup> Still, the "antifascist day" took place. Although there was no mass response, the incident clearly signified a turning point in the KPD's attitude toward National Bolshevism.

Communist enthusiasm for National Bolshevism was now on the wane. By September 1923 the objective situation too no longer favored such a program. With the abandonment of passive resistance in the Ruhr by Stresemann, extreme nationalism had lost much of its attraction.<sup>41</sup> In actuality the Schlageter line had never had a chance to succeed. Firm and lasting cooperation between *Völkische* and Communists was ruled out by the former's reluctance. The right, politically on the rise, considered itself so strong that any real concessions to the left to gain additional mass support seemed unnecessary. Furthermore, the *Völkische* stood on certain principles they were unwilling to compromise in any circumstances.<sup>42</sup> They would not give up their war against "the Jewish danger," would not submit to proletarian leadership in any form, and would not risk Russian domination. Indeed, on August 14 the Nazis had already decided to ban any further cooperation.<sup>43</sup>

The Communists, on the other hand, had been less squeamish. They had taken the initiative and, anxious for a favorable response to their overtures, had exhibited fewer scruples in trying to effectuate an alliance with the *Völkische*. That the KPD had in fact gone too far in trimming its ideological tenets to ensnare the fascists was admitted by the 1924 Party Congress. In its view the movement had committed "extraordinarily dangerous deviations." The party had relied "far too heavily on nationalistic phraseology, and had committed the grave and perilous error of asserting that Com-

<sup>40</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *German-Soviet Relations between the two World Wars, 1919-1939* (Baltimore 1951) p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> Erich Müller, *Nationalbolschewismus* (Hamburg 1933) p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> See Franz Borkenau, *The Communist International* (London 1938) pp. 246-48.

<sup>43</sup> Carr, *Interregnum* (cited above, note 23) p. 183.

munists could march together with *Völkische* 'ein Stück Wegs.' ”<sup>44</sup> With national tensions subsiding and the country on the road to economic prosperity, it seemed judicious to shelve the program of National Bolshevism.

## III

The period of stability during the mid-twenties was but the calm before the storm. The worldwide depression which began in 1929 deeply affected Germany. Unemployment rose to spectacular heights; the plight of the lower middle class became desperate, and agriculture too found itself in dire straits. The problem of reparations had once more become acute; the Young Plan of 1929 did not impress large segments of the German people as a viable solution. Unable adequately to cope with these difficulties, the republican regime increasingly lost the confidence of the masses. The rampant discontent bred political extremism. Both Nazis and Communists now scored phenomenal electoral victories, and the destiny of Germany seemed to lie in the hands of one of these movements.

Under the stress of domestic and foreign crises National Bolshevism appeared for the third time. Among the nationalists it was born out of a virulent hatred for the ailing capitalist system, and intensified hostility toward the Versailles powers. The Communists returned to National Bolshevism in an attempt to stave off the rapidly gaining National Socialists, and to prevent any rapprochement between Germany and the West, which Russia considered a threat to her security.

The prevailing hostile attitude toward the Young Plan provided the KPD with an incentive to play the nationalistic card once more. The party condemned the new reparations settlement on the ground that it exposed the workers to exploitation of the harshest kind. According to the Communists it constituted a betrayal of the German toiling masses by the German bourgeoisie and the Social Democracy to international capital. Ernst Thael-

<sup>44</sup> *Verhandlungen des IX. Parteitags der KPD* (cited above, note 10) p. 375.

mann, the unquestioned leader of the party, took pride in the fact that Communists went further even than the Nazis. The latter, he said, acknowledged that once in power they would pay those reparations Germany could afford, while the KPD unequivocally rejected all reparations.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, reflecting the ever-present anxieties of the Soviet leaders, who scented in the Young Plan another conspiracy against Russia, Thaelmann insisted that the agreement "is not only of importance for Germany, but represents a plot of the international bourgeoisie against the Soviet Union."<sup>46</sup>

In preparation for the crucial Reichstag elections in September 1930 the Comintern ordered the KPD to lay even more stress on the nationalistic theme. To take the wind out of the sails of the Nazis, the Central Committee announced its "Program of National and Social Liberation" to a startled electorate on August 24. Denouncing the nationalistic slogans of the Hitlerites as demagogic, the party solemnly promised to tear up "the predatory Versailles Treaty" and the Young Plan. "Only social revolution by the working class will be able to solve the national problems facing Germany." The program called on the toilers to break with the deceitful fascists and abandon the "treacherous Social Democracy," the party of the Versailles Treaty.<sup>47</sup>

The resort to nationalism may have aided the Communists, but the Nazis proved infinitely more skillful in the use of the same weapon (from 1928 to 1930 the former's share in the total vote increased by 24 percent, the latter's by 604 percent—though nationalism was not, of course, the only factor involved). Seemingly unperturbed, the KPD persisted in espousing this line. Indeed, as the Nazis stepped up their nationalistic campaign, the Communists did their utmost to outdo them. In an *Inprekorr* article they chided the Nazis for their meekness: "What demands does

<sup>45</sup> *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, vol. 426 (Berlin 1930) February 11, 1930, p. 3938.

<sup>46</sup> Ernst Thaelmann, "Die Probleme der KPD auf der Sitzung des Erweiterten Praesidiums des EKKI," in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, vol. 11 (1930) p. 528.

<sup>47</sup> The complete program may be found in Flechtheim (cited above, note 39) pp. 281-84.

Hitler make upon France [in *Mein Kampf*]? Does he want to regain the territories lost in 1918? No. He condemns the . . . demand for restoration of the 1914 boundaries . . . Thus Hitler at once surrenders the German population of Alsace, Eupen, and Malmedy, which went to Belgium, and probably even Danzig and the parts of Upper Silesia which fell to Poland." On the question of "regaining the lost colonies" the article accused the Nazis of ambiguity, "willingness to bargain," and appeasement of the Western imperialists. There could be only one explanation for this timidity: "It is treason! Those betrayed and cheated will be the German masses, who expect real national liberation from Hitler. Instead an even more shameful enslavement awaits them! Hitler, 'the liberator,' thus ends up at the point where the servile policy of the past 13 years has held us: in subservience to French imperialism." In conclusion the article strongly urged the KPD to bring home to the masses the essential truth that Germany's sole real friend was the Soviet Union. The Nazis were the "mortal enemies" of Germany's struggle for national liberation, and "only Communism will break the chain of Versailles!"<sup>48</sup>

The KPD's protestations of patriotism failed to accomplish the desired end. The Nazi rise to power could not be stopped, at least not by these means. Even after the National Socialists had proved their energy and ruthlessness by smashing the trade unions and crushing all political opposition, the Communists continued, from exile, to taunt them for their supposed insincerity on the national question. What had happened, asked a KPD appeal in May 1933, to Hitler's boast that he would tear up the Versailles Treaty? Hitler, the declaration assured, would never accomplish that feat, for he "recognizes Versailles and pays interest on the tribute! That is the plain truth, just as it is indisputable that he abandons the Germans in Alsace, Danzig, the Corridor and Upper Silesia, and Southern Tyrol who were torn away from their fatherland. He

<sup>48</sup> T. Neubauer, "Die auswärtige Politik des deutschen Nationalsozialismus; Hitler und Frankreich," in *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz*, vol. 12 (1932); quotations from pp. 1253, 1255, 1256.



leaves them under the terror of the Versailles victors without putting up any resistance.”<sup>49</sup> Hitler was not long in proving his “sincerity.” The Communists taunted no more.

The Communists always maintained that the adoption of nationalism did not involve any ideological compromise. They spoke of “tactical manoeuvres” within the framework of “revolutionary internationalism.” On the right, however, the third phase of National Bolshevism was characterized by a genuine ideological reorientation. Overwhelmed by the disintegration of German society on every level, many nationalists reacted vehemently against both capitalism and democracy, which they held responsible for the country’s calamity. Eager to overcome a “decadent parliamentarism,” they shunned all formal organization. Instead, they drew together in numerous small literary circles, as devotees of certain periodicals, in secret societies and illicit semi-military formations (Kampfbünde).<sup>50</sup> None of these had a clearly defined political program, but all were inspired by one absorbing aim, to find an immediate and radical solution to Germany’s ills.

A National Bolshevik strand appeared even within the Nazi party, and was responsible for a split in that organization. With Hitler’s refusal to accept Otto Strasser’s fervent anticapitalism and Eastern orientation in foreign policy, the latter, on July 4, 1930, led his followers out of the movement, with the slogan “The Socialists leave the NSDAP.” He then founded the “Black Front,” a secretive loose union of several anti-Nazi right-wing organizations. Acknowledging its indebtedness to Moeller van den Bruck, the coalition defined its position as follows: “The Black Front is nationalistic and socialistic in spirit, martial and rustic in form, and *völkisch* in essence.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> “Kämpft für Arbeit, Brot, Freiheit, Sozialismus,” Ein Aufruf der KPD, in *Rundschau über Politik, Wirtschaft und Arbeiterbewegung* (Basel), vol. 2 (1933) p. 391.

<sup>50</sup> For an excellent survey of these various groups see Armin Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland, 1918–1932: Grundriss ihrer Weltanschauungen* (Stuttgart 1950).

<sup>51</sup> Richard Schapke, *Die Schwarze Front: Von den Zielen und Aufgaben und vom Kampfe der deutschen Revolution* (Leipzig 1933) p. 76. Leading position in the

The most forceful statement of rightist National Bolshevism during the early 1930s is to be found in the writings of Karl O. Paetel and Ernst Niekisch. The former led the "Gruppe Sozial-revolutionärer Nationalisten" (Organization of Social-Revolutionary Nationalists), which derived most of its support from the Youth Movement (*Bündische Jugend*). In the tradition of the World War I and Freikorps generations, these groups exhibited an almost mystical reverence for the nation. But for the followers of Paetel<sup>52</sup> national liberation presupposed social regeneration. They hoped to build "a Reich of true justice, honor, liberty, and dignity for all its people" (Wulf), a Germany that would enjoy freedom and genuine organic unity. A state based on such principles, the Paetel circle believed, could be established only when the capitalistic order had been overthrown. Capitalism was tearing the nation apart into warring factions. The German bourgeoisie made common cause with the Western exploiters. The way out of this morass lay in support of the oppressed revolutionary proletariat, which by means of a successful class struggle would put an end to fraternal strife and achieve a true *Volksgemeinschaft*. Both the NSDAP and the KPD were essentially proletarian parties, thought Paetel, and the social-revolutionary nationalists ought therefore to heal the rift between them.

The Paetel group also sharply attacked Western culture which, they alleged, was corrupting and ruining Germany. Urbanism, liberalism, and parliamentarism were the elements of decay to be rooted out, for they kept the nation divided and in constant turmoil. Against these foreign values they posited those of the

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"Black Front" was held by Strasser's own circle, the "Kampfgenossenschaft revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten." Some of the other units were the "Bund Oberland," the "Tat-Kreis," and the "Wehrwolf" group. For a full discussion see Adolf Ehrt, *Totale Krise—Totale Revolution? Die "Schwarze Front" des völkischen Nationalismus* (Berlin 1933) pp. 49-75. For a summary exposition of Otto Strasser's views see his *Aufbau des deutschen Sozialismus* (Leipzig 1932).

<sup>52</sup> Subsequent quotations of Wulf, Becker, and Paetel himself are from the work edited by Paetel (cited above, note 8), as follows: Friedrich Wulf, "Sozialismus und Nation," p. 42; Rolf Becker, "Bauer und soziale Revolution," p. 69; Karl O. Paetel, "Standort," p. 78.

German peasant rooted in native soil. "Born out of the deepest Germanic blood and anti-Roman and anti-Western sentiment, the peasant represents for us the pivot of the social revolution" (Becker). The existing institutions overthrown, a "German soviet state" was to be founded "which would make possible the self-government of the toiling masses." The way would then be open for an alliance with Soviet Russia, also an "oppressed nation."

A force capable of attaining the new order, argued Paetel himself, was in the process of formation. This "German front" belonged neither to the right nor to the left. It stood above the quibbling parties, it was independent of party bureaucrats and dogma: "Anyone from either extreme who is concerned about Germany and socialism belongs to us. We are not interested in his party label."

Paetel's intellectual development, it has been said with some justification, had reached "an advanced stage of Bolshevization," and "nationalism was merely used by him to attain Bolshevism."<sup>53</sup> Ernst Niekisch shared most of Paetel's ideas, but differed in putting primary emphasis on the ideals of Prussianism. He may therefore be characterized as a "Prussian Bolshevik." The slogan of the circle he headed, the "Widerstandsbewegung," was, appropriately enough, "Sparta—Potsdam—Moscow," and its emblem consisted of a Prussian eagle, a sword, and the hammer and sickle.<sup>54</sup> Niekisch bemoaned the fact that Germany had forsaken the traditions of Potsdam, and admired Soviet Russia for having adopted them. The Eastern colossus had achieved stability and strength because it had cultivated an ethos of revolutionary activism, of work and dedication to the community. He commended the Bolsheviks for not tolerating internal discord, a "babbling parliament," and for introducing order and authoritarian discipline. In his *Entscheidung*, published in Berlin in 1930, he declared (p.

<sup>53</sup> Ehrt (cited above, note 51) p. 56.

<sup>54</sup> Klemens von Klemperer, *The Conservative Revolution in Germany, 1913 through the Early Years of the Republic*, unpublished dissertation (Harvard, 1949) p. 305.

134): "The ruthless bravery and roughness of Communism reveal a hardy military spirit; it contains more Prussian severity than Communists realize or Prussians themselves suspect."

If Germany was once again to be imbued with the spirit of Prussianism, Niekisch maintained, all Western influences would have to be weeded out. The nation would have to break irrevocably with the ideals of humanitarianism, rationalism, and all other liberal values. Instead of living in large, teeming cities, which encourage "cringing docility," Germans ought to return to the soil, to a rustic and primitive way of life, to self-imposed poverty which alone produces warlike virtues. They must free themselves from the shackles of "Christianity which stunts their heroism and makes them susceptible to enslavement by Rome" (*Entscheidung*, p. 153). In short, Germany had to tear herself away from Europe and enter the mainstream of "Germanic-Slavic civilization."

In Niekisch's view no means could be spared to liberate Germany from foreign oppression. "For an enslaved people no weapons are forbidden." Germany might have to wage war against the enemy's civilian population. "Fortunately the progress of technology and science—airplanes, advances in chemistry and bacteriology—makes it possible to conduct such a war" (*Entscheidung*, p. 149). When applied for the purpose of national emancipation the most barbaric measures were justified.

The Communists were not slow in perceiving the opportunities offered by these tendencies in the nationalist camp. One alert observer in Moscow noted that in their theoretical formulations some of the rightists were "approaching Marxism."<sup>55</sup> And the KPD, responding to the signal from Moscow, once again decided to fight fascism with an "ideological offensive." Anxious to stem the Nazi tide not merely with the stick but also with the carrot, Heinz Neumann, a daring young party leader, attended Nazi meetings. At a rally chaired by Goebbels, Neumann is said to have offered the services of his party and the might of the Red Army

<sup>55</sup> Otto Pohl, "Deutscher Nationalradikalismus und die Ostrichtung der Politik," in *Moskauer Rundschau*, vol. 1, no. 27-28 (1929) p. 1.

for an assault against Western capitalism. He is quoted as having pled with the stormtroopers not to reject his offer: "Young Socialists! Brave fighters for the nation: the Communists do not want to engage in fraternal strife with the National Socialists."<sup>56</sup>

The KPD's agitation succeeded in converting a number of National Bolshevik officers and intellectuals, such as Captain Beppo Römer, the head of the Freikorps Bund Oberland, which had a long record of collaboration with the Communists.<sup>57</sup> Junkers like Ludwig Renn (pseudonym for Arnold Vieth von Gollsenau) and Count Alexander Stenbock-Fermor also joined the Communists. One of the converts, the writer Bodo Uhse, had run the gamut in his membership, from the Freikorps, the NSDAP, the Strasser circle, to the KPD. The party's attempts to induce nationalists to join its ranks is known as the "Scheringer Course," so called because of the widely publicized case of Lieutenant Scheringer. Early in 1931, while serving a prison sentence for carrying on Nazi propaganda in the Reichswehr, Scheringer had yielded to the enticements of the Communists, accepting their assertion that they represented the only true nationalist force.<sup>58</sup> He became a Communist organizer, and claimed to have succeeded in "producing a healthy nucleus for Communism" among the rank-and-file and the leadership of the Nazi Storm Troops.<sup>59</sup> There is some evidence to indicate that one of the aims of Hitler's blood purge of June 30, 1934, was to eliminate National Bolshevism within the Nazi party.<sup>60</sup>

With the consolidation of the Nazi regime in June 1934 any open manifestation of National Bolshevism became impossible. The Communists had by now realized that the nationalism they

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Georg Schwarz, *Völker höret die Zentrale: KPD bankerott* (Berlin 1933) p. 206.

<sup>57</sup> Müller (cited above, note 41) p. 36; Ehrt (cited above, note 51) p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> See Spartakus, *German Communists* (London 1944) p. 67.

<sup>59</sup> See Scheringer's letter of June 14, 1934, in *Manchester Guardian*, July 20, 1934.

<sup>60</sup> Lionel Kochan, *Russia and the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, Eng., 1954) p. 174. See also Hitler's speech of July 13, 1934, in Norman H. Baynes, ed., *The Speeches of Hitler*, vol. 1 (London 1942) p. 315.

had so ardently encouraged had backfired.<sup>61</sup> It had turned into a monstrous force that could not be controlled. Indeed, Hitler began to put into effect his program of expansion, which endangered not only the "capitalist West" but also the "socialist East." The National Bolshevik line had to be discarded. Russia needed the West.

## IV

In National Bolshevism the two extremes of German political life met. This does not imply that all ideological differences between them disappeared. The Communists remained committed to their basically rationalistic approach, to the idea of transitory proletarian hegemony, and to the ultimate goal of a classless society. The thinking of the rightists continued to reflect their mysticism; they still clung to racism, to the leadership principle, and to the ideal of a hierarchically ordered community. Furthermore, it must not be assumed that National Bolshevism was of equal significance for both right and left. For the Communists it was basically an aspect of their overall strategy. They embraced nationalism in order to woo those social strata among whom the *Völkische*, and later the Nazis, were making the greatest headway. The right, on the other hand, had a real ideological commitment to National Bolshevism. They ardently espoused aggressive nationalism as well as some kind of program of social and economic amelioration. Despite these differences, right and left were brought together by certain affinities of temperament and, above all, by common hatreds. Both loathed the "Weimar System" and both were obsessed with bitter hostility toward the West.

The inability of the German governments from 1919 to 1932 to solve either the national or the social problems besetting Germany provided fertile soil for such extremism. Nationalism was largely abandoned to the enemies of the Republic; as a result of widespread economic misery, socialism became a manipulative tool of

<sup>61</sup> See Wilhelm Pieck, *Zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands: 30 Jahre Kampf* (Berlin 1949) pp. 25-26.

demagogues. Whenever these foreign-policy and domestic issues reached the critical point at the same time, National Bolshevism came to the fore. This curious amalgam was then advanced as a solution to both problems.

Since it appeared to many Germans that the only dynamic solutions were offered by extremists who rejected the entire social and political framework, democracy could not but suffer. The simultaneous onslaught from the right and the left increasingly undermined the young, fragile Republic. The traditional political divisions became blurred. Communists adopted nationalism. Nationalists advocated socialism. The KPD hailed former "fascist hoodlums" as "gallant heroes." Arch-conservatives clamored for the Bolshevization of Germany. In this climate of confusion and political demoralization the real issues were lost, making it possible for that party most adept at manipulating the frustrations of the German people finally to win out.

For the right this denouement was essentially welcome. The Communists had intended it to be different. Obsessed with the security of the Soviet Union, they had fanned the flames of nationalism in order to buttress the wall against the West. They also hoped that the general turmoil would enable them to ride into power. They scorned an alliance with the democratic forces, the last hope for the preservation of the Republic. Instead, the Communists centered their fire on the Social Democrats. They deluded themselves into believing that a short period even of Nazi rule would be but a prelude to their final triumph. In subordinating their policies to the national interests of the Soviet Union, the Communists failed to advance either their own or Russia's cause. In fact, this strategy cost Germany and Russia dearly.