



AAUD/AAUD-E READER

<i>The Communist Left in Germany 1918-1921</i> by Gilles Dauvé and Denis Authier.....	3
<i>Paul Mattick and Council Communism</i> by Claudio Pozzoli.....	18
<i>Council Communism</i> by Mark Shipway.....	20
<i>The Councilist Movement in Germany (1914-1935): A History of the AAUD-E Tendency</i> by CICA.....	22
<i>Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization</i> by René Riesel.....	41
<i>The Origins of the Movement for Workers' Councils in Germany</i> by GIC.....	42
Program of the AAUD.....	49
Extracts from the Guidelines of the AAUD.....	50
Guidelines of the AAUD-E.....	58

I compiled this reader mostly for myself, but you may get some use of it. Here is a collection of most of the English material available online on the AAUD/AAUD-E, the German council communist unions that existed during the period right after the First World War.

Footnotes have not been included, but I added some here and there, to help make sense in certain parts where segments of a piece are included, but not the whole thing.

*One important resource left out is Philippe Bourrinet's book, *The German-Dutch Communist Left*. This is because it's only in PDF format online and would take too long to reformat.*

-Juan Conatz (Liquidationist Faction)

The communist left in Germany (1918-1921) by Gilles Dauvé / Denis Authier

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From Chapter One

Only the survival of these organizations, which had become autonomous in relation to the proletariat, gave any real force to the persistence of what has been called the “reformist spirit” which still held sway over the majority of the German proletariat after 1918. Between 1871 and 1913, real per capita income doubled in Germany and Great Britain, and tripled in the United States. There seemed to be no net progress, however, during the decade leading up to 1914 in Germany, England or France: instead, economic progress for the German workers was measured by the reduction of working time.[2] Wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers rose between 1871 and 1913, falling only after 1914. These differentials fell from 31% to 18% in the railroads, and from 25% to 10% in construction (in Berlin, Hamburg and Stettin) between 1914 and 1918. At the same time, real wages decreased by 35% between 1914 and 1918: in 1921, they were still 10% below their 1914 level.[3] It is likely that the pre-1914 division[4] between skilled workers (organized in trade unions) and unskilled workers (usually unorganized) gave way after the war to a division between employed and unemployed workers, even though the possession of a job did not necessarily correspond with reformism, nor did unemployment necessarily correspond with revolutionary inclinations. The “unions” (AAU), born after 1919, consisted of employed workers, as was clearly demonstrated by the fact that they were composed of revolutionary factory organizations.

[...]

The OS', on the other hand, together with the “revolutionary shop stewards” who were still members of the trade unions (see Chapter 4), created the “factory organizations” during the war, and later formed the autonomous “left” radical organizations of the proletariat: the AAUs (General Workers Unions). The trade unions could no longer ignore this majority of the proletariat, even though only the most radical minority of the OS joined the AAU. The skilled workers, previously reticent about admitting unskilled workers into the trade unions, welcomed them after 1919. The trade unions, which in fact adopted an organizational structure based on factory and industry, soon had nine million members. This development was also encouraged by pressure from capitalists who refused to enter into contracts with workers who were not members of the trade unions (see the KAPD *Program*).

[...]

The organization of workers into *unions* (*unionen*, in German; not to be confused with the “unions” of the English-speaking world, whose counterparts in this text shall be referred to on all occasions as “trade unions”—tr. note) or councils, formed especially during the extensive mass strike movement, corresponds to the transition from the “tool-machine phase” to the “specialized machinery phase”[9]: an epoch during which the trade unions passed from reformism (although not yet integrated into the State), to systematic collaboration, and capital passed from surrounding life, to totally penetrating life. At this juncture the proletariat made the workplace the site of its attempt to achieve unity because the workplace was not yet totally conquered by capital.[10] Many workers still worked on tool-machines. They were trained within the old trade union framework, and demonstrated the results of this training in the factories where they worked, where they preserved a relative autonomy and carried out many tasks. This stage of *large-scale mechanized industry* progressively yielded—later, with the war and then during the twenties, at an accelerated pace—to the stage of the OS and of the scientific organization of labor. There is no rupture between these two mutually interconnected periods; the struggles which developed immediately after the

1 Unskilled worker

war, however, comprised the meeting point of the two phases.[11] In the United States and Canada, within a more modern capitalism, the most intense proletarian movement arose among the OS (who were often recent immigrants)[12] who tried to unite in the IWW (see Chapter 9). The councils constituted an attempt on the part of the proletarians to form autonomous groups: they were forced to do so; there was no other way to carry out any kind of struggle, even a simple reformist struggle. In their collaboration with the bourgeoisie, the trade unions went so far as to give their approval to the prohibition of strikes, and even prohibited them themselves; the councils were therefore above all compelled to undertake the tasks which the trade unions no longer fulfilled. Their form (organization by factory, uniting organized and unorganized workers) was better-adapted for an effective reformist struggle against modern capitalism. But the control of the entire productive apparatus by workers councils is in no way revolutionary if the workers limit themselves to administering what has fallen into their hands in the same way as before, or even better, with greater efficiency than before. Capitalist society, although managed by the workers themselves, would still be capitalist.

From Chapter Four

Besides the fact that it did not join the ISD², the Hamburg group³ was most notable for its connection to the revolutionary movement in the USA: the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). Wolffheim had been a militant in the IWW in California for several years. The views expressed by Wolffheim and Laufenberg in *Democracy and Organization* were similar to the ideology of the IWW (see Chapter 9).[6] Their ideas also presaged German *unionism* (the AAU and AAU-E). Workers should not, they said, organize and struggle while grouped by trades and skills (as in the trade unions) because the structure of capitalism had changed since the formation of the first trade unions. Trades had long since ceased to be the basic economic units and consequently were no longer the locus of the class struggle of the proletariat. This unit was now the factory and, at a higher level, the industry. Against the monopolization and trustification of capitalism in its many forms, the workers could not prosecute an effective struggle unless they monopolized and trustified themselves at their workplaces, factory by factory, and then by industry: “To the monopolized form of industry corresponds, on the workers’ side, the pure industrial union on the basis of the factory organization.”[7] This would, in addition, permit the still “unorganized” workers to join the struggle.

[...]

The two touchstones of the left at the founding Congress of the German CP would, in effect, be electoral abstentionism and sabotage of the trade unions. These two positions were arrived at by the ISD in the course of its theoretical development, greatly influenced by the workers movement during the war. It was in *Arbeiterpolitik*⁴ that, for the first time, the watchword of the German Revolution appeared: *Heraus den Gewerkschaften!* (Out of the Trade Unions!), at first to be subjected to criticism, and later to be adopted. Much the same thing took place regarding the concept of the *unitary organization* which was expressed for the first time in 1917 in the same journal. This idea would be re-appropriated and further elaborated by Wolffheim and Laufenberg, providing the first theoretical foundations of the AAU. But the German Left went beyond the IWW: instead of basing itself on economic organizations which rejected politics, it wanted to positively overcome the rupture between political and economic organizations. Finally, the critique of social democracy and its methods led the ISD to the rejection of parliamentarism as a tactic which fatally led to the domination of the parliamentary delegation over the rest of the Party which would thus become the instrument for purely electoral ends. The later theoretical elaborations of this current are clearly of great interest today: *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*, by Pannekoek, as well as three texts by Rühle: *The Revolution is Not a Party Matter!*, *Fundamental Questions of Organization*, and *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*.

[...]

2 International Socialists of Germany – a formalized split-off from the Social Democratic Party (SPD)

3 One of the informal groups that broke from the SPD

4 'Workers politics' – a publication of the Bremen ISD

All strikes were prohibited by the trade unions as a “betrayal of our brothers at the front”. As a result, everything was very clear from the beginning on the labor front, as far as organizations were concerned: in every strike, a new organization was born in each factory, led by the “revolutionary shop stewards”. These men were generally regularly-elected trade union delegates who did not follow the official line of the ADGB’s Central Committee. The new structures were based on the *factory*, and these factory organizations (BO, *Betriebsorganisation*) were organized by *industrial* regions (for example, the workers council of Greater Berlin), in accordance with the technical structure of capital during that era. This form of organization would be adopted and theorized by the German Left (KAPD, AAU), and was also the embryo of the future workers councils. The shop stewards held effective leadership over all strikes, and called them off without any negotiations when they felt that the strike movement was in no position to make the State back down. Starting and stopping strikes almost at will, the shop stewards were the most authentic expression of the labor rank and file at that time: they comprised its executive organ. Constantly spreading, the strikes were supposed to have terminated in the insurrectionary general strike. The shop stewards would elaborate a plan for November 1918 along such lines which, as it turned out, could not be executed: once again, it became obvious that the revolution would begin spontaneously before the D-Day foreseen by all the leaders. Later, when this revolution directly posed problems at the level of the State, once the struggle became directly political, the shop stewards in fact proved incapable of leading it: they generally rallied to the USPD as their political party. Incapable of transcending the limitations of the factory, they left it only in order to fall prey to the limitations of political democracy. Opposed to mass action, which they considered to be “revolutionary gymnastics”, the *Revolutionäre Obleute*⁵(RO) proved that the mere fact of their working class and factory background did not confer upon them any more immunity against opportunism and immediatism than was the case with social groups “outside” the factories. The most radical sectors of the proletariat (the “left”) would not clearly emerge until the revolution.

From Chapter Five

On January 1, 1919, the RO refused to become the KPD’s economic organization, and requested, among other things, that the party abandon the provocative name of “Spartacus”.^[8] As an expression of its radical-reformist base, the RO would be replaced during the struggles of early 1919 by the factory organizations and action committees, the precursors of the future AAU. After the end of 1918, left wing action committees existed in all of Hamburg’s factories.

From Chapter Six

The Congress⁶ held a debate on the question of organization, but for the most part opposed centralism. Workers autonomy, if not workerism, occupied a preferential place in the Congress. Eberlein declared:^[18] “The organizations of the old SPD, except for periodic elections, were inert and empty... We must construct our organization on totally different foundations. We demand that the workers and soldiers councils exercise all political power. The factory councils are the basis of power. Our organization must be adapted to this situation. It would then be best, probably, to create communist groups in the factories. It cannot be tolerated that orders should be imposed from above. The industrial organizations must enjoy complete autonomy. The task of the central organ is above all that of synthesizing the movements which develop outside of it and assuring political and ideological leadership.” Each organization must have full autonomy of action; the central office has a minimal political role: information clearing house, preparation of congresses and managing day-to-day business. Above all it was not to be a revolutionary general staff for all of Germany. The representatives of the party’s minority faction were elected to leadership positions: Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Jogisches, Levi. The only “leftist” among the party’s leaders, Frölich, was dispatched to Bavaria. The KPD would not adopt Bolshevik centralism as a “principle” of organization until its third Congress (October 1920), after having excluded the left, which would denounce the centralism-federalism alternative as false and argue that it had been superseded by the “*union*” (cf. the texts of the

5 'Revolutionary Shop Stewards'

6 Founding congress of the German Communist Party

KAPD and the AAU):[19] this was the beginning of the critique of organizational fetishism.

[...]

It was crucial for its current and future activities that the KPD Congress should affirm that the party should work for the destruction of the trade unions and call upon all of its members to leave them: such was the opinion of the abstentionist majority. On behalf of the left, Frölich (Bremen) expounded the obligation to end the old separation between political organization (party) and economic organization (trade union): the theme of unitary organization already broached in 1917 in *Arbeiterpolitik* and which would be championed by Rühle and the AAU-E. Luxemburg and the rest of the party minority did not directly address this issue: it was only after the revolution that the trade unions, they said, could be replaced in their economic role by the councils. Luxemburg managed to have this question tabled and referred to a committee and consequently it was not the subject of a party resolution. Opposition to the trade unions was by no means assured, since it was largely based on a preference for the councils, and it was already known that the latter were, in their great majority, reformist.[21]

From Chapter Seven

The Ruhr was the scene of insurrectionary strikes, but the Essen miners council, upon proclaiming the socialization of the mines, merely decreed what would today be understood as “nationalization”. The most important revolutionary undertaking in this region was carried out by the anarchists of the FVDG (cf. Chapter 9): joint action between the FVDG and the KPD lasted until May 1919. After having momentarily crushed Berlin, the counterrevolutionary troops hurried to the Ruhr. The SPD had already prepared the terrain: present in the councils and committees alongside the USPD, the KPD and the FVDG, it helped disorganize the strike. The troops then intervened and pacified the region. The workers of the Ruhr, who had a certain degree of faith in the SPD in the past, abandoned the party and the trade unions in droves in order to create *unionen* (the “unions” of the future AAU).

[...]

Between the crushing of Magdeburg-Brunswick and the reduction of Leipzig, the defeat of the Ruhr took place. At the end of March, the movement there provided the first instance of an autonomous organization on the scale of an entire industrial region. On the 30th, delegations of revolutionary workers from throughout the Ruhr, breaking with all trade union ideologies, formed the *Allgemeine-Bergarbeiter-Union* (General Miners Union) in Essen; unable to prevent its creation, the other groups were forced to strangle this “union” in its cradle. Its existence would be brief, but it was the first union and prefigured the AAU. The KPD’s leftist faction saluted it as the *ne plus ultra* of revolutionary proletarian organization, since it was oriented towards the suppression of the party-trade union dichotomy, and was the creation of the masses themselves. Its birth was the subject of commentary in the *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Communist Workers Newspaper) of Hamburg and was mentioned in Wolffheim’s pamphlet, *Factory Organizations or Trade Unions?*

[...]

The united front of the anarchosyndicalists and the communists (November 1918 to May 1919) corresponded, within the FVDG, to the ideological hegemony of Roche: non-rejection of violence, dictatorship of the proletariat, defense of the council-form. These were positions close to the form assumed by the revolutionary movement, not advice about what had to be done to prevent a “return to capitalism”. This observation could be applied to the left as a whole. Its merit was its boycott of elections of all kinds, *de facto* destruction of the trade unions, and theorizing these attitudes as affirmations of an authentically proletarian movement. But if it is true that antiparlamentarism and anti-trade unionism constitute the movement’s best points, they are not enough. These points would be assumed by the only capitalist party which would rise to the occasion of the German revolution and would also be capable of repressing it, Nazism. Roche provided a definition of the councils which indicated their limitations: “the councils are the

parliaments of the working class.” After all the struggles of the month of May, the syndicalist camp returned to a more classical anarchosyndicalism: remaining in the minority, Roche would become a theoretician of the AAU.

From Chapter Nine

The FVDG broke the radical front by opposing the renovation of the General Union of Miners, destroyed in May 1919, and turned to the creation of an organization on the principles of revolutionary syndicalism in the Rhineland-Westphalia region, where it was strongest: the *Freie Arbeiter Union (Rhineland-Westphalia)* (Free Workers Union) was founded at the Düsseldorf Congress on September 15-16, 1919. The very name, FAU, was a compromise between anarchism (*Freie*: free) and unionism (*Union*). Indeed, besides the members of the post-November 1918 reconstituted FVDG, local unionist organizations sympathetic to the KPD also attended the congress (the Essen AAU, the General Union of Miners). The opposition of the two tendencies was clearly defined: the syndicalists appeared as “dogmatists” who wanted their 1906 program to be adopted. At that point, the differences revolved around organization by trade, an article of faith for classical revolutionary syndicalists, or by factory. A compromise was reached: in theory, organization by trades was adopted, but in practice the organization was based on what actually existed (organization of miners by shafts, and the others by factories). All political parties were condemned except the KPD. The FAU (R-W) would remain a coalition of organizations until the creation of the FAUD and the AAU.[13]

[...]

The Origins of Unionism

(It should be emphasized that the *Unionen* discussed in this book were not (and in fact fought against) what are called “unions” in the English language (*Gewerkschaften* in German)) (Author’s note to the American edition).

Unionism, as a concept of proletarian revolutionary organization, was conceived by elements which had arrived during the war, at the time of the revolution in Germany, from the USA. The IWW, an organization of radical economic struggle, born in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century, had historical roots which extended back to Owen’s theory of *One Big Union* (ca. 1830). The workers in the IWW were organized by factory and by industry. The IWW had various tendencies, one of which—a minority—asserted the need to form an alliance with a revolutionary political party; this tendency was inspired by DeLeon and was actually excluded from the IWW. The DeLeonist SLP and the workers groups under its influence worked in parallel with but separately from the IWW. DeLeon thought a party distinct from the unions was necessary in order to destroy the State: once this purely negative act had been consummated, the party would be eclipsed by the unions’ administration of society. The majority of the IWW’s membership rejected this dual party/unions structure, and wanted to make the IWW the sole revolutionary organization. Dannenberg, having arrived from America, led a small unionist tendency in Braunschweig, and was undoubtedly influenced by DeLeon. The greatest difference between the IWW and anarchosyndicalism was the IWW’s dedication to the principle of the factory organization.

The IWW was considered to be a sympathetic but confused movement, or as one of those rare cases of a workers organization which was “not manipulated” from outside by a “party”. It played a role in the formation of the German Left. When the KAPist worker P. Mattick immigrated to the USA in 1926, he joined the IWW. The IWW’s real nature must be acknowledged, as well as its *failure* in 1914, *just like* that of the parties and trade unions against which it carried out such an effective struggle. Its failure was not due only to its repression, which it had neither wanted to prepare for nor was capable of confronting. From its founding in 1905, it tried to remain on the margin of political groups, but it had an overwhelming tendency to ignore the question of power as well as that of the destruction of the State. It was more apolitical than antipolitical.[18] The IWW’s 1916 congress called for the organization of a general strike in case of war. *Just like* the resolutions of the Second International (cf. Chapter 4), this proposal would not be respected. A

minority fraction demanded the implementation of the decisions of the 1916 congress when the US entered the war in April 1917. The IWW's *General Executive Board*, after long deliberation, refused to do so. Even after April 1917, when the IWW was under attack by the State and armed gangs (assassinations, arrests, destruction of its offices), the GEB took no action. B. Haywood, the IWW leader, stated that everything would return to the way it was before the war and that the organization would rebuild itself. For the next two years, the IWW restricted its defensive activity to the legal system ... which the State itself did not respect.[19] The war revealed its limitations, just as it had exposed those of the trade unions and socialist parties.

Unionism held that the workers should be organized by factories and then by *economic* regions (and not by industries). This difference is crucial (within the context of the period under consideration, and obviously not as an abstract, ahistorical opposition): the point of view of industrial unionism, in its debates, and its power position, was framed in relation to the cartels and industrial trusts—it was a form of organization designed to return to the roots of true trade unionism. Organization by economic regions, however, united all the workers in the same region, transcending not only the trade or profession (like all unionism) but also the industry and even the factory; this kind of unionism which goes beyond the interests of trade, of factory, and of industry is, in fact, a geographical-strategic grouping with a view to revolutionary action and had a tendency to supersede the proletarian condition itself. Furthermore, the one time when a union, with the assistance of the AAUD, led a reformist struggle (in 1927), it was an industrial union: the Union of North Sea Fishermen.

In 1919, the unions were temporary associations which worked on the formation of councils: it was the councils and not the unions which were called upon to manage production. For all the currents of the period, socialism was a problem of management: the different conceptions of socialism concerned the form of workers management of production (by the party, by the council, the trade unions, the union, etc.). The unions appeared spontaneously during the war and the revolution. When the workers abandoned the trade unions they did so factory by factory and not by the basic units of trade union organization (the trades).

The idea of *unitary* organization (neither party, nor trade union, but something beyond both) appeared for the first time in an anonymous article in the Bremen *Arbeiterpolitik*, and was presented as a concept which had originated among rank and file workers. The “soul of the proletarian” cannot be divided into a “political soul” and an “economic soul”. In *Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions*, Luxemburg had expressed the idea that the separation of the party and the trade union was by no means absolute. In a sense, what was taking place was a return to the primitive organization of the proletarians, except, this time, as the fruit of a more advanced movement. The trade union-party distinction was proof that the previous era was not revolutionary: the same was true of the distinction between maximum and minimum programs. The mere fact, however, that a proletarian organization would define itself, in the first place, in relation to the *workplace* shows that the proletarian offensive was deadlocked.

At the KPD's founding congress, the left defended the concept of unitary organization. During the ensuing period of struggles, the party's majority implemented the slogan “abandon the trade unions” and also helped to create the elements of the future AAU. The unionist current was seeking its own identity at the moment (May 1919) when the syndicalists broke with the revolutionary front. At that time, revolutionary groups were once again forming in the Ruhr, in Central Germany, and above all in various cities in the North (Bremen and Hamburg) in a series of organizations which were neither classical trade unions nor revolutionary syndicalist trade unions. In Hamburg, a direct line of descent connected the IWW to the unions. Wolffheim had spent several years with the IWW in California. With Laufenberg, he urged the workers to join the AAU when it was created in August of 1919, and they considered it to be the German section of the IWW.[20]

It was in Hamburg that unionism was theorized in particular detail. The Hamburg *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung* published numerous articles from May to August 1919 from various sources (“theoreticians”, “rank and file militants”, “trade unionists”, “communists”, etc.) under the rubric of “a contribution to the debate concerning the trade union question”. It was here that the idea arose that the

party should end by dissolving itself into the AAU, after having contributed to the latter's generalization. Moreover, all the tendencies and future splits were to be found in embryo within the debate concerning the *rate* at which this dissolution should proceed.

Organizations of the AAU type (by factory and by region) expressed a primordial fact: the workers who formed them carried out a revolutionary struggle by attacking the roots of the economic relations and not their effects. To declare oneself in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat was also the sole criterion for membership in the AAU. Viewed negatively, only those workers who rejected any idea of reformist or partial struggle could organize in the AAU. When the revolutionary wave receded and was submerged in the sea of reformist action, the trade union-type organization, with its professional divisions, reigned unchallenged. The AAU ceased to be an instrument of struggle, since the struggle which it served no longer existed, and it would be relegated to the status of a subsidiary sect of the KAPD.

The relation between organization based on skills/trades and the reformist struggle would be negatively confirmed in 1923. The spectacular inflation of that year caused a day's wage to lose one-third of its value after 24 hours.[21] The wage struggle once again having become impossible, the trade union organizations were dismantled and replaced by factory organizations: but this time the latter did not undertake any revolutionary action worthy of the name.

The Formation of the "AAUD"

In August 1919, factory organizations, acting upon the basis of the positions of the KPD, met in Essen to found the AAU of Essen. For the last time, the Levist central committee gave its assent to such an act. In itself, this meeting was of little importance, but the AAU was the focal point for the foundation of the AAUD. It participated in the foundation of the FAU(R-W) but quickly broke with the latter, since unionism was in the last stage of acquiring its own identity. The founding congress of the AAUD (General Union of German Workers) met on February 14, 1920. The principle spokespersons for unionism had become isolated: Wolffheim and Laufenberg had devoted themselves exclusively to propaganda for their national-bolshevik theses. Frölich and Becker had remained in the KPD and joined the fight against "leftism" (cf. Chapters X, XIII and XV, for the Bremen left).

The two leading tendencies at the congress were composed of those who called for the immediate abolition of the party organization (Roche, from Hamburg, and Rühle, from Dresden) and those who thought that it was necessary to maintain the party for a certain time (Schröder and the leadership of the future KAPD). The Hamburg national bolsheviks comprised a very small minority of the congress delegates. The first theoreticians of unionism were thrown overboard at the very moment that unionism began its existence.

During this period, Becker thought that the unions should "be intermediate organs between the party and the class", a position which the other tendencies felt was too rigid. The split which developed among the "centralists" helped to hand over the leadership to the "federalists", who were particularly strong in Hamburg and Dresden, and who would dominate the organization's leading positions in 1920. For example, supreme authority was vested solely in the hands of the national congress: "The AAUD's organization would never completely achieve the same stable character as the FAU. The AAUD was, more than any other union, the expression of the revolutionary movement of the *Betriebsräte*, and from the moment the revolutionary movement began to stagnate, this would appear as an enormous weakness." [22] But this was only true from an extremely "organizational" point of view: as if the proletarian revolutionary movement should provide itself with (mass) organizations capable of resisting an extremely long counterrevolution. Again: organizations like the AAUD were so exceptionally subversive because they were so completely attuned to the revolutionary movement; they overcame the opposition between the movement and a petrified organization. The fact that they disappeared at the end of the revolutionary period would, instead, be a good sign, if one did not know that they would never admit the full extent of their failure and all of its implications.

Dannenberg's tendency advocated "industrial unionism": the unions should federate by industry and not by

region, and should link up with a political party (in this case, the USPD). This tendency disappeared along with its leader in 1921, after having been excluded in 1920, “attacked by all other tendencies for its pro-USPD sympathies and its ‘economistic reformism’”.[23]

The debate at the congress was very confused, and the delegates had just enough time to agree about what the AAUD *was not*, before the police arrested them. But the organization’s foundation responded to a real movement. The formation of the unions coincided with a *de facto* break with and a rejection of trade union organization. To conceive of the AAUD in purely organizational terms, as one more link in “the life of groups”, is to have not understood it in its essence. In August 1919, the Union of Port and Shipyard Workers of Hamburg was formed, with a communist leadership. Such splits had a *political* basis: “It attacked the trade union *Zentrale* for its support of Ebert and the Kaiser’s generals, it supported arming the proletarians, recognition of the Russian soviet republic, militant solidarity with Russia, and opposition to Ebert-Scheidemann’s support of the Poles and the White Army. Had the revolutionary situation remained more generally aggressive, the events which took place in Bremen and Hamburg would have been repeated.”[24]

The second conference of the AAUD, which took place on March 10-12, 1920, just before the Kapp Putsch, adopted some very simple statutes.[25] The Roche-Rühle tendency emerged victorious: federalism, no party. In November 1920, the third conference convened while the KAPD was in its ascendant phase, after it had excluded Rühle and his supporters. Joint action between the KAPD and the AAUD was especially extensive during the month of August due to the sabotage of arms shipments to Poland. The KAPD tendency (Schröder) gained support. This tendency recognized the temporary necessity of the party as a separate institution, even after the revolution, at the advent of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The conference also adopted a very succinct program and a set of “General Guidelines”. [26] These two texts were in absolute conformity with the KAPD program, from which entire passages were borrowed.

Rühle’s current separated from the AAUD (cf. Chapter 14). The destiny of the AAUD after its third conference was indistinguishable from that of the KAPD. What is essential is that, from the organizational point of view, the AAUD was not merely an appendix of the KAPD which the latter had created.

Particularly strong in Hamburg, Berlin (30,000 members in December 1920) and central Germany, the AAUD had 150,000 members in the winter of 1920-1921:[27] during this same period the KAPD never had more than 40,000 members. In December 1922, the AAUD would have no more than 120,000 members in its so-called “Berlin” tendency and a few hundred in the “Essen” tendency (cf. Appendix I). It was during 1919-1920, however, that the union was most active, even in terms of its propaganda: the union had at least ten weekly newspapers and its numerous pamphlets sometimes had print runs of 120,000. After 1923 it was left with almost no members. While the FAU(G) was stronger in the mines, the AAUD was especially strong in the metal industry. “The trunk of the class”,[28] as Radek had described it at the congress of the Communist International, had thus abandoned its traditional organizations. This phenomenon of workers regroupment also took place, prior to 1914, in the British trade union movement, where the Triple Alliance consolidated the miners, the railroad workers and the transport workers in order to stage turbulent but non-revolutionary actions. The IWW, on the other hand, recruited mostly in the newer industries with a heavy representation of unorganized immigrants. These facts, by the way, refute the legend according to which the German Left was mostly composed of “déclassé” elements. The members of the AAUD were not *lumpen*, as Rosenberg would have us understand in his *History of the Weimar Republic*. [29] All layers of the working class were to be found in the AAUD, as well as in the FAUD, the KAPD and the KPD.

First, the members of the KAPD and the AAUD came from all layers of the proletariat. Furthermore, after half a century of social democratic domestication, and in opposition to the despotism of the factory, the rejection of the discipline of the various parties was something completely positive, especially in Germany. It has been said that the “leftists” lacked any experience of organization. But this is utterly untrue: they knew the organizations of their time all too well and knew that these organizations considered them to be a simple “mass” which was always led to defeat and massacre. An important fraction of radical proletarians acted in a revolutionary way and knew what they had to do. It is all to their credit that they did not want to

hear of any discipline which did not originate among their own ranks. What would be absurd would be to raise anti-discipline, anti-organization and anti-authority to the status of categorical principles, as if the rebels of the various insurrectionary movements had not had their own leaders, organizations and discipline. The principle that “the whole world must give the orders” is only valid where there is nothing that has to be done.

As long as the AAUD was a living organization, its polemic against the anarcho-syndicalism which was attempting to return to organization by trade had a real basis. It was the expression of the movement of radical proletarians which, by organizing to achieve goals held in common by the whole proletariat, also entered into conflict with the forms which were keeping them isolated in stagnant compartments. As a distinct ideology, revolutionary syndicalism played a reactionary role during this phase. But when, during the period of reaction, some survivors of unionism devoted themselves to making a fetish of the forms of organization of the radical current of the German Left (councils, factory organizations, AAU, etc.), this propaganda underwent a change of function. Encouraging the workers to create these organizations was in this case a substitute for revolutionary action. And this was all the more dangerous insofar as these forms, which had previously expressed a subversive content, could become the vehicle for tendencies which were simply reformist, as a result of the further development of capital and of the forms of its domination.

From Chapter Ten

[...]

The left's attitude did not change. The focal point of the tendency at that time was in northern Germany: Wolffheim and Laufenberg were the radicals' spokesmen, and the central committee concentrated its attacks on them. But the theoretical expression of the movement was provided by Pannekoek who tirelessly wrote for the left press under the pseudonym of K. Horner. Hamburg paved the way by violently destroying the trade unions. The AAU was strongest in the north.

[...]

After this first purge, there was still an internal opposition, since the abstentionist tendencies had remained in the party, *believing that their position was justified by the theses they had just adopted*. In regard to the trade union question, the central committee was forced to reach an accommodation with the representatives from Rhineland-Westphalia who did not want to hear anything about a return to the trade unions. In November 1919, the Ruhr sections of the KPD were still in favor of collaboration with the AAU, which might have prevented the infiltration of syndicalists into the region's unions. But the KPD leadership opposed this proposal.[8]

[...]

Pannekoek soon reached the conclusion that the German revolution had come to an end: unlike Gorter, he remained on the margins of the various organizations of the left, even though he was most sympathetic to the perspectives of the AAU-E and Rühle.[16] Prior to the war, he had already made an essential distinction, in *Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics*, [17] between the existing organizations (he was speaking of the SPD) and what he called “the spirit of organization” in the proletariat. After 1919 Pannekoek undoubtedly soon adopted the idea that no organization, however “leftist” it may be, unless it was the organization which the proletariat created for itself during the revolution, could justify calling itself the party of the proletariat.

From Chapter Twelve

[...]

During this period, the Ruhr was the stronghold of the revolution in Germany. It was there that the influence of the Left and of the revolutionary trade unions was strongest. But no one group was strong

enough to unleash a movement on its own, and the insurrection was a spontaneous offensive of the proletariat (it was the first and next-to-last proletarian offensive during the German revolution until March 1921). At the time of the Kapp Putsch, “numerous regions such as the Ruhr and central Germany had not yet undergone the great defeats suffered by the workers during the previous years...”[7] Instead, the organization of the revolutionary movement in the Ruhr had suffered from the split in the KPD, so the *unionen* were not well-established there and their weakness worked to the advantage of the anarchosyndicalists, who were opposed to political action, which, by definition, they identified with anything which transcended the framework of the workplace. The General Union of Miners had, however, organized one-third of the Ruhr miners, whose principle region, Rhineland-Westphalia, was a *union* bastion. The USPD’s split and its lack of interest in the *unionen* facilitated the growth of anarchosyndicalist influence.[8]

[...]

A large part of the red army, evidently, did not recognize the terms of this agreement. The members of the AAUs, the future KAPists and the anarchosyndicalist rank and file acted in opposition to the views of the Berlin central committee of the FAUD. According to Angress, the KPD’s militant groups formed only “an insignificant contingent compared to the anarchosyndicalist rebels, the unaffiliated, or the members of the KAPD, the USPD and even the SPD”. [13] On the 30th, the radical workers also rejected an ultimatum. The KPD leadership was in favor of abiding by the Bielefeld agreement: it was necessary to follow the SPD-USPD directives, since these two parties represented the majority of the workers. This stance was an indication of the KPD’s extreme weakness after Heidelberg. [14] The workers were unmoved. The *Reichswehr* would no longer “keep out of the Ruhr” and, from the 3rd to the 6th of April, easily defeated a red army weakened by negotiations.

From Chapter Thirteen

[...]

On January 8, 1921, utilizing its new forces, the VKPD⁷ initiated a large-scale campaign in the purest style of the “workers united front”. The central committee sent an “open letter” to all “workers organizations”, from the most reactionary trade unions to the KAPD and the AAUD, proposing a joint struggle against capitalism. Written by Radek and Levi, the letter called for a campaign to increase wages, dissolve the “bourgeois defense organizations”, create workers self-defense organizations, and to compel Germany to re-establish diplomatic relations with Russia. It was hoped that, should the recipients reject this joint action, they would stand revealed as traitors before the masses, and would lose all their influence; should they accept, it was thought that they would be obliged to collaborate with the KPD so as to continue to appear to be revolutionaries, and the KPD would thereby become the driving force of the movement. This action was to have an “educational” value for the “masses”. According to the formula of *Infantile Disorder*, the KPD would have caught the organizations which called themselves revolutionary just as the “rope catches the hanged man”. The KAPD and the AAUD, “prisoners of their ultra-leftism”, rejected the proposal.

From Chapter Fourteen

[...]

In mid-August 1920, the Red Army was at the gates of Warsaw, and the Alliance sent important aid shipments to the Poles, which passed through Germany. The KAPD, AAUD and FAUD carried out sabotage operations against these shipments which as a whole were quite successful, and tried to use these actions as a springboard for an insurrection, which was a total failure. The KAPD blamed the public denunciations of

⁷ 'United Communist Party of Germany' (VKPD), the result of a merger between the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the left-wing of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), itself a result of a split in the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD).

these actions by the KPD and the USPD.[10] Where logistical reasons prevented their cadres from receiving the orders to refrain from participating in this action, seizures of power at a local level took place: such was the case of the Köthen “council republic” in Central Germany, ridiculed by those who contributed to its defeat. Many radicals were taken prisoner. “The KAPD was the only party which took a chance on fulfilling its antidemocratic content in everyday work.”[11]

[...]

In a general strike of electrical workers, in October 1920, the KAPD, faithful to its role as “trigger” of the movement, denounced the betrayal of the KPD, SPD, etc. The government itself had to repress the strike. After March 1921, the KAPD worked to set up action committees in the factories and promoted “Italian-style” occupations. The Fourth Congress (September 1921) would assign itself the task of “keeping the revolutionary will of the German proletariat alive”. The KAPD had turned towards activism, becoming a “party in the traditional sense”. With the definitive ebb of the revolution, new internal divisions arose and the KAPD began to turn into a sect. The last revolutionary enclaves were reduced by external intervention (many were killed in various actions) and internal causes (activism and the clashes between tendencies). The creation of the AAUD-E was a vain attempt to react to these developments.

The Debate Concerning the “Unitary” Organization

Due to their mutual opposition to the Bolsheviks and the social democrats, all the factions of the German Left agreed on one point: it was not the “Party” which would secure power during and after the revolution, but the councils, institutions which would allow the proletarians to simultaneously exercise both political and economic power. But the KAPD Program distinguished between “political” and “economic” councils: a sign of disagreement over the timing of the party’s dissolution. The AAUD-E represented the current which supported the party’s immediate dissolution.

The idea of unitary organization, as we have mentioned above, first appeared in Bremen[13]: this point was the only novel feature of the text in which it appeared, however, which otherwise still advocated a trade-based structure as well as parliamentarism. The notion remained confused for a long time, and further evolved only with the wildcat strikes during and after the war. The revolutionary workers then organized themselves by factories and by regions, and sabotaged the trade unions and elections.

The confusion, and the source of later disagreements and splits, derived from the fact that the idea of unitary organization was also shared by individuals and groups belonging to a party: the KPD. The Left defended the idea at the KPD’s founding Congress against Luxemburg and the right, for whom the tasks of the trade unions were to be carried out after the revolution by the councils.[14] Since they had agitated in favor of an organization which rejected the party, while they belonged to a party, they arrived at the idea that this party (the KPD(O) and later the KAPD) must dissolve itself into the unitary organization. *Schematically*, two positions took shape: immediate dissolution or dissolution at the end of a “certain period of time”. This “certain period of time”, of course, generated new tendencies, from the moment when more refined distinctions began to be made. In the meantime, as Schröder said in his *On the Future of the New Society*,[15] the party would be preserved as a “necessary evil”. The supporters of unitary organization, not being numerous enough among the proletariat, had no choice but to join the party.

While the whole radical left (uniting all tendencies) was organized in the KAPD, the split first began, as so often happens, over another issue: the position to adopt regarding Russia and the Communist International. Rühle, who was a convinced anti-bolshevik and opposed the KAPD’s joining the Communist International, was excluded from the KAPD, which wanted to collaborate with the Communist International. Rühle had often been reproached for his “semi-anarchism”. Yet the KAPD had attempted to overcome the thesis opposing Marxism to anarchism, as black to white. One of its delegates to the Third World Congress thought that the anarchists underestimated “the organized class struggle ... that they lived history too quickly, that their tactic is premature by several decades”. This is insufficient, of course, but the renascent revolutionary movement synthesized what was good in Marxism and anarchism, implicitly

criticizing[16] the opinions of Marx and Engels.[17]

Rühle's position on Russia was quickly supported by the tendency which was in favor of immediate unitary organization, and the effective break within the KAPD and the AAUD rapidly unfolded. In December, the Saxony district of the KAPD dissolved itself into the AAUD. Later, the Hamburg AAUD excluded from its ranks all those who wanted to remain in the KAPD. Throughout Germany, a fraction of the leftists immediately entered the unitary organization. The latter would criticize the KAPD during the March Action.

In October 1921 this movement held its first autonomous conference and gave itself the name AAUD-E, the "E" standing for "Unitary Organization". This conference adopted "The Guiding Principles of the AAUD-E". The AAUD-E then had 13 economic districts which counted several tens of thousands of members, but would decompose even faster than the other left organizations.

The AAUD-E's theory was essentially expressed in *Die Aktion* after 1920 and in Rühle's pamphlets, each being a development of the previous one.[18] Pannekoek, although not a member of any group after 1920, showed, in a letter dated July 15, 1920, that he was closer to the AAUD-E than to the other left tendencies: "The idea that two organizations of 'enlightened' workers should exist is false." [19] It was upon the principle of the unitary organization that the KAUD (Communist Workers Union of Germany) was founded in 1931, regrouping the remnants of the various groups of the German Left.

From Chapter Fifteen

Between the defeat of the Red Army of the Ruhr and the March Action of 1921, proletarians launched a series of dispersed local actions, which were simultaneously defensive and offensive, comparable to those which had previously broken out in central Germany and Saxony, although on a different scale, but were unable to unite their forces.[1] The March Action first developed in the region of Halle and Mansfeld, which had remained as the last revolutionary stronghold after the crushing of the Ruhr. The copper mines of Mansfeld and the ultramodern chemical works at Leuna formed the backbone of the Action. The workers there had kept the arms they had seized in 1918. Saxony, which had attracted new workers to its lignite and chemical industries, was still the stronghold of the USPD, despite the inroads made by the VKPD, which had its most solid district there: in reality, it merely carried on the tradition of the USPD. The VKPD had 60,000 members in Saxony; in the February 1921 elections it won 200,000 votes, more than the SPD (80,000) and the rump USPD (75,000) combined. The 25,000 workers at Leuna were organized into military formations, and 2,000 of them belonged to the AAUD. It was undoubtedly one of the strongest districts of the KAPD-AAUD. The region had been subjected to the martial law of the Kapp Putsch in March 1920. Many weapons had remained hidden. A wave of theft spread in the factories. The workers demanded, above all, a reduction in working hours (in the Leuna works, for example) and the suppression of the private security forces in the factories, which were violently attacked.[2] Sooner or later the government would have to intervene to pacify the region. If the pre-existing autonomous defensive movement of the proletariat was the starting point for the March offensive, one must not ignore, on the other hand, an essential factor in the context within which the Action took place: the VKPD's change of orientation at the beginning of 1921, and the emergence of a leftist tendency in the Communist International.

[...]

The KAPD demonstrated its jubilation: "It is the proletariat itself which has spoken. The masses of the VKPD have taken action by following our watchword. They have compelled their leaders to do the same." (*Communist Workers Daily*, organ of the Berlin district of the KAPD). A proclamation of the VKPD from March 18 declared: "All workers, ignore the law, and take up arms wherever they can be found." With such slogans, the two parties worked together provisionally. The only current on the left which was reluctant to join in this opportunity to encourage an insurrectionary action was that of the AAUD sections which had broken with the KAPD (the Rühle tendency).

[...]

The rest of Germany remained calm. In Hamburg, on the 23rd, a large rally of unemployed workers and a demonstration headed for the port ended in a confrontation between strikers and non-strikers. Organized by the AAU, the workers faced off with the police in the city: several were killed. It was the only city where proletarians attempted an uprising. After the 24th, martial law was imposed in Saxony. On the same date, the KPD central committee (together with the KAPD) called for an unlimited general strike throughout Germany (only two days before Easter Sunday). According to the KPD there were one million workers on strike (Hamburg, the Ruhr, Berlin and central Germany). The number of strikers was actually somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000, with insurrectionary tendencies in Berlin and the Ruhr. Approximately 120,000 workers heeded the strike call in central Germany. In general, the strikers were primarily workers who were organized in *unionen* affiliated with the FAUD and the AAUD.[16]

“The little coordination which existed during the March Action was the work of the *Unionen* (Hamburg and the Ruhr) and of the AAUD and KAPD in the Leuna works, their stronghold, as well as of M. Hölz’s group.”[17]

Hölz wanted to link up with the Leuna works, but this proved to be impossible. On the 27th, he distributed 50 marks to each member of his armed commandos. They went towards Halle, but his troops were surrounded and forced to disperse. He took part in his last battle on April 1. Leuna had already fallen. On the 31st, the KPD central committee cancelled its general directives. The last battles took place on the 1st of April.

[...]

The KPD’s membership fell to 180,000 and later rose again to over 200,000 in 1922. Radek was ordered to be more attentive to the affairs of the KPD. The KPD elected a new leadership and confined itself to the legal terrain, to agreements between parties and the formation of coalition governments. As 1923 approached, the Eighth Congress declared its support for “workers governments”, that is, coalitions of the KPD and the SPD at the regional level. But a new leftist tendency was born at this Congress, led by A. Maslow and R. Fischer, representing the Frankfurt, Hamburg, Berlin and Ruhr districts. It wanted to create new red trade unions and to boycott the official trade unions and was opposed to the creation of “workers governments”. During this period, the Left, as typified by the KAPD, AAUD and AAUD-E, had almost ceased to exist (cf. Appendix I).

[...]

2. The KAPD and Rühle’s AAUD-E

Gorter and other leaders of the KAPD published *The Path of Dr. Levi, the Path of the VKPD*, whose putschism they denounced:[24] they blamed the failure of March on the tactics followed by the rightist KPD leadership since 1919. Reversing its policy in such a brutal fashion, going suddenly from the legal struggle to the revolutionary struggle, the VKPD had assumed a putschist attitude. But the March Action, as a real movement of the proletariat in central Germany, was not merely a putsch: it was even “the first conscious offensive action of the German proletarians”. [25] The KAPD would unconditionally defend the March Action at the Third World Congress.

The pamphlet briefly mentioned “the pressure exercised by certain authoritarian influences” on the VKPD prior to March, but it was Rühle’s tendency which more fully developed this theme. As Rühle wrote: “The workers must know that the Action in central Germany was an act of madness and a crime, for which the VKPD is entirely responsible.” The VKPD had acted without taking account of the situation, which was by no means favorable for an uprising. But this was not just a case of the VKPD behaving in an absurd manner: it was a case of “the totally subordinate execution of a misunderstood order which ‘came from above’”. “The Bolshevik power has used the German revolution until its internal situation was totally stabilized.”[26] At

that moment, that is, after the 18th, when Kronstadt had been recaptured, it was too late to call off the Action.

As for Hölz, captured a few days after the end of the fighting, he was condemned to life in prison. At first, his defense was organized by the communist left and then, once the latter had disappeared, it passed into the hands of “leftist personalities” on a committee created by the KPD, which made Hölz into a legendary figure. Hölz himself contributed to his own cult. The post offices in the city where he was imprisoned were inundated with packages and letters addressed to him from all over Germany. He was ultimately released. The KPD displayed him for a while as a leading personality, but later, when he became too troublesome, the party sent him to Moscow, where he died during the 1930s, undoubtedly eliminated by the GPU. The *Workers Communist Newspaper* of the KAPD celebrated his achievements in the following passage: “Max Hölz has shown us how to annihilate the bourgeoisie. Max Hölz was our example! Our symbol! Our leader!” Thus has Max Hölz, and above all his cult, become a rather typical product of the immaturity of the proletariat.

From Chapter Sixteen

[...]

Trotsky was correct, of course, to recall that “the most important source of the revolution is still necessity”, and to situate the “degree of education” of the masses in its proper place. But educationalism did not yet characterize the German Left as it would later.[23] Gorter did not consider consciousness to be something which comes *before* action, as it does in the Kautskyist view, in which the proletariat could not become conscious except after having been inoculated by socialist ideas. In its practice, the Left, despite certain imprecise formulas, which are often produced by any revolutionary tendency, considered that clarification must be attained through *action* and not pedagogy. The Communist International, Lenin, and later the Italian Left, chose to attack only the weakest points of the German Left by focusing on its idealist formulations. In his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, Gorter noted how Lenin, instead of attacking positions which had been “officially adopted, often attacks the ‘private’ declarations of the KAPD. The same holds true for his charge of organizational ‘fetishism’”:

“The German Left, throughout its first years, demonstrated that it possessed a sufficiently healthy instinct by not theorizing too much about the form of the *unionen*, but only about their content, thus leaving the possibilities open to the future revolutionary movement ... one must add, however, that, with respect to the ‘economic’ analyses of the *unionen*, there were (particularly in the AAU-E) councilist idealizations concerning the organizational bases of the *unionen*...”[24]

From Appendix I. The Groupuscular Phase

[...]

The AAUD-E

The AAUD-E spawned numerous factions. Until 1925, its leadership was in the hands of Rühle, Pfempfert and J. Broh (who had left the USPD). There were many expressionist artists on the editorial committees of *Die Aktion* and *Die Einheitsfront* (the United Front), the main journal of the AAUD-E. One tendency wanted to unite with the FAUD. Another wanted to participate in wage struggles and the elections for the legal works councils—this faction was excluded. Another tendency, the so-called Heidenau or “smokestack autonomy” tendency, defended absolute autonomy. Finally, the “council communist” or “centralist” tendency fought to make the resolutions approved by the AAUD-E’s Congress compulsory for all the organization’s members.

The latter tendency emerged victorious and made the AAUD-E into an organization which was no longer opposed to the KAPD and the AAUD on the issue of “organizational principles”. The efforts of the Berlin

KAPD to achieve reunification were rejected until 1925. The Heidenau tendency moved in 1923 towards resolutely anti-organizational positions of principle, mixed with anti-intellectualism: it dissolved itself in December 1923.

“All organizations pursue their own survival. The united front of all the creators cannot be realized in the factories and in the countryside unless the organizations rid themselves of all their defining characteristics, since they smuggle the bacillus of schism and therefore the absence of unity into the workers movement with their programs, their leaders and their factory walls. They constitute an obstacle to progress. The comrades of Heidenau have arrived at the necessary conclusions and, first of all, destroy their own organization.”[7]

K. Guttman, a member of the AAUD-E, declared: “In the German proletariat, whatever does not teach organization is not revolutionary” (*Los von Moskau!*, published by the AAUD-E of Hamburg).[8]

In 1925, Rühle, judging that the reaction was too powerful to justify the continuation of revolutionary activity, resigned from the AAUD-E. According to the historians of the GDR,[9] he rejoined the SPD. This seems quite improbable, especially since these *Documents* from East Germany do not document Rühle's departure from the AAUD-E. In addition, he was to continue to make theoretical contributions within the left tradition.

The AAUD-E joined two other groups in 1926 to form the Spartacus League of Left Communist Organizations (or “Spartacus No. 2”) under the patronage of Pfempfert and *Die Aktion*. The other two groups in this organization were the Industrial Union of Transport Workers and Ivan Katz's group, which had recently been excluded from the KPD for “Trotskyism”. This fusion earned the ridicule of the KAPD, but the Berlin tendency would do the same thing a few months later (cf. below). Despite this cartel of organizations, the AAUD-E's membership was falling towards zero, and had no more than 31 members when it fused with the AAUD in 1931 to rejoin the KAPD.

[...]

The AAUD (Berlin tendency) and the KAUD

The AAUD-Berlin underwent a schism at its Seventh Conference in 1927, when the majority declared their support for participation in the partial struggles of the working class, the sole proviso being that the workers themselves must conduct the struggles. The AAUD urged its members to form “action committees” in the factories to prepare wildcat strikes. For the first time in its history it would therefore conduct an economic struggle: the struggle of the North Sea fisherman in 1927. The theses of the Eighth Conference also no longer spoke of the need for a separate party, and consequently for the KAPD, undoubtedly as a result of the Schwach affair. A little later the AAUD declared that it would henceforth assume the tasks of the KAPD. Thus, there was no longer any principled opposition to the vestiges of the AAUD-E, which led to the creation of the KAUD, into which the two organizations fused: at the moment of its founding (Christmas 1931), the KAUD had 343 members. This unification took place, in part, on the advice of the GIKH, with which the AAUD had been in close contact since 1927. The acronym itself, KAU (Communist Workers Union), contrasted with the old name (General Workers Union), indicating that the Germans for their part accepted one of the principle conceptions of the GIKH: the working class must organize itself, no one can attempt to be the pole of this process of self-organization:[12] after 1933 the KAU clandestinely distributed the bulletin *Rätekorrespondenz*, printed with the help of the GIKH in Holland, calling upon the radical workers to form communist workers groups and to carry on the struggle independently of democratic anti-Nazism.

During the crucial years 1920-1930, the Netherlands took up the torch of council communism. After 1945, however, the remnants of this current were relatively strong in central Germany (which became *East Germany*). All the leftists who resumed their activity or who were recognized by the KPD, a total of several hundred, were arrested.[13] The 1953 workers uprisings in this part of Germany assumed the forms of the

council movement, in consonance with the relative backwardness of East German capital during that era.
[14]

From Epilogue (2004)

[...]

Towards the Unitary Organization

The fact that, at the beginning of the 21st century, the basic accusations hurled at the world in 1919 are still current is nothing to be proud of: it means that the world has not changed basically since 1919. Far from it: the rule of capital is more deeply entrenched and has assumed a planetary scale. Even when the outward appearance has changed, the structures of capitalist society, such as the State, parliament, and the trade unions, have remained and preserve their essential functions. The great practical and theoretical merit of the German revolutionaries was that they counted parliament and the trade unions among their adversaries, at a time when these institutions had until then been the very structure of the workers movement in the advanced capitalist countries.

The repudiation of the trade unions in 1919 in Germany was not mere rhetoric, but reality. Not a renunciation, but an act of creation. “*Get out of the trade unions*” expressed the real activity of hundreds of thousands of workers who abandoned them to form unitary organizations, the *unionen*.

“Union” must be understood here in its two meanings: the reunion of the proletarians, but also the single organization, combining economic and political functions. It did not involve the resurgence of a more or less Proudhonian “economism”, concerned above all with managing the workshop in a different way, and then the factory and finally the whole industry. In the fall of 1919, the AAU of Bremen declared that it was not a trade union, not even a “revolutionary syndicalist” type of trade union, and that it was fighting for political power.

Unionism was the tendency to break down all trade barriers: when workers abandoned their trade unions, they did so by entire factories, rather than by this or that trade. It also signified the will to organize beyond the boundaries of each industry: the unions operated on the scale of whole economic regions.

In a negative sense, unionism is a reaction against the institutions which accepted the war, collaborated with the Sacred Union in order to increase production, and then broke the wartime strikes. In a positive sense, it was solidarity, a community of action. Workerism? The criterion for membership in the AAUD was to declare that one is favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat. A worker in favor of sectional struggles by trade category would not have been admitted. Unionism does not reduce the proletarian to a producer.

In practice, and especially in Hamburg and Bremen, where this tendency was most vigorous, the communists attacked the trade union offices and distributed the contents of the trade union treasuries to the unemployed, and the rank and file members of the trade union did nothing to defend an institution which they no longer considered to be theirs. This tendency would persist in the KPD even after the purge of its leftists. In 1919, the Heidelberg Congress, which excluded the left, still did not preclude the possibility that “if it becomes necessary”, “the destruction of the trade union form and [...] the creation of new forms of organization”[3] would be undertaken.

Paul Mattick and Council Communism by Claudio Pozzoli

Written in 1976 as the intro of a Paul Mattick anthology titled *Ribelli e rinnegati*

Online at: http://www.redemmas.org/collective_action_notes/Pozzoli1.htm

In Germany, left communism comprised the majority at the founding Congress of the German Communist Party, advocating, against Rosa Luxemburg, abstentionism and anti-parliamentarism. It was one of the currents of western communism that Lenin would later define as “infantile extremism”. In October 1919, at the Heidelberg Congress of the German Communists, the left majority was expelled from the KPD. This break was preceded, on the part of the left, by campaigns against the trade union movement and in favor of the factory organizations and the workers councils. In April of the following year the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) was founded and revolutionary factory organizations—formed during the previous two years in spontaneous strikes that often displayed an anti-trade union character—were organized in the General Workers Union of Germany (the AAUD).

Of these two organizations, only the AAUD could be characterized as a truly new type of organization. Towards the end of 1920, before its decline, the AAUD had approximately 300,000 members. With the parallel founding of the KAPD, which was of a purely political character, profound disagreements arose among the “unionists” of the AAUD. If, on the one hand, the latter were unanimously in favor of preventing the formation of “leadership cliques” and bureaucracies within the mass organization (whose purpose was to organize the entire proletariat) that would necessarily become independent of the rank and file, they were on the other hand divided with regard to the problem of relations with the KAPD and concerning the option or the necessity of accepting a separate political organization alongside the AAUD, with distinct goals of its own.

A minority within the AAUD, opposed to collaboration with the KAPD and “dual organization”, split from the AAUD and founded the AAU-Einheitsorganisation (unitary organization). The principle inspiration for the new AAU-E came from Otto Rühle, whose theories were to acquire decisive importance for council communism. According to the unionists of the AAU-E, “die Revolution ist Keine Parteisache” (the revolution is not a party matter), and the unitary organization of the proletariat must simultaneously have political and economic goals; bureaucratic statutes and machinery are superfluous; and, if the proletariat is not yet mature enough to make decisions and act autonomously in the course of its own struggles, this does not mean that these tasks must be delegated to a party. The “dual organization”, even that of the AAU and the KAPD, is nothing but a reprise of the traditional organizational schema: separate party and trade unions with a rigid division of tasks.

If the KAPD, on the other hand, thought that the revolutionary party was still necessary, it was far from considering the mass organization to be a thing of the past. The party, however, had to be an elite, therefore, based on the “quality” rather than the “quantity” of its members. “Revolutionary cadres” are therefore necessary, whose purpose is to act within the masses, to mold them and to serve as catalysts in their actions. The task of organizing the masses themselves in the factories, at the point of production, falls to the AAU. The latter must fight against the traditional trade union and destroy its influence over the working class and, finally, it must fight for the transformation of the factory organizations into workers councils controlled directly by the class as a whole. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” is nothing but the AAU extended to every workplace.

With the defeat of the revolutionary actions of 1921 and 1923, the left communists and their organizations saw the number of their followers steadily decline. The workers “vanguards” were frustrated and/or returned to the traditional organizations.

In a 1945 essay, Paul Mattick wrote that all revolutionary groups to the left of the Communist Party at first stagnated and then collapsed:

“It did not help that these groups had the ‘right’ policy and the Communist Party the ‘wrong’ policy, for no questions of revolutionary strategy were here involved. What was taking place was that world capitalism was going through a stabilization process and ridding itself of the disturbing proletarian

elements which under the crisis conditions of war and military collapse had tried to assert themselves politically.”

After 1924, “left communism” as an organized movement ceased to represent a significant political factor within the German workers movement. Even those groups that during the second half of the 1920s broke with the Communist Party and moved towards the left did not manage to assume a political dimension. According to Mattick:

“Although organizationally the ‘ultra-left’ groups continued to exist up to the beginning of Hitler’s dictatorship, their functions were restricted to that of discussion clubs trying to understand their own failures and that of the German revolution.” Later in the same essay he observed that “The necessity of restricting activity to educational work became a virtue: developing the class-consciousness of the workers was regarded as the most essential of all revolutionary tasks.”

Council communism was born from the disintegration of these organizations in Germany and from the reflections of similar groups in other countries.

The first council communist group, the GIC (Groep van Internationale Communisten), was formed in Holland in 1926 as a result of a split in the Dutch Communist Workers Party—a parallel organization of the German KAPD. In France, Belgium and other countries similar groups were formed during the 1930s. In the United States the council communists (among whom Paul Mattick figured as one of the movement’s first founders) were active primarily within the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW), which at the end of the 1920s had no more than 20,000 members. After a split within the originally Leninist and minuscule Proletarian Party of America, they founded the United Workers Party, which published the journal *International Council Correspondence*; soon thereafter they assumed the name of Council Communists. Prior to the New Deal, the American council communists were active participants, above all in Chicago, in the unemployed workers movement, one of the most radical movements to emerge from the crisis of 1929.

In Germany the first council communist group was formed in 1931 with the reunification of the AAU and the AAU-E, which had become numerically insignificant. The KAU, the Communist Workers Union, no longer concerned itself with those organizational problems that had led to divisions and splits within left communism. The new unionists defined themselves as a group whose goal was to carry out communist propaganda for an autonomous working class struggle against “the capitalists and the old organizations of the workers movement”. The class instrument they thought was most valid in this struggle was the wildcat strike.

Council communism by Mark Shipway

Written in 1987 and included in the book *Non-market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

Online at: <http://www.marxists.org/subject/left-wing/1987/council-communism.htm>

[...]

At the beginning of the 1920s the KAPD had claimed a membership in excess of 40 000. In close alliance were a further 200 000 workers in the revolutionary anti-trade-union 'factory organisations' under the umbrella of the General Workers' Union of Germany (AAUD). However, as is the case with any active communist organisations outside periods of revolutionary turmoil, these numbers steadily decreased throughout the 1920s, so that by the 1930s the council communists existed only as small, scattered propagandist groups, mainly in Germany and Holland. The Dutch Group of International Communists

(GIG), which was formed in 1927, published the journal *Rätekorrespondenz* ('Council Correspondence'). This served as the vehicle for numerous important theoretical debates, many of which were taken up by the German revolutionary emigrés in the USA who had started publication of *International Council Correspondence* (later known as *Living Marxism* and then as *New Essays*) in 1934. This was edited by the ex-KAPD member Paul Mattick, and its contributors included Rühle, Pannekoek and Karl Korsch. The group in America had some contact with the longest-surviving British council communist organisation, the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation. The APCF (formed in 1921) published a succession of newspapers, the best and last of which was *Solidarity* (1938-44). During the Second World War Anton Pannekoek wrote what is probably the best-known expression of council communist ideas, *Workers' Councils*, and he continued to contribute articles to the revolutionary press until his death in 1960. In the USA Paul Mattick published a number of books after the war, mainly concerned with a Marxist critique of bourgeois economics. His *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* (1978) collected together the fruits of a life-time's commitment to the revolutionary movement.[14]

[...]

Rühle's views on political parties seem to have been shaped decisively by the experience of the mass parliamentary parties of the Second International. His break with the SPD, which he had once represented in the Reichstag, led to an indiscriminate rejection of *all* political parties. In Rühle's view, all political parties were, by definition, 'bourgeois'. In 1924 he wrote that, 'The concept of a party with a revolutionary character in the proletarian sense is nonsense.'[42] At the end of 1920, Rühle's sympathisers dissolved the sections of the KAPD to which they belonged into the local factory organisations (part the AAUD). Rühle opposed the separation of economic and political organisation, and favoured a single, 'unitary' revolutionary workplace organisation. To this end he was influential in the formation of a breakaway from the AAUD, called the General Workers' Union of Germany - Unitary Organisation (AAUD-E) in 1921.

The Councilist Movement in Germany (1914-1935): A History of the AAUD-E Tendency by Group of Council Communists of Galicia

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The Tendency's Origins: From the First World War to the Defeat of the 1918 November Revolution

It is not our intention to provide a comprehensive review of the history of the German Revolution; as interesting as that would be, what interests us in regard to the historical experience of the German Revolution is recognizing its essential characteristics and what was new about it. In our view the historical elements we shall discuss are sufficient for evaluating the conclusions set forth below.

Our central theme will be the history of the councilist current that at one particular historical conjuncture took the form of the AAUD-E, or the *unitary* current. We shall therefore attempt to shed light on the AAUD-E's process of formation, growth and dissolution, and how revolutionary ideas emanated from the experiences and the problems that shaped the practical process of the revolutionary struggle.

1. The Formative Stage of the Councilist Tendency

The councilist movement was born in the era of the First World War and its aftermath. It was during these years of worsening intercapitalist contradictions and escalating levels of class conflict due to the terrible consequences of the war (especially in the two nations headed for defeat: Germany, and Russia with its weak capitalism), that the various tendencies within the working class movement were compelled to adopt precise practical and political positions on capitalism. This would lead to a series of splits between reformists and revolutionaries which naturally spanned a wide array of positions, and implied practices with quite different contents, from the most moderate like the reformist social democracy, to the most radical like council communism.

This process of transformation affecting the conditions and dynamics of the class struggle can be illustrated by the following statement of Otto Rühle, who wrote:

“With regard to the class struggle, today’s workers came of age in party organizations as well as trade unions. They saw, and still see, membership in these organizations as the duty of the class-conscious proletariat, the proof of its political maturity and the expression of its combative spirit. To be organized politically and industrially seemed, and still seems to them to be an almost sacred duty, so obvious and so important, that any attempt to separate them from these organizations appears to be a hostile act, counterrevolutionary and contrary to the interests of the working class. Those who have grown old in a tradition find that which was good in their time to be good now. But in our era, what was good has become bad, the true has become false: what was reason becomes folly, what was beneficial becomes harmful. The revolution, an epoch of profound change that leaves not one brick of this society standing on another, does not spare the old organizations. It destroys all that is old, so as to build a new life from the ruins.” (“Fundamental Issues of Organization”, 1921.)

The centrifugal forces affecting the social democratic movement due to the war and its consequences began to have an impact on the German Social Democratic Party (the SPD). Within the SPD, the various tendencies that would later crystallize could for the most part already be discerned: the collaborationist and strictly reformist sector (Ebert, Scheidemann, etc.) that held the leadership positions in the SPD; the centrist sector, vacillating between the habits and rewards of reformism and the revolutionary road (Bebel, Kautsky, etc.), that would later form the USPD (independent social democrats); and the radical sector, which could be defined by its support for a revolutionary interpretation of Marxism (Rosa Luxemburg, Karl

Liebknecht, etc.), that would subsequently form the Spartacist League (*Spartakusbund*) and later comprise the leadership of the German Communist Party (KPD) after the expulsion of the (majority) left opposition.

Our tendency was in part situated within this latter radical sector. We must point out, however, that the driving force of the formative process of the revolutionary tendency was not to be found within political organizations, but in processes internal to the working class among its most advanced sectors. With the intensification of class conflict, more and more workers advanced toward revolutionary attitudes and perspectives, and joined the most radical and coherent political tendencies in the practice of the class struggle. It was this organic process that led to the separation of the radical tendency (radical with regard to both form and content) from the various reformist tendencies, accelerating the evolution towards new ruptures as well as providing more solid foundations for new practical-theoretical formulations rooted in the experiences of the class.

The radicalization process that affected the Spartacist tendency cannot be understood without taking this sorting-out process of the most radical proletarian elements into account, nor can one understand the characteristics of the new organized tendency that would later take shape (along with other groups) without an understanding of its class composition as the most advanced core of the German industrial proletariat.

The formation of the German Communist Party (KPD) at the end of 1918 was an important moment in the radicalization process affecting the proletarian vanguard. It was at that time that the fundamental disagreements within the Spartacist League and between the latter and the other groups began to develop, marking the start of the process leading to the formation of a “left opposition”. In fact, the Spartacist League was really nothing but a form of revolutionary social democracy, that is, it was still ridden with all the bourgeois concepts of the original social democracy, which Marx described as a combination of a red-tinted petit-bourgeois democratism and socialist perspectives adapted to the capitalist structure. The fact that, in terms of theory, Rosa Luxemburg was closer to revolutionary communism than she was to Lenin’s Bolshevism, does not rid Spartacist practice of its social democratic traits, even if the latter were expressed in an attenuated form in the Spartacist League.

The Spartacist League always remained a hybrid of communism and petit-bourgeois radicalism after its origins in the SPD. This is the basic reason why the Spartacist leadership converged with Bolshevism and the KPD’s left opposition formed the German Communist Workers Party, the KAPD, in 1920.

But, while we are looking at this formation process of the proletarian revolutionary current through the lens of the party-form, we must not lose sight of the fact that its dynamic source was the *intensive* and *integrated* development of proletarian *autonomous action*, of the proletariat’s abilities and class consciousness, expressed in the revolution and the pre-revolutionary struggles. Only this can explain the succession of qualitative changes, such as the fact that anti-parliamentary and anti-trade union positions could emerge victorious during the founding congress of the KPD against the positions of the Spartacist leadership, which at the time included Luxemburg. *Quantity (the condensed accumulated class antagonism) is transformed into quality (into a new kind of praxis): proletarian autonomous action transcends the alienated condition of a ruled class and assumed autonomous and self-conscious forms, i.e., new principles, new forms of action and new goals.*

The revolution could not be expected to conform to reformist practice, with justifications concerning the backwardness of proletarian consciousness, the relative weakness of the revolutionary current compared to the forces of reformism and capitalism, etc., for the simple reason that it was already *taking place*. In class society the authentic revolution is not the creation of a conscious will that attempts to mould the world in accordance with its aspirations, but the involuntary result of the development of social contradictions which affect the existence and the consciousness of every individual, the expression of historical necessity that is imposed with the force of a natural process and which in the revolutionary class proceeds in accordance with a conscious will and aspiration. Consciousness therefore does not precede the revolutionary process, but is formed through class struggles, and it is only in the revolutionary process itself that revolutionary consciousness in its intellectual form can acquire a mass dimension.

2. Proletarian Revolution and the Consciousness of the Masses

General class consciousness, the consciousness of the masses, corresponds to the level of development of the general struggle of the masses as a whole. Generalized revolutionary consciousness can only arise through an equally extensive revolutionary struggle. The objective content of the struggle, the result of the material circumstances in which the class lives and acts as well as of its own autonomous activity, determine the subjective content of consciousness.

This does not mean that revolutionary consciousness cannot take shape in a spontaneous form *parallel* to the development of the revolutionary crisis, as the effective expression of the immediate need to resolve the conflict between the social needs of individuals—and of the class as a whole—and the existing conditions of class rule and division in society. The working class is therefore obliged to think and to act in a revolutionary manner with respect to its immediate problems, even though it still lacks an understanding of the consequences implied by its practice and of a wider perspective for social change (an intellectual consciousness). This is how the Workers Councils arose, and what started as a mobilization against war and pauperization was transformed into a revolution.

Thus, with a revolution underway in Germany, there were only two possible roads open to the revolutionaries, as Mattick pointed out: the *first* was to withdraw from the fray and betray the proletarian masses, who were still subjectively under the influence of the social-reformists, but whose objective practice driven forward by the conditions would ultimately and necessarily lead to either revolutionary victory or a crushing defeat at the hands of the counterrevolution; the *second*, to go down fighting or to conquer with the fighting class, devoting all their energies to building the elements needed for the victory of the revolution, despite the fact that such a victory appeared to be unlikely at the time, or even that the revolution was effectively doomed to fail.

Following Leninist reasoning, but without its party deformation, the conditions for victory can also be built, and what may seem to be a questioning of the revolutionary capacity of the class on the part of its “vanguard” actually derives from the crisis of the substitutionist mode of comprehending the vanguard’s leadership role (in alienated terms: a “Crisis of Leadership”, as the Trotskyists say). By not establishing its politics as a function of the spontaneous dynamic of the real class struggle, but by doing the opposite, by attempting to define the orientation of the class struggle on the basis of the “objective” evaluation of the situation by leaders, it was inevitable that sudden changes, discontinuities and new problems, would provoke a “leadership crisis”. But such crises are the effects of the division between masses and leaders and result from an objectivist and mechanistic understanding of historical materialism. The true meaning of events can only be understood on the basis of the totality of intervening factors, but this totality is dynamic, not static, and the individual’s point of view is necessarily partial and relative; which is why truth must be understood as *dynamic* and analyses of a process must always be understood to be *transitory*. Truth, in absolute terms, cannot be understood; it can only be lived and experienced, flowing in the dynamic of the totality. It is not by chance that the typical origin of theoretical leaders in the intellectual class is a determinant factor in their tendency to separate themselves from the dynamic of the class as a whole and to develop a substitutionist perspective.

This contradiction between mass action and the intellectual consciousness of the vanguard formed the background for the debates that reached their peak at the founding congress of the German Communist Party. At that time, Otto Rühle was one of the spokesmen for the KPD’s left tendency, which rejected parliamentarism because (in Rühle’s own words):

“Such participation would be interpreted as approval of the National Assembly. In this way we would only help to divert the struggle from the streets to parliament. For us the only task is to reinforce the power of the Workers and Soldiers Councils.” (Quoted in *Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin*, Ed. Prudhommeaux.)

The debate over breaking with social democratic methods in the Spartacist League was prefigured by the process leading to the split in the Dutch Socialist Workers Party (SDAP), precipitated by the SDAP's left tendency (whose spokespersons were, among others, Pannekoek (1873-1960), Gorter and Roland-Holst), as well as the debates concerning the split in the Dutch party which pitted Anton Pannekoek against Rosa Luxemburg, in which Luxemburg identified social democracy with the workers movement and even asserted that "*We cannot remain outside the organization, outside of contact with the masses*" (letter to Roland-Holst, August 1908), and that a bad party was better than no party at all.

Another key debate revolved around the question of trade unionism, which we shall investigate below. The left's positions on parliament and the trade unions were, however, the outcome of experiences spanning the whole revolutionary and pre-revolutionary process, and were by no means the result of a sudden turn.

3. The Precursors of Council Communism

As we pointed out above, the new communist current would not issue solely or predominantly from the radicalization of Spartacism. Its more remote origins were prefigured in the small groups of politicized workers in many industrial centers like Bremen, Brunswick, Berlin and Hamburg, some of which coalesced to form the ISD (International Socialists of Germany) towards the end of 1915. The roots of the political vision of these groups grew from their experience within social democracy and from the critique of the role of the trade unions in the mass strikes that took place in Germany and other countries.

The ISD was born from the convergence of groups on the social democratic left that voted with the Bolsheviks at Zimmerwald for the resolution in favor of breaking with social democracy in order to "transform the imperialist war into a civil war" and to form a new international. These groups broke with the SPD at the end of 1916, advocating the necessity of creating a radical organization of the left that was totally independent of the social democracy. Numerous members and sections of the Spartacist League concurred with these views, such as the Dresden section (Rühle). Rühle, who in March 1915 was the second Reichstag deputy after Liebknecht to vote against war credits, joined the ISD tendency after a brief period of membership in the Spartacist League.

On November 23, 1918 the groups of the ISD (Bremen, Brunswick and Berlin), which would be joined by a group from Hamburg, changed the name of the organization to the International Communists of Germany (IKD). The Hamburg group was to a great degree inspired by the revolutionary trade union movement in the U.S.; one of its theoreticians (Wolffheim) had been a militant for several years in California in the IWW trade union (Industrial Workers of the World).

The IKD, like the Spartacists, advocated "all power to the Councils", but—unlike the Spartacists—also criticized the existing Councils, emphasizing the difference between the bourgeois revolution and the proletarian revolution and denouncing the attempts on the part of the SPD and the "Independents" (USPD) to control the Councils.

4. The Theoretical Progress of the Revolutionary Current

The new concepts that arose as critiques of the traditional workers movement of the era must not be considered as finished products, but as elements of a process of elaboration in which concepts and definitions continued to evolve over the entire period (ca. 1914-1924) and even thereafter.

Although, from the perspective of revolutionary hopes, the gaze of the advanced proletariat was directed toward the Russian revolution, towards the image of the Soviets and to a lesser degree of the Bolshevik Party, the most important influence on their day-to-day organization and struggle as a class within capitalism was the example of the American IWW. The latter became increasingly influential with the construction of new industrial complexes, often featuring North American technologies and working methods that were more advanced than their German counterparts, which marked the end of the preeminence of skilled workers in industry.

This influence can be demonstrated by the references made by the members of the KAPD to the experience of the American IWW or the British *Shop Stewards* (Factory Delegates) movement in defense of their own positions. As Hermann Gorter pointed out:

“Lenin and his colleagues have played a strange role. On the one hand, they have revealed the road to communism to the world proletariat; on the other hand, they have helped world capitalism penetrate Russia and Asia. . . . for our part, we shall always consider the real communism towards which the English, North American and German workers direct their efforts to be of the greatest importance.” (H. Gorter, *World Communism*, 1923.)

Although the Spartacists were closer to the masses, and were involved in many struggles, the groups close to the ISD carried out a much more profound and fruitful process of theoretical elaboration. *While the Spartacists possessed the appearance, the revolutionary groups grasped the essence.* They wanted to study all the implications for the working class posed by the new capitalist phase that was accelerated and accentuated by the war. A new basis for the class struggle imposed new tasks and required new principles, and also opened up new perspectives.¹

The first outlines of the idea of “unitary organization” appeared in the ISD’s Bremen publication, *Arbeiterpolitik* (“Workers Politics”), and combined the functions of the political party and the industrial organization within the same structure. This unitary organization was nonetheless still viewed within the framework of parliamentary and trade union struggles. Only later would it constitute the basic model for a revolutionary synthesis of critical-praxis against the traditional workers movement.

The process of radical reorientation deepened over the course of the war years, while radical social democracy remained paralyzed by old ideas.

Thus, the theoretical efforts of the ISD-IKD ultimately yielded practical results, crystallizing in a tendency that, encouraged by the increasingly political direction assumed by strikes during the last year of the war, comprised together with the most advanced Spartacists the majority of the delegates at the founding congress of the KPD.

5. The Defeat of the November Revolution

The advance of the counterrevolution, which undermined the power of the councils and brutally repressed the revolutionary tendencies with the passive acquiescence of the majority of the working class, demonstrated the latter’s subjective immaturity and thus the need for a whole process of development of the class as a revolutionary subject, the basis for which must be the most concentrated and vital, direct and unmediated form of class antagonism; i.e., the struggle within the factories.

But the “Retreat to the Factories” did not mean that the revolutionary tendencies were reduced to small groups. To the contrary, after the war the KAPD had 40,000 members compared to the KPD’s 14,000, and at the time of the split between the AAUD (General Workers Union) and the AAUD-E (General Workers Union-Unitary Organization) in 1921 each of the latter two organizations had around 100,000 members. The great limitation of the effective relevance of these organizations in mass struggles must be understood as the result of the brevity of the revolutionary process and the enormous ideological power that the social democratic parties (SPD, USPD, KPD) and the trade unions still exercised over the class (a power that the inevitable historical degeneration of these organizations as extensions of capitalist power, and the resulting maturation of the class, would later greatly diminish).

The subsidence of the November revolution led to both a willingness to return to parliamentary politics as well as an accentuation of the KAPD’s putschist tendencies. This was due to both the reestablishment of bourgeois political hegemony as well as the attitude of the KAPD-AAUD tendency, which was still extensively influenced by the ideological and organizational forms of bourgeois politics. Within the Workers

Unions the conflict between the objective necessities of the revolutionary process and the subjective dependence of the proletariat with respect to the bourgeois world intensified, and took the form of a conflict between the AAUD-KAPD tendency and the *unitary* tendency (AAUD-E). The abyss separating reformist practice and revolutionary practice would continue to expand.

In the early stages of the revolutionary process reformist tendencies are often spontaneously overcome by the demands of real life, and revolutionary groups see their positions vindicated by the unfolding of practical struggles or, at least, are presented with exceptional circumstances for propaganda in favor of their program. Outside an openly revolutionary process, however, during periods of reflux, class unity within a *front for the immediate advance of the revolution* yields to the preeminence of internal conflicts. It then becomes imperative to make a clean break within the conscious revolutionary movement with those elements and tendencies that are still weighed down by reformism, and to form a “pure” revolutionary nucleus that unites the tasks of the economic and political struggles. This revolutionary nucleus is not a new party, but a grouping of all those elements consistently committed to the revolution, which during the phase of revolutionary struggle implies an authentic mass organization. Nor is the *unitary organization* the negative consequence of the intensification of internal conflicts, but the positive resolution of the contradiction between the necessity of revolutionary action and the still-capitalist social conditions.

6. The Birth of the Revolutionary Factory Organizations

The defeat of the 1918 revolution was not the end of the revolutionary movement; the latter would, precisely during the course of this setback (and because of it), make new advances.

Since strikes were prohibited by the trade unions, with every new strike necessity forced the adoption of a form of organization in the factory to conduct the struggle, led by “revolutionary men of confidence” (*Revolutionären Obleute*, “Revolutionary Delegates”), most of whom were regularly elected trade union delegates who did not follow the ADGB (General Federation of German Trade Unions) line. These factory delegates, who were opposed to the war and the social truce conceded to the bourgeoisie, formed the organizing center for the biggest strike to take place during the war, in January 1918. At that time about one million workers in the armaments industry mobilized against the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in solidarity with the Russian proletariat. This group would later join the USPD and, as the Spartacist League, would maintain a separate existence within the party. As a result, most of the *Revolutionären Obleute* did not go on to form a trade union left; they were to the USPD what the ADGB was to the SPD.

It was in 1919 that the most radical elements in the *Revolutionären Obleute* decided to issue a call to get out of the trade unions and to form revolutionary factory organizations. According to Jan Appel, a member of the RO and then of the KAPD, it was at a general conference of *Revolutionären Obleute* in Hamburg, which had already come to the conclusion that the trade unions were useless as far as the revolutionary struggle was concerned, where the formation of revolutionary factory organizations as the basis for the Workers Councils was proclaimed. These organizations were to be formal and permanent and would be for the purpose of revolutionary struggle. Propaganda for this goal spread from Hamburg, and later resulted in the founding of the AAUD.

The slogan “Get out of the trade unions!”, which had already echoed during the war, now found fertile soil with demobilization and rising unemployment, and spread effectively throughout the leading industrial centers. Thousands of workers left the trade unions (*Gewerkschaften*), often dissolving their local branches, appropriating their funds and redistributing them as aid to the unemployed. This process marked the beginning of a profound break with social democracy and trade unionism.

As a result, the year 1919 saw the creation of *revolutionary factory organizations*, composed of the numerous workers who had abandoned the trade unions, often formed during or in the aftermath of wildcat strikes.

The *revolutionary factory organizations* were spontaneous creations of the proletariat, the outcome of its alienation from the trade unions and the emasculation and domination of the Workers Councils by the social democratic parties. *It was necessary to begin the struggle against the forces opposed to the power of the councils, opposed to the power of the proletariat as a class (that is, its real emancipation as a class).* The adoption of a new, more decentralized form of organization, although seemingly constituting a step backwards, a retreat in the face of social democratic usurpation that transformed the existing councils into organs of the parliamentary parties and subordinated them to the bourgeois State, *was in reality what was needed to enable a regrouping of the revolutionary workers' forces.*

Starting as small, isolated factory groups, in April of 1920 the latter met at a conference to unify the factory councils, attended by delegates from all the industrial regions of Germany. This conference led to the founding of the *General Workers Union of Germany (AAUD)*. The *factory organizations* became the basic structures of the *Workers Unions (Arbeiterunionen)*, in which they were regionally and nationally affiliated and centralized.

During the early stages of this process of breaking with the traditional movement based on trade unions and political parties, many advanced workers joined the recently formed anarchosindicalist trade union, the FAUD (Free Workers Union of Germany). The FAUD's predecessor, the FVDG (Free Federation of German Trade Unions), had exercised considerable influence in pre-war industrial struggles. While its most advanced core (the FAU of Rhineland-Westphalia) leaned towards revolutionary industrial unionism, as opposed to trade-based organizational conceptions, the FAUD as a whole generally evolved in the direction of classical anarchosindicalism (R. Rocker, etc.); it was militant, democratic and more apolitical than anti-political. The FAUD therefore rejected the political struggle and the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat, defended the trade unions as organs of revolutionary power, and was incapable of drawing revolutionary conclusions from the political experiences of 1914-1919. For these reasons the tiny Marxist opposition that had formed within the FAUD left the trade union and, together with many other workers, also helped to form the AAUD.

The AAUD was based on the struggle against the trade unions and the legal councils, and rejected both parliamentarism and subordination to a party as well as trade union bureaucratization and division by trades.

At a time when the social democratic trade unions had 8 million members, the Christian trade unions more than 1 million and the company trade unions more than half a million, between April and December 1920 the AAUD's membership increased from 80,000 to 300,000, although some of its members were also still members of the FAUD or the Red Trade Union International (RTUI). This growth was generally connected with the development of the revolutionary crisis situation affecting capitalism.

7. The Formation of the *Dual Organization AAUD-KAPD* and the Opposition of the *Unitary Current*

The AAUD was in the process of being formed when the KPD's majority communist tendency was expelled from the party; this tendency would later form the KAPD in 1920.

The Spartacist tendency, now in full control of the KPD, resolved to return to parliamentary and trade union practice, transforming the party into an ordinary membership party rather than a party of class-conscious militants, a process that would later be reinforced by its merger with the USPD left, resulting in the formation of the VKPD (Unified Communist Party).

As a result, relations between the AAUD and the KAPD, already close because of their overlapping membership base, became much closer, while both groups distanced themselves from the FAUD and the VKPD.

In the KAPD's conception, based on the party's views regarding the decline of capitalism, the *factory organizations* would form the basis of the *council system*, reorganizing production in a communist way. They could only fulfill this function, however, on the basis of the hegemony of communist consciousness in the factory organizations. As a party the KAPD conceived of itself as the organization of conscious communists, whose role was to promote the revolutionary program and conceptions through its participation in the factory organizations. It was in relation to these issues that the discord between the KAPD-AAUD current and the *unitary* current that was later to found the AAUD-E was to revolve.

The KAPD militants were supposed to play a leading role in class struggles through the factory organizations, and thus direct the development of the industrial struggle towards communist perspectives. According to this conception, the members of the AAUD were not supposed to assume the leadership of struggles for factory reforms or wage increases, or of any struggle whatsoever that could not be steered in a communist direction. They were to express their solidarity with these struggles, but were not to accept their capitalist framework, thereby excluding themselves from playing a leading role in such struggles.

The viability of this perspective was inseparably linked to the revolutionary potential of the struggles of the time but it did not clearly distinguish between the spontaneous activation of this potential in the struggles associated with the ascendant stage of the revolution and the dormancy of these struggles during the stages of decline and reaction. From our perspective, this relative dormancy must be addressed by way of a combination of assuming the leadership in everyday struggles and defending a *practical* revolutionary orientation. The KAPD did not think it was possible to unite the struggle for reforms and the struggle for revolution, that is, to apply the tactical principle: *formal flexibility, rigidity with respect to principles*. The AAUD-E would hold the same position with regard to this question as the KAPD.

The conflict within the AAUD between the KAPist tendency and the *unitary* tendency reached a turning point at the Second Conference of the AAUD in March 1920. At this conference the AAUD ratified the positions of the *unitary* tendency of Hamburg (Roche) and Dresden (Rühle), rejecting the role of the party, simplifying the statutes, applying the federalist principle, etc. But after Rühle's current was expelled from the KAPD at the end of October, the Third Conference of the AAUD which took place in November of the same year reaffirmed the KAPD's positions, ratifying a program and guidelines for membership that were almost identical with texts the party had recently published. The necessity of a revolutionary party was therefore recognized, although this necessity was subject to many *qualifications*:

"The goal of the AAU is unitary organization. All its efforts are directed towards the achievement of this goal. Without admitting that there is a justification for the existence of political parties (since historical development is leading towards their dissolution), the AAU does not fight against the political organization of the KAPD, whose goals and fighting methods are shared by the AAU, and endeavors to advance alongside the KAPD in the revolutionary combat." (Thesis IX of the AAU Program adopted at the Third Conference, December 12-14, 1920.)

Nonetheless, the preeminence of the factory organization was emphasized:

"The formation of political parties is linked to parliamentarism. To this extent and for this reason, parties have exactly the same characteristics as capitalist organizations and are therefore constructed in accordance with the following principle: leader and masses; the leader standing above the masses, the organization functions from the top down. The leader commands and the masses obey. Above, a leader or a group of decision-makers, below, an army of subjects, a few foxes and millions of donkeys. And the principle of: where one goes, the others follow. The masses constitute the object of politics, an object that the 'leaders' manipulate according to their needs. The instrument of such a party is tactics, more precisely the tactics of capitalist businessmen: pure swindling. The leader is the businessman; the party is his property. The neighboring businessman is his competitor. Ever more refined tactics, ways and means derived from experience with capitalist business lead to success. He does not yield for anything. To be a Party

man means: to value spiritual narrow-mindedness and hucksterism, to stifle what makes a man human.” (Extracts from the Guidelines of the AAUD.)

“The factory organizations are above all organizations of class struggle. Grouped within the AAU (General Workers Union), they are neither political parties nor trade unions. The latter terms are mired in the meanings they have hitherto possessed, that is, institutions of the kind one sees in today’s parties and trade unions.”

“Within them the proletariat begins to consciously organize for the complete overthrow of the old society and for its unification as a class. In the factory organizations the masses will be united by the consciousness of their proletarian class solidarity: it is here that the proletariat’s unification is organically prepared (that is, as a natural process, in a natural way, in accordance with circumstances). . . .” (Ibid.)

On the other hand, the AAUD did not succumb to a “fetishism of the Council form”, since it had learned the lessons of the first phase of the German revolution:

“It is just as obvious that the Workers Councils are not an empty phrase, but the complete expression of the new proletarian organization. It is the case that, in their process of development, authentic councils decay and petrify into a new bureaucracy. These councils will then have to be fought with the same determination as the capitalist organizations. But the developmental process will not stop and the proletariat will not rest until it has provided the new organization, the Council System, with its historically realizable expression in the classless society, beyond the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.” (Ibid.)

8. The Split in the KAPD and the AAUD: The Birth of the Workers Union as an Integrated Organization

As we have seen, the councilist movement was in many ways unencumbered by the fetishism that would later arise, but with regard to the party form the AAUD could not overcome the dominant influence of the KAPD which, for the most part, was unable to do more than draw ambiguous distinctions between the “traditional parties” and its own concept of the “revolutionary party”, distinctions that would later prove to be insufficient in practice.

But the *unitary* tendency led by Otto Rühle had drawn its conclusions from the process of the Russian revolution as well as from that of the German revolution. The ambiguities of the KAPD had no place in its perspective. It had already analyzed and called attention to the establishment of capitalist relations in Russia and Russia’s opportunist-reformist policies in the Third International before their comrades in the KAPD.

As Rühle wrote after his return from Russia as a KAPD delegate to the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, the Bolshevik system was soviet in name only: *“The Russian workers are even more exploited than the German workers.”*

Rühle’s critique of Bolshevik substitutionism was published in 1921 in an article entitled “Basic Issues of Organization”:

“Russia has the ruling bureaucracy of the Commissariat. It does not have a Council System. The Soviets are elected from lists of candidates proposed by the Party; they exist under the terror of the regime, and are therefore not Councils in the revolutionary sense. They are ‘show’ councils, a political deception. All power in Russia resides in the bureaucracy, the mortal enemy of the Council System.”

“But proletarian autonomy and the socialist economy require the Council System; in the latter everything is produced for need, and everyone takes part in its administration. The Party prevents Russia from attaining a Council System, and without councils there is no socialist construction, there is no communism. The dictatorship of the Party is a despotism of the Commissars, it is State Capitalism. . . .”

“. . . the czarist dictatorship was that of one class over the other classes, that of the Bolsheviks is that of 5% of a class over the other classes and over 95% of its own class.” (*Die Aktion*, No. 37, 1921; Journal of the AAUD-E.)

After having seen this, the “Twenty One Conditions” for admission to the Third International, and the impossibility of debate and discussion in the face of a *fait accompli*, Rühle chose not to attend the Congress of the International and returned to Germany. As a result, he was censured by the KAPD Central Committee and excluded from the party a few months later after a meeting of the Central Committee, of which he was an elected member (October 1920).

During this time the party was being dissolved into the Workers Unions in the Saxony and Hamburg districts. In Hamburg, anyone who chose to remain in the KAPD was excluded from the Workers Union. The *unitary* current organized as an opposition within the AAUD, and finally set forth its *Guidelines* at the Fourth Conference in June 1921 (these Guidelines were later officially adopted at the First autonomous Conference of the AAUD-E after the latter separated from the AAUD).

The final split was inevitable. The *unitary* tendency’s opposition to joining the Communist International, and the KAPD’s collaborationist position with respect to the latter, blinded by its illusions concerning the Russian revolution, triggered the split in the AAUD. At the end of 1921, the *General Workers Union-Unitary Organization* (AAUD-E) was formed, which embraced close to one-half the membership of the AAUD and whose supporters published the journals *Die Aktion* and *Einheitsfront*.

9. The Concept of the AAUD-E vs. the Concept of the KAPD: *the Organic Unity of Proletarian Praxis as Content of the Revolutionary Struggle vs. the Hegemony of Organized Revolutionary Class Consciousness*

The AAUD-E differed radically from the KAPD with regard to the following points: 1) the political primacy of the factory organization as the only basis for the revolutionary organization of the proletariat; 2) its unity as a political and economic organization, combining all the political and economic tasks and functions for the preparation and defense of the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) its complete rejection of the Third International; and 4) its opposition to the KAPD’s evolving tendency towards putschism (coups and political substitutionism in general). Furthermore, and characteristically, the AAUD-E conceived the unitary organization of struggles (organic unity of political and economic struggle) as a precondition for the development of a unitary mass organization (organic membership of the whole proletariat in the AAUD-E and then in the Workers Councils).

When the KAPD was founded Rühle held that the party must exist as a separate organization only as long as it was needed to prepare for its effective dissolution into the AAUD. It was at the insistence of his tendency that the KAPD defined itself as “*not a party in the traditional sense, not a party of leaders. Its principle activity will be to support the German working class until it will be capable of doing without any leadership.*” (Minutes of the KAPD Congress, 1920.)

But we must not overlook the fact that the disputes concerning “unitary organization” cannot be reduced to the issue of suppressing the party, but also involved the concept of the Workers Councils (and, as we shall see, the concept of the development of class consciousness). For the KAPD, while the councils are the real institutions of the proletarian revolution, they are nonetheless divided into economic councils and political councils² (for the KPD and the Spartacists—the right wing of the original KPD—the councils were merely extensions of the functions of the trade unions and the party; not only did they ratify the distinction

between economic and political councils, but their ideas concerning the functions of the councils were openly reformist and counterrevolutionary).

No one involved in the debate concerning the suppression of the revolutionary party was openly opposed to the idea of unitary organization. Instead, and in this respect it resembled the historical debate between anarchists and Marxists over the question of proletarian state power, the central issue revolved around determining the moment when the revolutionary party would *cease to exist*. The *unitary* tendency held that the party must disappear immediately in the Workers Unions, while the KAPD tendency maintained that it would only gradually disappear (in the meantime the party would be a “necessary evil”, in the words of Schröder, a KAPD leader).

The KAPD’s concept of the relation between the revolutionary party and the Workers Councils was set forth in 1921 in its “Theses on the Role of the Party” as follows: *“To the degree that the masses, after the political victory of the revolution, are prepared in their class organizations to introduce the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the council system, their importance in relation to party will increase. . . . when the masses finally transform their dictatorship into a communist economy, the party ceases to exist.”*

The KAPD rejected the Leninist concept of the party, the mass party (whose core was formed by professional revolutionaries),³ and articulated a concept of the revolutionary party as a party of the elite, based on quality rather than quantity, whose mission was focused on the development of the consciousness of the proletariat by means of propaganda and political discussions arising in the midst of workplace struggles. The KAPD thereby assumed the intellectual function which (in its view) a mass organization was incapable of performing, while the AAUD grouped the masses in a network of factory organizations, opposing and destroying the influence of the trade unions, by means of both propaganda and direct action. Its activity was that of a *“group that shows in the struggle what the masses must become”* (H. Gorter). It was not understood that the specialized concept of intellectual function practically reproduces the separation of intellectual and manual labor, so that the party had a tendency in practice to fight for political-intellectual hegemony over the movement and within the organizations in which it played a role.

For the AAUD-E the development of revolutionary consciousness would come from freedom of speech and discussion within the factory organizations. This self-sufficiency of the factory organizations, however, and consequently of the Workers Unions, does not imply the absence of an internal vanguard nucleus; this position, to contrary, originated with the most advanced core group within the AAUD-E itself. While this concept can be explained by the era’s revolutionary character (which, in retrospect, can be determined to have entered into decline after 1923), it cannot be understood in isolation from the results of the class struggle and the autonomous activity of the organized proletariat within that struggle. Thus, the revolutionary intellectual core group within the AAUD-E, led by Rühle, probably saw the unitary organization as an open and potentially expanding arena to extend its own influence.

The very idea of *unitary* revolutionary organization already implies the suppression of the separation of intellectual and manual labor within the class movement. The AAUD-E emphasized the autonomous development of proletarian consciousness through unitarily-organized collective activity, as opposed to the idea of the interventionism of the political party. The separation of economic and political struggles also affected the development of proletarian consciousness: it created a tendency towards an “economic” and “pragmatic” consciousness in the mass organization, while the development of theoretical and political consciousness remained more or less a party monopoly.

The AAUD-E also criticized the KAPD for its centralism, with its professional leaders and salaried editors, and claimed that the only differences between the KAPD and the KPD were the former’s rejection of parliamentarism and its critique of trade unionism (a partial critique, since the AAUD was still the “economic” organization of the KAPD). The AAUD-E rejected the idea of paid leaders as well as the distinction between Revolutionary Party and Workers Union, which it described as the lingering hangover of the division between political party and trade union, political organization and economic organization.

This *unitary* critique of the old movement was essential and indispensable for formulating a complete reorganization of the proletarian movement on the basis of new political principles. The continued existence of organizational dualism was a reflection of capitalism, a reproduction of the capitalist division of labor rather than an allocation of labor based on abilities and needs, in which there are no absolutely separate fields or stagnant and artificial specializations, but different degrees of consciousness and committed participation in the class struggle. The “unitary” principle of organization, then, is an application of the universal communist principle that each person—in this case, each organization or collective—does what is best for the whole of its own accord and, correspondingly, the whole is organized in such a manner as to realize the needs for each part’s emancipation (*From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs*). Communist coherence is expressed in the practical application of principles, not in the defense of ideological forms.

II. The Decline of the Councilist Movement in Germany and its Reorganization in the KAUD.

1. “Change of Function” of the Factory Organizations vs. Clarification of Their New Characteristics.

Because of its basically different outlook, the *unitary* current (which had not yet coalesced in the AAUD-E) refused to participate in the 1921 insurrection staged by the KPD and the KAPD-AAUD (the “March Action”), denouncing it as nothing but a smokescreen for the events then taking place in Russia, where an economic crisis, a strike wave in Petrograd, and the bloody repression of the Kronstadt Rebellion were taking place. At that time it was the only current that firmly dissociated itself from and denounced the Bolshevik tactics of the Third International:

“Bolshevik power made use of the German revolution until its domestic situation was totally stabilized. The workers must understand that the Action in Central Germany is madness and a crime for which the VKPD is fully responsible.” (Rühle.)

Even after the “March Action” the KAPD did not admit its own incoherence in collaborating with Bolshevik tactics intended to distract attention from the class struggle within Russia, which challenged the power and the “revolutionary” nature of the Bolshevik government. Instead, the KAPD kept its distance from any defense of the Kronstadt Rebellion until it was expelled from the Third International. The KAPD’s insurrectionism and its “tailism” with respect to the KPD even led it to engage in frontal confrontations with sectors of the working class by supporting the KPD again in the disastrous and isolated Hamburg insurrection of October 1923.

As a consequence of the repression and defeat it suffered as a result of the March insurrection of 1921, the AAUD was rapidly on the way to becoming a mass organization in name only. Within that historical context and considering the range of its influence, the outlook for the AAUD-E, formed a few months later, could hardly be any different.

We do not, however, concur with the analysis of H. Canne Meijer, who maintained that the decline of the AAUD and AAUD-E turned them into “*insignificant political parties*” (together with the remains of the KAPD) as a result of a “*change in their function*”.

As they conceived their function in the class struggle, the factory organizations did not lead strikes or negotiate with the factory owners, nor did they formulate demands. All these things must be the work of the participants in the struggle themselves. The factory organizations were institutions of the struggle, they restricted their activities to propaganda and mutual aid, helping to organize strikes, placing their publications at the service of strikes, and organizing meetings. If one of their members participated in a strike committee, he did so as a representative of the strikers, not of the factory organization.

During the normalization period extending from 1923 to 1930, the waning of the class struggle reduced the activity of the factory organizations to propaganda and analysis. According to Meijer, this is “political activity” and it led to an exodus of the membership, as well as the abandonment of the factory as an organizational base, so that meetings were held elsewhere. But this “change of function”, or more precisely, this shift of the focus of activity towards theoretical tasks (as in other conditions there would be a shift from theoretical to practical tasks, following a dialectical movement), does not constitute “political activity” unless one defines theoretical activity as the purview of a political party.

The problem actually resides in the difficulties standing in the way of overcoming the alienation created by the separation of manual and intellectual labor, that is, the difficulties faced by the proletariat itself in overcoming its reduction to responding to “immediate” problems and assuming a more long-term perspective along with the resulting need for a broad-based theoretical understanding to serve as a guide to action. Furthermore, there was no intentional abandonment of the workplace as an organizational base; instead, this abandonment was an adaptation to the “technical” necessity of coordinating diverse factory groups due to a declining membership.

Thus, the revolutionary factory organization did not undergo a change of function; instead, having been reduced to the status of an advanced militant nucleus, to its natural condition in a non-revolutionary situation, its role as an active mediator between the positive and comprehensive revolutionary program (the elaboration of which requires a group focused on the tasks of theoretical elucidation) and the mass struggle concerned only with immediate needs, also became strikingly apparent. The function of the militant nucleus is, then, not only to instigate proletarian struggles, but also to incite proletarian consciousness towards an essential revolutionary perspective which is merely embryonic, but which—by virtue of its transformation into a practical force—accelerates the process revolutionizing the general struggle of the class itself.

The unity of theoretical and practical functions in the revolutionary nucleus is therefore inherent in its character as an instrument of class struggle, due to its function as mediator between the comprehensive communist program of the intellectualized vanguard of the class and the mass struggle for immediate needs.

Returning to Meijer’s argument, the explanation for the subsequent dynamics of the efforts to reunify the AAUD, AAUD-E and the KAPD does not reside for us in the fact that “*there were no longer any practical differences separating the KAPD, the AAUD and the AAUD-E*” (Meijer). Historical experience does not support the idea that a similarity of “political” tendencies will in and of itself lead to a process unifying different “fractions” into one organization. The cause of this dynamic of recomposition resides in the need to regroup forces when faced by the decline of the revolution and the rise of reaction, in order to be able to hold out for an indefinite period by preserving as much of the organization’s influence in the proletariat as possible.

2. The Beginning of the Movement’s Decomposition

In the original view of the AAUD-E, which was also that of the AAUD, the growth of the factory organizations witnessed in 1919 and 1920 would continue and lead to a mass movement of “millions of conscious communists” that would *overwhelm* the power of the self-designated “class” trade unions. They expected that the revolution would advance, and they saw their own growth as a measure of the development of the fighting spirit and class-consciousness of the proletariat. This view did in fact have an objective basis: the critical situation of the German economy due to Germany’s defeat in the First World War, and its colonization by the victors.

It was only the U.S. “aid” plan, with its credits to rescue the German economy, which made the 1924-1930 recovery possible. Big foreign capital had to come to the assistance of a country undergoing recurrent situations of revolutionary crisis, but not without wanting something in return, of course. Then, in

1930, the great worldwide depression that began at the end of the previous decade had an especially powerful impact on Germany; by then, however, the situation was qualitatively different.

After the 1923 crisis, the Workers Unions went into decline and were reduced to cells of conscious communists. The exhaustion of the proletariat's energies during the revolutionary years, as well as the subsidence of class antagonisms during the subsequent period of stabilization and recovery of the German economy, resulted in a process of quantitative decomposition of the movement, which was necessarily conjoined with a qualitative concentration, so that only those elements with the strongest militant and revolutionary convictions continued to resist.

This is our explanation for the characteristics displayed by the subsequent reunification process of the councilist movement, as well as the necessary continuity of its decline.

Because the revolutionary factory organizations, the Workers Unions and their intellectual revolutionary proto-organization (the KAPD) were organic forms of a social movement, determined by the dynamic of historical conditions, their decline together with the disappearance of those conditions was completely natural, as soon as the movement was unable to complete its historical mission while the latter still had an objective basis.

As a result, two tendencies arose—each with its own practical and theoretical forms that interacted with each other: reaction/self-movement, decomposition/recomposition—in response to the transformation of the dynamic conditions of the class struggle. The first is reaction and decomposition: most proletarian militants abandoned the revolutionary organizations, which they had joined for purposes of a necessary combat in real life and, as a corollary of this dismemberment, the petit-bourgeois component of these organizations was not only freed from proletarian influence but also powerless to prevent the hemorrhage of members from their organizations. This tendency expressed itself theoretically in an incipient form of “anti-workerism” (which would undergo further development), as it took account of the fact that the greatest enemy of the revolution had been the majority of the working class itself. By adopting this position it tended to lose sight of the real causes of the defeat and the materialist comprehension of the centrality of the proletariat: the revolutionary essence of the proletariat is expressed not in what it thinks or in its particular actions, but only in the general movement of its struggle. The question, then, concerns the preconditions for the growth, development and victory of this general movement, since the latter does not evolve gradually or consciously by progressing from particular movements into a universal movement, nor can its general content be developed except through the universal self-activity of the masses (in their needs and consequently in the extension of those needs).

The second tendency is self-active and recomposing. It takes account of the new conditions and attempts to preserve the theoretical and practical contributions of the revolutionary movement, awaiting a new revolutionary upsurge.

This last feature cannot be interpreted as idealist optimism. The critique that maintains that the preservation of organizational elements and forms of practice was a conservative effort based on illusions and that persists in characterizing the groups which played such a role as sects loses sight of two fundamental points: first, that organizational elements are necessary both for the revolutionary struggles of the future as well as to maintain a practical example of the necessity and the possibility of new forms of revolutionary organization; second, that sects, strictly speaking, are characterized essentially by their alienated forms of thought and action, as in “groupusculation” (subjective separation from the real movement, the idea that one's organization is perfect and that it simply must increase the number of its members, etc.) and its attendant dogmatism.

On the other hand, as we shall see with respect to the formation and development of the KAUD, such stagnation does not seem to have taken place and, moreover, very important progress was made toward the clarification of questions concerning the form of the revolutionary organization and tactics during the period of reflux. (In a context where a non-revolutionary dynamic is imposed on the class struggle,

however, an objective separation from the real movement, and the corresponding tendency to withdraw into the subjective world, would only tend to become absolute—sectarianism—if the revolutionaries were really outside the real movement, that is, if they were to renounce the class struggle in its existing form and if they were also to renounce revolutionary thought.)

The process of the decline of the revolutionary movement was not part of a process of capitalist restructuring of the proletariat, but an aspect of the decomposition of the old workers movement in the absence of a new workers movement to replace it. The moderation of the class struggle, punctuated by the defeat of the revolution, led, with the onset of the great depression of the 1930s—which acted as a factor aggravating the crisis of the old workers movement—to the triumph of Nazism. Following Mattick, and maybe going a little further, it was the proletarian masses themselves who, with their inaction, allowed Nazism to destroy their old reformist organizations; the counterrevolution managed to do what the revolution could not accomplish. The two extremes converged on that point. Once the revolutionary movement was destroyed, reformism became a nuisance for a crisis-ridden capitalism. So it was condemned.

But, to paraphrase Marx, the revolution relents after having felled its enemy, so the latter reemerges stronger than ever, engendering a powerful counterrevolution, an adversary against which the party of subversion must struggle in order to mature, to become a really revolutionary party. This adversary, however, cannot serve only as the negative foundation of a new class consciousness, but must also sweep aside the old obstacles produced by still-immature capitalist relations in order to compel the proletariat to develop new forms, to raise the level of its struggle.

Germany provides a dramatic example of how proletarian trade unionism and party politics were historically destroyed, and were only able to continue to exist in the form of institutions *structurally* integrated into the capitalist system and inseparable from the latter. Furthermore, this was not the result of a forced convergence, but of the essential identity of their forms of activity and functions with the needs of capitalism and with the economic-political role of the capitalist State. This superstructural, ideological and organizational identity progressively became a more compact structural unity as capitalism had more need of control over the value of labor power.

Henceforth, wherever proletarian combativity sought expression, it necessarily had to adopt the form of assemblies, committees, etc. (formed for the purpose of collective struggles), the form of activist nuclei in the workplace that encourage the development of those struggles, and the form of individuals or small groups devoted to theory that try to work for the raising and clarification of class consciousness. When the old forms reappear they always do so in order to emasculate and domesticate the movement, to re-channel struggles into the capitalist framework, to attack and silence the proletarian critiques of their reactionary role.

The voluntarism of the radical militants of the old movement could do nothing to affect the tremendous material and spiritual power of the system, nor could they impede the inherent tendency of their own organizations—*which were incapable of developing autonomous proletarian activity by breaking with the foundations of alienation*—to become more and more integrated as part of that system's power, as trade unions and parties acquired practical relevance in the economic process. In the best cases, they strove for political power over the State in order to exchange one form of capitalism for another.

3. The Process of Clarification and Recomposition

At the end of 1929 the AAUD decided to break off all contacts with the KAPD at its Ninth National Conference, due to the conflict between the KAPD's tendency towards substitutionism and the AAUD's tendency towards trade unionism.

While the KAPD was still imbued with the “party spirit”, manifested in its putschist pretensions, leadership politics, etc., which were for their part accentuated by discouragement in the face of the definitive ebb of the revolution, it is also true that the decomposition of the AAUD was manifested in its “flexible” tactic of supporting workers struggles for higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions.

For the first time in its history, the AAUD conducted a strike, just like a trade union. This was the result of its new tactic. The KAPD viewed this as the victory of labor parliamentarism, the subordination of the class struggle to the capitalist bargaining table, without any appreciation for its partial truth.

(We recall that for the KAPD the members of the AAUD were not supposed to assume the leadership of any struggles for reforms or wage increases, or any struggle that was incapable of proceeding in an openly communist direction. They were supposed to express their practical solidarity with such struggles but were also supposed to refuse to accept their frame of reference. As a result the KAPD was incapable of addressing the new conditions of the class struggle. This inability reflected the attitudes of its original membership, which was composed for the most part of young and unemployed workers who shared the insurrectionist perspective of the core leadership.)

For the non-councilist “left communists”, that is, the Bordigists or the various types of “left Leninism”, the rupture with substitutionist tendencies could appear to be the result of the spread of an “anti-authoritarian ‘anti-leader’ ideology” (P. Bourrinet), and as a degenerative process. From our perspective, on the other hand, the tendency to decomposition is manifested on the organizational plane in a dogmatic and idealist anti-authoritarianism, reaching the extreme of anti-organizational and anti-theoretical positions, etc. But this was not the case with the current we are examining, or at least it did not play a decisive role.

Furthermore, the conflict between the AAUD and the KAPD was not the only one of its kind. All the organizations of the revolutionary left were affected by internal disputes as a result of the return of the class struggle to the capitalist framework, and were split into various opposed currents.

If, until 1925, the leadership of the AAUD-E was defined by Rühle’s tendency, afterwards there appeared: 1) a tendency that wanted to merge with the FAUD; 2) a tendency that wanted to participate in wage struggles and elections for the legal councils (this tendency was excluded); 3) a tendency that defended absolute workplace autonomy, and which later evolved towards anti-organizational and anti-intellectual positions (which quite consistently dissolved its own organizations); and 4) a tendency that defended the principle that the resolutions adopted by the AAUD Congress must be obligatory for all members of the organization (this tendency was victorious, and brought the AAUD-E closer to the AAUD). In 1926 the AAUD-E merged with two other groups, the Industrial Union of Transport Workers and a Trotskyist group expelled from the KPD, forming the Spartacist League of Left Communist Organizations.

But despite the accentuation of what may be considered to be “bourgeois tendencies” in the advanced fractions the latter were still part of the communist vanguard. The conditions of the time finally drove the AAUD and the AAUD-E to conduct discussions with a view towards merger. Anton Pannekoek and the Group of International Communists of Holland (GIKH) participated as invited guests at the Unification Conference so they could offer their contributions to the efforts of clarification.

In its contribution to the Conference, the GIKH presented its theses on the “factory cells” (contained in the GIKH’s document entitled “Guidelines Concerning the Factory Cell (*Betriebskerne*)”). The GIKH questioned the AAUD’s pretension, expressed in its program, of becoming a “mass organization”. The AAUD was incapable of being either a party or a trade union, but must instead consider itself to be an association of “*revolutionary factory cells*”, whose principle task was propaganda for “*the association of the free and equal producers*”. These cells can never compete with the trade unions by making economic demands. Their task was to contribute, within the context of wildcat strikes, to the formation of a *unitary class front against the trade unions*.

It was only in the mass struggle that the factory organizations could really become the organization of the whole class, while the “*factory cell*” was only capable of “*orienting the struggle*”. According to the GIKH, they could only be permanent organizations in the context of a revolutionary uprising. After the struggle is over, only the “*factory cell*” would remain as an arena for propaganda in favor of the self-organization of the class. It would constitute the most active and alert part of the class, so the *Workers Unions* will henceforth be a small core group.

The GIKH was, however, like the AAUD, opposed to the AAUD-E’s denial of the need for any kind of “party”. They thought that dual and separate organizations would continue to be necessary, although the two organizations must definitely be separate and the AAUD must by no means fall under the domination of a party. It was on this basis that the unification of the AAUD and the AAUD-E took place at the end of December 1931, leaving unresolved the issue of the supersession of the party-form.

4. The Formation of the Communist Workers Union (KAUD)

The new organization resulting from the merger of the AAUD and the AAUD-E called itself the *Communist Workers Union of Germany* (KAUD). It had only several hundred members. A minority of the AAUD remained in the KAPD, and a few members of the AAUD-E left for the ranks of the FAUD, but the majority was integrated into the *new form* of an *explicitly communist* Workers Union (*Kommunistische Arbeiter Union*).

This step implied a change of conceptions. The perspective of the AAUD and the AAUD-E was that they would become the *general* organizations of the proletariat, organizing millions of workers just like a “revolutionary trade union”.

The practical verification of the fact that, outside the direct influence of a revolutionary situation, the Workers Unions were reduced to a very restricted nucleus of advanced militants, who were then much less capable of action or exercising influence over other workers, led to a critique of the idea of the “organized class” as the central subject of the movement, that is, it led to a critique of the centralist perspective that was reproduced in the relation between the Workers Unions and the struggles of the masses. The KAUD called upon the working class to organize itself in its struggles, overcoming the notion that subordinated the *organized struggle* of the class to the existence of an organization formed *prior to* the struggle (which for its part was profoundly anti-dialectical, since the mass struggle and the class organizations are two elements that arise and interact in a single indivisible process).

The masses of the workers would have to organize themselves in the struggle, to act as an “organized class”. For its part, the KAUD united revolutionary workers, ready to fight for the communist goal, but no longer claimed to be a general union of the class. The identification of the organization with revolutionary power, a legacy of the pretensions of revolutionary syndicalism (like the Party-State in Bolshevism) of taking in its hands the economic and political management of society through its own organization, assumed other forms in the AAUD and the AAUD-E, but nonetheless concealed an error. With the change of conception regarding mass organization, the idea that the Council Organizations⁴ would develop until they become a System of Workers Councils, or would be directly incorporated as the foundation of the councils that would be formed, was abandoned. This new position was based on the practical experience of the fact that, in the conditions of a still-ascendant capitalism, permanent revolutionary mass organizations cannot survive, and are rapidly reduced again to the most advanced and active nucleus.

Nonetheless, it is not entirely clear that the idea of developing Council Organizations as the foundation of the Council System was totally abandoned. For our part, we resolve the problem by viewing the Council Organizations as the result of the revolutionary process of development of the real proletarian movement, whereby the revolutionary nuclei acquire the dimensions of mass organizations and the groups devoted to theory can be fully integrated into these institutions, their necessity as separate organizations progressively

reduced. That is: *the formation of a Workers Union as an economic and political Unitary Organization will be the ultimate purpose of the revolutionary nuclei of militants.*

The KAUD adopted a perspective in which the place of permanent mass organizations would be occupied only by temporary organizations like strike committees, strike assemblies, etc., created by the working class itself. This adaptation, by partially negating the self-identification of the organization with revolutionary power, helped to partially resolve the disagreements among the AAUD, the AAUD-E and the KAPD and to give rise to the new perspective that the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be placed in the hands of specialized organizations, but into those of the class in struggle.

The functions of the new Workers Union were communist propaganda, the clarification of the goals of the struggle, to drive the struggle forward, principally by means of the wildcat strike, and to show the class how to unleash its forces and overcome its weaknesses. The KAUD saw itself as a vanguard and as a proletarian “elite”.

To summarize: the KAUD form was essentially a development of the AAUD-E form in a direction somewhat more in accord with its real foundations, although this was still not sufficiently clarified. In fact, the KAUD defined itself as an association of conscious communists, a highly developed communist nucleus, which was the reflection of a situation of increasing isolation of the revolutionary nucleus. A nucleus, condensed and isolated from the general movement of the class by the objective developmental trends, increasingly reduced to those proletarian elements with the most advanced understanding and a complete militant dedication to the struggle for the proletarian revolution. This elite composition was the exact opposite of the origins of the Workers Unions as mass organizations.

As a result, the old conceptions of the AAUD-E were in many ways abandoned and in this sense the KAUD also expressed, as its negative side, the decline of the movement. But, despite a certain degree of theoretical vagueness, the new Workers Union was a further development of the unitary principles of organization and struggle, although in different forms. Many of the characteristics of the AAUD-E and the AAUD were no longer practically relevant in an association of small groups, possessed of a consciousness of the totality with regard to the economic and political aspects of the class struggle, but necessarily insignificant in a workers movement once again operating within the framework of capitalism. Nor were the conditions of the time propitious for new developments. It would not be until the 1970s, with the assembly movements and the currents involved with the workers committees or commissions, that these ideas would be viewed from a new perspective.

5. The End of the Councilist Movement in Germany

During the early years of the Nazi dictatorship the movement went underground and was not eliminated by fascist repression. After March 1933, the KAUD published its information bulletin, whose title was frequently changed in an attempt to evade the Gestapo: the *New Programmatic Journal*; *Workers Correspondence*; *Labor Correspondence*; and *Reflections on Fascism*. In the June 1933 issue of this bulletin the KAUD announced that its task was to “*sweep aside the ruins of reformism and help give birth to the revolutionary front of the struggle of the proletarian masses*” through the creation of “*communist cadres who will act as the spores of the proletarian movement*” and the establishment of “*new circles*” and undertaking “*an educational program that will anchor the communist ideology even deeper in the proletariat.*” Unlike the KAPD, it took a stand “*against the renaissance of Bolshevism*”.

The KAUD held three congresses, which resulted in a merger with the remnants of the KAPD. But disagreements concerning the party form were too strong for the organization to maintain a solid foundation, and in December 1933 the new organization was shattered by intense factional struggles.

The members of the KAPD totally rejected the slogan “*go to the masses*” and defended a course of action more consonant with the period of counterrevolution and strictly clandestine work. The most important

issue for the KAPD was to preserve the party cadres, not “going to the masses”, thus adopting a position close to Bolshevism. The KAPD rejected any kind of “left” alliance in the name of the common struggle against fascist repression. The organization therefore dissolved in the summer of 1934, to be replaced by a new one called *Revolutionären Obleute* (Revolutionary Delegates) as the heir of the KAUD.

The new group established contacts with the GIK in Holland and with the council communist organization led by Paul Mattick in the U.S. (Chicago). But this was the end. The revolutionary movement would not recover. Capitalist stabilization was not a temporary process and, as a tendency, would last for decades thanks to State Capitalist methods and the growth of totalitarianism in all nations.

They did not labor in vain, however. Their ideas and contributions are even more pertinent today than they were when they were first formulated and are therefore of immense value, an authentic treasure trove for today’s revolutionary communist militants.

Although the minority character of its radical movements prevents us from considering the revolutionary process in Germany as the beginning of a new class movement, it must nonetheless be viewed as the prelude to such a movement, and the reduced remnant of the radical movement must be seen as the precursor to a new general movement, as the beginning of its formative stage which will last until the proletarian revolution (when it will become the process of the revolution itself). The new movement can only develop quantitatively and qualitatively as the result of the decline of capitalism, through processes of ruptures and rapid advances and long periods of gradual development, processes that depend on capitalism but also depend on the outcome of the class struggle; they depend on objective determinations but also on the subjective activity that is nourished by these processes and constitutes the creative element, capable of constructing new class forms, ideas, attitudes and practices.

The new perspectives, ideas and forms of organization and activity that arose during the 1920s in Germany can therefore only be a rough sketch for their present-day counterparts, which must not only be adapted to the concrete conditions of our time but also must be enriched by all the experiences which have accumulated since the 1920s. This is not optional, but a practical imperative. Radical leftists think that it is enough to have ideological conviction based on “principles”, ideas, forms, etc. They forget that the emancipation of the class can only be the work of the class itself, of the class as a concrete totality (individuals, their relationships, the combination of their energies and abilities in a collective process of liberation). They also forget that the eminently practical basis for this principle consists in the fact that the developmental trend of capitalist rule makes the further development of proletarian theory, organization and practice a necessity and an indispensable condition even for the defense or conquest of limited improvements within the system (always with temporary, precarious and meager results). Only the experience of the class as a whole can provide a synoptic view of the preconditions for the transformation of the totality of the capitalist society and its system, since particular experience necessarily breeds particular conclusions, the tendency to erroneously generalize them and the consequent inattention to practical questions that directly affect the development of the proletariat in its totality as an effective revolutionary, i.e., collective subject.

Grupo de Comunistas de Conselhos de Galiza (Group of Council Communists of Galicia)

Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization by René Riesel

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[...]

The councilist organizations that will be formed will therefore not fail to recognize and appropriate, as indeed a minimum, the Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations adopted by the 7th Conference of the SI (see *Internationale Situationniste* #11). Since their task will be to work toward the power of the councils, which is incompatible with any other form of power, they will be aware that a merely *abstract* agreement with this definition condemns them to nonexistence; this is why their real agreement will be practically demonstrated in the nonhierarchical relations within their groups or sections; in the relations between these groups and with other autonomous groups or organizations; in the development of revolutionary theory and the unitary critique of the ruling society; and in the ongoing critique of their own practice. Maintaining a unitary program and practice, they will refuse the old partitioning of the workers movement into separate organizations (i.e. parties and unions). Despite the beautiful history of the councils, all the councilist organizations of the past that have played a significant role in class struggles have accepted separation into political, economic and social sectors. One of the few old parties worth analysis, the *Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands* (KAPD, German Communist Workers Party), adopted a councilist program, but by assigning to itself as its only essential tasks propaganda and theoretical discussion — “the political education of the masses” — it left the role of federating the revolutionary factory organizations to the *Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* (AAUD, General Workers Union of Germany), a schema not far from traditional syndicalism. Even though the KAPD rejected the Leninist idea of the mass party, along with the parliamentarianism and syndicalism of the KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* — German Communist Party), and preferred to group together politically conscious workers, it nevertheless remained tied to the old hierarchical model of the vanguard party: professionals of Revolution and salaried propagandists. A rejection of this model (in particular, a rejection of the practice of separating the political organization from the revolutionary factory organizations) led in 1920 to the secession of some of the AAUD members, who then formed the AAUD-E (the ‘E’ for *Einheitsorganisation* — Unified Organization). By the very working of its internal democracy the new unitary organization aimed to accomplish the educative work that had until then devolved on the KAPD, and it simultaneously assigned itself the task of coordinating struggles: the factory organizations that it federated were supposed to transform themselves into councils at the revolutionary moment and take over the management of the society. Here again the modern watchword of workers councils was still mixed with messianic memories of the old revolutionary syndicalism: the factory organizations would magically become councils when all the workers took part in them.

All that led where it would. After the crushing of the 1921 insurrection and the repression of the movement, large numbers of workers, discouraged by the waning prospect of revolution, abandoned factory struggle. The AAUD was only another name for the KAPD, and the AAUD-E saw revolution recede as fast as its membership declined. They were no longer anything but bearers of a *councilist ideology* more and more cut off from reality.

The KAPD’s evolution into terrorism and the AAUD’s increasing involvement in “bread and butter” issues led to the split between the factory organization and its party in 1929. In 1931 the corpses of the AAUD and the AAUD-E pathetically and without any sound or explicit bases merged in the face of the rise of Nazism. The revolutionary elements of the two organizations regrouped to form the KAUD (*Kommunistische Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* — German Communist Workers Union). A consciously minority organization,

the KAUD was also the only one in the whole movement for councils in Germany that did not claim to take upon itself the future economic (or economico-political as in the case of the AAUD-E) organization of society. It called on the workers to form autonomous groups and to themselves handle the linkups between those groups. But in Germany the KAUD came much too late; by 1931 the revolutionary movement had been dead for nearly ten years.

If only to make them cry, let us remind the retarded devotees of the anarchist-Marxist feud that the CNT-FAI – with its dead weight of anarchist ideology, but also with its greater practice of liberatory imagination – was akin to the Marxist KAPD-AAUD in its organizational arrangements. In the same way as the German Communist Workers Party, the Iberian Anarchist Federation saw itself as the *political* organization of the conscious Spanish workers, while its AAUD, the CNT, was supposed to take charge of the management of the future society.

[...]

The Origins of the Movement for Workers' Councils in Germany by Group of International Communists

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[...]

The Development of the Factory Organizations

The isolation into small groups factory by factory was not premeditated, nor a matter of principle. It was due to the fact that these organizations appeared, separately and spontaneously, in the course of unofficial strikes (for example, among the Ruhr miners in 1919). Many tried to unite these organizations and present a united front of factory organizations; the initiative for this coming from Hamburg and Bremen. In April 1920, there was the first conference for unification of the factory councils. Delegates came from every industrial region of Germany. The police broke up the Congress; but too late. The general unified organization had already been founded; and it had formulated its principles of action. This was given the name of the General Workers Union of Germany (*Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* – AAUD).

The AAUD was based on the struggle against the trade unions and the legalised workers' councils, and rejected parliamentarism. Each organization affiliated to the Union had a right to a maximum independence and freedom of choice as to tactics.

Almost immediately the AAUD began to grow. At that time the trade unions had more members than they ever had, or were ever likely to see in the foreseeable future. The socialist unions in 1920 grouped almost eight million paid-up members in 52 unions; the Christian unions had more than a million members; the company (or 'yellow') unions, had about 300,000. Then, there were the anarcho-syndicalists unions (*Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* – FAUD) and also some breakaway unions which, a little while later, affiliated to the Moscow-controlled Red International of Trade Unions – RILU.

At first, the AAUD numbered 80 000 (April 1920); by the end of 1920, this was 300,000. It is true that many of its constituent members were at the same time adherents either of the FAUD or RILU.

There were, however, political differences in the AAUD and in December, a number of associations left it to form a new association, the AAUD-E (*Einheitsorganisation* – or united organization). Even after this break, the AAUD reckoned on more than 200,000 members (4th Congress, June 1921); but this was by then a paper organization. The defeat of the Central German rising in 1921, led to the dismantling and destruction of the AAUD. It could no longer resist police persecution.

[...]

2. The KAPD and the AAUD: Differences

Let us leave the parties for a moment and go back to the factory organizations. This young movement had shown that important changes had been made in the working class world. There was general agreement on the following points:

- the new organization had to be built up and continue to grow;
- its structure must be such that no clique of leaders could establish itself;
- once it had established itself with millions of members it would establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

There were two major points of controversy within the AAUD. The first was: should there be a political party of the workers outside the AAUD and the second was on the question of administration of social and economic life.

At first the AAUD had only rather vague relations with the KPD. Its differences were of no importance. But it was different once the KAPD was formed. The KAPD immediately became involved in the affairs of the AAUD. Many of its members did not agree with this. In Saxony, Frankfurt and Hamburg etc., there was strong opposition to working with the KAPD. Germany was still extremely decentralised, and its decentralization was reflected in the workers organizations; hence the possibility of the KAPD working with the AAUD in some districts and not in others. As a consequence, the militants who opposed the formation within the AAUD of a 'leadership clique' (namely the KAPD), left, and formed their own organization the AAUD-E, which rejected the idea of a party of the proletariat and held that the factory organization was all sufficient.

The Common Platform

These three currents agreed in their analysis of the modern world. They accepted that because of the change in society, the proletariat no longer formed a restricted minority in society that could not struggle alone and had to seek alliances with other classes, as had been the case in the days of Marx. At least in the developed countries of the West, that period was over. In those countries the proletariat was now the majority of the population while all the layers of the bourgeoisie were united behind big capital. Henceforth revolution was the affair of the proletariat ALONE. Capitalism had entered its death crisis. (This was the current analysis accepted in the '20s and '30s.) But if society had changed in the West at least, then so had the conception of communism to change. The old ideas, in the old organizations, represented quite the opposite of social emancipation. Otto Rühle, one of the chief theoreticians of the AAUD-E, said this (in 1924):

"The nationalisation of the means of production, which continues to be the programme of social-democracy at the same time as it is that of the communists, is not socialisation. Through nationalisation of the means of production, it is possible to attain a strongly centralised State capitalism, which will have perhaps some superiority to private capitalism, but which will nonetheless be capitalism." [Otto Rühle]

Communism could only arrive from the action of the workers themselves, struggling actively on their own. For that, new forms of organization were necessary. But what would such organizations be? Here, opinions divided, and conflicting views could cause endless splits. Although by this time, the workers had turned away from revolutionary action, and any decisions the movement might take were of little consequence, it may be of interest to note what their interpretations of the future society were.

The Double Organisation

The KAPD rejected the idea of the Leninist party, such as prevailed after the Russian Revolution (a mass party) and held that a revolutionary party was essentially the party of an elite, based on quality not quantity. Such a party, uniting the most advanced elements of the proletariat, must act as a 'leaven within the masses', that is it must spread propaganda, keep up political discussion etc. Its strategy must be 'class versus class,' based on the struggle in the factories and armed uprising; sometimes, even, as a preliminary, terrorist action (such as bombings, bank robberies, raids on jewellers shops etc.) which were frequent in the early '20s. The struggle in the factories, led by action committees, would have the task of creating the atmosphere and the class consciousness necessary to mass struggles and to bringing ever greater masses of workers to mobilise themselves for decisive struggles.

Herman Gorter, one of the principal theoreticians of this party, justified, thus, the necessity of a small communist party:

"Most proletarians are *ignoramuses*. They have little notion of economics and politics, do not know much of national and international events, of the relations which exist between these latter and of the influence which they exert on the revolution. By reason of their position in society they cannot get to know all this. This is why they can never act at the right moment. They act when they should not, do not act when they should. They repeatedly make mistakes." [4]

So, according to this theory, the small select Party would have an educational mission, it would be a catalyst of ideas. But the task of regrouping the masses and organising them, in a network of factory organizations, would be that of the AAUD. Its essential objective would be to counter and overthrow the influence of the Trade Unions, through propaganda, but more particularly through determined action, that of a "group which shows in the struggle what the masses must become" [Gorter]. Finally, in the course of revolutionary struggle, these factory organizations would become workers' councils, uniting all the workers and controlled by them. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would be nothing more than an AAUD extended to the whole of German industry.

The AAUD-E Argument

The AAUD-E was, as has been said, opposed to a political party separate from the factory organizations. It wanted a united organization which would lead the day to day struggle, and later on take over the administration of society, on the system of workers' councils. It would have both economic and political aims. It differed from revolutionary syndicalism in that it disagreed with the hostility to working class political power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the other hand, it did not see the usefulness of a political party (KAPD style). Though granting the same arguments about the backwardness of the working class, for them the factory organization itself would suffice for the educational role so long as freedom of speech and discussion were assured within them.

The AAUD-E criticised the KAPD for being a centralised party, with professional leaders and paid editors, only distinguished from the KPD by its rejection of Parliamentarism. They derided the 'double organization' as a 'double pie card' for the benefit of the leaders. The AAUD-E rejected the notion of paid leaders; 'neither cards nor rules nor anything of that kind', they said. Some of them went so far as to found anti-organization organizations.

Roughly, the AAUD-E held that if the proletariat is too weak or divided to take decisions, no party decision could remedy this. Nobody could take the place of the proletariat. It must, by itself, overcome its own defects, otherwise it will be beaten and will pay a heavy price for its defeat. For them the double organization was a hangover from the political party and trade union partnership.

As a result of the differences between these three trends, KAPD, AAUD and AAUD-E, the latter refused to participate with the other two in the Central German insurrection of 1921. This was launched and led in a great part by the armed elements of the KAPD (still at that time regarded as sympathetic to the Third International), since the AAUD-E claimed it was merely to camouflage the events in Russia and in particular the repression of the Kronstadt sailors and workers by the Red Army under Trotsky.

Despite continued internal dissension, always very high and often obscured by personalities; in spite of excesses provoked by disappointment, the 'communist spirit', that is to say, the insistence on violent direct action, the passionate denunciation of all political and trade union colours (including the 'palace mayors' of Moscow) continued to permeate the masses. All financed by illegal means; their members, though often thrown out of employment because of their subversive activities, were extremely active in the street and at public meetings etc.

Disappointment

But it had been believed that the growth of the factory organizations of 1919-20 would continue at the same rate, that they would become a mass movement of 'millions of conscious communists' which would override the power of the allegedly working class trade unions. This was not however to prove the case. They started from the hypothesis that the proletariat would struggle and win as an organised class, and would work out the way of building the new organization. In the growth of the AAUD or the AAUD-E, the development of the fighting spirit and class consciousness of the workers could be measured. But these organizations drew in on themselves after the American financed economic expansion of 1923-29. In the years of Depression they were reduced to a mere few hundred members, a few cells here and there in the factories which employed some 20 million. By the time the Hitlerites came on the scene, the factory organizations had shrunk from being 'general' organizations of the workers to being cells of conscious council communists. Notwithstanding what their aims might be or their press might say, the AAUD and the AAUD-E had become no more than minor political parties.

The Function of the Organisations

Was it however, merely the withering away of their membership that transformed the factory organizations into minor political parties?

No!

It was a change of function. Though the factory organizations never had for their proclaimed task the leading of strikes, negotiations with employers, formulation of demands (all of which they left to the strikers themselves) – they were the organs of struggle. They restricted their functions to those of propaganda and support. Every time a strike was launched the factory organizations helped to run it; their press was the strike press; they put on speakers, AAUD or AAUD-E and ran meetings. But, so far as conducting negotiations was concerned, it was the task of the strike committee and the members of the factory organizations did not represent their group as such but the strikers who had elected them and to whom they were responsible.

The KAPD, as a political party, had a different function. Its task was seen as being above all propaganda, economic and political analysis. At election times it undertook anti-parliamentary activity; it called for action committees in the factories, streets, among the unemployed, etc.

After the bloody repression of 1921, and during the period of economic prosperity, the above named functions became purely theoretical. The activity of the factory organizations became solely that of propaganda and analysis, that is to say political activity. Many members were discouraged and left the movement. As a result of that, too, it meant that the factory was no longer the basis of the organization. Meetings began to be held outside the factory; on the basis of the district, perhaps in a bar where, German fashion, they sang the old workers songs of hope and anger...

No longer was there a practical difference between KAPD, AAUD and AAUD-E. In practice they put forward the same line, and were all political groupings whatever they called themselves. Anton Pannekoek, the Dutch Marxist who was one of the great theoreticians of council-communism, said in this respect:

"The AAUD, like the KAPD, is essentially an organization whose immediate goal is the revolution. In other times, in a period of decline of the revolution, one could not have thought of founding such an organization. But it has survived the revolutionary years; the workers who founded it before and fought under its flag do not want to let themselves lose the experience of those struggles and conserve it like a cutting from a plant for the developments to come." [Anton Pannekoek]

Three political parties of the same colour was two too many!

With the dangers threatening the working class as the Nazis started on the road we know so well today, and with inertia and cowardice of the old and powerful 'working class' organizations, there were moves to unity. In December 1931, the AAUD (having already separated from the KAPD) fused with the AAUD-E. Only a few elements remained in the KAPD, and some from the AAUD-E went into the anarchist ranks (the FAUD). But most of the survivors of the factory organizations were in a new organization, the KAUD (Kommunistische Arbeiter Union Deutschlands) or the Communist Workers Union of Germany. This expressed in its title the idea that the organization was no longer a 'general organization' of the workers, as the AAUD had been at one time. It united all those workers who were declared revolutionaries, consciously communist, but did not claim it united all the workers any longer.

The KAUD

With the change of name, there was a change of conception. Up till then, council-communism had only taken note of the 'organised class'. Both the AAUD and the AAUD-E had believed from the beginning that it would be they who would organise the working class, that millions would rally to them. It was an idea close to that of revolutionary syndicalism, which looked forward to seeing all the workers join their unions, then the working class would be an 'organised class'.

Now, however, the KAUD urged workers to organise for themselves their own action committees. No longer was the 'organised' class struggle to depend on an organization formed previously to the struggle. In this new conception, the 'organised class' became the working class struggling under its own leadership.

This change of conception had other consequences. It affected the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for instance. If the 'organised class' was no longer the exclusive affair of organizations formed before the struggle, those organizations were no longer able to be considered as the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Thus, disappeared one of the causes of dissension: whether the KAPD or the AAUD would have to exercise power. It had to be agreed that the dictatorship of the proletariat could not be in the hands of specialised organizations; it would exist in the hands of the class which was in struggle. The task of the new KAUD would amount to communist propaganda, clarifying the objectives of the struggle, urging the working class to struggle, principally by means of the unofficial strike, and showing it where its strengths and weaknesses lay.

Communist Society and the Factory Organisations

This evolution in ideas had to be accompanied by a revision of recognised notions concerning the future communist society. The general ideology in political circles accepted by the masses was State Capitalism. There were many shades of state capitalism, but state capitalist ideology could be brought down to some very simple principles: the state, through nationalisation, through planned economy, through social reforms, etc., represented the lever for socialism, while parliamentary and trade union action represented the means of struggle. According to this theory, the working class had hardly and need to struggle as an independent class; instead they should entrust the 'management and leadership of the class struggle' to Parliamentary and Trade Union commanders. Needless to say, in this ideology, Party and Trade Unions became a component part of the State, and the management and leadership of the socialist or communist society of the future would be theirs.

Indeed, during the first phase (following the defeat of the revolution in Germany) this tradition still strongly impregnated the conceptions of the AAUD, the KAPD and the AAUD-E. All three were in favour of an organization 'grouping millions and millions' of workers in order to carry out the political and economic dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1922, for instance the AAUD declared that it was in a position to take over, on its reckoning, based on its active membership, '6% of the factories' of Germany.

But these conceptions altered. When there were hundreds of factory organizations, united and co-ordinated by the AAUD and AAUD-E, they could demand the maximum of independence as to the decisions they took and avoid 'a new clique of leaders'.

But it was asked whether it was possible to preserve this independence in the midst of communist social life?

Economic life is highly specialised, and all enterprises are directly interdependent. How could economic life be administered if the production and distribution of social wealth are not sometimes in centralised forms? Was the State dispensable or indispensable as a regulator of production and organization?

It is easy to see there was a contradiction between the old idea of communist society and the new form of society that was now proposed. While there was fear of economic centralization, it was not clear how to guard against it. There was discussion about the greater or lesser degree of 'federalism' or 'centralism': the AAUD-E leaned rather more towards federalism, the KAPD – AAUD leaned more towards centralism. In 1923, Karl Schröder (1884-1950, Spartacist fighter with a price on his head, then a professional leader of the KAPD, was expelled from the KAPD in 1924; later he became an official of the Socialist Party. He was one of the few of his party to organise 'resistance' to Nazism. Imprisoned in 1936 with other KAPD veterans, he is today one of the German Socialist 'martyrs') the theoretician of the KAPD, proclaimed that 'the more centralised communist society is, the better it will be'.

In fact, as long as one remained on the basis of the old conceptions of the 'organised class', this contradiction was insoluble. One side rallied more or less to the revolutionary syndicalist conception of 'taking over' the factories through the unions; the other, like the Bolsheviks, thought that a centralised apparatus, the state, must regulate the process of distribution and production, and distribute the 'national income' among the workers.

But to discuss the communist society on the basis of 'federalism or centralism' is sterile. These are problems of organization, technical problems, while communist society is basically an economic problem. Capitalism must give way to another economic system, where the means of production, the products of labour power, do not take the form of 'value' and where the exploitation of the working population to the profit of privileged layers has disappeared.

The problem of 'federalism or centralism' is devoid of sense if it has not been shown beforehand what the form of organization and its economic basis will be. Forms of organization are not arbitrary: they derive from the very principles of the economy. For example, the principle of profit and surplus value, of its private or collective appropriation, lies at the bottom of all forms of capitalist economy. That is why it is insufficient to present communist economy as a negative system: no money, no market, no private or State property. It is necessary to show up its positive character, to show what will be the economic laws which will succeed those of capitalism. This done, it may well be that the problem of 'federalism or centralism' is no problem at all.

The End of the Movement in Germany

The AAUD had separated from the KAPD at the end of 1929. Its press then advocated a 'flexible tactic'; support of workers struggles solely for wage demands, the improvement of conditions or hours of work. More rigidly, the KAPD saw in this tactic the bait for a slide towards class collaboration, 'horse-trading' (*Kuhhandel*) politics. After expelling its leader Adam Scharrer for 'making a pact with the enemy' (i.e., having a novel published by the German Communist Party publishing house), (Adam Scharrer, 1889-1948, metalworker, Spartacist fighter, afterwards professional leader of the KAPD from which he was expelled in 1930. A novelist like Schrader, he lived in Moscow after 1934. He later moved to what was East Germany where he was regarded as a 'pioneer of proletarian literature'. Needless to say, some features of his past life were not exactly advertised.) – the KAPD turned to the advocacy of individual terrorism. One of those who accepted this idea was Marinus Van der Lubbe. In setting fire to the premises housing the Nazi Parliament, and burning down the *Reichstag*, he wished by a symbolic gesture to urge the workers to abandon their political apathy and rise against the Nazis. (It should be noted in passing that effective Stalinist propaganda has all but obscured the heroic role of Van der Lubbe, who in English speaking countries at least, has been classified almost as a Nazi stool pigeon – a slander begun by Dimitrov and Thälmann, Communist leaders, in their defence.)

But neither tactic had any results in any case. Germany had gone through an economic crisis of major depth. There was huge army of the unemployed. Unofficial strikes became impossible. While it was true

that nobody any longer thought of obeying their trade unions, the latter were collaborating directly with the employers and the state. The press of the council communists was frequently seized. The supreme irony was that the only great unofficial strike of that period – the transport workers of Berlin in 1932 – was organised by the Stalinist and Hitler high priests acting together against the high priests of the Socialist trade unions.

3. After Hitler

After Hitler's rise to power, the militants of all tendencies were hunted down and imprisoned in concentration camps where large numbers disappeared. In 1945, some survivors were executed, on the orders of the GPU (Russian Military Intelligence) when the Red Army entered Saxony. As late as 1952, in West Berlin, one of the old leaders of the AAUD, Alfred Weiland, was kidnapped in the open street and taken to the East, where he suffered a heavy term of imprisonment. No trace remained of this movement of workers' councils. The men were liquidated and so were their ideas. Commercial expansion and prosperity directed feelings elsewhere. How has this movement enriched our knowledge of the struggle for workers power?

The Economic Foundations of Worker Power

To understand the fundamental economy of communism, the AAUD had to be freed from the old traditions of the 'organised class', and to understand that the working class could only achieve its real unity in the mass all embracing struggle without the need for a specialised organization which at best could only represent a fragmentary part of what the total proletarian aspiration consists of. In 1930 it published a study (drawn up by the Dutch Council Communist Group) on *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*.

This analysis did not propose a 'plan' of any kind, to show how it would be possible to build a 'finer', more 'equitable' society. It concerned itself only with the problems of organization of the communist economy as an organic whole, the practice of class struggle and social administration. The *Principles* give a theoretical idea of the economic consequences of the struggle by the independent mass movement at a political level.

When the workers' councils have taken power, they will have learned to 'manage their own struggle' directly, and they will be obliged to give a new basis to their power by introducing new economic laws by which the measure of labour time will be the pivot of all production and distribution of all social products. The workers are able to run production themselves, but only through calculating labour time in different branches of production, and dividing produce by this means.

The *Principles* examine this problem from the viewpoint of the exploited worker who not only aims at the abolition of private property, but also of exploitation in general. The history of our times has shown that the suppression of private property does not necessarily mean the end of exploitation.

Program of the AAUD

Adopted at their third national conference in Leipzig, December 12-14, 1920.

Online at: <http://libcom.org/history/program-aaud>

- 1.** The AAUD fights for the class unity of the proletariat.
- 2.** Its goal is a classless society, the first phase of which is the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, the will of the proletariat alone determining the political and economic organization of society in its entirety, thanks to the organization of the councils.
- 3.** The progressive realization of the council idea is the road which the growth of the self-consciousness of the proletarian class is taking. The dictators, properly speaking, are the delegates of the councils; these delegates must carry out the decisions of the councils. The councils can be recalled at any time by the rank and file which bestowed their mandates. There is no place for so-called leaders except as advisors.
- 4.** The AAUD rejects all reformist and opportunist methods of struggle.
- 5.** The AAUD is against any participation in parliamentarism, since that would mean sabotage of the council idea.
- 6.** Likewise, the AAUD rejects all participation in the legal enterprise councils as dangerous class collaboration with the employers.
- 7.** The AAUD is opposed to trade unionism because the latter is opposed to the council idea.
- 8.** But the AAUD is particularly opposed in the most violent possible manner to the trade unions because they are the principal obstacles to the continuation of the proletarian revolution in Germany. They are the principal obstacles standing in the way of the unification of the proletariat as a class.
- 9.** The goal of the AAUD is unitary organization. All of its efforts will be directed towards the attainment of this goal. Without admitting the justification for the existence of political parties (since historical development impels towards their dissolution), the AAUD does not fight against the political organization of the KAPD, whose goals and methods of struggle are also those of the AAUD, and strives to move forward alongside the KAPD in the revolutionary struggle.
- 10.** The mission of the AAUD is to carry out the revolution in the workplace. It takes the political and economic education of the workers seriously.
- 11.** During the phase of the conquest of political power, the Factory Organization becomes a link in the proletarian dictatorship exercised in the workplace by the factory councils, which is founded upon the Factory Organization. The purpose of the Factory Organization is to assure that political power is always and exclusively exercised by the executive council.

Extracts from the Guidelines of the AAUD

Extracts from the December 1920 *Guidelines* of the AAUD

Online at: <http://libcom.org/history/extracts-guidelines-aaud>

What Is Organization?

To organize means to arrange and give form to something. Parties, trade unions, the army, the Church, the State and the League of Nations are organizations.

What, basically, is an organization? Have they always existed in their current forms? The whole world knows the answer is no. Among nomadic peoples they were different from those of the Middle Ages, centuries later, with that era's feudal guilds and serfs. Germany, then fragmented into dozens of principalities, duchies, free cities, etc., had a form of organization unlike that later assumed by the German Reich. Nor should this be surprising. The external forms of an epoch are not simple wrappings which can be donned and shed at will. So, what we must confront today, in the form of a trust or a large city, just like the organization of a city registrar's office or a local commission for the poor, is as much connected to the *general situation* as are the branches of a tree or its trunk to its roots. They form a whole. The organization is therefore a particular construct which possesses precise foundations. Just as skin takes different forms, and is smooth or wrinkled depending on the general condition of the body, a change in an organization's foundations brings in its wake a change in the organization. Relations of production and economic relations constitute the foundation of man's social relations; it is upon them that man's way of producing what he needs depends. Capitalism is the modern form of production. Thus, the current form of organization is inseparable from the existence of capitalism itself, it is its result. Naturally, it is, like capitalism, subject to change: it ceaselessly undergoes metabolism, it grows, ages, dies and is reborn. An historical and revolutionary *process* unfolds. To be born, a new organization must emerge from, by means of an often very painful evolution, the upheavals and convulsions of which the old organization is still capable. The way in which the combatants conceive of this genesis naturally plays a decisive role in this process. One could all the more easily demolish the old organization and make room for the new one if one knows where the explosives must be placed.

The Old Organization

The State

At present, the *modern State* represents the most advanced and most powerful expression of the capitalist system. Will it, or will it not, achieve its principal goal, that is, a world economic syndicate and the League of Nations? This depends on the struggle, the resistance, and the victory of the world proletariat, and on the stages traversed by the latter on its road to victory.

For the proletariat, the capitalist State is the representative of the ruling class. It protects the private economy and private property. It is the executioner of the exploited. Its justice is class justice. Its organization and administration (trusts, trade unions, bureaucracy, militarism, parliamentarism, education via school textbooks, etc.) inhibit and repress the proletariat. They allow a restricted number of "guarantors", assisted by their intellectual slaves, to *govern* an immense majority of *subjects*. They reduce the proletarians to the status of cogs in a machine. On top: leaders, blessed by the gods and untouchable, then the administrators who depend entirely upon them, and at the bottom, below all, the masses, dispossessed of rights, to whom some crumbs are thrown or who are fitted with the bridle and the bit: whether they receive crumbs or the bridle depends upon the ease with which it is thought that the "beast" can be pacified.

The Parties

The parliament is a link in the chain of the organization, and one of the forms of expression, of the capitalist State. *Parliamentarism* is one of the most typical forms of activity in the capitalist world, that is, a world of exploited and exploiters, a world of political-economic inequality, a world of class struggle. Parliamentarism designates not just the occupations to which the “official” representative institution is devoted, which today is no more than a business office for capitalism, a façade *behind which the real business is conducted* and a safety-valve of capitalism, but it is above all a symbol of capitalism. It is the expression of the being, the structure, the basic constitution of capital, of its tactics and its methods in the current period.

The form assumed by political parties is bound to parliamentarism. So much so that the parties have precisely the character of capitalist organizations and are therefore constructed according to the following principle: leader and masses; as the leader over the masses, the organization goes from the top down. The leader commands, the masses obey. Above, a leader or a group of rulers; below, an army of the ruled, a few foxes and millions of donkeys. It is the “Simon Says” principle. The masses constitute the *object* of politics, an object which the “leaders” manipulate in accordance with their needs. The instrument of such a party is tactics, or more precisely, the *tactics of the capitalist businessman*, pure fraud. The leader is the businessman, the party is his *property*. The neighboring businessman is his competitor. These tactics, the ever-more-refined ways and means of capitalist business practice, make for success. They stop at nothing. To be a party man means: to enforce spiritual narrow-mindedness, to practice charlatantry, to stifle what is human in man.

The unequal development of capitalism in the various countries, the competition between nations, even between racial and cultural communities, and, since the second half of the 19th century, the *organized* combat, defensive and offensive, becoming more noticeable every day, of the oppressed proletarian class, temporarily prevent capitalism, as a political-economic system, from attaining its ultimate possibility of expression, *i.e.*, centralized rule over the world thanks to a capitalist world economic syndicate.¹ This era, the second half of the 19th century, in which the proletariat acquired consciousness of itself as a class by comprehending the capitalist process and in which, on the other hand, instinctive consciousness led to its comprehension of, that is, to an understanding of the necessity of, the *class struggle*, of proletarian *solidarity*, and of international bonds, whose goal is a *classless society*--this era is the one in which modern communism was born.

But since capitalism was not yet exhausted and the proletariat had not yet formed a mass *conscious* of belonging to the same class, and both continued to develop within one and the same process, it is clear that proletarian organization could not be born all at once, and especially prior to the political victory of the hitherto oppressed class, an organization which would have—unlike capitalist organization—a primarily proletarian class character and which could utilize proletarian methods of struggle derived from that character. Attempts towards this end were made, of which traces can be found in the confrontation between Marx and Bakunin. But these attempts were naturally weak, or accomplished nothing, or were distorted. Proletarian class consciousness developed very slowly (the mere *number* of members of the socialist organizations is of no significance) and the characteristic trait of the *transitional period* bridging that epoch and ours is the flood of a multitude of the exploited into the ranks of the social democratic parties and trade unions. The struggle of these organizations, as they were being carried out on capitalism’s own terrain, obviously did not require the “advocacy” of a goal, but advice concerning the road to follow and how to most advantageously utilize all the bourgeois strongholds. The trade unions’ fight for wage increases and the parliamentary struggle were political necessities in an epoch when a slogan like the unhindered right to vote could awaken and provoke revolutionary energies. But in the course of this fight, the next goal, which was “the development of proletarian class consciousness”, was lost sight of completely. The point of view according to which “the emancipation of the working class will be the task of the workers themselves”, and which made the *development of the workers class consciousness* the principal task which should not be forgotten for even one moment, was increasingly disregarded. The more time passed, the more the socialist organizations assumed the character and the methods of capitalist organizations. They became “organizations of leaders”, private property in the hands of those who pulled the strings and who were still under the spell of bourgeois capitalist conceptions. They became *ends in themselves*.

The “leadership” of the *class struggle* was in the hands of a few individuals who were *cut off from the needs of the proletariat*. It was the victory of parliamentarism which necessarily led to the paralysis of the revolutionary activity of the masses. The class struggle and the revolution became the concern of a *group of high-level managers*.

This trend has not yet come to an end. The “socialist” parties, or, more properly, the rabble of the parties, only attained their most repugnant display after the revolution of 1918. From this point of view, the old social democracy is related in a direct line of descent to the “Unified Communist Party” (VKPD) and the degree of abjectness only increases as we get closer to the VKPD.

The Trade Unions

Even more clearly than the parties, the trade unions became organizations of a perfectly capitalist nature. Born in an epoch of small-scale war against employers who were not yet powerfully organized in cartels, they were originally the adequate form for proletarian combat against capitalism’s tendencies towards pauperization.

“It was by combating capital, combating its tendencies to absolute impoverishment, setting limits to the latter and thus making the existence of the working class possible, that the trade union movement fulfilled its role in capitalism, and this made it a limb of capitalist society itself. . . .”

“Just as parliamentary activity incarnates the leaders’ psychological hold over the working masses, so the *trade union movement* incarnates their material authority. . . . In developed capitalism, and even more in the epoch of imperialism, the trade unions have become enormous confederations which manifest the same developmental tendencies as the bourgeois state in an earlier period. There has grown up within them a class of officials, a bureaucracy, which controls all the organization’s resources—funds, press, the appointment of officials; often they have even more far-reaching powers, so that they have changed from being the servants of the collectivity to being its masters, and have identified themselves with the organization. And the trade unions also resemble the state and its bureaucracy in that, democratic forms notwithstanding, the will of the members is unable to prevail against the bureaucracy. . . . [T]he workers do not control their trade union, but . . . it stands over them as an external force against which they can rebel, although they themselves are the source of its strength—once again like the state itself” (Pannekoek).²

In the final accounting, the trade unions form a bureaucratic organization on the margins of the world of the private economy, to which, however, its leaders are connected, as veritable permanent employees, for good and for ill. Since their existence depends upon the existence of the trade unions, they unavoidably find themselves under the pressure of circumstances; and their decision-making power is thus increased, while they are more and more hesitant to use it even in the best cases.

The trade unions are organized by trades. They have increasingly deviated from the rigorous and implacable idea of the class struggle and instead content themselves with demands for better wages and working conditions for the various job categories. They have separated the employed workers from the unemployed, the young from the old, men from women. The employers, united in ever more powerful trusts, put them on the defensive, despite their decline into an increasingly more pronounced *reformism*. They have, whenever possible, prevented important strikes. The general strike and the mass strike were preventatively denigrated as general nonsense. In effect, such strikes would annihilate the trade unions, as well as the existence of their bureaucratic leadership.

Council Organization as Proletarian Organization

The decline which has overtaken the capitalist period also affects its forms of organization. Our descriptions of the party and the trade union clearly show us that their organizational forms are, or have become,

capitalistic. These organizational forms are *economically* based upon the profit economy and tend to assume a form developed within the private economy: State capitalism. These forms, from the ideological point of view (that is, as a spiritual reflection of their economic foundations), are the origins of the cults of personality, the “leader” and authority, and the growth of individualism and egoism.

The formation and growth of the proletarian class naturally brings about forms of organization and expression which accord with the development of that class. This outcome is obviously not produced unless the proletarians have a perfectly-developed *consciousness* of forming a class whose own interests are opposed to those of capitalism. These forms of organization and expression are not created overnight and are not perfectly pure *a priori* constructions; they evolve thanks to the progress of intellectual understanding and the influx of increasingly crucial masses of people. They *will not attain complete maturity* unless the proletarian base exists, hence until after the disappearance of the private economy and the profit economy, which will have been replaced by a *communitarian proletarian economy adapted to need*.

It is easy to understand that there will be an organization unlike capitalist organization when the proletariat will have become a society, a total collective owner of all the means of production (mines, factories, etc.), of everything which had previously been “property”, when everything belongs to everyone in common. But before reaching that point, the proletariat creates—and does so all the more effectively the more conscious it is of its forming a class—forms of expression, *organs*, which incarnate *class consciousness*, social consciousness, the consciousness of mutual solidarity. When this form of organization becomes a revolutionary process, it is called *council organization*.

This organization develops by way of an uninterrupted struggle against capitalist forms. It disrupts them, smashes them to pieces, it causes them to explode. In this new organization, leaders and masses will relate to one another differently. The current will not flow from above downwards, but *first of all* from below upwards. Then one will be able to witness the living interpenetration of the united whole.

The organization of the councils will be the mortal enemy of all bureaucratism, of all parliamentarism, of all partnerships with capital. It will be totally based on the masses who are conscious of constituting a class.

The organization of the councils will therefore—as long as the workers fight for it—permit liberation from the capitalist yoke, and particularly from the yoke of the bourgeois ideological sphere. In its future is incarnated the *progressive evolution of the self-consciousness* of the proletariat, the will to transplant the class consciousness of the proletarians into reality and to give it a real expression. The intensity of the fight for this organization of councils allows one to exactly measure to what extent the proletariat conceives of itself as a class and how determined it is to impose its will.

It is equally obvious that the workers councils are not just empty words but are completely the expression of the new proletarian organization. It could happen that, while developing, authentic councils are corrupted and crystallize into a new bureaucracy. It will then be necessary to combat them as vigorously as the capitalist organizations. But the course of development will not halt, and the proletariat will not stop, until it has given the new organization—the council system—its historically attainable expression in the classless society which lies beyond the “dictatorship of the proletariat”.

The Factory Organization

The Factory Organization is the preliminary step towards the formation of the specifically proletarian organization, or organization in councils. The outlines of such an organization have already been created on various occasions. But only the *revolution* clearly left its mark upon the Factory Organizations which then could be considered to be the real offspring of the most lucid proletarian class consciousness. They were born because they were the class weapons of the workers combat. The old organizations, especially the trade unions, could not and did not want to play that role.

The Factory Organizations are not, then, artificial. Nor are they the products of confusion. The class consciousness of the proletariat breaks out in them with all its power due to the economic relations and the clear understanding of specific conditions. They are new institutions which grow from the bottom up, expand, shatter all that is old, destroy and uproot it, and convert *social* life and thought into realities.

No one can deny that we are living in an epoch where the capitalist world is on its last legs. Communist production is the only possible way out. Now is the time to find the way by which the revolution can be most rapidly and successfully brought to a conclusion. It is not enough to take political power (the proletarians took political power in 1918)—one must *hold on to it*. The most urgent task facing the proletarians—who are still largely imbued with capitalist ideology—is to discover, against the power of capital in Western Europe, against the power of its organization (State, militarism, parliamentarism, management, bureaucracy, schooling, hierarchy), the possible ways to definitively destroy these old forms. But one does not build by satisfying oneself with destruction. That which is content to criticize, to reject, without being able to offer positive proposals, finally finds a place within the bourgeois world. The bourgeois intellectuals also make a harsh critique of their world. But scorn, jokes and derision alone are not enough to allow the growth of proletarian class consciousness. The struggle against centralism and blind obedience, against leaders and trade union *bonzes*, cannot succeed, that is, it will not allow the *proletarian revolution* to move forward, if it is content to fight them to the death and to smash them to pieces; it is necessary that purely proletarian forms should arise (as a prelude to the organization of the councils) and that these new forms should *uproot* the old. The Factory Organization is the expression of this demand.

If the workers desire their definitive liberation as a *class* and not just advantages for a few cliques and social strata, *it is necessary* for them to create forms which are completely the work of their own class rather than the products of a few “leaders”. They must create forms in which autonomous thought and action are not just words, but *realities*. Such forms, having issued from their deepest being, that is, having been born from their proletarian class will, shall stand totally opposed to all forms which are dependent on capitalism, to a greater or lesser degree. While they cannot be absolutely “pure”, because we are living in a period of transition, their *orientation* must be absolute and always *clear*: their corollary must be proletarian *solidarity*, which for this same reason becomes an imperious *necessity*.

The Factory Organizations are above all *organizations of class struggle*.

United in the AAUD (General Workers Union), they comprise *neither a political party nor a trade union*. These two terms are employed in accordance with the meanings they have had up until now, that is, referring to institutions whose nature we can all understand with reference to today’s parties and trade unions.

Within these organizations the proletariat begins to consciously organize itself for the complete demolition of the old society and for its unification as a class. In the Factory Organizations the masses will be united by the consciousness of their class solidarity, of their *proletarian* class solidarity: they constitute the location where the unification of the proletariat is organically prepared (that is, like a natural process, in accordance with the circumstances). The Factory Organization is the beginning of the communist future and, as the backbone of the factory councils, will become the basis of the future communist society, of the classless society. Classless society means communitarian economy and all-encompassing forms of social expression. It means the total unification of the *economic base*.

At first, everyone will receive as much as possible. Later, according to their needs. Everyone will have to work as much as is necessary for any given situation.

The formation of such Factory Organizations as organizations of class struggle can only take place in the workplace. There, where each is the class brother of the other, all are obliged to be equals, and to have the same rights. There, the masses find themselves within the engine of production; they incessantly struggle to understand and to control it. There, the spiritual battle takes place, the revolutionary transformation of

consciousness, in an incessant electric current passing from man to man, and from masses to masses. Everything is oriented towards the supreme class interest rather than the mania of forming organizations. The interest of each trade is reduced to its proportionate share. At a more advanced level of development, the Factory Organization will become an instrument of class struggle in perpetual motion, an institution which is always bubbling with new blood thanks to the permanent possibility of new elections, recall, etc.³

The Unity of the Factory Organizations within the AAUD

The Factory Organizations, in a profusion of living elements, are grouped together in the General Workers Union (AAUD). This association is not an arbitrary amalgam of different groups, each separate from the other and existing independently, but responds to an internal need. As the council idea develops as an expression of the class will of the proletarians, the various Factory Organizations must grow along with the latter. In effect, born in pieces, they only find their culmination in the vast current of the general evolution which leads to the proletarian form of organization. Just as streams end up forming a river, they will necessarily unite. Such an association, in conformance with the council idea, emerging from the rank and file, is wanted and needed by the proletarian class. To fight as an exploited class unites, creates and provides a form for the social *bond*, for proletarian solidarity, and for *class solidarity*, which is not expressed in words but in deeds.

As an organization of the whole, as a beginning of the organization of the councils, the AAUD, naturally, is never complete. New Factory Organizations will flow into it, and more than once mud and silt will spread through it, instead of clear water. It is a natural process. It will be obliged to ceaselessly fight for its purity.

Centralism and Federalism

The fight which the AAUD must lead is the class struggle in its purest form. It is already carrying on part of this fight by constituting its own organization in accordance with the proletarian idea of the councils, in opposition to capitalist forms of organization. It strives ceaselessly and in every way within the production process to realize this idea in an ever clearer and purer form. Its very existence alone is already a threat to all the capitalist forces. It provides an example of the progressive development and crystallization of proletarian class consciousness, and therefore compels the whole proletariat to take a stand. The organization's development in this direction will increasingly demote to a secondary level the conflict between what are known as *centralism* and *federalism*. From the AAUD's point of view, the polemic over these two principles, these two forms of organization, will become a dispute of empty words. Obviously, these two terms must be understood according to the meanings they have possessed until now, and not according to a new meaning foisted upon them.

By *centralism* we understand the form which, through the will of a minority, bridles and enslaves the masses. For the AAUD, it is a demon which must be extirpated. It is antisocial.

Federalism is the opponent of centralism, but an opponent operating on the basis of the same economic system. It is the sovereignty, the stubborn obstinacy of the individual (or the workshop, or the region, or the nation) understood on its own terms. It is equally antisocial and must be fought just as vigorously.

These two forms progressively evolved over centuries past. Federalism was victorious in the Middle Ages, while centralism prevailed during the period of advanced capitalism.

Sympathy for federalism is based simply on the fact that, by seeing it as the negation of centralism, one assumes that it will bring freedom and paradise. This desire for federalism leads to a caricature of *autonomy* (the right to self-determination). So it is thought that when one attributes autonomy in all domains to each region, to each place (one might also say, to each person), one is acting in a social and a proletarian way. In fact, this accomplishes nothing except to abolish the empire so as to replace it with a number of small principalities. Petty kinglets (local bosses) arise everywhere who themselves assume rule

over a fraction of the membership in a centralized manner, as if it was their own private property: from this, fragmentation and general collapse ensues.

Centralism and federalism are both *bourgeois* forms of expression. Centralism is more typically big bourgeois, while federalism is more petit-bourgeois. Both are anti-proletarian and stand in the way of the purification of the class struggle. The proletariat knows that it cannot defeat capital unless it closes ranks. The more the consolidation of the council system advances, the greater will be the gains registered by the proletariat's unity in both intensity and scope. Within this unity, with its control from below, with its unleashing of all proletarian forces and potentials, with its strong bonds connecting the leaders to the masses, all conflict will then be absorbed, the development of class consciousness and the development of absolute social affinity will become realities. First spiritually, and then later in the communitarian economy.

It will be easily understood that all of this is yet in the process of becoming and that the road which the AAUD must follow before reaching its goal is still a long one, and that many errors will yet be committed (in particular, the meddling interference of certain groups or individuals--which is quite understandable as a result of the disorder caused by the confusion of secondary tasks); this will provide the "centralists" and the "federalists", who are for the most part good fighters, although with confused ideas, with the continually renewed occasion for protesting against dictatorship or to demand more dictatorship. But this must not prevent us from following the correct road; which is to say that the proletariat, as an *international* class, seeks and finds, by building the council system, its increasingly more compact unity, a unity which it realizes in order to definitively vanquish capitalism and the spirit of capitalism, a unity which will later issue into its conclusion as the classless society.

Masses and Leaders

The very structure of the AAUD, as clearly manifested in the organization's statutes, itself engenders between *masses and leaders* relations unlike those prevailing in organizations of the capitalist type. If, in the latter, the proletarians are the playthings of all variety of politicians, in the AAUD they will increasingly become the masters of their own fates, of the fate of their class. The theory according to which the real emancipation of the laboring class can only be accomplished by the workers themselves becomes a material force.

The concept of "masses" acquires a different meaning than it has in the capitalist system. In the minds of the supporters of the private economy, the word "masses" is always synonymous with corpse, with an object which is manipulated at will. It is considered as the "property" of certain men, offices and cliques. *In proletarian thought, on the other hand, the masses do not constitute an incoherent collection of confused egos, but instead denotes the proletariat to the extent that its class consciousness allows it to indissolubly unite social thought and will.*

Such masses can only arise through their own increasing activity and ceaseless organizational efforts, first in the fight against capital, building their own organization; then, in their constant collaboration in the production process.

What we have just said expresses the current understanding of the word "leader" from the proletarian point of view. This leader must be intimately connected to the class-conscious masses. He will represent and organize the life and thought of the masses, who will in turn transmit their own enthusiasm to him. He must not fight like a businessman does, for his property, for his people, for his nation, but as an integral part of the vast proletarian masses who feel, who think, and who desire, and who exist throughout the entire world. He must not fight while saying, "I want to transform the proletarian movement into *my* movement, the revolution is *my* affair, it is me whom you must follow"; all of these sentiments correspond to private capitalism, they comprise part of bourgeois ideology.

As long as it has to fight, the AAUD will therefore not reject leaders *a priori*, which would be equivalent to rejecting all intelligence, all ability, all resolute will. If it did so it would no longer be a socialist organization but a military and bourgeois prison in which, fatally leveled, the human being would be mistaken for the product of a machine. It would also be utopian, since the struggle has just begun. This position, however, will burden the proletarian leaders with the greatest responsibility. The only requirement of the organization and the system will be that all its officers are subjected to the strictest *control*. The council organization is to be understood in this *sense*. It carries out a merciless battle against one-man dictatorship, against ruling cliques and organized power centers which have separated from the needs and living conditions of the proletarian masses and which use the methods of capitalist social climbers. It most violently takes its stand against the *intellectuals*, that is, against those persons who use their higher education to transform the proletariat into a plaything of their own conceptions and interests.

The AAUD is the inveterate enemy of the capitalist bourgeoisie from both the internal and external points of view. It thus naturally finds itself on the terrain of the “*dictatorship of the proletariat*”. Its subsequent goal will be to fight for the realization of this dictatorship. Such a dictatorship means that *in the struggle for the communist and classless society there is no compromise of any kind between exploiters and exploited, between capital and labor. To attain this goal, it is absolutely necessary for the proletariat to have all decision-making power over all of society’s political and economic institutions, via the council organization.*

The dictatorship will last until the old powers have disappeared. The AAUD stigmatizes as much as it can the imposture of bourgeois democracy, which takes for granted an *a priori* economic inequality.

It would be a waste of time to dilate upon the nature of that kind of democracy (of the ballot-box) to proletarians who have had to endure its indelible effects since August 1914. Every democracy of that kind is a dictatorship of the owners. At a time when all of the preconditions for the proletarian seizure of power are present, that is, when capitalism’s survival is no longer possible except by way of an unprecedented increase of exploitation, leading to the deaths of millions upon millions of proletarians, the exploited, in ever-increasing numbers, are carrying out a *revolutionary* struggle against “democracy” and will not rest until capital lies prostrate at their feet. One cannot expect a voluntary abdication, except perhaps one which is only for appearance’s sake (as in Hungary, for example). Once the proletariat becomes the ruling class and while communism is being built, it will have to use every means to demolish every counterrevolutionary movement; it will have to use *violence*. Otherwise, it would commit suicide. The dictatorship of the proletariat is irreconcilable with the freedom of the bourgeoisie. To deny this would be either the result of a lack of understanding, the chatter of priests, utopia, or a direct or indirect defense of the counterrevolution.

But the AAUD’s clear profession of faith in favor of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” consists equally of the fundamental rejection of any kind of collaboration with capital. It is the profession of faith in favor of the proletarian struggle relying on its own methods.

The politics, or, to put it another way, the struggle of such an organization, has an *a priori* proletarian class character. This means above all rejecting any form of parliamentarism regardless of its type. It should also be said, expressed negatively, that all parliamentarism leads to the sabotage of the proletarian revolution as soon as such Factory Organizations come into existence.

Furthermore, *the AAUD’s battle is entirely international*. The proletariat, as a *class*, acts resolutely only as a result of its international, unified character. The internationalist point of view stands in the forefront. The AAUD’s goal is *the international communitarian economy* and, finally, *humanity as a classless society*. The form taken by its struggle is naturally linked to a certain extent to the conditions in each country. It will, from the very start, incessantly strive to create links between and to unite the revolutionary councils of the various countries.

Guidelines of the AAUD-E

Guidelines of the AAUD-E, as presented at the Fourth Conference of the AAUD in June 1920

Online at: <http://libcom.org/history/guidelines-aaud-e>

- 1.** The AAUD is the unitary political and economic organization of the revolutionary proletariat.
- 2.** The AAUD fights for communism, for the socialization of the production of raw materials, the means of production, and the forces of production, as well as of the consumption goods which are the products of those forces. The AAUD wants to establish production and distribution according to a plan, which would do away with the current capitalist mode of production and distribution.
- 3.** The final goal of the AAUD is a society where all power will be abolished, and the road to this society passes by way of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the exclusive determination of the political and economic organization of communist society by the will of the workers, thanks to the council organization.
- 4.** The most urgent tasks of the AAUD are: a) the destruction of the trade unions and the political parties, the principle obstacles standing in the way of the unification of the proletarian class and the further progress of the social revolution, which can be the affair of neither the party nor the trade unions; b) achieving the unity of the revolutionary proletariat in the factories, the cells of production and the foundations of the society of the future. The form assumed by this unity is the Factory Organization; c) the development of the self-consciousness and the solidarity of the workers; d) the preparation of all measures which will be needed for the work of political and economic construction.
- 5.** The AAUD rejects all reformist and opportunist methods of struggle, and is opposed to any participation in parliamentarism and the local enterprise councils; such participation would be tantamount to sabotage of the council idea.
- 6.** The AAUD fundamentally rejects all professional leaders. Its only relation with official leadership will take an advisory form.
- 7.** All positions in the AAUD are unpaid.
- 8.** The AAUD does not consider the proletariat's struggle for freedom to be a national, but an international affair. For this reason the AAUD strives for the unity of the entire world proletariat in a council International.