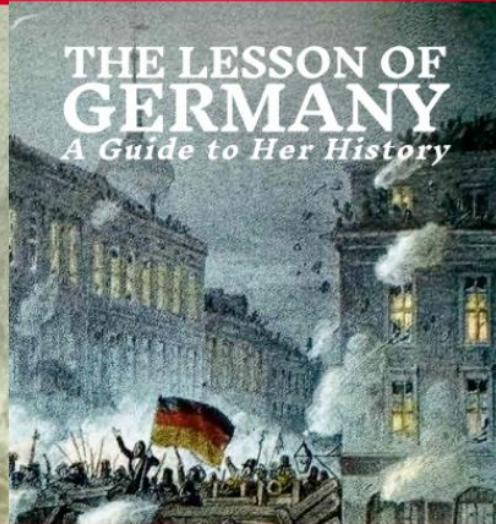




Peat Bog Soldiers (Die Moorsoldaten) - German Anti-Fascist Song

PEOPLES SCHOOL FOR MARXIST-LENINIST STUDIES™



NOP Presents: The Lesson of Germany

Albert Norden
Albert Schreiner

PSMLS 09/15/25



What we'll be learning today:

- The Defeat of the Revolution and the end of WWI
- The Rise of Fascism
- The Nazis Set Up Their Dictatorship



Introduction & Historical Context



Please Get Your Own Copy for Your Marxist Library

Tonight's class gives a truncated look at the book *Lesson of Germany* by Gerhart Eisler, Albert Norden, and Albert Schreiner.

Unfortunately, an hour and a half course can hardly do the book justice. After attending the class, it is recommended that all attendees and viewers order a the book from New Outlook Publishers using this link:

<https://newoutlookpublishers.store/shop/history/the-lesson-of-germany/> to read the book in its entirety.



The Roman Catholic Church

- Once a unifier of Europe, the Vatican would hinder the national unification of Germany
- This led to the Reformation movement to break the German kingdoms away from the Papacy
- The disorganized peasant uprisings which culminated in the Great Peasant War of 1525 led to its defeat
- The break with the corrupt Vatican was achieved but the maintenance and strengthening of localized feudal despots which prevented a modern German national state
- The struggle against the Catholic church would have a lasting imprint on Germany with the Prussians of the east developing an anti-Catholic nationalism and the Austrians and Southern Germans aligning closely with the Catholic Habsburgs.
- These regional conflicts would culminate in the reactionary and anti-worker Prussification movement and Kulturkampf which led to repression against the Southern German Catholics



Effect of French Revolution of 1830 on Germany

Lesson of Germany (Pg. 29)

The first break in the general paralysis came with the Revolution of July, 1830, in Paris. This historic event, marking the emergence of the working class as an independent force, sent sparks of democratic and socialist ideas into neighboring Germany. Moreover, changed economic conditions gave the German middle class and newly arising industrial working class of the 1830's solid ground on which to wage their fight.

- This event also revived the German nationalist movement that began after the national liberation from Napoleon and was repressed by the ensuing reaction



Liberty Leading the People by Eugene Delacroix depicts the liberation of the French from King Charles X



Anti-Semitism in Pre-Hitler Germany

- After Napoleon Bonaparte's conquest of Europe, he passed edicts guaranteeing Jewish people equal status to the French and peoples conquered
- After the downfall of Napoleon, the edicts guaranteeing equal status was revoked in most German states
- Pogroms against the Jewish people started to pick up in the 19th century such as the Hep-Hep Riots of 1819



Painting depicting Hep-Hep Riots



Anti-Semitism in Pre-Hitler Germany Cont.

- In 1880 the Prussian Parliament drafted a petition to Otto Von Bismarck with the following:

“Your Excellency, may your mighty influence in Prussia and Germany urge:

1. that the immigration of alien Jews be at least limited, if not completely prevented;
2. that the Jews be excluded from all positions of authority; that their employment in the judiciary—namely as autonomous judges—receive appropriate limitation;
3. that the Christian character of the primary school—even when attended by Jewish pupils—be strictly protected; that only Christian teachers be allowed in these schools and that in all other schools Jewish teachers be placed only in special and exceptional cases;
4. that a special census of the Jewish population be reinstituted.”

Source:

<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/forging-an-empire-bismarckian-germany-1866-1890/ghdi:document-1801>>



Poster titled “German Seven” depicting the men pushing anti-Semitic legislation in Bismarck’s Germany



Legacy of the Second Reich

- While Bismarck succeeded in German Unification and setting in motion a modern capitalist Germany, Bismarck, a Junker (pronounced Yoonker; Prussian name for Gentry), maintained the rule of the Hohenzollern Dynasty
- With a late start to capitalist development, the bourgeoisie and proletariat were weak which caused a weak liberal movement and capitulation of the bourgeoisie to the feudal aristocracy and monarchy
- Bismarck's anti-Socialist laws of 1878 which repressed the Socialist movement and banned the Social Democratic Workers Party of Germany (SAPD), gave the class-collaborationist, pro-German imperialist, anti-Marxist Lassallean General German Workers Association (ADAV) to dominate (Lasalle's followers would later be colloquially referred to as Kaiser Socialists)



Defeat and Revolution



Revolutionary Fervor in Post-WWI Germany

Two events outside Germany had given a powerful impetus to revolutionary tendencies. The first was the October Revolution in Russia. Large numbers of German troops on the Eastern Front had fraternized with Russian soldiers. Tens of thousands of them, transferred to the Western Front after the signing of the Treaty of BrestLitovsk, brought back the facts about the Russian Revolution.

Secondly, President Woodrow Wilson's Message of January 8, 1918, made a deep impression on the German people. Wilson's fourteen points corresponded with the sentiments of the broad masses in Germany who were pressing for peace and a democratic regime. Long before this, German left-wing revolutionaries had urged a peace without annexations or indemnities and the right of self-determination for all peoples. Placing no faith in the statesmen who exploited Wilson's fourteen points as a weapon in their antidemocratic maneuvers, they appealed directly to the people. Moreover, Wilson's hostile attitude toward the Russian Revolution deepened the distrust of the German left against the representative of American imperialism.



Bolshevik Revolution of
1917



The Lasallean Social Democrats Conspire to Maintain the Prussian Monarchy

General Wilhelm Groener, held a conference in the Chancellor's office with six leaders of the Social-Democrats and free trade unions. At this meeting Ebert made the following proposal: "Kaiser Wilhelm abdicate if we are to prevent the masses from staging a revolution. I therefore propose that today, or at the very latest tomorrow, the Kaiser abdicate of his own free will and entrust one of his sons, perhaps Eitel Fritz or Oskar, with the Regency." Side by side with these secret negotiations to bolster the Hohenzollern regime went passionate appeals from the Social Democratic and trade union leaders to the workers not to strike or demonstrate, but to await the results of negotiations by Ebert, Scheidemann, and Karl Legien, head of the trade union movement.

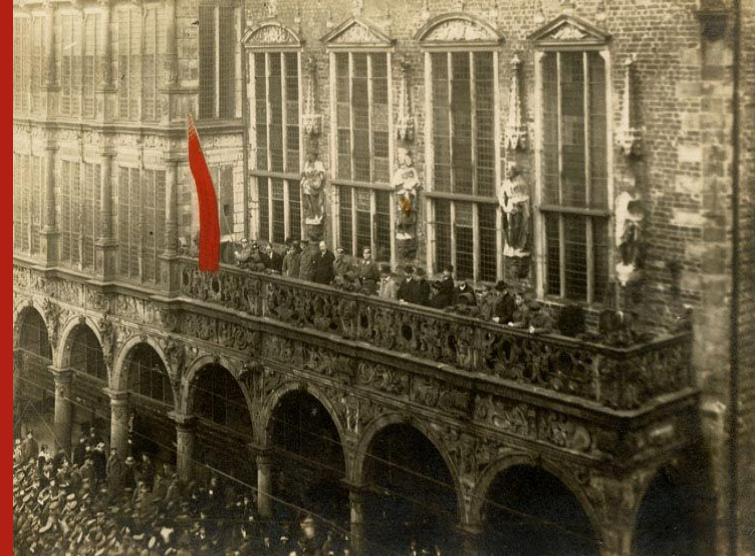


Friedrich Ebert



“But it was too late! The Revolution rode roughshod over all obstacles.”

On the morning of November 9, all factories lay idle. Huge crowds of workers, some of them armed, marched to the barracks where they were joined by the soldiers. They proceeded to the district where the government buildings were located. On all sides, they were met by exultant shouts for the republic. The military authorities were helpless; the armed people ruled the streets. The Revolution had triumphed in the capital city of the Reich! When Ebert and his associates realized that they could no longer stem the tide of events, they too proclaimed a general strike at one o'clock in the afternoon—a strike that had broken out several hours before and against their will. They then hurried to the office of Prince Max of Baden. In a scene reminiscent of a sentimental tearjerker in the movies, the Prince resigned as Chancellor in favor of Ebert.



Proclamation of the Bremen Soviet Republic outside the city hall on 15 November 1918



The Communists and the Revolution

Certainly, the Spartacists were active—but they were only relatively small groups which had been formed during the war under illegal conditions. They possessed no long traditions; they had no deep roots among the workers. Not until January 1, 1919, had they organized into the Communist Party of Germany and demanded the disarming of the imperial officers; the formation of an armed workers' militia, the replacement of the political apparatus of the previous regime by Workers' and Soldiers' Councils; the formation of a revolutionary court to try the Hohenzollerns, Hindenburgs, Ludendorffs, Tirpitzes, and the other German war criminals; the expropriation of the Junkers, bankers, and big industrialists. At the same time, the Communists emphasized that they did not intend to overthrow the Social-Democratic government by means of a *putsch* but, as Rosa Luxemburg wrote in the program of the Spartacus League, they sought power “only through the clear and unequivocal will of the great majority of the proletarian masses.”



The Counter-Revolution Begins

When the counter-revolution of Ebert, Scheidemann, and the generals struck, the Communist Party was the soul of the resistance movement. It paid heavily in human blood for its heroic struggle against the counter-revolution. But the initial Communist Party congress showed a lack of clarity on fundamental questions of political tactics. And the reactionaries intended to smash the party to bits before it grew out of its swaddling clothes and could assume leadership of the German working class.



Discussion



The Rise of Fascism



The Freikorps are Let Loose

During the first half of 1919, under the pretext of maintaining “law and order,” military detachments were sent to break up the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils. These troops struck at the workers with a savagery like that which, fifteen years later, characterized the S.A. and S.S. formations of Adolf Hitler. On February 11, General von Watter, acting under government orders, dissolved the General Soldiers’ Council. The Free Corps (freikorps) were let loose. In reply, a general strike was called. Coincident with the advance of the troops, the Social Democratic leaders formulated the slogan: “Socialization is already law,” and misled their own followers into abandoning the strike movement. The Free Corps ruffians shot and stabbed, clubbed and drowned workers, soldiers and sailors at will. They arrested left-wing leaders, and the commander of the People’s Marine Division was shot “while trying to escape.” The murderer, a Sergeant Tamschick, was rewarded by the Social-Democratic government with a promotion to lieutenant! On March 16 1919, the government peremptorily ordered the arrest of all Communists.



Freikorps paramilitaries in Berlin, 1919



The Birth of the Weimar Republic



The Weimar Republic in 1930

The revolutionary government fled with the National Assembly to Weimar. There, at the beginning of February 1919, the National Assembly elected Friedrich Ebert president of the republic and set up a cabinet of Social Democrats, Democrats, and Catholic Centrists. This coalition was to dominate the political scene in Germany for the next few years. The Republican Constitution went into effect on August 11, 1919. Its progressive articles were the fruit of the Revolution and the subsequent mass strikes. Freedom of opinion and association, equal and universal suffrage by secret ballot, and other democratic principles found legal expression in the document. At the same time, Article 48 provided for the abrogation of all these freedoms in case of emergency. This Article later became a favorite instrument of the governments of the Weimar Republic. The Constitution also sanctioned the establishment of workers' councils which were, in fact, little more than agencies for settling disputes between employers and workers. The burning issue of socialization was ceremoniously buried in parliamentary committees.



The Kapp Putsch

In March, 1920, the militarist clique felt that the left had been sufficiently weakened by the 1919 blood-letting, and that it could now proceed openly to institute its own monarchist dictatorship, which led to the attempted “Kapp putsch.” What decided the date of the uprising—known as the Kapp putsch—was the fact that the moment had come for disbanding the army in accordance with the Versailles Treaty. To the professional officers and non-coms, therefore, the putsch became a matter of their very livelihood. The Reichswehr generals were not willing to fire on units of their own army taking part in the anti-government putsch, and President Ebert and his government fled Berlin. The rebels occupied the government buildings. The legal government hid in Stuttgart. But the workers, salaried employees, and civil servants throughout Germany arose in a mammoth people’s strike which shut down every factory, mine, dock, and office. Kapp and Luettwitz operated in a vacuum. Their orders went unheeded; in many places their troops suffered defeat in armed conflicts with the workers. On March 17 they abdicated. The rescued government returned from Stuttgart.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 119-1983-0019
Foto: o. Ang. | März 1920

Soldiers in Berlin Attempting to Overthrow the Revolutionary Government in the Kapp Putsch

Forming a Popular Front

Now commanding general, von Watter's troops marched into the industrial centers, bearing aloft the black-white-red imperial flag and shouting for the monarchy. On March 15, a joint appeal was issued, signed by the leaders of the Rhineland Westphalia Social Democrats, the Independent Socialists, and the Communists. Its aim was: "(1) gaining political power by means of the dictatorship of the proletariat; (2) immediate socialization of branches of industry ripe for it." The workers fought and expelled the Kapp militarists from one city after another. On March 19, Essen fell to the workers.

Members of the Red Ruhr Army. Dortmund, 1920



A People's Army

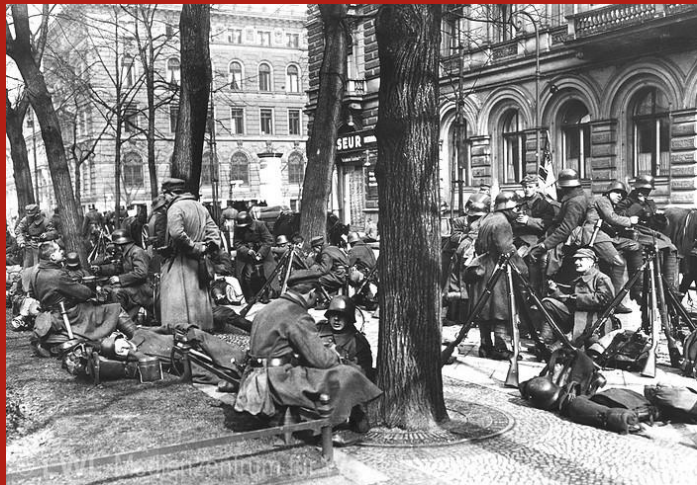
A central military committee organized the workers into a Red Army, which by March 21 had entirely cleared that vital industrial region of Germany of reactionary troops. The Ebert government began negotiations with a view to smashing the Ruhr workers' united front, and utilized the time gained to assemble troop transports from the whole Reich against Western Germany. In the name of the government, a pact was signed that allowed the workers to form local defense groups and pledged that the Reichswehr would not occupy the Ruhr region.

Members of the Reichswehr sitting above the bodies of Red Ruhr Army fighters who had been shot, 2 April 1920





The Nazi Party Program



A Group of Kapp Putschists in Military Uniform

Why did the Government sign this accord? No sooner had a large section of the workers, trusting the agreement, laid down their arms than the Social Democratic Chancellor Hermann Mueller and General von Watter set an impossible time limit for the immediate dissolution of all people's defense groups and the surrender of their weapons. With the demobilization in full swing, the Kapp putschists of yesterday, reinstated as "loyal" government troops, struck with unbridled ferocity. Invading the Ruhr, these military bands turned it into a veritable inferno. The Kapp putschists who had lost their jobs received substantial yearly pensions. Proceedings against 540 putschists of the Reichswehr were suspended. But the workers who had resisted the uprising received an aggregate total of more than one thousand years' imprisonment. With the defeat of those who bore the main burden in smashing the Kapp putsch, the revolutionary period of 1918-1920 came to an end.



Disappointed and Embittered

The elections of June 6, 1920, were for deputies to the first Reichstag, which succeeded the Constitutional National Assembly. The election results should have been a warning to the government which had enlisted the aid of the reactionaries to defeat the people. Some of those who had formerly voted for the Weimar coalition, disappointed and embittered, moved to the Left; others, especially among the city and rural middle classes, returned to the Rightist camp which they had left in 1918 in the hour of military defeat. These results were bound to encourage the Right. The same Captain Erhardt who had organized the Kapp putsch now formed the O.C. (Organization Consul), the members of which attacked and murdered people holding high posts in the republic.



Ehrhardt in Berlin during the Kapp Putsch.



Appealing to the despairing middle-class professionals and intellectuals who were facing ruin in the inflation, the reactionaries prepared their coup. In the foreground of the movement was the German Workers' Party of Adolf Hitler, founded in Munich in 1919. In February, 1920, Hitler provided the party with a program that promised to “abrogate unearned income, break the Foreign Policy of the Weimar Republic, destroy the bonds of interest-slavery, confiscate all war profits, turn over all trusts to the state, introduce profit-sharing in all big enterprises, create a healthy middle class, divide department stores into a number of small shops leased by small storekeepers at low rentals, give maximum consideration to small merchants in furnishing supplies to the state, and punish usurers and speculators with death.” Known as the 25-Point Program, it outlined the ideology of the German Workers' Party (DAP), which was renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), or Nazi Party, on the same day

The 25 Point Program



Hoping to Win the Masses by Wearing a Socialist Mask

The name and program of the party was proof that the German reactionaries could hope to win the masses only if they wore a socialist mask. The politically unstable middle classes, who had supported the republic only to find themselves draining the cup of their misery, were particularly receptive to Hitler's unbridled chauvinism: "All people of German blood, whether they live under Danish, Polish, Czech, Italian, or French rule, must be united in the German Reich...."

Almost immediately after his failed November 9, 1923 putsch Hitler's party completely disintegrated. However, Hitler had powerful supporters and had to serve only a few months of his five-year sentence, in a comfortably furnished fortress. After this none-too-arduous sojourn, he was set free to rebuild his party and spread his Nazi propaganda. The leaders of Social-Democracy wanted no cooperation with the Communists. They saw in the economic upturn which set in after 1924, and which was aided by foreign loans, the beginning of a long period of capitalist prosperity. Powerful trusts arose in Germany during these years: for example, the I. G. Farben combine, formed from the merger of a number of chemical enterprises, and the Vereinigte Stahlwerke, which fused the coal mines, iron and steel works into a single giant undertaking.



Adolf Hitler and Julius Streicher
at Nuremberg, Sept. 2nd 1923



Signing the Death Warrant of the Republic



Heinrich Brüning c. 1930

The German industrialists began working through Chancellor Dr. Heinrich Brüning after he came to power in the spring of 1930 and the first act of the Brüning cabinet was to reduce social expenditures and to increase taxes on the low-income groups. When Brüning feared that the Reichstag might reject his harsh economic decrees, he invoked Article 48 of the constitution and had Hindenburg enact his “emergency decrees” into law. This article gave the President the right to govern dictatorially without consulting parliament, in the event of serious unrest in the country. There was no such unrest. When on October 18, 1930, a majority of the Reichstag, including the Social-Democratic deputies, voted for this authoritarian course, the Weimar politicians signed the death warrant of their own parties and of the republic.



Diverting the Wrath of the Masses

The party of Adolf Hitler was again in the public eye. With the failure of the beer hall putsch of 1923, it had sunk into obscurity. Now it rose rapidly. Hitler's party became therefore the center of attraction for the great mass of the politically vacillating who were desperately seeking a way out of their misery. Its far-flung apparatus offered many well paid jobs for jobless intellectuals, ruined storekeepers, and former officers who had originally been active in forming the "storm-troop units." Many of these S.A. headquarters were crowded with unemployed men, deprived of unemployment insurance by the Bruening decrees.

Hitler's main propaganda weapon was his attack on the Versailles Treaty and on those parties he held responsible for having signed the Diktat. Hitler hid the fact that the real authors of German poverty were the big capitalists who were his paymasters. To prevent a social explosion within Germany, the Nazis diverted the wrath of millions of Germans into chauvinist and anti-Semitic channels.



Hitler Leaving Prison in Dec. 1924
Having Served Only A Fraction of
His Sentence for the Beer Hall
Putsch



Voting for the “Lesser Evil”



President von Hindenburg
shakes hands with Hitler, 1933.

The 1930 elections showed that the Nazis had not succeeded in penetrating the ranks of the politically conscious workers. Both workers' parties, with the pendulum of influence swinging slowly in favor of the Communists, had stood their ground in the face of the Nazis' head-on assault. But to halt the rising tide of Nazism demanded that they unite their efforts. Instead, the Social-Democratic leaders declared that Brüning was “the lesser evil” and had to be tolerated, against the greater evil, Hitler. But Brüning's policies as chancellor hastened, not hindered, the victory of Hitler. By his emergency decrees, Brüning dug the grave of the Weimar Republic. Hindenburg's seven-year term of office as President expired at the beginning of 1932. To illustrate how low the ruling parties of the republic had fallen, the only candidate they could find to oppose Hitler was Hindenburg, who would run once again. In 1925, the Germans had voted for Wilhelm Marx who later made common cause with Hindenburg. Now they voted for Hindenburg, who less than a year later made Hitler Chancellor of Germany.



The Future Looks Dark and Gloomy



Hitler, Goebbels, and Hess
Engaged in Conversation

The Nazi movement did not come to power in Germany because it had won over the majority of the people to its policies, or because the Germans are “by nature” Nazis. Even under the most advantageous conditions, despite fraudulent elections, terror, and the pro-Nazi sympathies of many government officials, the National Socialists never won a clear majority of the voters in anything like a normal election. Three months after their most resounding electoral victory, in the Reichstag elections of November 6, 1932, they lost 2,000,000 votes. Describing the mood of the Nazi Party, Goebbels wrote in his diary for December, 1932: “Deep depression throughout the organization. One feels so worn out; one longs for nothing but a few weeks’ escape from the whole business....” “Phone call from Dr. Ley: The situation in the party is getting worse from hour to hour.” “The year 1932 has brought us eternal ill luck.... The past was sad, and the future looks dark and gloomy; all chances and hopes have quite disappeared.” “For hours, the leader (Hitler) paces up and down the room in the hotel. It is obvious that he is thinking very hard.... Suddenly he stops and says: ‘If the party once falls to pieces, I shall shoot myself without more ado.’ A dreadful threat, and most depressing.”



Hitler Becomes Chancellor

But Hitler did not have to shoot himself, nor did his party fall to pieces. The parties and classes opposed to his assumption of power did not take advantage of this favorable situation. They failed to act. But the reactionaries needed him and his party in order to set up a dictatorship. On January 4, 1933, in the presence of Franz von Papen, Hitler negotiated with the Cologne banker, Kurt von Schroeder, a financial intimate of the big industrialists and a man who had excellent international connections with British and American financial interests. As a result, Hitler obtained all the money he needed to finance his campaigns and his terrorist gangs. And he received much more. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany by von Hindenburg, the very man whom the middle-class democrats and Social-Democratic voters had elected President in order to defend the Weimar Republic against Hitler



Newly appointed Chancellor Adolf Hitler greets President von Hindenburg at a memorial service. Berlin, 1933



Discussion



The Nazis Set Up Their Dictatorship

**XII THE NAZIS SET UP THEIR DICTATORSHIP**

On January 30, 1933, Hitler became Chancellor in a coalition government of the reactionary parties and groups. To add insult to injury, the deadly enemies of democracy passed off their dictatorship as a government of the Weimar Republic. It was as if history with gruesome irony was bent on showing the German people that democracy could mean anything in their “democratic” republic, in which reactionaries occupied every key post and decisive position of power.

Hitler was a partner in the reactionary dictatorship; but it was not yet a full-blown Nazi dictatorship. For a short time Hitler was forced to continue playing the comedy of legality to which he had committed himself to Hindenburg and his partners in the coalition. He still had to maneuver in order to dupe both. For behind Hindenburg stood the Reichswehr generals, and behind his German Nationalist colleagues stood important big business men and the Junkers who insisted on retaining some semblance of legality in their dictatorship as a last safeguard to prevent Hitler from excluding them from the political leadership of German imperialism.

The Hitler-Hugenberg coalition could rule without a Reichstag only if, in accordance with the constitution, two-thirds of the Reichstag deputies passed a so-called enabling law, voting themselves out of existence. The Catholic Centrists, without whose assent no two-thirds vote was possible, still refused to agree to such a law. They feared that a free hand for the Hitler-Hugenberg coalition would mean attacks on the Catholic Church and on Catholic government officials, and would also affect the interests of Catholic industrialists in the armaments industry.

In this situation, Hitler demanded of his German Nationalist colleagues the dissolution of the Reichstag and the calling of new elections. If the German Nationalists insisted on adhering formally to the constitution, Hitler would seek by means of a new election, in which he hoped to win a clear majority, to solve in his own way the question of the two-thirds vote in Parliament and the constitution. Hugenberg and von Papen had no illusions about Hitler's intentions. Lacking mass appeal, they could not hope to win anything from an election. After long deliberations and after Hitler had pledged himself not to alter the composition of the government, no matter what

Ch. 12



Hitler is sworn in as Chancellor



But the Nazis were no gentlemen like those British Tories who in 1924 used the forged “Zinoviev letter” to stage a noisy anti-Bolshevik campaign to win victory at the polls. Mere forgeries were not enough for them: was not their whole propaganda based on fraud? They required something far more grandiose and startling. On February 27, 1933, they set fire to the Reichstag building, discovered the blaze they had themselves started, extinguished it, accused the Communists of the fire, and then paraded before Germany as the saviors of the country.

SATURDAY, *The Daily Mail* OCTOBER 18, 1924.

CIVIL WAR PLOT BY SOCIALISTS' MASTERS.

MOSCOW ORDERS TO OUR REDS.	£5,000 A WEEK FOR LIFE.	DE VALERA ARRESTED.	PEKING CHANGES HANDS.
GREAT PLOT DISCLOSED YESTERDAY.	"DAILY MAIL" ELECTION COMPETITION.	ULSTER POLICE ACTION.	CUT WHILE CITY SLEPT.
"PARALYSE THE ARMY AND NAVY."	JUST FORBIDS NEWS.	TO PREVENT RALLY OF REPUBLICANS.	GATES OPENED BY PLUTocrats.
MR. MACDONALD WOULD LEND RUSSIA OUR MONEY!	THE DAILY MAIL'S GREAT ELECTION COMPETITION.	Mr. De Valera, the Irish Republican leader, was arrested by the Ulster authorities last night when he entered the Town Hall at Drogheda, County Down, in defiance of a prohibition in support of the Government.	CHRISTMAS 'GENERAL' "HONGKONG."
DOCUMENT ISSUED BY FOREIGN OFFICE	FOREIGN AFFAIRS.		
AFTER "DAILY MAIL" HAD SPREAD THE NEWS.			

The faked "Zinoviev Letter" contents published in the Daily Mail ahead of the Oct 1924 General Election

Newspaper Article on the “Zinoviev Letter”



After the Reichstag fire, Germany divided into two great camps. One consisted of the “know-nothings” who swallowed the provocation whole. Since 1918, they had been carefully and thoroughly schooled by the parties of the Weimar Republic to believe the worst about the Communists and the Soviet Union. They were joined by those who, despite their qualms, refused to believe that the National-Socialists could commit such a wanton act. Had not Hindenburg, the President of Germany, made the Nazis the leading government party? The other camp knew well who the incendiaries were. But it in turn was divided between those who courageously denounced the Nazi provocation, and those who kept silent out of fear of the Nazis or for “diplomatic reasons.”

To this last-named group undoubtedly belonged the heads of the Reichswehr; the old Pan-German chauvinist, Hugenberg; and the diplomatic spy of World War I, Franz von Papen. They and their colleagues had no doubts as to who the guilty parties were. They realized also that the Nazis would utilize the Reichstag blaze in such

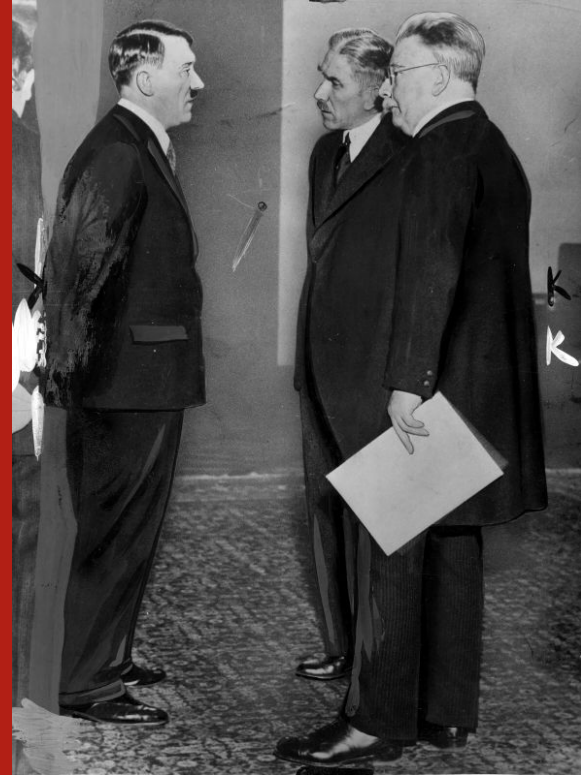


The burning of the Reichstag



a way as to shift the balance of forces within the reactionary coalition in favor of Hitler. They knew that they would not find it easy to deal with their Nazi associates, who in the struggle for power would stop at nothing. But they felt that the destruction of democracy and the labor movement, the rearming of Germany, and the preparations for new imperialist aggressions were far more vital than all such “petty and subordinate” differences of opinion. So Hugenberg and von Papen acquiesced in every measure Hitler proposed to save the Fatherland from the “Communist menace,” including the outlawing of the Communist Party.

In this situation, Hugenberg and von Papen did insist on one thing: they accepted the ban on the Communist Party, yet they refused to allow the duly elected Communist deputies to be deprived of their mandates. For they could not completely rid themselves of the illusion that with the help of the Communist deputies they could prevent Hitler from obtaining a two-thirds majority in the newly elected Reichstag. The German Nationalists had not yet given up the hope of holding the balance of power in the government.



Hugenberg and von Papen (right)



The Reichstag fire, the panic it helped create, and the wave of organized Nazi terror paid handsome dividends. The National-Socialists gained 6,000,000 votes. Yet despite the widespread falsification of returns, the Nazis did not succeed even now in winning a majority of the voters and the German people. They obtained about 43 per cent of the votes. Their total of 17,772,000 compared with a combined vote of 21,571,000 for the Social-Democrats, Catholic Centrists, Communists, and German Nationalists. Despite all the terror and fraud, the Nazis could not win over large numbers of adherents of these four parties.

Nevertheless, Hitler was able to utilize the results of the "Reichstag fire" election to transform the coalition dictatorship into a Nazi dictatorship. Now he began systematically to suppress and



Two Nazi SA men (left), along with representatives of the (Catholic) Center, Social Democratic, Communist, and other parties, campaign in Berlin



“coordinate” all other political parties and organizations. He demanded of the new Reichstag an enabling act which would grant him as Chancellor full powers for four years: thus he would be in a position to promulgate laws and conclude treaties without the consent of the Reichstag, the Reich Council, and the President of the Reich.

The incoming Reichstag consisted of 656 deputies, 343 of whom were National-Socialists and German Nationalists. Opposed to them were 291 deputies of the Social-Democrats, Centrists, and Communists, and 22 deputies from small splinter parties. To obtain the necessary two-thirds majority for the enabling act, Hitler first declared the seats of the 81 Communists null and void. But even after annulling these mandates, the outcome of the voting still depended on the behavior of the Centrists, or at least some of them. Hitler negotiated with the leaders of the Centrist Party, Monsignor Kaas and Heinrich Bruening, who also must have been aware of the real culprits in the burning of the Reichstag. By promising to sign a *concordat* with the Vatican and to respect the interests of the Catholic Church in Germany, Hitler elicited from them the pledge that the Centrists would vote *en bloc* for his “full powers” decree.

March 23, 1933, was a tragic hour for German Catholicism. Its political leaders—in the face of strong opposition in their own ranks—voted to make Hitler absolute dictator of Germany for four years. The Social-Democratic deputies voted against the “full powers law,” but their negative vote was accompanied by a declaration of their party leader, Otto Weis, in which he expressed his solidarity with the demand formulated by Hitler for “German equality of rights” in foreign affairs.

Weis asserted: “We agree with the demand for German equality of rights in foreign affairs which the Reichschancellor has raised; and we support it all the more vigorously in that we have always fought energetically for that principle.” Weis spoke in the name—though not with the approval—of all the Social Democratic deputies. Did they not know of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*? Were they not acquainted with the plans of the German trusts and Reichswehr generals for whom Hitler spoke? Weis and the other Social-Democrats in Parliament knew exactly what Hitler meant by “equal rights for the German people”; he meant unlimited rearming for new imperialist aggressions. And yet the Social-Democratic fraction of the Reichstag

expressed solidarity with his demand; they even justified it as a fundamental principle for which the Social-Democrats had long fought.

On May 17, 1933, the representatives of German Social Democracy and Catholic Centrism repeated this show of solidarity with Hitler’s foreign policy in even more striking fashion. On that day, Hitler called a special session of the Reichstag, in order to make clear to the governments of other powers that all Germany, not only the Nazis, backed German rearmament and her “freedom to defend herself.” In a long address, Hitler justified Germany’s right to rearm, which he then called in diplomatic language “Germany’s equality in the world.” After his speech, Hermann Goering presented the following resolution for the deputies to vote on: “The German Reichstag as the representative of the German people agrees with the declaration of the government; and in the decisive question involving the nation’s life, the equality of the German nation in the world, stands solidly behind the government.” Not only the German Nationalists and National-Socialists, but also the Centrists and sixty of the Social-Democratic deputies voted for this resolution. The Social-Democrats had been specially invited to the session to furnish the outside world with a demonstration of German national unity behind Hitler’s rearmament program and his foreign policy.

And while, down below, Nazi gangsters with clubs and revolvers began to whip the Germans into line for the coming war, blotting out every trace of liberty in the country, non-Nazi deputies, up above, demonstrated their solidarity with this policy of preparing for World War II. They used their last legal appearance to give the masses one more lesson in how to surrender to German reaction, the traditional policy of the German liberals and Social-Democrats. A few months later—at the Reichstag fire trial—a Bulgarian, George Dimitroff, gave these German democrats a lesson in how to conduct oneself in the struggle against Nazism.

The behavior of the Centrists and of many of the Social Democratic leaders during these fateful months was typical. Where they could still come forward legally, they did so only to accept Hitler’s promises, surrender, disarm politically, and dissolve their own organizations. They all behaved as though possessed of the spirit of Job: “Though He slay me, yet will I put my trust in Him.”



Hitler did not hesitate to “slay” them. All the non-Nazi parties that had hoped the Communists alone would serve as lightning-conductors and divert the wrath of the Nazis, were soon tragically disillusioned. On March 28, 1933, the pro-monarchist war veterans’ organization, the *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmets), was dissolved; its leader, Seldte, promptly joined the Nazis. In April, 1933, all SocialDemocratic headquarters were occupied by the Nazis, Social-Democratic newspapers were banned, and their printing presses confiscated.

Every attempt by the leaders of the trade union movement, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund*, to compromise with the National-Socialists on the question of preserving the trade unions, was futile. Their alacrity to obey the Hitler regime and function under its command led to naught. The labor leaders degraded themselves to such a point that on May 1, 1933, they called upon the workers to participate in the Nazi May Day celebration. The very next day, all trade union headquarters were occupied and their assets confiscated. The Nazis took over the unions, dismissed their leaders, driving some into exile, jailing others, and murdering many. The German trade union leaders who, instead of uniting the workers in struggle against the Nazis, had followed out the policies of the right-wing Social Democrats to the bitter end, now handed over their unions, the prize of the German labor movement, to the Nazi enemy without a fight.

On May 10, 1933, the Social-Democratic Party was banned and all its auxiliary organizations dissolved. On June 5, 1933, Bruening was compelled to disband the Catholic Centrist Party. On June 27, Hugenberg was forced out of the government coalition and his party, the German Nationalists, was dissolved. In vain the Nationalists sought to escape their fate by rebaptizing themselves “the German Nationalist Front.” The question of who was to wield the dictatorship was now solved—with Hugenberg and the German Nationalists on the losing side.

The Nazis began to “cleanse” the state apparatus from top to bottom. Social-Democratic, democratic, and Jewish civil servants were replaced by National-Socialists or by those who hastened to leap on the Nazi bandwagon. The police and secret police (*Gestapo*) became powerful instruments in the hands of the Nazis for persecuting their opponents. District and provincial governments

were dismissed, with administrative powers entrusted to Nazi commissars.

Having triumphed, the Nazi dictatorship sought feverishly to strengthen its hold in every conceivable direction and to turn every German into a National-Socialist. Any opposition to Nazism became a crime against the state. Any organization that was not National-Socialist was dissolved or “co-ordinated.” The adventure of the Third Reich could now begin. Hitler promised the German people that this adventure would last a thousand years.



XIII SURRENDER TO NATIONAL SOCIALISM

The majority of the German people, especially the decisive sections of the workers, were against the Nazis. But, having said this, one must add that this majority surrendered to National-Socialism without a struggle. Neither the workers as a class, the middle-class democrats, the Catholics, nor the liberal intellectuals, all of whom saw in Nazism their enemy, proved themselves, in those fateful years, sufficiently far-sighted and resolute to take up the fight against Nazism in order to safeguard their own existence and, with it, the existence of their country.

The situation was rendered even more tragic by the fact that millions of Germans, Social-Democrats as well as Communists, middle-class democrats as well as Catholics, saw the need for such a fight. Individual Germans of every social category demonstrated courage and self-sacrifice in opposing Nazism. Germany was in a state of permanent guerrilla warfare: bloody clashes at meetings and demonstrations were frequent. The most active of the anti-Hitler Germans defended their democratic liberties against the Nazi gangs and the “republican authorities” who so conspicuously aided these gangs, they defended democracy not only with speeches but with their lives. Many of these anti-Nazis were thrown into jail by the reactionary judges of the Weimar Republic. There were moments, such as after von Papen’s *coup* against the Prussian state government, when the workers would have responded at once to an appeal by the trade unions and the workers’ parties for a general strike. They waited in vain for such an appeal. What was lacking? A unified, centrally directed struggle by the workers’ parties and the entire democratic camp against National- Socialism.

If the policies of the counter-revolution were determined by the most reactionary forces, those of the anti-Nazi camp were determined by the working class. Only the workers could have become the focus of resistance against the projected dictatorship; only they could have attracted and gathered together all the other groups comprising firm or even vacillating foes of the Nazis. But such a move presupposed unity of action on the part of the working class parties and the concentration of all their efforts against NationalSocialism.



Efforts to lead the discontent masses towards victory were unsuccessful due to a lack of unity in leadership



Comparison with Current Events

In the present day we see terroristic individual acts of violence as discontent grows amongst the masses.

When there is no strong communist movement to guide the frustration of the masses into collective action, individuals turn to desperate acts of violence.

Though the individuals targeted are not martyrs by any means, killing individuals who are mere figureheads of a larger oppressive system does not bring us any closer to democracy. On the contrary, it exacerbates the problem, as the reactionaries in power blame these actions on the left to justify expanding their power and use of the military against civilians.

Now that we've learned the mistakes of Germany and German left, we are better equipped to build a popular front in time.

Fascism couldn't take root in the US in the 1940s, and we continue the struggle to ensure it doesn't this time.



On the Recent Act of Political Terrorism

Statement by Politburo of Party of Communists USA

The assassination of right-wing Christian nationalist Charlie Kirk is an individual act of political terrorism. The Party of Communists USA condemns such acts of political violence, which are driven by the lack of a working-class-oriented consciousness.

“We believe that even a hundred regicides can never produce so stimulating and educational an effect as this participation of tens of thousands of working people in meetings where their vital interests and the links between politics and these interests are discussed, and as this participation in a struggle, which really rouses ever new and “untapped” sections of the proletariat to greater political consciousness, to a broader revolutionary struggle.” Vladimir Lenin, "New Events and Old Questions," Iskra.

President Trump has decried radical left political violence. What about radical right political violence? We see 1920s Germany and Italy being repeated. The contradictions of capitalism come to a head and lead to the rise of fascism.

Unity between the left and center is necessary as this individual act of terrorism has led to calls for political repression and violence against progressives and Democrats. This left-center unity will work to uproot the conditions that produce the reactionary acts by dispossessed people; namely: destitution and decaying society.

The utility that together we can affect change which is better than what we can do alone.



Discussion & New Members Introductions



New Member Introductions

- What is your name, pronouns and state (or country/territory)?
- Where do you work? Is it unionized?
- How did you find out about the People's School?
- What do you think about tonight's class?



Discussion & Wrap Up



Announcements

- PCUSA Cell Chairs need to call members of their cells to remind them about attendance.
- The next issue of New Masses (2025) has begun production. If you have art you want us to feature, email it to info@partyofcommunistsusa.net.



Volunteers Needed!

We are in need of volunteers for the staff of the People's School! Here's a few roles we need filled:

- People to help manage posting on our social media and podcast platforms
- Video Editors, Audio Editors, Graphic Designers, Artists, Narrators
- Web Controls, Moderators

Email info@peopleschool.us if you're interested and try to attend our next staff meeting if possible.



View From Left Field

<https://viewfromleftfield.libsyn.com>



The Old PSMLS Youtube is now the Youtube of View From Left Field, a podcast of analysis and discussion of current events from a progressive perspective.

Like the Youtube videos and subscribe with 5 star ratings on your podcast platforms.

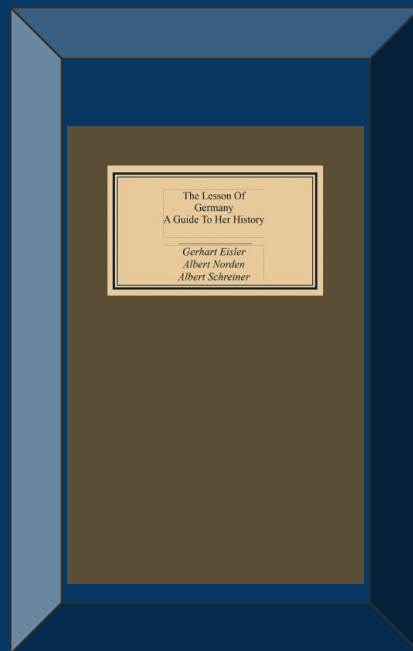
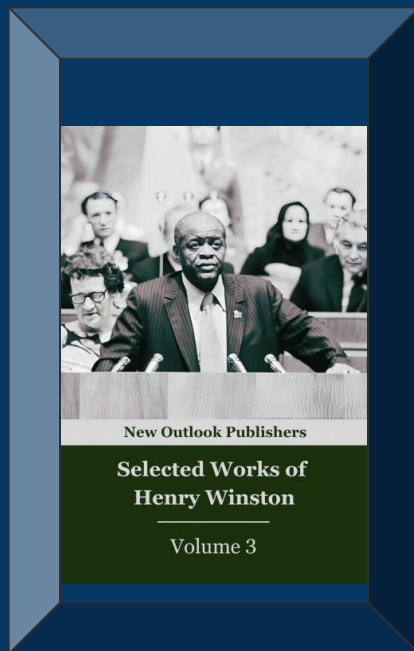
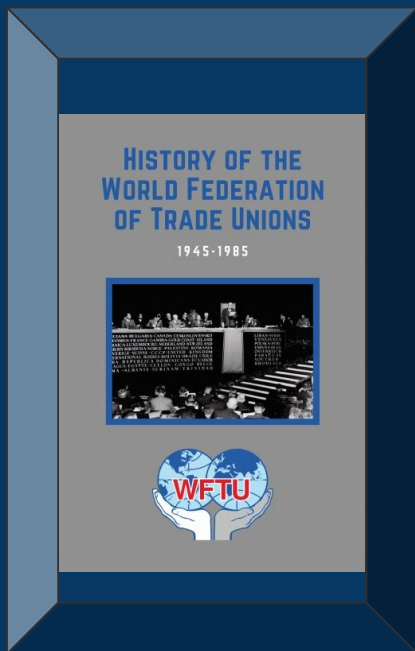




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Latest & Relevant Releases





Join us for our
Secular High Holidays Class
Friends and Family of
all Ages are Welcome!

September 27th, 2025

Saturday

6:00 PM Eastern

HAPPY
*Rosh
Hashanah*



For a zoom link please email with subject:

"High Holidays" info@ujpfo.org

Jewish Peoples Schule

- ★ The Jewish Peoples Schule educates in fraternity along secular, progressive lines to our Jewish and non-Jewish friends to share and relate the historical struggles of the Jewish peoples to other peoples' struggles against oppression.
- ★ During the Days of Awe, let us reflect and learn together about Jewish-American Working Class Heroes. September 27th, 2025
6:00 PM to 7:30 PM EASTERN



Harry Bridges School of Labor

luel.us/laborschool/



The Harry Bridges School of Labor is a monthly class held 2x per month. Classes cover a variety of topics aimed at building class consciousness among union members.

October's class is Part 2 of History of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Class will be October 4, 2025 at 7pm EST/4pm PST.





Marching Song of the Red Front (Die Rote Front Marschier)