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## **Germany**

The following report was compiled from details supplied by a comrade of the S.A.P. (German Workers' Party), who spent several months in Germany at the end of last year.

### **The Workers**

"I met some comrades from the Communist Party (C.P.) and the Socialdemocratic Party (S.P.) who were still thinking on the old lines. It is possible that attempts were made in some localities to build up local or even regional centres bearing the old party names. But all that was not important: history has made an anachronism of all such attempts.

Working class organisations were virtually non-existing. There were, however, men and women, old and young, who seriously discussed all sorts of problems. Many of them were former trade union officials, now 40 to 50 years old; most of them had been members of the S.P., some of them of the C.P. or other workers' organisations. They kept in touch with people whom they considered seriously interested in finding the truth. They were solely interested in building up one united workers' party which had rid itself of old party views. This party should be neither dependent on Russian nor on Anglo-American influence but have a truly international outlook. They thought it specially necessary and desirable that the French and the German workers should co-operate as closely as possible and they believed that circumstances would favour that.

They considered it a matter of course that the economic State planning carried out by the Nazis would stay but would be put under democratic control and that the key industries would be nationalised. The trade unions would have a very important rôle to play. The working class as the only reliable social basis of democracy would be a decisive factor in political life. It would, however, enter a coalition with other democratic forces and social groups.

Should the occupation authorities try to hinder such developments they would probably at first be successful. The workers would be so exhausted and so dominated by the desire not to be involved in new struggles that they would probably adopt a passive attitude towards such attempts on the part of the occupation authorities. None of the existing problems could, however, be solved in this way and after a short while they would present themselves again in their full gravity. It was ridiculous for any emigrants to expect they could return to Germany with the aid of America, Great Britain or Russia and then start reconstruction from above slowly establishing contact with the rank and file. The workers who had stayed in Germany

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all the time and kept up the old traditions would start a strong movement. The only persons who would be able to retain important public positions were those who had a close contact with the common people and would be really trusted by them.

The workers were seriously concerned with the need to ensure that people who to-day justifiably enjoyed confidence in their circles would continue to do so in the future. They expressed the problem in this way: 'In former times we had S.P. officials who were not in touch with the masses. We had C.P. officials who were nothing but employees and tools of their superiors inside and outside Germany. Now we have the Nazi officials. How can we avoid in future this deep gulf between the workers and their officials?' The answer was roughly on these lines: 'The rank and file of the big organisations must in future be able to ask their leaders to account for their activities. They must be able to change the leaders if they are unsuitable or if they become too autocratic. The right to elect new leaders every few years at big party conferences is not a sufficient guarantee of the democratic character of the organisation.'

The opinions cited above were held in the political circles of the working class. Such politically interested workers were relatively numerous; one could find them even amongst officials of the D.A.F. (Deutsche Arbeitsfront - German Labour Front) and specially amongst the officials of the N.S.V. (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt - national socialist people's welfare organisation) and similar organisations. It would be wrong to think that only reliable Nazis held such positions. A number of determined anti-Nazi workers took on such jobs, because this enabled them to have contact with other workers and to give them assistance in a number of concrete instances.

Before the war there were even some Nazi Party members who came out in defence of the workers' interests in Nazi organisations. They honestly believed that this corresponded to the wishes of their party. There were heated discussions about that in Nazi circles. Then Himmler put a stop to it; since then the lower formations of the Nazi Party and the labour Front have lost all importance. They were replaced in the factories by the S.S. and the 'Werkscharen' (Nazi spies and Gestapo agents recruited from the ranks of the factory workers).

As to the so-called unpolitical sector of the working class: a much greater adaptation to the Nazi rule had taken place there than people generally believed. This was due to the fact that even before the Nazis took power the workers' organisations had been disintegrated and the workers had become terribly disillusioned; only a very small section of the working class was really convinced of the opinions of the C.P. and the S.P. Especially many fellow-travellers of the C.P. who during the years of economic crisis had joined the C.P. soon associated themselves with the new régime. They got jobs and food, family allowances, cheap amusements, holiday travels etc. The terror of the Gestapo was only directly against individuals whose activities were considered by many people as nonsensical (at least in 1934). The workers got a shock whenever the one or the other of their work mates did not turn up at work because the Gestapo had fetched him. But the humdrum worries of everyday life soon made them forget all about it.

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## **The Workers and the War**

Many were shocked and disillusioned when war broke out. Most people were really against war. Amongst the mass of the people the conception prevailed that Hitler had not wanted the war, since an agreement had been reached in Munich. Why should the

British resort to war because of Danzig of all places, which was after all a German town? Many individuals thought and spoke differently but they were in a difficult position because the Munich policy had completely confused the people. Moreover, persons who spoke against the war were quickly liquidated by the Gestapo whatever their position in society. The first victories of the war, bolstered up by clever propaganda, evoked the pride of the population. I met young workers in 1940 who complained that they could not fight in France and in Belgium because they were reserved for essential war work at home. When Great Britain refused to capitulate after Dunkirk a new shock went through the masses. Nazi propaganda had succeeded, however, in awakening the widespread belief that now greatest unity was demanded because England was out to annihilate Germany.

A few days before the invasion of the Soviet Union many former Socialdemocratic, Communist, S.A.P. and other officials of working class organisations whose names were on the files of the Gestapo were arrested and deported to the Eastern front for building fortifications. The Nazis were afraid that these people might carry on subversive propaganda amongst the masses. A part of the bourgeoisie welcomed the war against Russia and some workers who had fallen victims to the Nazi propaganda had no particular objections to it either.

## **Radio**

Russian wireless stations were listened into by comparatively few workers; listening to the B.B.C. on the other hand was widespread, and particularly amongst large sections of the middle classes. The B.B.C. had sometimes quite undesirable effects: it increased the fear of the German people - which was carefully nursed by Nazi-propaganda - that the whole German people would be made responsible for the war and that after a defeat they would all have to live as slaves. The effect of the B.B.C. would be infinitely greater if it would concentrate on straight news and besides that on plans for reconstruction in which a Germany which had rid itself of the Nazis would be included.

## **Opposition**

Those who complain about the lack of resistance on the part of the German people should not forget that Himmler succeeded in building up an internal S.S. - apart from the Waffen-S.S. - who ruthlessly interfered wherever and whenever necessary. This S.S. formation was well paid and generally very well looked after; but it was systematically prevented from getting too close a contact with the masses; e.g. they were allowed to visit only certain selected establishments. No doubt, the S.S. would remain loyal to the regime until the bitter end. No revolt of the workers could be expected before an obvious military defeat; such an attempt would only mean a useless massacre of individuals or even masses of people. Even acts of open sabotage on a somewhat considerable scale were made impossible through the vigilance of spies in the factories. For these reasons the political opposition against the Nazis concentrated upon preparing for the day of defeat and for the future in general. In the meanwhile, military setbacks and the bombing of German towns were helping to decrease the number of those who fell for Nazi propaganda. Amongst former members of working class organisations who had made their peace with Nazism, one could find many

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employees of local authorities who had been able to get a job under the Nazi régime

and were not troubled by more far reaching problems.

I recall some experiences which show how seriously people were thinking. One experience with a working class boy: a builder's apprentice of 15 ½ years of age, lived for a time in the same house as I did. He obviously tried to find ways and means of getting into contact with me because he thought I was a serious person. One day he came to me with his arm in a sling and told me that a board had fallen on his arm and he got 14 days sick leave; he then asked me whether I would like to play chess with him every day. The first few days he did not dare to speak, but then he came out with his problem: he had been worried for a long time by the question how it was possible that in a national community (Volksgemeinschaft) in which the workers were supposed to hold a specially important and honoured place such great differences between the various classes existed? In reality that was no 'Volksgemeinschaft' at all. He had two friends with whom he often spoke about these problems. Every night after work he walked one hour each way to see them, but they did not know an answer to this question either. As long as I stayed in that place he always came to me for advice and even gathered a few more friends to discuss these problems.

I want to add that these politically minded workers whom I mentioned were, of course, not only concerned with preparing for the day of Nazi defeat but they took an active interest in the day-to-day problems of the workers. They tried to defend the rights of the workers in the factories and discussed amongst themselves how to act in certain cases. They took advantage of what chances there were for carrying out acts of sabotage and took care that the pace of work in the workshop was a slow one.

I had the opportunity to watch a great number of foreign workers and to hear accounts of their relationship to the German workers. The Czechs were the most eager to tell the German workers what atrocities were being perpetrated in the occupied territories. The French adopted on the whole an attitude of reserve. Hatred was burning in the eyes of the Russians and the Poles. I think that no power on earth will restrain the Poles and Russians from carrying out terrible massacres as a revenge for their experiences when they get a chance to do so.

Literature sent by emigrant circles into Germany had a very bad effect; that applied especially to communist literature. It not only had the effect that people were arrested, but above all, it discredited the emigrants. A special instance of this were reports of the C.P. which contained so many incorrect statements regarding conditions inside Germany and so many pure inventions that some of the most sensible C.P. workers broke off their relations with their old party on that account.

## **Middle Class and Intellectuals**

I had some very interesting experiences with middle class people. A flying officer of about 26 years of age approached me and asked me full of amazement whether I had come in a legal way, but then added that in reality this did not matter to him two hoots; he wanted to have a thorough talk with me. In the course of this talk the following facts

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emerged: This flying officer had a circle of friends with whom he discusses the development of Germany from 1914 onwards. They used books and pamphlets of the pre-Nazi period as a basis for these discussions. They first came to adopt the views of the technocrats (international co-operation of the technicians as a solution for the great

problems of our time) but then topical political questions led them to the conclusion that what mattered were political forces and that technocratism was no solution. They then agreed that the working class would be the pioneer of democratic reconstruction both nationally and internationally. This conclusion, however, led to the big question: 'What is the matter with the German working class, are the German workers politically dead?' This was the question which they still eagerly studied on the basis of the history of the Socialdemocratic and Communist parties since 1919. He wanted to discuss this question with me, because he knew of my former political activity.

I had another experience in a cabaret where I got so interested in the artist that I visited the cabaret for three evenings running. On the third evening the artist came to me, sat down at my table and asked me why I was so obviously interested. We became deeply involved in a conversation in the course of which the artist got a poem out of his pocket and asked me to read it. This poem dealt with the same problems the flying officer had mentioned. We discussed the poem and the artist asked for an opportunity to invite me to a small circle of friends where he would recite more such poems and discuss them. We arranged such an evening and I got to know that this artist had on some previous occasions approached people who looked to him serious-minded and had formed small discussion circles.

During a train journey when all other passengers had left the compartment I started a conversation with a sergeant. We discussed Nazism and the future of Germany. In the end the sergeant gave me his address while on leave and asked me emphatically to visit him in the course of the week to continue this conversation. When I left the train he suddenly got out too and told me that his fiancée would have to wait for him another day; he preferred to spend the night with me to finish our talk. That's what we did.

In the garden of a restaurant a man who looked like a big industrialist joined me at my table and started to abuse the Nazis. He then said: 'The Nazis will not win the war this year, they will not win it next year either, and the year after the British will have won it.' I wanted to go because I thought the man was an agent provocateur. But he said to me: Ah, you want to go now to denounce me to the Gestapo. You can do so if you like; nobody overheard me apart from you and you will never be able to prove what I said!' Then he added: 'I cannot imagine that you will do that, you look much too intelligent!'

## **Peasants**

I had no special contact with peasants nor a very detailed knowledge of their conditions. I heard that the younger generation of peasants was very scornful about the individualism of their fathers. They were very enthusiastic about modern technique, and in favour of large-scale collective cultivation of the soil. Many of them had technical jobs as soldiers and went to agricultural colleges; they developed a mentality completely different from the peasants of old. But both young and old peasants were full of anger against the 'Kreisbauernfuehrung' (Nazi Peasant organisation) which dominated and controlled everything. The peasants all

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desired a greater measure of self-administration.

## **Big Industrialists**

I had excellent contact with big industrialists and they enabled me to stay for such a long time illegally in Germany. I heard from an industrialist who had been present at a conference that took place in the Rhineland in 1940 in the house of the banker Schroeder [1]; at this conference a personal conflict broke out between Rhinish industrialists and Hitler. The industrialists complained about the preferential treatment of the Hermann Goering concern [2] as compared with big private industry, in the production of certain Ersatz materials, the expansion of property etc. The other complaint was that a leading man of the Hermann Goering concern had been made president of the Reichskohle-Ausschuss (national Committee for the production of coal). The industrialists demanded an extension of their rights, the effect was that Pleiger's [3] unrestricted powers were curtailed a little later. At first Hitler thought he could treat the gentlemen in a rather highhanded way, finally he made a three hours speech which ended with an epileptic fit.

On several occasions the industrialists gravely sabotaged the national effort. During the winter of 1940 there was a shortage of coal although the dumps were well stocked. There was constant friction between the industrialists and the government. The industrialists had especially good connections with military circles. While the battle of Smolensk was in process they circularised amongst themselves the copy of a memorandum addressed to Hitler by a general of a panzer division. The content of this document was as follows: 'We die of victories. (Wir siegen uns zu Tode). The initiative in the present battles is not with us but with the Russians. We shall never get Moscow. I think our only chance is to withdraw and to fortify the Russian frontier.' This question was and still is eagerly discussed in such circles. Big industrialists, especially those of the chemical industry, made several attempts to build up an organisation of resistance and they had good contact with certain army circles. But Himmler knew all about it and had a well organised net of spies and informers. In the course of the years a number of persons were arrested or killed (e.g. they were suddenly found dead in a railway compartment). Here too the Gestapo interfered effectively again and again; I therefore think that before the final collapse of the regime - which can only be caused by a military defeat - no decisive action on the part of the industrialists can be expected. Industrialists in Bavaria seriously talked about a new Danube State whose core should be Austria with Bavaria included. There was a general tendency to break away from 'Prussia' which was identified on the one hand with the State planning of the Nazis and on the other hand with the danger of bolshevisation. The officials of working class organisations whom I mentioned before knew of these views held by the big industrialists; these views confirmed all the more their conviction that the working class must by all means play a decisive part in reconstruction."

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## *Editorische Anmerkungen*

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1 - Kurt von Schröder (1889-1966), deutscher Großbankier und SS-Brigadeführer, Teilhaber des Kölner Bankhauses J.H. Stein (1921-1945), Mitglied der Deutschen Volkspartei (1928-1933), Zugehörigkeit zum Freundeskreis der Wirtschaft, später

*Freundeskreis Reichsführer-SS, Organisation einer Geheimbesprechung in seinem Kölner Bankhaus zur Vorbereitung der Regierungsübernahme Adolf Hitlers, Eintritt in die NSDAP (1933), Präsident der Industrie- und Handelskammer in Köln (1933), Eintritt in die SS (1936), SS-Brigadeführer (1943), französische Kriegsgefangenschaft, Verurteilung zu drei Monaten Haft und einer Geldstrafe durch die Briten.*

2 - *„Hermann-Göring-Konzern“ = „Reichswerk AG für Erzbergbau und Eisenhütten „Hermann Göring“, Berlin, Verwaltungssitz: Salzgitter, 1937 gegründeter staatlicher Mammutkonzern in NS-Deutschland (zeitweise 700.000 Beschäftigte, darunter 1943 etwa 50 Prozent Zwangsarbeiter), nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in der „AG für Bergbau und Hüttenbetrieb“ aufgegangen (1950), später „Salzgitter AG“ (1961).*

3 - *Paul Pleiger (1899-1985), Gründer der nach ihm benannten Maschinenfabrik in Hammertal (1925), Mitglied der NSDAP (1932), Vorstandsvorsitzender der Reichswerke Hermann Göring, Reichsbeauftragter für Kohleversorgung (ab 1941) und Reichsbeauftragter für die gesamte Wirtschaft des Ostens (ab 1943), wegen „Ausplünderung der besetzten Ostgebiete und Ausbeutung von Zwangsarbeitern“ zu 15 Jahren Haft verurteilt (1948), aber 1951 leitete er bereits wieder seinen Betrieb im Hammertal.*