

[Seite: - 1 -]

Germany

The following report was written by a German Socialist who since 1935 has been engaged in underground political activities.

"I had been working since 1935 in the big armaments factory of XYZ. I noticed that members of several political groups were employed there; communists, social democrats and a large number of free trade unionists. I told my political friends of this and we agreed that I should try to win all these comrades for common anti-Nazi work. I got into touch with them and we discussed the political situation. I pointed out that what mattered now above all was to form an anti-fascist front on a non-party basis.

Former social democrats showed understanding for this work. Although they did not commit themselves to do anything definite, they discussed the issue amongst themselves and with their trade union friends. The result of these discussions was that my suggestions were supported by an increasing number of comrades. With the communists things were different. They were unanimous in their attitude and still followed the old communist line, namely opposition to the social democrats. This was the reason why no organisation uniting all groups came into existence.

Until 1939 we only discussed current political events. After the outbreak of war our discussions became more frequent and thorough. Many of us thought that it was time to become politically more active. I utilised this atmosphere to create the basis for wider co-operation. Some social democrats, trade unionists and

[Seite im Original:] - 2-

myself formed a political group. I also approached a communist and asked him to join us; but in his case I met with opposition. On instructions given by Radio Moscow he followed the line of the Comintern, regarding this war an imperialist struggle which did not concern the workers. In his view the capitalist States should weaken each other to such an extent that the Soviet Union would remain the strongest power after this war. Then, with the aid of the Red Army, the World Revolution would be carried out. We rejected this attitude of the communists. We were convinced that the nationalsocialist regime could not win this war. Therefore we considered it of the utmost importance to train reliable officials who were to form the basis of a new and better working class movement. For that purpose we established contact with former leftwing workers, whom we knew to be reliable anti-fascists, and to reawaken their political interest, we started discussions on political and military matters. Furthermore, we thought it important to kindle the people's discontent with this war.

After the German invasion in Russia the attitude of the communists changed. They approached me suggesting co-operation and making practical proposals for political

activities. In view of the changed war situation they considered it important to hamper the German war effort. The only possibility for this was, in their opinion, sabotage of production. They suggested to form a common organisation for planning and carrying out common action. Through public propaganda they wanted to incite the workers to strike and sabotage. We were asked to produce and distribute leaflets.

We refused to participate in work of this character, because we considered it completely unpracticable. It would have been discovered immediately by the Gestapo and moreover, it would have had no political success, as the people at that time were impressed by the big German victories and were therefore not susceptible to anti-war propaganda. We kept to our first suggestion and no agreement was reached with the communists.

I had serious disputes with C. [1], a communist colleague of mine. I told him he would endanger himself and all of us if he continued to work the way he did. He had already revealed himself to be an enemy of the regime and the Nazi official in the factory was keeping a watchful eye on him. I told him that the first condition for underground work was to appear harmless to outside people. His first political action in the factory would lead to his own arrest, and to ours too. The risk of such an action would outweigh its

[Seite im Original:] - 3-

success. The other comrades refused to work together with him, unless he changed his attitudes. He told me that he had taken up contact with A., a former communist party official. A. had approved of his political activities and had warned him against the former communist B. We had some contact with B; I knew him from former times and considered him a reliable anti-fascist. I asked B. What he thought of A. B. knew A., but thought that A. would not approve of the political activities of C. He was very upset about being denounced by A. as being politically unreliable and suggested to me that I should arrange a meeting with A. and some other comrades. This meeting took place in the middle of June, 1943; C. did not attend it. In answer to my question A. stated that he disapproved of C.'s political activities. When I explained to him my views regarding political work he agreed with me. He denied having said anything against B. As A. had not been at our meeting we decided to have another one to discuss more thoroughly our underground work.

In the meantime foreign workers had been employed in our factory. This created for us a new political problem. We realised that in case the Nazi regime collapsed the foreign workers might become a danger to us. We therefore considered it necessary to take up contact with them. I fixed up a discussion with our social democratic comrades to consider ways and means to do this. The fact that we did not speak each other's language presented a great difficulty. To overcome it we asked two comrades to learn French, two to learn Russian and two to learn English in order to be able after the collapse to speak with the foreign workers in their own language. We decided to take up contact immediately with the foreign workers wherever practicable. I was already in touch with a Dutchman who was prepared to work with us. Unfortunately, he was arrested at the end of 1943, for unknown reasons. Our contact with the Russians was more of a personal than a political character, we gave them food and clothing.

After the defeat of the German army in Russia we thought that our efforts should be intensified. We wanted to appoint a committee of five to direct the illegal work in the factory. We were against forming an organisation any bigger than this. Each of these

five should concern himself with finding out whether the workers in the factory whom he knew to be former left-wingers, were still politically reliable. Furthermore, they should find out to what extent contact with the workers in other factories was possible, to start illegal work there, too, or, in case political groups were in existence, to co-ordinate the activities.

[Seite im Original:] - 4-

Our whole factory should be covered by a net of illegal workers. To prevent C., who was still working on instructions from Moscow, endangering our work through his carelessness, I insisted upon another discussion with C. We met end of September, 1943; C., B., A and myself. I gave a report about our future activities and made it clear that we could work together only on the condition that no-one acts contrary to our decisions. C. agreed in the course of this discussion to accept this condition. Thereupon a committee was elected, whose function it was to decide on every political activity. No-one was allowed to start activities on his own accord. The committee had only a few members; D. was chosen as its leader, because he had no party-political affiliation and was known to us as a reliable and able organiser. I had discussed the matter with D. before our meeting and he had agreed to take on the function of a leader. B. was given the task of getting in touch with his former C.P. comrades to find out whether any underground C.P. groups still existed, in which case we wanted to co-operate with them.

Shortly after this meeting we learned that A. was a Gestapo-spy. We then decided to suspend all political activities in the factory. We broke off all contact with left-wing workers. That happened at the beginning of 1943. The Gestapo left us alone until spring, 1944, probably hoping that we would form groups and start open activities. My foreman told me to be careful, as the Gestapo was watching me. In the late spring, 1944 the Gestapo arrested C., E., F., B., G., D., H. and myself. The Gestapo knew about all our plans. A. had given them an exact report. Our situation was specially aggravated by the fact that C. had admitted more than was necessary.

After having been detained in the Gestapo quarters for several months we were transferred to a prison at X. Some special circumstances enabled me to escape from there."

In discussing the above report its author added:

"It might interest you to know why I worked together with C., although he wanted to work under communist directives. I was concerned with getting together all workers in the workshop who were opposed to the Nazis. In my opinion it would not have been good to exclude the communists. C. was considered by the former communists and by other anti-fascists as THE man of the C.P. Quite a number of anti-fascists had rallied round C. If I had not taken up the contact with C. two groups would have been formed within

[Seite im Original:] - 5-

the workshop; this split I wanted to avoid.

Secondly, I was afraid that C. might recruit politically inexperienced people for his activities and endanger them unnecessarily, a fact I had already noticed.

Why did we regard the foreign workers as a danger at the time of the collapse of the system? We knew that they had been deported to Germany by force and that their food,

billets and treatment were poor. They had to suppress their anti-German feelings for the time being, but we thought that they would give them free rein at the time of the collapse. We were afraid that they would then be without any consideration for the interests of the German workers and that they would, for instance, loot food supplied and other stocks. To prevent this we wanted to include the foreign workers in the factory committees, and even in the Workers' Defence Corps, which we intended to establish for the fight against the Nazis, after their defeat. We wanted to recruit them for these corps for the following reason: in case the foreign workers started looting they should be prevented from this by their own people and not by the German police. I had discussed this plan with my Dutch comrade.

I was interested to find out what was the political opinion of the so-called 'Eastern Workers'. The attitude of the Russians to Stalin surprised me. With most of them he was not popular, there were a few exceptions, of course. Lenin, however, was held in very high esteem. The general standard of education of the Russians, especially the women, was very good. There was, however, a great difference between the urban and the rural population. The Ukrainians were very primitive, sanitary installations, for instance, were unknown to many of them. Although we had lavatories and washing installations they did not use them until the Russians energetically forced them to do so. The relationship between the Ukrainians and Russians was not good.

A worker in our factory at one time distributed a Pastoral letter by a Catholic bishop. This worker was then arrested but was released a few days later. To make up for his financial loss we made a collection for him. All left-wing workers in our factory contributed to this.

Editorische Anmerkungen

1 - Die Initialen C., D., E., F., G. und H. konnten nicht entschlüsselt werden.