silliness of an appeal to the Russian workers, those workers who must have learned by now to see in their new masters their new exploiters, and to tolerate them out of fear and necessity. Not to tolerate, and not to approve the new situation means to surrender the chance to improve one's own situation; and as long as Russian economy is expanding, individual ambitions and individual apologia will rule individuals. The suckers make the best of a situation which they feel is beyond their power to alter. Precisely because Trotsky was not a revolutionary, but merely a competitor for leadership under existing Russian conditions — ever ready to follow the call of a bureaucracy in re-organization should a national crises demand the abdication of Stalin — he became increasingly more dangerous to the present ruling clique engaged, as it is, in new, vast imperialistic adventures. Trotsky's murder is one of the many consequences of the re-birth of Russian imperialism.

Today Bolshevism stands revealed as the initial phase of a great movement which, expected to perpetuate capitalistic exploitation, is slowly but surely embracing the whole world and changing the no longer functioning private property economy into greater state capitalistic units. The rule of the bolshevist commissar finds its logical conclusion in fascist dictatorships spreading over the globe. Just as little as Lenin and Trotsky knew what they were actually doing when they were fighting for socialism, just as little do Hitler and Mussolini know today what they are doing in fighting for a greater Germany and the Roman Empire. In the world as it is, there is a wide difference between what men want to do, and what they are actually doing. Men, however great, are very small before history, which steps beyond them and surprises them always anew with the results of their own surprising schemes.

In 1917, Trotsky knew as little as we ourselves knew that the bolshevik revolution would have to end in an international fascist movement and in the preparation and execution of another world war. If he had known the trend of development, he would either have been murdered twenty years ago, or today he would occupy Stalin's place. As it is, he ended as a victim of the fascist counter-revolution against the international working class and the peace of the world.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Stalin murdered Trotsky, despite the displacement of all forms of bolshevism by fascism, a final evaluation of Trotsky's historical role will have to place him in line with Lenin, Mussolini, Stalin and Hitler as one of the great leaders of a world-wide movement attempting, knowingly and unknowingly, to prolong the capitalist exploitation system with methods first devised by bolshevism, then completed by German fascism, and finally glorified in the general butchery which we are now experiencing. After that — the labor movement may begin.

Prelude to Hitler

The Internal Politics of Germany: 1918-1933

As the period under discussion begins and ends with a revolution, our first and main concern will not be the particular problem, however important, that arise and are solved from day to day and from year to year in the normal development of a political unit. Our main concern is rather the basic problem of government itself. The crucial question that faced the so-called Weimar Republic during most of its life-time was the question whether this republic existed at all, and what was its real political structure.

From a formal point of view that question seems to be easily answered. When the empire had been finally defeated and its ruler, the Kaiser,— or more correctly the twenty-odd kings and arch-dukes and dukes who had been the collective sovereign of imperial Germany — had formally abdicated, the German people after a comparatively short period of turmoil and strife gave itself a new republican constitution by its chosen representatives at Weimar in August, 1919. That constitution remained valid until the advent of Nazism, and in a sense remains valid even today, as the state power was seized by the Nazi party in a perfectly legal manner. Hitler was made Chancellor, that is Prime Minister, by the President of the German Republic, Field Marshall Hindenburg, on January 30, 1933. He was confirmed in that position by the overwhelming majority of the Reichstag and by a number of practically unanimous plebiscites. The same procedure was observed when later, after Hindenburg's death in 1934, the office of president was abolished, and Hitler, in his new position as "Leader and Chancellor", united in his person and thereby in the office of Chancellor both the powers of the presidency and of the chancellorship. Even the transfer of all legislative powers from parliament to the Leader, including the power to further change the constitution itself, was performed in a perfectly legal manner. These powers were formally delegated from the Reichstag to Hitler's cabinet by the device of two "enabling acts" presented to the first and second Reichstags of 1933, and invariably accepted by majorities much greater than the two-thirds required by Article 76 of the Weimar constitution.

This formal record of the constitutional development does not, however, give a real answer to the basic problem of that fourteen years' interlude between two revolutions and two world wars that was the German Republic. There is even some doubt whether in the continuous flux and incessant struggle between progressive and reactionary, revolutionary and counter-revolu-
tionary forces there ever was any tangible condition or state of affairs sufficiently stable to be described as the German Republic or as a government based on the Weimar constitution.

For the purpose of a realistic interpretation the history of the fourteen years preceding the victory of Nazism in Germany must be divided into at least five totally different periods. The first period is marked by the struggle for and against the so-called Workers' Councils which lasted from November, 1918, to August, 1919. This was, according to a particularly intelligent and understanding British observer, "the critical period for Germany and for Europe. It was the formative and creative stage for a new Germany and for a new Europe." Locking backward, we may say indeed that this was the last chance for the survival of a genuine democracy under conditions of a rapidly increasing monopoly and state capitalism in post-war Europe.

The form of government during that initial period can be described under various aspects: According to the then generally accepted opinion, both the legislative and the executive powers were vested in a so-called Council of People's Commissaries which derived its authority from other and more democratic instances of the revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council organization. Yet the six leading members of the two fractions of the Social Democratic Party, who composed that so-called Council of People's Commissaries, actually regarded themselves as an anticipated cabinet of the parliament-to-be. These Commissaries were, in fact, replaced as early as February, 1919, by a coalition cabinet and a president elected by the National Assembly, which had convened in January. The "coalition cabinet" thus created, which was to recur again and again in the future development of the German Republic, represented the three parties which had been the only ones to accept unreservedly the new state form of a parliamentary republic on the Western model. The three parties were: (1) the moderate Social-democrats, (2) the catholic Center, and (3) the newly formed democratic State Party. They were opposed from one side by the two monarchist parties which differed from the traditional conservative and National-liberal parties of pre-war times by a change of name only, and from the other side by the new revolutionary parties emerging from the war and the ensuing collapse of the old regime. These new parties were the left wing or center-socialist parties which differed from the traditional social-democratic parties by their more radical and more democratic War Minister Noske.

The Reichswehr marched into Berlin through the Brandenburger Tor and the Weimar government fled in terror to Stuttgart where it was joined by the National Assembly. Nevertheless, the enterprise of Kapp failed utterly for two very different reasons. First, he had relied merely on military action and had neglected the task of building up a new political organization and a new political ideology — an experience which was not lost on later putschists. Yet even their later and better prepared actions were for a long time defeated until they had learned by experience and had finally built up that tremendously efficient and recklessly unscrupulous modern counter-revolutionary movement which was to deal the death blow to the Weimar Republic in 1933.

The second and much more important reason for Kapp's failure was not of a technical nature. The mass of the German workers, called upon for what they really wanted and they got what they had fought for. Up to then the Weimar constitution had enjoyed only a precarious existence. The official republican government had been barely tolerated by its own backers, i.e., by the reactionary army

1918, was followed by a violent struggle for power between the revolutionary workers' council movement on the one hand and a secretly growing counter-revolutionary form of government which can be most adequately described as a "government by Freikorps" on the other. This state of affairs was in no way changed by the formal enactment of the new republican constitution on August 11, 1919. It was the tragic fate of the German Republic that its first official government chose to lean more and more heavily on the power of the military. After a first unsuccessful attempt to find effective support in the remnants of the old imperial army, it turned for help and alliance to the newly formed military organizations (Freikorps) which were later to join in every reactionary assault on the constitutional government and which represented in fact the first important kernel of the future military organization of the counter-revolutionary Nazi power.

We now turn to the second period of the Weimar Republic which was inaugurated by the total defeat of the first reactionary onslaught on the new state made by the very powers which it had allowed and even helped to grow up for the purpose of its own defense. This was the monarchistic putsch of Generallandschaftsdirektor Kapp of East Prussia, or rather of the Reichswehr General von Lüttwitz, the close friend of the first social-democratic War Minister Noske.

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The second and much more important reason for Kapp's failure was not of a technical nature. The mass of the German workers, called upon by their government, rose in a unanimous general strike for the defense of republic and democracy. This was a kind of second revolution, though not in the direction of an increased radicalism — like that of the Jacobin Convention of 1792 or that of the Russian October Revolution that followed upon the first revolution of February, 1917. Rather, it was a falling back from the utopian dreams of the first attempt of November, 1918, to the realistic aims of the socialist movement that had developed during the preceding fifty years.

This time the workers fought for what they really wanted and they got what they had fought for. Up to then the Weimar constitution had enjoyed only a precarious existence. The official republican government had been barely tolerated by its own backers, i.e., by the reactionary army

and the ultra-reactionary Freicorps. It had now won a certain degree of stability. March, 1920, rather than August, 1919, is the birthday of the German constitution. Even so, this was not a republic triumphant, but at the most a republic mildly militant — as shown later by the feeble reaction of the public against the murder of the Catholic minister Erzberger in 1921 and the Democratic minister Rathenau in 1922. The republican revolt exhausted itself in empty street demonstrations and culminated in a never constantly applied Statute for the Protection of the Republic.

As a detailed discussion of the foreign politics of the Weimar republic is outside the scope of this paper, I propose to pass over the new deep crisis of 1923 which was mainly caused by the impact of foreign coercion: Versailles, reparations, occupation of the Ruhr, separatism, Hitler’s beer-hall putsch in Munich, revolutionary rising of the German workers in defense against the Hitler threat, and military expeditions led by Hitlerite and neutral Reichswehr generals against all anti-Hitlerite movements of the people in various parts of Germany.

From this chaos there emerged a new phase of the German Republic, the parliamentary government of the so-called Stresemann era. The nine cabinets of the six-year period from 1925 to 1929 were of a widely different political composition, varying from the so-called bourgeois bloc which included the Nationalist Right, to a government headed by a social-democratic chancellor. Yet they were in fact all dominated by the undisputed leadership of one and the same minister of foreign affairs. Herr Stresemann represented those strata of German industrial capital which had by then resolved to accept for the time being the republican form of the state as a given fact and to comply with the repairation demands of the Versailles treaty by a carefully elaborated policy of “tactical” fulfillment. At the same time, the impossible burden which had been placed on the German nation after the 1923 crisis by the so-called Dawes Plan was gradually undermined until the Dawes Plan could be replaced by the Young Plan of 1929, which cut down the obligation of Germany to annual payments decreasing from 2½ to 1½ billions in 1938. It was in the violent campaign for a plebiscite against the acceptance of this plan that the new counter-revolutionary forces led by Hitler first joined hands with the old reactionary forces of traditional nationalism and conservatism, thereby foreshadowing the combined action of the two unequal partners in 1933. Yet against all such disturbing elements, the Stresemann policy of fulfillment and conciliation prevailed, paving the way for the final annulment of all reparation payments which was to be achieved, one year before Hitler’s advent, by the Lausanne conference of 1932.

It was during this Stresemann era — and this era alone — that it might be possible to speak of an existing Weimar Republic. This was the time of an exceptionally mild political climate, economic prosperity, and a comparatively undisturbed international situation.
Government by martial law and by emergency decree was rampant in Germany during the rule of the Social-democratic president, Ebert, from 1919 to 1924, and there was no misuse of the emergency power during the later period of 1930-1933 and beyond for which a precedent could not be found among the hundreds of emergency decrees issued during that earlier phase.** The much indicted replacement of the socialist government in Prussia by a Reichskommissar under von Papen in June, 1932, finds its precedent in the “imperial executions” of October and November, 1923, against the socialist governments which had attempted to fight the threatening march of Hitler to Berlin by the organization of a workers’ militia in Saxony and Thuringia. Nor was it a novelty when the most unpopular economy measures of Bruening and von Papen were decreed by the government under Article 48 with the formal justification that “according to the statements of the party leaders acceptance by the Reichstag could not be expected”. The machinery of Article 48 had been used for the purpose of normal financial and economic legislation as early as 1923 and 1924 under the presidency of Ebert. Even the “enabling acts” of Herr Hitler in 1933 had been preceded by the “enabling acts” of Herr Stresemann in 1923.

Thus while the whole history of the German Republic from 1918 to 1933 could be described as the history of the growth of martial law and emergency power, yet there are some important differences between the earlier and later periods. First of all, there had been that intervening period from 1924 to 1929 during which the application of Article 48 had become increasingly rare and had finally been discontinued. The return to those rough and ready improvisations after a time of comparative stabilization gives in itself a new significance to the use of the same method in the later period.

Another difference arises from a consideration of the main function fulfilled by Article 48 before 1924 and after 1929. During the first phase it had served mainly to invest the existing authorities with extraordinary powers for the suppression of what was rightly or wrongly considered as threats or dangers to the newly created order of the republic. This was, indeed, the time when all the forces which might have later resisted the victory of the fascist counter-revolution were most cruelly suppressed by an unchecked use both of the military and the civil executive power, by extraordinary courts, and by a general eclipse of the administration of justice in the ordinary courts whenever a crime could be excused on account of a pretended national interest. Even if the criminal was formally tried, he would escape without punishment because political murder from the Right was forever protected by the strong hands of the semi-legal and the wholly illegal, yet officially tolerated, organizations of the secretly recruited new army.

The later period of emergency government since Bruening showed an entirely different character. This time the ordinary business of parliamentary legislation was totally superseded by legislation through emergency decrees. There was a permanent discontinuance of all genuine parliamentary government and a deliberate attempt to replace it by the principle of leadership.

Article 48 became the most important part of the Weimar constitution.*** After five years of non-application of Article 48, Chancellor Bruening on July 16, 1930, enacted his whole program of financial reconstruction in the form of two decrees based on Article 48, and when a majority of the Reichstag revoked his decrees, he dissolved the Reichstag and re-enacted the decrees on the same basis before a new election. Article 48 was in the end used even for the purpose of decreeing the whole of the imperial budget for the parliamentary year 1932 — the last year of the Weimar Republic.

We shall not deal in detail with those last phases of German republicanism that preceded its ultimate overthrow by the temporarily combined forces of the old nationalist and militarist reaction on the one hand and the new and incomparably more vigorous, reckless, and efficient forces of the Nazi counter-revolution on the other. A closer study of the various phases of this final period would only further corroborate the fundamental result already reached in this paper. It would show that from the grim beginnings to the bitter end all the internal developments of the German Republic are not to be contrasted with the later Nazi development, but rather regarded as its first and preparatory phase.

The main points made in this paper are the following:

I have tried to explode two common fallacies:
1) that there ever was a “German Republic”; 2) that there ever was a “German Revolution”.

In opposition to those two fallacies I assert:

That the so-called “German Republic” that filled the gap between the old imperialist Germany of the Kaiser and the new Nazi Germany of Herr Hitler was forever a “republic without republicans”; that the so-called “German Revolution”, which is supposed to have taken place during the first years after the war, was neither a social revolution of the proletarian class nor a democratic revolution destroying the old reactionary powers. It was a “revolution without revolutionaries”.

Yet, although there never was a real revolution, it can be shown that there was — and there still is going on — a very real counter-revolution. Those forces which conquered the German state for the Nazi dictatorship in 1933 arose and grew simultaneously with the development of that political

** The number of decrees issued under Article 48, Section 2, by the government of the Reich alone during the first five years of the republic amounted to 135. To this number should be added the decrees issued under Article 48 during the same period by the governments of the states, the uncounted number of emergency measures enforced by civil and military authorities before August 11, 1919, and the 110 decrees issued under the “enabling acts” of October and December, 1933.

*** The comparative number of emergency decrees based on Article 48 as against normal parliamentary legislation rose from 59.5, in 1920, to 4239, in 1921, and to 59.5, in 1932.
system which was generally assumed to be a modern republican and democratic state. Although Nazism is neither socialist nor democratic, yet by feeding upon the failures and omissions of the so-called “system politicians” it enrolled in the long run the support of the majority of the nation, and in both the economic and political fields solved a number of concrete problems that had been neglected or frustrated by the unsocialist attitude of the socialists and the undemocratic behavior of the democrats. Thus a certain part of the tasks that “normally” would have been fulfilled by a genuinely progressive and revolutionary movement were fulfilled in a distorted, but nevertheless realistic manner, by the transitory victory of a non-socialist and undemocratic but plebeian and anti-reactionary counter-revolution. Nor is this a thing of the past. The Nazi counter-revolution that began in Germany, 1918-1933, is continuing today on an enlarged European scale.

Karl Korsch

WHICH SIDE TO TAKE?

The second World War has presented grave and fateful problems to the socialist workers’ movement. Again it is faced with a situation similar to that which confronted the old labor movement at the outbreak of the first World War. There is a danger that the mistakes which brought doom to social-democracy will be repeated.

The question confronting us today is whether Liebknecht’s slogan: “The enemy is at home!” is as valid for the class struggle now as it was in 1914. When Liebknecht voiced his slogan class-struggle conditions were relatively simple. In Germany, for instance, the semi-feudal government was undoubtedly a greater foe of the proletariat than the democratic governments of the Entente. Today, too, the fascist government of Germany is apparently a more dangerous enemy of the workers than is England. Liebknecht’s slogan would therefore have today an even greater validity for the German working class than it had in 1914.

It would seem, however, that today the workers in the democratic countries are faced with a different situation. Bourgeois democracy confronts them in their struggle for political and economic emancipation. Nevertheless, being at war with the totalitarian states, primarily with German fascism, the democracies cannot be regarded as the arch-enemy of the proletariat. Thus what may have been the wrong tactic then may be the right one today, and vice versa. Let us apply this to the present tactical shift.

When German Social Democracy in 1914 capitulated to the Kaiser and voted war credits, the proletariat of the whole world branded this act as a shameful betrayal of socialism. Until then it had been an established policy of socialists in parliaments to oppose military appropriations. In the case of war credits it was taken for granted that the socialists would act in accordance with the established policy. Therefore, when the socialists did vote the war credits they disrupted an established tactic and betrayed an established principle.

This act was universally condemned and aroused heated disputes within the entire socialist movement. The opportunists justified it on the grounds that they were exchanging “cannons for social reforms”. The radicals, on the other hand, urged a more vigorous struggle against the government in order to turn the war into a civil war and to prepare for the final struggle — the coming revolution.

For present day factions this struggle has become meaningless, mainly because socialist parties and parliamentary functionaries have become meaningless in many countries. And in those countries where they are still tolerated their voices have become mere patter. Either they are not consulted at all about whether they will grant war credits, or they themselves are its staunchest supporters. Without deliberation and without struggle they are on the side of their governments. If formerly they were allies of the bourgeoisie they are now its servants and lackeys, without being in the least aware of their role of betrayers. In England, France, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia — in fact everywhere — the Socialists were and are siding with the bourgeoisie. And the “Communists”, once the fiercest critics and opponents of the Social-Democrats, for whom the especially invented the term “Social-fascist”, bowed

no rights or possibilities to fight its own struggles. There is no doubt that totalitarianism is the greater, the more vicious and dangerous foe of the proletariat. It would appear then that Liebknecht’s slogan has thus lost its validity for the proletariat in the democratic countries.

In the face of this situation working-class movements of democratic countries shift in a direction which sets aside the struggle against democracy as long as the latter is engaged in a war against the totalitarian countries, in a great crusade against its arch foe, against monopoly, fascism, bolshevism — the totalitarian system in general.

It is this situation which gives rise to the present confusion, debate and controversy within the working-class movement. To understand the present tactical shifts, however, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the situation preceding the shift in policy in 1914. Laws, principles, programs and slogans have only a transitory validity, are determined historically by time factors, situations, and circumstances, and are to be viewed dialectically. Thus what may have been the wrong tactic then may be the right one today, and vice versa. Let us apply this to the present tactical shift.

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