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TITLE: Politics Unhinged: The Formation of the Communist Party of Germany and the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic

AUTHOR: Eric D. Weitz
   Associate Professor
   Department of History
   St. Olaf College
   1520 St. Olaf Avenue
   Northfield, Minnesota 55057

CONTRACTOR: St. Olaf College

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Eric D. Weitz

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Abbreviations and Glossary

AIZ Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (KPD illustrated weekly newspaper)
Alter Verband Mineworkers Union
Antifas Antifascist Committees
BL Bezirksleitung (district leadership of KPD)
BLW Betriebsarchiv der Leuna-Werke
BzG Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung
Comintern Communist International
CPSU Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DMV Deutscher Metallarbeiter Verband (German Metalworkers Union)
ECCI Executive Committee of the Communist International
GDR German Democratic Republic
GW Rosa Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke
HIA, NSDAP Hoover Institution Archives, NSDAP Hauptarchiv
HStAD Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf
IGA, ZPA Institut für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Zentrales Parteiarchiv
(KPD/SED Central Party Archive)
KPD Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
RCP(b) Russian Communist Party (bolshevik)
RE Ruhr-Echo (Ruhr KPD daily newspaper)
RF Rote Fahne (main KPD daily newspaper)
RFB Rote Frontkämpferbund (Red Front Fighters Association)
RGO Rote Gewerkschaftsopposition (Red Trade Union Opposition)
SBZ Sowjetische Besatzungszone (Soviet Occupation Zone)
SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SMAD Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany)
SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
StAM Staatsarchiv Magdeburg
UBL Unterbezirksleitung (subdistrict leadership of KPD)
Union Union der Hand- und Kopfarbeiter (Union of Manual and Intellectual Workers)
USPD Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)
ZStA Zentrales Staatsarchiv
Introduction

The revolutions of 1989-91, dramatic everywhere, achieved their most stunning contours in the German Democratic Republic. Here, the regime seemed especially well entrenched, fortified by a combination of repressive political measures and economic and social policies that had provided its citizens with a well-developed system of social security and, at least by eastern European and worldwide comparisons, a reasonable standard of living. According to one widely cited estimate, by the 1980s per capita income in the GDR had surpassed that of Great Britain. To many observers, the East German regime had managed to create, after forty years, a distinctive national identity despite the GDR’s obviously precarious position as the remnant of a divided nation located on the front-line of the east-west divide and faced with the constant competition and allure of West Germany’s prosperous social welfare capitalism.¹

Though the breakdown of the East German regime came rapidly and unexpectedly, the origins of the collapse lay far deeper than the immense changes in the international order initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms. Ultimately, the collapse of the GDR stemmed from the long-standing popular hostility to the signature policies of the regime—strict central direction of the polity and economy and sharp demarcation from the "bourgeois" systems of the west, notably the Federal Republic of Germany. These policies, in turn, were not merely Soviet strains forcibly planted in German soil in the years after 1945. Rather, they were rooted also in the political strategy and culture that had enabled the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) to become in the 1920s the first mass-based communist party outside of the Soviet Union.

Among the major European communist parties that achieved mass status in the epoch
of communism, only the KPD accomplished its popular breakthrough with a "classically" Marxist-Leninist strategy. Despite intense factional conflicts and frequent leadership changes, the KPD through most of the Weimar period promoted a view of revolution as a singular event in which the proletariat, acting under the leadership of the vanguard party, would destroy the existing state apparatus, seize the reins of power, and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. The KPD's strategy thereby emphasized the voluntaristic element in the revolutionary transformation, the active and conscious participation of the party and its supporters in surmounting existing conditions, and the critical role of central state power in the construction of the new social order. The strategy entailed an utter rejection of the view, common to social democrats generally and to communists in the popular front era, that an escalating wave of reforms could lead to the creation of socialism. Instead, the KPD promoted an unrelenting opposition to all the organs of bourgeois society and a highly masculinized conception of political violence as the means of social transformation.

This political strategy, so successful in building a mass movement in the Weimar Republic, is most often attributed to the ever deepening extent of Soviet and Comintern influence on the German party in the course of the 1920s. In most accounts, the assassinations in early 1919 of Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leo Jogiches almost immediately deprived the young party of a highly capable and independent leadership. The early defeat of its own insurrectionary effort in the (misnamed) Spartacist Uprising, coupled with the general containment of the German Revolution in 1919 and 1920, pushed the party closer to ideological and practical dependence on the Soviet Union, a move consummated in
the unification of the KPD and Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) on the basis of Lenin's Twenty-One Conditions. Intense factional disputes and the defeats in two subsequent insurrectionary efforts, the March Action 1921 and the attempted October Revolution of 1923, along with the Russian party's assertion of its own preeminence within the Comintern made the KPD increasingly subject to decisions made in Moscow. In Hermann Weber's standard account--now being reiterated, ironically enough, by appraisals emanating from the former GDR--the KPD by the end of the 1920s had become a "stalinized" party. The KPD, rooted originally in the social and political life of German labor, increasingly took on the character of its Soviet mentor. Practices developed out of Russian conditions were grafted on to German politics and society. Not the least, the Leninist-Stalinist ideological orientation came to define the political ideas and strategy of the KPD and its successor, the Socialist Unity Party (SED).²

Certainly, it would be pointless to dispute the ever increasing influence of the Soviet Union on the KPD and the SED. But the interpretive schema described above is too simple. By locating the fount of political and historical development in Moscow, the history of German communism—as party, movement, and state—is moved out of the course of German history in the twentieth century, only to find its way back, the prodigal son returning, in 1989/90. Yet the KPD became a mass party in the Weimar Republic, and the reconstituted KPD/SED attracted significant popular support in the first post-World War II period. However assiduously party cadres read the works of Stalin and Lenin (let alone Marx and Engels) and followed Comintern and Soviet directives, these still needed to be translated into political discourses and political actions that had resonance among German workers in the Weimar Republic and the East German citizenry in the post-1949 period. Had this not
occurred, the KPD would have remained a sect rather than a mass movement, and the GDR would never have attained the legitimacy--however unstable and limited--it acquired for at least a part of its history. For Hermann Weber and others who argue in his vein, the socio-political history of the Weimar Republic functions as a mere backdrop to, rather than as a constituent element of, the development of a party whose essential course was defined in Moscow. In ideological terms, Weber and others see a party whose initial democratic impulses, articulated most forcefully by Luxemburg, were increasingly replaced by the authoritarianism characteristic of Lenin and Stalin.

The political strategy with which the KPD/SED became a popular movement and a ruling party had both ideological and social-historical origins, and their geographical fount lay in Germany as well as in Russia and the Soviet Union. Rosa Luxemburg provided much of the ideological orientation of the KPD through her unwavering hostility to the institutions of bourgeois society, commitment to class struggle as the means of political progress, and rhetoric of militant confrontation. In the course of the Weimar Republic, the KPD joined---joined, did not replace---these positions, common to Luxemburg and Lenin, with Lenin’s emphasis on a disciplined party organization and a powerful central state. By the late 1920s, the Luxemburgist-Leninist hybrid was increasingly subject to Stalin’s particularly authoritarian interpretation of Leninism, but major elements of Luxemburg’s orientation, shorn of the democratic sensibility with which she endowed them, retained their vitality in the KPD and SED. Far from being erased from historical memory in the KPD/SED or misappropriated in the service of party rule--the impressions left by the standard western German histories of the party--Luxemburg’s legacy was mobilized in eminently recognizable ways even while aspects of her ideas were distorted.
But popular movements are not made by movement ideologues alone. The KPD was founded in the most revolutionary period in European history since 1848. It developed amid the intense, if sullen, political, economic, and social conflicts of the Weimar Republic. Alongside the ideological dimension, the KPD’s politics and culture were forged amid the contestations over the shaping of the Republic, which ended only with the Republic’s demise on 30 January 1933. The KPD was formed by the intersection between popular and specifically party activism, and by the largely successful efforts to contain left-wing efforts to create a more radical republic or a proletarian dictatorship. Most critically, in the Weimar Republic leaders of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the trade unions, business, the state bureaucracy, and centrist and conservative parties forged a "coalition of order" whose policies resulted in the spatial transformation of labor politics in the Weimar Republic. The coalition, by marshalling the state’s weapons of coercion, closed off by 1923 the option of armed revolution, while the deployment of rationalization measures in the mines and factories created high unemployment that drove the KPD from the workplace.

As a result, the streets served increasingly as the decisive place of political engagement for the KPD. There, the party marshalled its supporters in demonstrations and combative confrontations with the police, fascist organizations, and even the SPD and employed workers. As the place of political contestation, the streets carried a distinctive political logic. They helped forge a politics of display and spectacle, which encouraged ideological pronouncements and harsh physical engagements rather than the effective mediation of practical political issues. This kind of politics only accentuated the combative, masculine elements already inscribed into the party by its ideological orientation. They
indeclined the party to venerate still more intensely male physical prowess as the decisive revolutionary quality, a move that made nearly impossible the creation of political alliances with non-proletarian groups.

The construction of the mass party in the Weimar years on the basis of an intransigent strategy of revolutionary militancy--rather than on a strategy based on political alliances and legislative reforms, as was true of other communist parties at a later period--constituted the crucial, formative experience of the KPD, a legacy that would be cultivated and glorified and carried over into the vastly altered circumstances of the Third Reich, the Soviet occupation, and the formation and development of the German Democratic Republic. The careful cultivation of the militant legacy of the party drastically limited the KPD's openness to other political strategies and ideas. Within the Comintern, the KPD remained the party most hostile to the popular front strategy. Despite some trenchant reconsiderations during the Nazi and immediate postwar years, most of the German communists placed in power by the Red Army at the end of World War II drew almost instinctively towards the policies promoted by the Soviet Union, policies that accorded the central state the primary role in the construction of society and that demonized the bourgeois west. While some eastern European economies introduced elements of a market system as early as the 1960s and accepted private peasant agriculture, the GDR remained wedded to central planning and large-scale, socialized agriculture. A number of European communist parties, east and west, gradually abandoned many of the undemocratic practices enshrined in the communist movement in the interwar years. In contrast, the Socialist Unity Party retained its affection for such Leninist hallmarks as democratic centralism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and
the demonization of bourgeois political systems.

While the KPD had been forged out of the political and social history of both the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union and by the Luxemburgist-Leninist ideological tradition, in the German Democratic Republic politics lost their grounding in the real life circumstances of society. Instead of a politics shaped and limited by societal influences, politics in the GDR became largely the means of making, or trying to make, society—politics became unhinged from society.

Ultimately, however, ossified politics proved the undoing of the regime. Although the GDR’s centrally-planned economy was partly successful in the 1960s and 1970s in improving living standards, it proved unable to deal with the more complex economic realities of the 1980s. At the same time, the slight easing of political repression that began in the late 1970s failed to defuse the long-simmering resentment against the stultifying political practices of the regime. When the reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev offered new political possibilities, the East German citizenry grasped the opportunity to overthrow its regime and with it, the legacy of German communism as formed in the Weimar Republic and cultivated in the German Democratic Republic.

The essay that follows is, then, an historically-grounded analysis of the origins, development, and collapse of state socialism in the German Democratic Republic. The first section concentrates on the construction of the party in the Weimar Republic. I examine here both the ideological and the social-historical elements that shaped the politics and culture of German communism. I then trace the impact of this orientation through the party’s history
in the Third Reich and the Soviet Occupation Zone. The epilogue briefly traces the
historical lineage of the policies implemented by the SED after 1949 and their relation to the
ultimate collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989/90.
Part I: The Formation of the KPD in the Weimar Republic

The Ideological Moment

1. Rosa Luxemburg and the Ideological Development of the KPD

The KPD’s origins, as is well known, lay in the development of the radical wing of the Social Democratic Party in the pre-World War I period. More profoundly than most communist parties that were formed in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, the KPD emerged out of an internally-generated process of ideological and political development within the German labor movement, one that well antedated 1917. Rosa Luxemburg, as is also well known, played the major role in defining the politics of the nascent KPD, and her ideas continued to provide a great deal of the party’s ideological and strategic orientation despite the many transmutations in the personnel and politics of the KPD in the Weimar Republic.

Luxemburg’s commitment to democratic politics stands as her most pronounced intellectual legacy. Her rhetoric, rarely mundane, becomes especially compelling and powerful when she invokes the creative potential of human beings to order their own affairs, the lifeblood of society pulsing through the actions of ordinary people. Especially her famed writings on the Russian Revolution have served as the intellectual wellsprings for an alternative socialist politics beginning with Paul Levi (her successor as head of the KPD) in 1922 and continuing through the entire course of the twentieth-century left. The oft-cited passages, written within months of the Bolshevik Revolution and while she still languished in prison, offer some of the finest expressions of her democratic sensibilities:
...socialism by its very nature cannot be decreed or introduced by ukase. It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force—against property, etc. The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot...Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off all the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress...There it was political in character; the same thing applies to economic and social life also. The whole mass of the people must take part in it. Otherwise socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals.  

And in a sweeping critique that many subsequent commentators have lauded for its predictive powers, Luxemburg went on:

...with the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life
gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of their leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously--at bottom, then, a clique affair--a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat, however, but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins...Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages, etc....That is an overpowering objective law from which no party can be exempt.5

In the margins she wrote what would become one of her most famous passages, the central phrase of which--"Freiheit ist immer Freiheit der Andersdenkenden"--became the clarion call of the GDR opposition in its early phase, first unfurled at the Liebknecht-Luxemburg counter-demonstration in January 1988.

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party--however numerous they may be--is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical conception of "justice" but because all that is
instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when "freedom" becomes a special privilege.⁵

Yet for all of her democratic sensibilities, Luxemburg's conception of democratic politics is immensely problematic, reflecting the insufficiencies of both the Marxian socialist tradition and her own particular contribution to it.⁷ Most seriously, Luxemburg devoted precious little attention to the institutional grounding of a democratic-socialist polity. Instead, she continually promoted mass activism in demonstrations and strikes both as a tactic for accomplishing the transition from capitalism to socialism and as the substance of democracy. In other words, for Luxemburg mass activism constituted, in and of itself, the highest expression of democracy, with the streets serving not just as the primary terrain of political conflict, but, even more fundamentally, as the constitutive space of political democracy.⁸ The "normal" political arena of legislatures and municipal councils could only supplement the streets, and then as the site of agitation and propaganda rather than of effective, practical work. By elevating street combat to the essential element of political life, Luxemburg neglected any serious consideration of the possibly negative aspects of mass mobilization, such as the excessive use of weapons of coercion and the imposition of political positions on unwilling subjects, and avoided the problem of how an ongoing democratic politics would be constituted.⁹ Her failings on these counts were inextricably entwined with her maximalist views: for Luxemburg, politics always turned auf das Ganze, a totalizing position fully in keeping with the Marxian tradition, but raised to new heights by her celebration of mass
These shortcomings are particularly evident in her interventions in the last two years of her life, traversed as they were by the world historical events of the Bolshevik Revolution, Germany's loss of World War I, the German Revolution, and the founding of the KPD. Her writings and speeches in this period concern the most crucial issues of revolutionary politics—the nature of democracy and of socialism and the problems in general of the transition from capitalism to socialism. Both issues intrinsically involve, as well, the intractable problem of political terror. The stance she adopted on these issues shaped many aspects of the KPD's ideological orientation, and, in derivative and altered form, those of the SED as well.

In the first months of the German Revolution of 1918/20, the major debate revolved around the character of the political system, that is, whether Germany should become a parliamentary democracy, with the election of a Constitutional Assembly as the first step, or a council republic, a political system built upon the workers and soldiers councils. Luxemburg, along with other radicals, clearly sketched out her opposition to a parliamentary system and to the politics of majority rule. For her, a democratically-elected Constitutional Assembly would only signify an obsolete relic of bourgeois revolutions, a shell without content, an item from the period of petit-bourgeois illusions about the "unitary people"...Whoever takes up the call today for a Constitutional Assembly...is only a secret agent of the bourgeoisie or an unconscious ideologue of the petit bourgeoisie.¹⁰
In "The Russian Revolution" she lauded the Bolsheviks for their revolutionary audacity, their refusal to follow the chimera of majority rule. The Bolsheviks have demonstrated the true dialectic of revolution, she argued:

...not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority--that is the way the road runs.\textsuperscript{11}

The rejection of electoral and parliamentary politics also found fervent expression at the KPD's founding congress, which convened at the very end of December 1918. While the syndicalist-oriented left radicals in attendance rejected any electoral participation as a diversion from the task of revolution, Luxemburg and her followers supported participation, but on tactical grounds only.\textsuperscript{12} Even Paul Levi, later to return to the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) and then the SPD, never defended the intrinsic worth of parliamentary structures. The Constitutional Assembly itself was continually castigated as, in Levi's words, the

banner of the counterrevolution...the fortress, which the counterrevolution wants to construct...

The Constitutional Assembly will be a pliable instrument in the hands of the counterrevolution, just as the bourgeoisie and their agents Ebert and Scheidemann [the Social Democratic leaders] desire.\textsuperscript{13}
Luxemburg argued that parliament was only a subsidiary sphere of action to the streets:

We will still have to take to the streets, our tactics are based on developing the major actions in the streets...The streets should everywhere lead to power and victory. Inside the Constitutional Assembly we want to raise a victorious banner that is built upon actions on the outside. We want to blast this bulwark from the inside.¹⁴

In opposition to a Constitutional Assembly, Luxemburg proposed a political system based on the workers and soldiers councils. In her sketch of the revolutionary political order—one of the very rare instances in which she devoted some attention to the institutional grounding of politics—Luxemburg proposed a system of councils running through all the political and economic institutions of the nation.¹⁵ This entailed a far more active role for the councils than had actually occurred in most localities, where most often the councils only sought to supervise (zu überwachen) the regular municipal and regional state officials or the workplace management. Luxemburg’s conception of a council system thereby signified an effort to broaden radically the public sphere, to extend the political space in which workers and working-class power would operate. In this sense, the notion was deeply democratic. Not the organs of bourgeois class rule, but those of the popular masses would govern society. These organs would exist in "continual, vital interchange" with the population, thereby infusing the state with the spirit of socialism.¹⁶ Through their activities in the councils, workers would learn how to become free, thinking, self-determining directors of
the economy and polity.

While infused with democratic sensibilities, Luxemburg's conception of the councils failed to address a myriad of fundamental issues. To Luxemburg, a "true" workers and soldiers council could only be revolutionary in nature. A moderately-inclined council system, dedicated to co-governance perhaps but not complete power, never came into her purview. Hence, the instrumental nature of her politics, which had foreordained the goals, at least in general terms, of working-class political action, and sought only the most efficient means of reaching them. She could not even begin to address, intellectually or politically, the possibility of conflict between a "true" socialist system and the popular masses. Luxemburg absorbed that Marxian utopianism that imagined all social conflicts erased from the human tableau with the onset of working-class power. When faced with the choice between imperfect councils and raising the revolutionary fervor in the streets, she reverted almost instinctively to the latter course.

To be sure, Luxemburg offered the usual protestations that any attempt to delineate the future society in detail signified a reversion to utopian socialism. Instead, the contours of the future would be determined by self-directing social actors. She also wrote into the Spartacus program such highly democratic features as new elections of the Central Council every three months and the right of local councils to recall their delegates. But rights of recall have rarely been exercised even in the best functioning democracies, and the eternal dilemma between bureaucratic entrenchment and popular participation has never been resolved by the almost continual reshuffling of political leadership. Moreover, she made clear in the Spartacus program that only workers and soldiers would have suffrage rights in
elections to the councils. The potential problems of disenfranchising entire segments of the population—not just Junkers, officers, and industrialists, but also the broad and diverse middle classes and small landholders—went completely unexamined. By failing to provide insight into the realities of postrevolutionary social conflicts and workable democratic safeguards in a council system, Luxemburg, no less than Lenin, opened the way for the arbitrary exercise of power as the means of resolving conflicts—despite her own strong and undeniable democratic sensibilities.

Moreover, to Luxemburg (and to other radicals), the council system seems to have been understood as equivalent to the dictatorship of the proletariat, a term she continually promoted. Even in her critique of the Russian Revolution, she only chastised the Bolsheviks for the manner in which they created the dictatorship, not its substance:

The basic error of the Lenin-Trotsky theory is that they too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy. "Dictatorship or democracy" is the way the question is put by Bolsheviks and Kautsky alike...It [the proletariat] should and must at once undertake socialist measures in the most energetic, unyielding and unhesitant fashion, in other words, exercise a dictatorship, but a dictatorship of the class, not of a party or a clique—dictatorship of the class, that means in the broadest public form on the basis of the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of the people, of unlimited democracy.19

If the Bolsheviks established, in her view, a false dichotomy between democracy and
dictatorship, Luxemburg merely elides the two and, perhaps intuitively sensing the difficulties, resorts to Marxian platitudes in her discussion of the dictatorship of the proletariat:

Dictatorship of the proletariat, that is democracy in a socialist sense.

Dictatorship of the proletariat...that is the use of all the means of political power for the realization of socialism, for the expropriation of the capitalist class--in the sense and through the will of the revolutionary majority of the proletariat, therefore in the spirit of socialist democracy.20

It should have been clear, even in 1919, that the dictatorship of the class could not at all be equivalent to the "dictatorship of the broadest public," or, as she termed it in other writings, a dictatorship that would be under the control of the "entire public,"21 whether the essential class is defined sociologically or politically. Ultimately for Luxemburg, the institutionalization of the councils cum dictatorship of the proletariat was the means of expanding the political sphere with the goal of abolishing politics, to create, in the famous words, the system whereby the administration of things would replace the administration of men. But administration of things, in its utopian guise, is simply an effort to replace a politics of mediation with a thinly disguised politics of totality.22

These maximalist positions were, for Luxemburg, the very essence of politics. A politics of mediating differences, of rational discourse about the common good, was the furthest thing from her mind. She wrote disparagingly of the German Revolution:
Ach, how German is this Revolution--how German! How sober, how pedantic, without verve, without brilliance, without greatness.\textsuperscript{23}

As she wrote when the Revolution was barely three weeks old:

And what has changed for the masses of workers in their daily wages, in their living conditions? Nothing at all or as good as nothing at all! A few meager concessions are made here and there, and then right off the employers try to deprive the proletariat once again of the slightest benefits.\textsuperscript{24}

A curious picture of the Revolution this! The fact that democratic norms had been established, that workers had gained many of the demands for which they had long struggled--the eight-hour day, union recognition, higher wages, equal suffrage rights--none of this was of much concern to Luxemburg. Or, to put it differently, it concerned her only as a first step to the more complete revolution. To Luxemburg, only a politics of revolution, a politics that rejected thirty years of social democratic practice, a politics that signified the actualization of the world-historical tasks of the proletariat, was worthy of the name:

...for us there is no longer a minimum and a maximum program. Socialism is one and the same; that is the minimum, which we today must establish...\textsuperscript{25}

This determination to forge a politics of totality only contributed to the political
invective inscribed into the communist movement at its beginning. Luxemburg’s ire knew no bounds when it came to the social democratic Ebert-Scheidemann government, the "agent" of the bourgeoisie. About the Independents she was even more scathing—they prostituted their own supposed politics by joined the SPD in the revolutionary government, they mediated and conciliated and negotiated, and altogether lacked the "manly resolve" required for a clear, revolutionary politics. In words that bear an uneasy resemblance to the Comintern’s later "social fascist" line, which made unerring attacks on social democracy, the last bulwark of capitalism, the quintessence of revolutionary politics, Luxemburg wrote:

The conflict with the capitalist class signifies in Germany first and foremost the settling of accounts with Scheidemann-Ebert, who provide the wall of protection for the bourgeoisie. And the settling of accounts with the Scheidemanns presupposes the liquidation of the USP [the Independent Social Democratic Party], which functions as the protective wall for Ebert-Scheidemann.

Such intransigence prima facie ruled out any kind of strategy that included cross-party, let alone cross-class, political alliances, as Luxemburg wrote in the Spartacus program:

The Spartacus Group declines to share governmental power with those hacks of the bourgeoisie, Scheidemann-Ebert, because it sees in such collaboration a betrayal of the principles of socialism, a strengthening of the
counterrevolution, and a crippling of the Revolution.29

All the difficulties with Luxemburg’s conceptions of democracy and dictatorship are only heightened in her highly amorphous and even contradictory discussion of terror. Her rhetoric and logic, generally so powerful, become notably mundane and even trite when she addresses the use of terror as a political weapon. Substantively, she claimed to reject terror. In the party program, she wrote:

The proletarian revolution does not need terror to accomplish its goals, it hates and abhors the murder of people..30

In some of the least compelling passages of her usually insightful and moving corpus, she descends to platitudes and to crass determinism to explain the distinctiveness of the proletarian revolution and the irrelevance of terror for it:

It [the proletarian revolution] does not need these methods of struggle [terror] because it struggles against institutions, not individuals. It does not enter the arena with naive illusions, whose inevitable unfulfillment it would then feel compelled to avenge in a bloody manner. It is no desperate attempt of a minority to model forcibly the world after its ideals, but the action of the great mass of millions of people, who are called to fulfill the historical mission and to make reality out of historical necessity.31
Yet immediately afterwards, in a passage worth quoting at length, she defends armed struggle and political coercion in the hands of the proletariat:

But the proletarian revolution is at the same time the death knell for each form of subordination and oppression. For this reason all of the capitalists, Junkers, petty capitalists, officers, all the parasites and the beneficiaries of exploitation and class power--they all align together as one man and raise the life and death struggle against the proletarian revolution.

It is sheer nonsense to believe that the capitalists will accept the socialist verdict of a parliament or constitutional assembly, that they will calmly give up their property and profit and privileges of exploitation. All ruling classes have clung to their privileges to the very end with the fiercest tenacity. The Roman patricians and the medieval feudal barons, the English cavaliers and the American slave traders, the Wallachian Boyars and the Lyon silk manufacturers--they have all spilled rivers of blood, they have left a trail of corpses, and murders, and fires, they have ignited civil war and treason, all to defend their privileges and their power.

As the last scion of the exploiting class, the imperialist capitalist class surpasses the brutality, the open cynicism, the baseness of all of its predecessors. It will exert every effort, fight tooth and nail, use every method of cold evil to defend its profits and its privileged right of exploitation...It will move heaven and earth against the proletariat.
If one can only expect rivers of blood once again, if the bourgeoisie will move heaven and earth to defeat the working class, then how could the counter-terror of the proletariat not be appropriate? The whole rhetorical structure of the passage moves toward the acceptance of terror in the hands of the proletariat, and the rejections appear as mere disclaimers.\[^{33}\]

This becomes even clearer in the subsequent paragraphs of the KPD program:

All this opposition [of the capitalist class] must be broken step by step with iron fists, with ruthless energy. Against the power of the bourgeois counterrevolution, must be set the revolutionary power of the proletariat. Against the blows, intrigues, and chains of the bourgeoisie, the unbending clarity of goals, the vigilance, and the ever-ready activism of the proletarian masses. Against the threatening danger of counterrevolution, the arming of the people and the disarming of the ruling classes. Against the omnipresent power of bourgeois society, the concentrated, tightly drawn, ever increasing power of the working class.\[\ldots\]

The struggle for socialism is the most powerful civil war ever seen in world history. The proletarian revolution must prepare the necessary armaments for this civil war, it must learn to use them—in the struggle and in victory. To arm the compact, working masses of people in this fashion, with all of the political power to fulfill the tasks of the revolution—that is the dictatorship of the proletariat and, therefore, true democracy.\[^{34}\]
Indeed, Luxemburg's own rhetoric often soared into celebrations of revolutionary coercion, as in the powerful ending to the KPD program:

Proletarians! To the struggle! There is world to conquer and a world to combat. In this last class struggle of world history, this effort to realize the highest goals of humanity, apply to the enemy the words: Thumbs on the eyes and knee on the chest!35

Or as she said at an USPD meeting, two days after the initial publication of the program in Rote Fahne:

Socialism does not mean sitting together in a parliament and passing laws. Socialism signifies the suppression of the ruling class with all of the brutality that the proletariat can bring to bear in its struggle.36

This may have been overwrought rhetoric, and it is only too easy now to critique the faith in the moral rectitude of the proletariat. But it was the last sentence of the party program--"Thumbs on the eyes and knee on the chest! [Daumen auf's Auge und Knie auf die Brust!]"--that was reproduced so often in the KPD press of the 1920s and 1930s, contributing to the political culture of violence that the party cultivated in the Weimar Republic.

More than seventy years later, the problems with the rejection of electoral and
parliamentary politics, and the concomitant elevation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and
the acceptance of terror as a political weapon, are virtually self-evident. Luxemburg’s
politics hinged on a traditional Marxian belief in historical determinism fueled by the political
agency of the proletariat. Luxemburg posited, for all of her democratic beliefs, an
intrinsically instrumental politics since the end point— the revolutionary transformation of
capitalism—is predetermined. Indeed, given the idealization of the proletariat and the
historical determinism that underpinned socialist ideas, politics could only be instrumental.
Hence, the need, through a politics of action, to "enlighten" (aufzuklären) and to "instruct"
(zu schulen) the as yet "unripe" proletarian masses.37 Luxemburg presumed that, properly
instructed, the proletariat will find the correct path. For all of the supposed distinctions
between Lenin and Luxemburg—Lenin believing that the proletariat had to be led to class
consciousness by the party, Luxemburg never neglecting the role of leadership, but giving far
greater weight to the natural generation of class consciousness from the life world of the
proletariat—their ideas meet on the plane of historical determinism. No less than Lenin’s,
Luxemburg’s position opened the way for the party substituting itself for the working class,
leading, in the case of the KPD/SED, to a politics that became ever more unhinged from
careful analysis of existing conditions.

Moreover, the expectation that proletarian political power and socialization of the
means of production would resolve all social conflicts, creating unlimited prosperity, elided
all sorts of problems: of forms of oppression that were not, or only partly, class-based, such
as of gender or of race; of the institutional grounding of the polity and the economy; of the
relationship between civil society and the state. Clearly, Luxemburg imbibed that nineteenth-
century materialism that subsumed all issues to property relations. By offering no intermediate political goals whatsoever, by directing everything auf das Ganze, Luxemburg left no room for a more mundane politics of everyday life. She obliterated the intermediate aspects of political life—the public sphere as a mediating arena between state and society—in the effort to collapse the state and civil society. Her own democratic beliefs were undermined by the deterministic leap of faith in socialism and in the proletariat as historical agent, and by her understanding of politics as instrument, as a way of building a society whose outlines, if not details, are already known. This kind of politics directly contravenes a notion of democracy as rational discourse in the public sphere designed to arrive at the common, as yet undefined, good, a democratic politics involving democratic procedures and a certain open-endedness in relation to goals. Her own rhetoric could be so provocative as to sound very much like the promotion of proletarian terror, a prospect made only more likely by her failure to ground adequately democratic institutions.

Luxemburg gave vibrant expression to the possibilities and the limits of the socialist tradition. Her political and personal commitments were infused with hope in the future and the belief that human beings together could transform the limits of their own situation. But even at her most democratic, Luxemburg's thinking remains highly problematic—despite the ever increasing fascination with her personal and political persona. All of the tensions were held together by her great intellectual and literary powers, but the rhetorical structures of her writings could not mask the uneasy tensions and even contradictions to which she gave expression. In this sense, Luxemburg, like later communist dissidents, provided a highly insufficient grounding for democratic politics. As John Willoughby has written of another
compelling and tragic figure, Nikolai Bukharin, one of the greatest tragedies lies in the fact that Bukharin's (like Luxemburg's) democratic sensibilities had such weak grounding in his own theoretical approach, and thereby offered little upon which to build adequate resistance to left-wing tyranny.  

2. Constructing the Luxemburg Legacy in the KPD/SED

Luxemburg's political and intellectual legacy entails, then, far more than the democratic views for which she is most remembered. Crucial to her politics was also an uncritical evocation of the power of mass activism; an unyielding commitment to a politics of totality; consequently, the denigration of every kind of limited politics, of a politics that substantively focused on everyday concerns and that, tactically, centered around political alliances; and, finally, a commitment to central power in the guise of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Each of these points intersected with Lenin's views, at least those of the "classical" period of the Bolshevik Revolution 1917-21. Progressively shorn of the democratic content with which they were endowed by Luxemburg, they were incorporated into the politics of the KPD and SED. While often misappropriated, Luxemburg's politics nonetheless provided the KPD and SED with a sound basis upon which her legacy could be mobilized. Every attack on the treasonous nature of social democracy could be supported with reference to Luxemburg's own visceral hostility to the SPD and trade unions. Every reaffirmation of revolutionary commitments, whether against the "social fascist" SPD or the "imperialist" Federal Republic, could be supported by invoking the heroic martyrdom of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Every claim that a new revolutionary wave was emerging could
be supported by recalling Luxemburg's abiding faith in revolution.

It is, therefore, highly misleading to depict the history of German communism as a linear process whereby its radical, socialist-democratic and German character--articulated most completely by a Jewish woman born in Congress Poland--became supplanted in the course of the 1920s by bureaucratic, authoritarian and Russian communism. Instead, German communism was forged, ideologically, from a Luxemburgist-Leninist tradition that, while increasingly deprived of its democratic timbres, nonetheless retained recognizable aspects of its progenitors' commitments. Of course, in the process of political mobilization ideological traditions may be transformed in ways unimagined by their originators, but that only renders problematic, does not sunder, the historical link between ideological production and mass political movements.

Certainly, Luxemburg's legacy was greatly contested in the KPD and in the Comintern. The conflicts began almost immediately with Paul Levi's publication in 1922 of her pamphlet, "The Russian Revolution." Some of her oldest allies and friends were marshalled into the service of defending her commitment to the Bolshevik Revolution against Levi's efforts to depict her as a fiery critic. While some sought to preserve her for the Comintern, others thought revolutionary politics could only be made by driving Luxemburg from the communist pantheon. Ruth Fischer, KPD leader in 1924 and early 1925, issued a number of highly charged, even vicious, criticisms of Luxemburg. By the mid-1920s, the standard communist critique of her, reiterated until the very end of the GDR in 1989/90, were already in place. Luxemburg, it was claimed, had kept the Spartacists for too long within the confines of social democracy, did not recognize the importance of the "party of a
new type" and dangerously exaggerated the potency of "spontaneity," failed to recognize the revolutionary force of the peasantry, and erred theoretically on the national question and on the crisis mechanism of capitalism.\textsuperscript{44} Stalin gave forceful expression to this view in 1931 in his blanket condemnation of the pre-war SPD left, Luxemburg in particular, and its "Menshevik errors." His intervention was soon followed by still more vicious attacks by various KPD and Comintern spokesmen.\textsuperscript{45}

When not condemned, Luxemburg was often appropriated for the factional conflicts of the 1920s and 1930s in ways that did violence to the tenor of her views. In 1929, amid the party conflict against the "right" and the "reconcilers," \textit{Rote Fahne} wrote:

When the Communist Party of Germany, ten years after its founding, excludes from its ranks a few treasonous and lazy elements, those who are incapable of developing with the party to the heights of Marxism-Leninism and, instead, fall back into the swamp of centrism and social democratic ideology--when the party excludes such elements, it is acting in the spirit of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.\textsuperscript{46}

On the eleventh anniversary of their assassination, \textit{Rote Fahne} linked the Comintern strategy of the "third period" with the revolutionary views of Liebknecht and Luxemburg.\textsuperscript{47} Often, her criticisms of the Russian Revolution were eviscerated in the effort to demonstrate her support for the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{48}

Yet the critique and misappropriation of Luxemburg is only one part of the story.
Luxemburg’s legacy retained a vital presence in the KPD and Comintern even beyond Stalin’s condemnation and beyond the fate of her immediate followers, most of whom by the end of the 1920s had either voluntarily quit or had been forced out of the party. Her letters and works were brought out in many editions in the 1920s. For the party’s ten-year jubilium in 1928, a number of leading communists wrote reminiscences of the party’s founding in which they lauded Luxemburg’s role. Indeed, the very same issue of Rote Fahne that carried a critique of her “mistakes” also had an article on the founding congress of the KPD that described the high point of the event as Luxemburg’s speech, which she delivered with all the sharpness of Marxist dialectics, with the perceptiveness of her revolutionary instincts...Her reckoning with the falsification of Marxism, propagated for decades by the official leadership of German social democracy, was the crowning achievement of a life dedicated to struggle and to the conflicts of the pre-war period. That great expression of Lenin’s about Rosa, when he named her an eagle that soared over the common level of the socialist movement of Germany—despite his criticism of many of her theoretical shortcomings and errors—that expression found its purest confirmation and fulfillment in Rosa Luxemburg’s overpowering speech at the founding congress of our party.

The small, fragile figure, from which burned the holy flame of revolutionary spirit and an untrammeled revolutionary energy, from which grew the
complete and selfless devotion to the cause of the proletarian revolution--this picture of Rosa Luxemburg will forever remain with each and everyone who witnessed it, and is, at the same time, the motor power and the inspiration for our party in the present and in the future!  

Summing up in rather more prosaic terms the KPD’s long standing evaluation of Luxemburg, the article concluded:

The break with the supporters of opportunism and reformism, which only became complete with the formation of the independent revolutionary party—that was the historical fact accomplished by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg with the founding congress of the KPD in the last days of December 1918.  

Generally the names of Liebknecht and Luxemburg were invoked in ways designed to inspire party supporters to still greater exertions on behalf of the proletarian revolution:

…Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht fell in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship. The German working class will fulfill the living legacy of their dead leaders in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship!  

In the days just before the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Luxemburg and
Liebknecht, *Rote Fahne* published a series of tributes under the dramatic headline, "They are still not avenged!" The lead article, with pictures of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, admonished party members, "Forward in the spirit of our pioneers." As late as 1933, almost one and one-half years after Stalin’s condemnation of her and just before the Nazi rise to power, *Rote Fahne* again lauded Luxemburg’s contributions with an article commemorating the assassinations, complete with a drawing on the front page of Lenin, Liebknecht, and Luxemburg peacefully laid out in their coffins and the headline "Forward in their spirit!" On a more mundane but no less significant level, *Rote Fahne* readers in 1930 could still encounter an article entitled, "Writings of Rosa Luxemburg that every worker should know." With little difficulty, the editors of the party daily assembled quotations from Luxemburg and Liebknecht under the headline, "Forever indicted! Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg lash out at the social democratic leaders." *Rote Fahne* summarized in 1929 the party’s views on the matter with the slogan, "With Rosa Luxemburg to Lenin!"

Even the KPD’s leader Ernst Thälmann, faithful Stalinist that he was, invoked the powerful meaning of Liebknecht and Luxemburg for the KPD some months after Stalin had disabused communists of such views:

We have no intention of diminishing the importance of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, and the other comrades who formed the left radical wing of pre-war social democracy. We have no intention of denying the true revolutionary character of these fighters and leaders, or of denying
their solid revolutionary traditions. And we certainly do not want to leave them to the social fascists, SAPers, or Brandlerists, who defame the dead. Rosa Luxemburg and the others belong to us, belong to the Communist International and the KPD, on whose founding they contributed.\textsuperscript{60}

Indeed, few German communists would allow themselves to go as far as Stalin in his blanket condemnation. On the occasion of the KPD's fourteenth anniversary, Wilhelm Pieck wrote that the KPD as a member of the Comintern had learned

to adopt the teaching of Leninism, of Bolshevism. It has taken up the revolutionary legacy of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, but has cleansed its ranks of the bad inheritance of social democratic traditions, of un-Marxist, un-Leninist views, to which even these great leaders adhered.\textsuperscript{61}

The party's leading organs issued directives that echoed Stalin's attack, but also contained series of citations that gave Luxemburg her due as a revolutionary.\textsuperscript{62} Even in the rather scurrilous 1952 attack on Luxemburg by Fred Oelßner, the SED's leading ideologist at the time, the author felt compelled to remind readers that Luxemburg was

one of the most significant personalities of the European labor movement...A sharp-witted theoretician and writer of Marxism...a virulent enemy of opportunism, a helpful friend, always at the ready, of the exploited and
oppressed, an unwearying agitator--that was Rosa Luxemburg.

Rosa Luxemburg is especially dear to the German proletariat. The young generation of socialist fighters of course recognizes the name of this outstanding leader of workers, but not her life and work. It is therefore an urgent responsibility to develop this knowledge among the masses.63

If the SED's official theses on the history of the KPD tended to slight Luxemburg, Pieck sounded a more positive evaluation in a 1951 article commemorating her birthday and in his introduction to the 1952 GDR edition of her selected speeches and writings.64 Pieck, to be sure, reiterated the standard criticisms and claimed that Luxemburg was on the road to Leninism when she was assassinated. In the high Stalinist language of the early 1950s, Pieck called all those who hold to "Luxemburgism" renegades and enemies of the working class, including "Brandlerists, Trotskyists, Titoists, and social imperialists." At the same time, he again lauded Luxemburg's revolutionary role, and described with some accuracy many of the issues that united Lenin and Luxemburg. He called hers "a life in the service of German working people," one that was "dear" to all Marxists.65 This 1951 article carried a photograph of Ernst Thälmann's daughter gazing at a plaque on the building where Luxemburg spent part of her prison term during World War I. Thälmann's daughter is shown reading the inscription:

Here, in the year 1916, Rosa Luxemburg was held and imprisoned because she struggled for socialism and peace.
This not very subtle representation served to establish the revolutionary lineage from the founding of the party, through the KPD of the Weimar Republic, and on into the SED-state. Pieck concluded his article with Ernst Thälmann's pronouncement, "Rosa Luxemburg belongs to us!" In succeeding years, this position won increasing recognition and culminated in the publication in the 1970s of her collected works and letters.

Other cultural practices aside from the print medium inscribed Luxemburg's legacy for generations of German communists. Every January, the party commemorated the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Following Lenin's death, also in January, these commemorations were turned into the so-called "LLL" (Lenin-Liebknecht-Luxemburg) festivals. The order of the names was not merely alphabetical, but reflected the evaluation of the importance of each of the leaders, as propaganda directives to the party districts in late 1932 advised: "There cannot be a shred of doubt that Lenin stands ahead of Luxemburg and Liebknecht."

Nonetheless, these festivals carried Luxemburg into the revolutionary pantheon through mass cultural activities that constituted a major focus of party activity and attracted widespread participation. In Halle-Merseburg, one of the KPD's most important areas, the district leadership in 1927 reported to the Central Committee:

There was a general and very active participation in the Lenin-Liebknecht-Luxemburg festivals. In Halle-Merseburg 44 LLL-Festivals took place. In 1928, 45 celebrations were held. These commemorations were immediately
reestablished following the defeat of the Third Reich—though with some important differences. In January 1946, for example, Liebknecht-Luxemburg celebrations were held jointly with the SPD in all the sub-districts of Halle-Merseburg, and many were well attended.\textsuperscript{70} No doubt designed to reassure social democrats while negotiations for a unified party were underway, the KPD discreetly dropped Lenin’s name from the festival.\textsuperscript{71}

In Berlin, the "LLL" commemorations always included a march to the gravesite of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, a practice resumed after World War II and maintained down to the very end of the German Democratic Republic. In both the Weimar and GDR periods, the marches were an occasion for memorializing the leaders and demonstrating the power of the party and of proletarian solidarity. Even allowing for propagandistic exaggeration, \textit{Rote Fahne}'s description of the 1933 march conveyed its emotional and political significance. Just two weeks before the Nazi \textit{Machtergreifung} radically altered the fortunes of German communism, the party daily claimed that tens of thousands had marched to memorialize the three great leaders of the workers' movement:

\begin{quote}
Red Berlin marched to the graves of Karl and Rosa...

Many times we saw one person give another his gloves, a youth drape his coat on an old comrade marching next to him, or vice versa. The Workers Music Group provided the march beat, and most of them played with bare hands. The fingers of the pipers became stiff, but they played anyway. With uncountable banners the columns marched on, from the north, the east, the south, the west, miles- and hours-long underway.
\end{quote}
The unemployed without breakfast, without coats, freezing inside and out, streamed together to the three meeting places.

Seven thousand workers from Wedding have honored Lenin, have honored Karl and Rosa...

In the demonstration line social democratic workers marched with their factory delegations. Workers from Hitler's Storm Troopers also marched, having found the way from the political legacy of the Guard Cavalry division to the Red Front...

It was impossible to count the flags, banners, and wreaths. "Read 'Rote Fahne,' the newspaper of Karl and Rosa!" read one banner, another "Defend 'Rote Fahne'!"...

Then out of the procession towered three pictures: Lenin, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, preceded by a banner with the inscription, "Fulfill their work!"... In front of the speakers' stand beamed the white head of our comrade Wilhelm Pieck. The Red Front cry roared out. Everyone greeted the comrade of Karl and Rosa. Everyone raised their fists and joined in the commitment to fulfill the work of our great departed ones...

The plaza in front of the monument is surrounded with a thick wall of red flags. A uniformed group of antifascists provides the honor guard. In the middle of the red of the flags shines the Soviet star. Everyone takes of their caps and hats and sings, "Brothers to the sun, to freedom." Then Comrade Wilhelm Pieck, the comrade in arms of Karl and Rosa, speaks...[followed by]
comrade Maurice Thorez [the head of the French Communist Party]. No one understands his words, but everyone feels the significance of the proceedings and is united in this proof of living, revolutionary internationalism.

Flags and fists are raised over the graves. We are fulfilling the work of Karl and Rosa! We believe it. The International is sung and then the thousands march from the cemetery.

During the march of thousands...there developed...a conflict. About twelve National Socialist SS people tried, in full uniform and in a cocky and provocative manner, to break through our ranks. Thousands cried out in indignation. Two SS men drew their pistols and fired two shots, thereby threatening the demonstrators and police officers, who then disarmed the Nazis and took them to the police station...Nevertheless there developed later again conflicts with other police units.72

If the KPD by the latter years of the Weimar Republic was rather too quick to assimilate Luxemburg's views into Lenin's, to ignore the criticisms she voiced of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution, if it commemorated her with a pathos and a cult of personality that Luxemburg would have found abhorrent, her revolutionary commitments, abiding contempt for social democracy, and inflamed rhetoric coexisted easily with the tenor of the party's tribute:

...six million communists hold the flag high, which at that time fell from the
hands of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Six million communists stand armed in
the spirit of Liebknecht and Luxemburg and with the weapons of victorious
Leninism to struggle for a socialist Germany.
Proletarians, when you march today, know that all of working-class Germany,
the entire proletarian world, marches with you in spirit to the graves in
Friedrichsfelde! Know that the names of Liebknecht and Luxemburg inflame
millions of Russian workers in the construction of socialism! Know that the
names Liebknecht and Luxemburg are holy to the last coolie of Shanghai and
are honored in the immense provinces of China where the impoverished
peasants have overthrown the yoke of the landlords and have established soviet
power!
There, where Karl and Rosa lay sided by side with many brave Berlin
workers, the victims of white officers, the victims of the murderous SA, the
victims of Zorgiebel and Grzesinski--there march today men and women and
youth of Berlin, communists and social democratic and unaffiliated workers
and swear to be worthy of the fallen proletarian heroes!
In the middle of a world ignited by the fire of war, in the middle of the
cacophony of arms of the reactionary powers, in the center of capitalist rule in
fascist Germany--today resounds the clear call of the proletariat, the call of the
Germany of workers and peasants:
With Luxemburg and Liebknecht--We are on the attack!73
Indeed, the KPD was on the attack, armed with the ideological weaponry provided, in great part, by Rosa Luxemburg. No less than Lenin, Luxemburg provided ideological support for a politics of confrontation fought out in the streets of Berlin, Halle, Essen, and other industrial centers; of untrammeled hostility to political coalitions; of abiding faith in the possibilities of revolution. Luxemburg’s maximalist politics served as an intrinsic element of the militant legacy of the KPD, a legacy that would drastically limit the KPD’s and SED’s openness to other political strategies and ideas.

The Social Historical Moment

The KPD did not derive, however, in pristine fashion from pre-defined ideological sources, whether the primal fount is seen as Luxemburg, Lenin, or Stalin. The first mass-based communist party outside of the Soviet Union was made also in the multifocal struggle over the shaping of the institutions and ideologies of German society in an era marked by intense social and political conflict. The KPD became a mass party through the convergence of party strategy with mass protest in the Revolution and the Weimar Republic, and through party and popular conflict with the "coalition of order," which sought to contain popular activism, limit the spheres of popular decision-making, and reestablish internal security. Most significantly, the coalition’s largely successful efforts to reconstitute authority decisively limited the spaces within which party and popular mobilizations could take place, thereby shaping the culture, politics, and constituencies of the KPD.
1. The Meaning of Revolution and Popular Protest

The period that began with the first wartime strikes in the summer of 1916 and ended with a failed miners strike in the spring of 1924 marked the most intense period of popular protest in Germany since the Revolution of 1848. At its most searing stage, the German Revolution from November 1918 through March 1920, the most powerful institutions of society—the monarchy and empire, private capital, the bureaucracy, the army—came under challenge time and again. Even after the successful reconstruction of order in 1923/24, Weimar society endured endemic, if sullen, social conflict often initiated by workers seeking to improve living standards and to secure labor's voice in the economy and polity. Labor activism in the German Revolution and afterwards signified the dramatic widening of the political tableau. Traditional practices like strikes and demonstrations were invested with new meanings, while entirely new forms of politics were adopted. The "political imaginary" soared as workers invented new institutions to serve as their fora of representation.

"Strikes were the order of the day," observed one company spokesman with an air of both resignation and frustration. Strikes became both more frequent and more intense, and their coercive element became more pronounced as participants more readily used force to displace hated foremen or to intimidate workers hesitant to join the ranks. Especially in the winter of 1918/19, the spectacles of a foreman thrown down a mine shaft or placed in a wheelbarrel and rolled out of a factory onto a garbage dump constituted essential elements of strike actions. Younger workers brandished revolvers or clubs and forced recalcitrant individuals to join in a strike, or at least to stay home. Especially in mining communities, women took to the picket line and harassed police officers and strikebreakers. In the most
vibrant period of revolution, strikes were waged not only for improved wages and working conditions, but also for labor's participation in the economy and polity, either through some form of co-direction or, more radically, through the socialization of industry and the replacement of managerial authority by workers councils.

Workers also took to the streets in greater numbers and more often than ever before. Demonstrations were designed to win particular demands, but also served as a display of power. Typically, workers would stream out of the factory or mine and march towards city hall, gathering up more participants as they went. In so doing, they moved their struggles from the workplace to the larger community, challenging the lines of authority in both. Later, when the boundaries between the different labor parties were more firmly drawn, demonstrations became more intimately tied with a particular party. Communists called demonstrations deliberately on the same day that fascists groups were out marching, and the resultant brawls served to inscribe male physical prowess as a critical element of communist politics.

The boundaries between properly political and criminal activism became indistinct. In the breakdown of lines of authority typical of a revolutionary era, popularly sanctioned transgressions of the criminal code became widespread as workers "stole whatever was not solidly nailed down," as one factory manager put it. In the hyperinflation of 1923, entire bands of people took to the countryside and took whatever food they could find in the fields; to the trainyards and coal depots and stole coal; to the local stores and marketplaces which they robbed and pillaged. Many of these "criminals" felt their actions justified because of the very real and intense material deprivation that they suffered, and because of their
heightened sense of exploitation and class injustice brought on by the war and by the unending political and social crises. Even the police evinced a certain sympathy for the desperate plight of so many people, and sometimes, instead of pursuing the "criminals," just threw up their hands in frustration.\footnote{78}

The unemployed, a significant proportion of Weimar society well before the onset of the Great Depression, milled about, marched on city hall and the local welfare offices, organized committees. They barged into the deliberations of city councils, demanding higher relief payments. They disrupted the bureaucratic work of local welfare offices, and fought with the police and, sometimes, with employed workers.

And workers took up arms. Almost irrespective of party affiliation, the experience of revolution brought armed political struggle into the repertoire of acceptable political tactics. Once established as a precedent in 1918/19, workers could envision the recourse to arms time and again, yet the more often it was attempted, the more armed political struggle became specifically communist rather than more general popular efforts. The final defeat of armed revolutionary efforts--the KPD’s failed insurrection in October 1923--did not, however, lead communists to reject the ultimate efficacy of military action.

Not only did the forms of mass activism multiply. Workers and their representatives groped their way toward new institutional and ideological arrangements. The workers and soldiers councils in the communities and the works councils in the factories and mines constituted the most innovative expression of the Revolution. Founded first during wartime strikes in 1917, the councils then mushroomed throughout Germany in the winter of 1918/19 in conjunction with the Revolution. Initially, the councils were largely moderate-inclined
institutions through which workers sought new and more forceful avenues of representation in the councils of state and of private entrepreneurial power. But the councils also bore within them the seeds of a more radical transformation. In a few instances, such as the socialization strikes in the spring of 1919, and in a few localities, the councils came close to becoming institutions of direct working-class power. In every instance of major popular protest in the Revolution and the first years of the Republic, workers continually demanded the institutionalization of the councils. In the view of some socialist and communist activists, these more radically-inclined councils, once extended throughout the country, would constitute something akin to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In these moments, when the councils seemed to be the institutional basis of a radical transformation of the German polity, economy, and society, workers and their representatives articulated the classical nineteenth-century socialist vision, whereby the social ownership of the means of production and the exercise of power on the part of the proletariat would signify the creation of a classless society in which all manner of social conflict had been surmounted.

Clearly, the massive movement of popular protest in the Revolution and the Weimar Republic articulated this essentially utopian vision only intermittently and incompletely. But mass protest did manage to redraw significantly the boundaries of politics and of representation. Popular protest meant a vast broadening of the public sphere in the fullest meaning of the term. Major issues that earlier had been consigned to the Social Democratic Party program, like the social ownership of the means of production, were actively contested. Strikes and demonstrations, armed revolution, the new institutions of workers councils--these challenged directly the hierarchies of domination presided over by industrial
managers and state bureaucrats, which limited decision-making to restricted and powerful elites. At the same time, collective action challenged the distanced, bureaucratized forms of representation favored by the trade union and social democratic leaderships and placed in their stead a myriad of more participatory but also chaotic forms. Moreover, these forms of protest and representation in and of themselves signified the expansion of the very definition of politics beyond the "normal" terrain of electoral contests and bureaucratic administration. Through popular protest, workers pushed at the outer limits of political practice and political thinking in Germany. They created a civil society far more activist and participatory, and, consequently, far more turbulent and chaotic, than anything seen in Imperial Germany.

All of these elements in the repertoire of popular protest in the Weimar Republic—new and reinvigorated forms of popular protest, the creation of new institutions like the workers councils, the articulation of a political vision of socialism that seemed attainable in the here and now—were not easily assimilated into the defined strategies and tactics of any of the labor parties. But they did provide the KPD, in particular, with numerous points of entry into working-class life and politics. The KPD emerged, not accidentally, amid this vibrant and chaotic upsurge of working-class activism. The party drew sustenance from these actions and visions as it sought to deepen and extend the repertoire of protest. At numerous moments, the party’s own strategy converged with manifestations of popular protest, enabling it to win substantial, though circumscribed, support. At the same time, the KPD sought to bring popular protest within the confines of the party’s own ideology, strategy, and organization, an enterprise that proved far less successful.

To almost every strike, the KPD responded, in Pavlovian fashion, "General strike!
Everyone out of the workplace!" It sought continually to deepen and extend the already high level of strike activity, to turn every contest over wages and working conditions into an assault on the institutions of the Republic. It called constantly for the formation of workers councils in the workplace and locality. The party built upon the long-standing practice of working-class demonstrations by promoting confrontation in the streets with the police and with fascist organizations. The party even categorized demonstrations on a hierarchical scale from peaceful to insurrectionary. In the middle were the kinds of demonstrations that were intended to be peaceful, but for which party members came prepared with clubs and small weapons. When the unemployed took to the streets or attacked the local welfare office, the KPD, if not in front, quickly followed with calls for more demonstrations and with efforts to organize the unemployed into the party's own committees. When women attacked shops and market stalls demanding reasonable prices, the party sought to channel and organize the unrest with proposals for the establishment of popularly-chosen control committees in every town and city. It formed committee after committee, called congress after congress of the unemployed, of control committees, of works councils. When workers took up arms, as in January 1919, March 1920, and March 1921, the KPD joined in, usually with alacrity. In October 1923, it sought to foment its own armed uprising, though with even less success. None of these defeats caused the party to reevaluate its commitment to political violence as the means of social transformation. Instead, the party's culture became increasingly militarized. It cultivated the legacy of its martyred heroes, and lavished attention on its paramilitary organization, the Red Front Fighters Association, and underground military apparatuses. It sought to link its own history, despite the failure of its
revolutionary efforts, to the heroicizing of the Russian October and Russian Civil War promoted by the Soviet party.

Hence, the party's own strategy of militant confrontation, derived ideologically from Luxemburg and Lenin, converged with the forms of popular activism, especially in the early phase of the Weimar Republic when popular protest was at its height. War, revolution, and hyperinflation, followed by a highly tenuous and uneven stabilization, and then by the Great Depression, generated unending material difficulties for workers, which created a reservoir of unrest that redounded to the benefit of the KPD. Many workers identified the conditions that generated their distress with the Weimar system and with the SPD in particular, the party most closely linked to the Republic. The KPD's continual attacks on the institutions of the Republic and on the SPD articulated the discontent of many workers, including those beyond the formal membership of the KPD. Moreover, the practice and experience of hard political struggle—in the streets, on the picket line, in combat, weapon in hand—also accorded with the KPD's own continual efforts to initiate and intensify these kinds of actions. Indeed, the KPD went still further by idealizing combative mass action as the very essence of politics, of masculinity, and of the great, world-historical effort to effect the transition from capitalism to socialism. The result was the creation of a party culture intensely hostile to political alliances and to all the institutions of bourgeois society, and that elevated male proletarian militancy to the model of revolutionary virtue.

The formation of a party culture of this kind resulted also from the nature of the German Thermidor, the largely successful effort to reconstitute hierarchical lines of authority in response to popular protest and revolutionary challenges. The character of the Thermidor
composed the third "shaping" factor, after the ideological origins and the convergence between popular protests and party strategies, in the history of German communism.

2. The Reconstruction of Order

The broadening of the public sphere did not, of course, go unchallenged. Driven together by common fears, real or imagined, of chaos and of Bolshevism, the old forces of order--army officers and state officials, industrialists and agrarian capitalists--forged a tenuous, but no less real, coalition of order with Social Democrats and trade unionists. The constituent elements of the coalition fought over the extent and reach of democracy and social welfare programs, but together they sought ways to reconstitute order and discipline in society. Their strategy of domestic containment was forged, as should be clear, in conflict. It was neither easily imposed, nor completely successful. Order had to be continually renegotiated, and required the absorption of at least some of the demands raised in popular struggles, such as union recognition, the eight-hour day, universal suffrage, and parliamentary politics. However incomplete, the reconstruction of order decisively shaped the spaces within which communist politics unfolded, and thereby the culture, constituency, and strategy of the KPD.

The individual elements of the strategy of domestic containment are clear enough. They entailed delimiting the public sphere by:

1. the elimination or partial institutionalization of the arenas of the popular public sphere, notably the workers and soldiers councils;
2. the establishment, in place of the councils, of corporatist-style arrangements of decision-making, which sometimes maintained the appearance of popular institutions while depriving them of their content;

3. the expansion of state welfare programs, i.e., of social provisioning via the mechanisms of central state power rather than through popular control from below;

4. the expansion of company social welfare programs, which were designed to bind workers to their firms;

5. parliamentary democratic mechanisms of representation;

6. efforts to curb popular activism via continual appeals for order and the granting of material concessions;

7. the use of force--of the police, judiciary, and army;

8. rationalization, which devolved greater powers to managers in the workplace and bureaucrats in the state.

A number of salient points need to be made here. Each element in the strategy of containment entailed the expansion of central state power and, consequently, of distanced and bureaucratized forms of representation. In the most blatant instances, the state simply marshalled its weapons of coercion and closed down the possibilities of representation. Indeed, the industrial areas of the country experienced one state of emergency after another in the first years of the Republic. In less conflictual circumstances, the state sought to "rationalize" existing social relations through corporatist-style interest group representation.
This reaffirmed the class stratification of German society, and only sought to create legally established and socially acceptable channels within which class conflict could be contained. The more radical and utopian vision embedded in the councils was thereby decisively rejected.

The strategy in toto bears, therefore, strong continuities with managerial and state strategies in the Imperial period, most blatantly in the almost instinctual reliance on the tools of central state power to contain civil society, a process central to the entire experience of German history in the modern era. Furthermore, the reliance on the tools of the central state marked the accelerated masculinization of social and political processes, despite the extension of suffrage to women and the extensive female involvement in the local state in the Weimar Republic. The strategy of containment made the sphere of production the crucial locus of interest group representation, while that of reproduction the object of state intervention—a program actively promoted by Social Democrats and trade unionists. No mechanisms were established for the representation of consumers or homemakers within the welfare state, and it was the rare industry, such as textiles, in which because of their sheer numbers women achieved a kind of independent representation. Moreover, the manifestations of women’s protests—in strikes, but also in food riots and community-based activism—indicated the existence of a different public sphere, one less amenable to welfare state intervention than the workplace arena of strikes and works councils.

Economic rationalization constituted a major element of the containment strategy, one that, as an ideology and a program of social reform, spread to other arenas of society like the household. Rationalization, implemented with a vengeance beginning in 1923/24,
signified the application of advanced mechanization to the work process, but technological improvements were entwined with social and ideological structures. Rationalization enabled management in a number of industries to reduce labor costs by a significant margin and to exercise greater control over the labor force. Widespread fears of discharge served to intimidate workers, while the new work processes themselves, e.g. the assembly line and other forms of serial production and longwall mining, gave management the ability to supervise the workforce ever more closely. Speedup and an extended work day were also part and parcel of the program of rationalization. As applied to the household, rationalization was seen as a way of making women's labors less burdensome. To the extent that it defined anew the household as women's sphere, this kind of rationalization was also a part of the effort to reconstitute order through the reaffirmation of existing gender relations.

The coalition of order, forged first in opposition to popular protest, found additional footing on the common ground of rationalization. Management promoted rationalization because of its anticipated economic benefits, and because it seemed to offer an arena of decision-making free of labor and state intervention. Social democrats and trade unionists supported rationalization because of their technological determinism, which led them to believe that any technological advance brought the day of socialism closer. State officials counted on rationalization to promote the economy and to aid in the reestablishment of domestic stability.

Social welfare programs went hand in hand with rationalization, but here the conflicts among the constituent elements of the coalition of order were much greater. Social democrats, trade unionists, Catholics, and liberal reformers sought to improve working-class
living standards through efficacious state action. They were bitterly opposed by industrialists and agrarian capitalists, who sought to maintain Sozialpolitik within their own hands, at the firm or estate level free of state intervention. Employers complained bitterly about the costs imposed upon them by the general costs of the welfare programs, and in particular by unemployment insurance and state-mandated labor protection measures.

Large firms especially established their own welfare programs, which went hand in hand with the expansion of company security forces. Firms built housing colonies, libraries, and recreational facilities, and provided amenities like free coffee and rest homes that could be utilized by their employees. These programs were all designed to bind workers to the firm and to provide arenas outside the workplace proper where workers could be supervised and disciplined. While the advocates of a welfare state had a somewhat different conception in mind, their notion of social provisioning via the central state also was seen as a way of disciplining the subjects, of creating "proper" citizens by ensuring their material security, hence their loyalty to the state. Like private companies, state social welfare measures were one part of a program of designed to create order; the other part involved blatant repression and the expansion of the state's security forces.

All of the measures carried out through the organs of the central state--corporatist interest-group representation, social welfare programs, and the expansion of the security forces--signified the greater articulation of state power, the enhanced internal integration of the various arms of the state, and also closer coordination among the elements of state and private power. This is evident in the closer coordination of various state security forces in the Weimar period, in the coordination of industrialists and state officials, and, often, of
social democrats and trade unionists in corporate institutions and in the state with elite social groups.

For the KPD, the strategy of domestic containment had enormous significance. The discontent generated by military repression and rationalization engendered continual support for the radical politics of the KPD. Perhaps most significantly, the reconstitution of authority resulted in the spatial transformation of labor and communist politics. The superior firepower of the state drove the KPD from the battlefield. Never again after 1923 did the party attempt an armed uprising. By the late 1920s, the KPD had also been driven from the workplace. The drastic decline in labor force needs that accompanied rationalization enabled employers, with the support of the unions and the state, to fire communists and other radicals, a process only accentuated by the employment crisis that ensued with the onset of the Great Depression. In a situation most ironic for a party whose entire meaning rested on the idealization of the proletariat and whose organizational structure supposedly rested on workplace cells, the KPD essentially lost its base in the factories and mines after 1923.

Consequently, the streets came to serve as the KPD’s primary space of political mobilization. Clearly, this accorded with Luxemburg’s own idealization of the streets as the site of democratic politics, and with the KPD’s own efforts to encourage demonstrations against the Republic. Ironically, it was precisely the democratic conditions of the Weimar Republic that enabled the KPD to use the streets, while dictatorial regimes drove other communist parties into the workplace, which provided some measure of security for clandestine activities. By the latter half of the Weimar Republic, the streets had for all
intents and purposes become the near-exclusive site of party mobilizations, a situation unimagined by Luxemburg and by the KPD in the earlier years of the Republic. In the latter years of the Republic, KPD officials complained constantly about the party’s insufficient anchoring in the factories and mines and the desultory activism in the workplace of even committed members.

The movement of party activism out of the workplace and the battlefield and into the streets had major consequences for the political culture of the KPD. The streets as the space of politics carried their own logic, one that did not operate independently of, rather intersected with, the larger social and political context. It encouraged, most generally, a politics of display and spectacle on the part of the KPD. That is, demonstrations were designed to be displays of party power, a sense conveyed by the sight of thousands marching along singing proletarian songs, by banners held aloft, by physical confrontations. In the streets the KPD carried out electoral propaganda, massed its rank and file in support of particular demands, and fought with the police and the Nazis. Such engagements put a premium not on the building of political coalitions, but on separate communist actions. They encouraged ideological pronouncements—banners with inscriptions in support of the Soviet Union, the workers and soldiers councils, socialization, in honor of Lenin, Liebknecht, and Luxemburg—far more than the effective mediation of practical issues. The displays of proletarian power made it still more difficult for the party to attract other social groups, whose desire for identification with massed proletarian power was slight in the first place.

Very significantly, the politics of the streets accentuated the masculine tenor of communist politics. Communist demonstrations were designed to be tightly disciplined
affairs, a level only infrequently reached. Nonetheless, party propaganda idealized the strong, uniformed formations of the RFB, the all-male paramilitary organization of the KPD. Indeed, in many party campaigns in the late 1920s, the RFB came to substitute for mass mobilizations. RFB units distributed electoral propaganda, performed street theater, and constituted the rank and file of numerous demonstrations. They provided security for demonstrations, and often led the attacks on the police and Nazis. The RFB’s uniforms were difficult to distinguish from those of the Nazi SA, especially when party leader Ernst Thälmann was depicted with jackboots and cap. Communists went to demonstrations prepared for, and sometimes determined to incite, confrontations with the police and with their political opponents, a trendaccentuated, but not invented, in the endemic street battles between Nazis and Communists in the last years of the Weimar Republic. Hence, male physical prowess became the standard of revolutionary militancy of the KPD. While the party called for the full equality of women and sought continually to promote women’s activism, its own subliminal message was that radical politics were men’s affairs, and only physically powerful and courageous men need apply.

The creation of a party culture of political intransigence and male physical prowess can be appreciated better, perhaps, through an exploration in some detail of two rather distinctive case studies: an examination of the party’s fate in the workplace, and of one particular demonstration. Both cases will show how the character of the KPD was shaped by both party ideology and the social historical context in which the party operated.
3. Communists in the Workplace

Throughout the early 1920s, both police and internal party reports indicate growing support for the KPD in the workplace, and the successful construction of communist cells within the unions. Continued material difficulties and opposition to employer efforts to rollback the gains of 1918/19 redounded to the benefit of the KPD’s efforts. In the major industrial regions of the Ruhr and Halle-Merseburg, for example, communists dominated a number of locals of the important mining and metalworkers unions (the so-called Alte Verband and the Deutsche Metallarbeiterverband (DMV)). KPD representation was also quite strong in the legally constituted works councils of both industries. The party had a strong presence also at the worksite and within the unions of construction, transport, carpentry, and even, in some localities, municipal workers. In Halle-Merseburg, one of the KPD’s strongest regions, the party controlled most of the DMV locals, and held every seat on the executive board of the carpenters’ (Zimmerer) union district organization, and nine out of eleven seats on the woodworkers (Holzarbeiter) executive board. In DMV elections in July 1923, communist candidates topped the lists in Düsseldorf, Bochum, and Oberhausen, all key Ruhr cities, and Berlin as well. Yet the KPD soon found its workplace position drastically curtailed. Even where it managed to hold on to union offices, as in Halle-Merseburg, it had grave difficulties using these positions to advantage.

First and foremost, unemployment simply ravaged the communist presence in the workplace. Rationalization and stabilization led to a drastic decline in labor force needs,
which employers met in part by ridding the workforce of communists and other radicals, often with the support of the established, social democratic and Catholic-led unions. Unemployment was so extensive that some years before the onset of the Depression a stratum of the structurally unemployed was created in Germany. One party estimate from early 1924 indicated that 85 percent of the membership in the Ruhr was unemployed. Among communist youth in the Ruhr, the unemployment rate at the end of 1925 was 40 percent, and the remaining 60 percent were employed in smaller firms, rather than the large-sized firms of the Ruhr that the party considered crucial to its efforts. At the outset of 1926, the Ruhr leadership reported:

Over 68 percent of the party members are unemployed. In some localities the entire party organization is unemployed. This means that we are more or less an unemployed party, or, better stated, we are the party of the unemployed and the Christians and the SPD are the party of the labor movement. This is also evident within the party and in relation to its campaigns. The general level in the party is not good. The unemployed comrades are inclined to all sorts of political nonsense which is easily explained by the fact that they are quite worn down by long unemployment and therefore are receptive to all sorts of voices.

As a result, in its union work the party had behind it unemployed union members, but not the core of employed workers. And even where the party attracted widespread sympathy
among workers, as was often the case, it proved much more difficult to catapult this sentiment into organizational successes. Of 500 new members recruited in the Ruhr in January 1926, 70 percent were unemployed. In December 1928, before the impact of the Depression in Germany, 20 percent of the membership in Halle-Merseburg was unemployed. In January 1930, reports from the Ruhr indicate that only 41.9 percent of the members were employed in the workplace, and by November the figure was down to 22.6 percent. This signified, as the party itself noted, an immense decline in the proportion of members still working in the factories and mines despite a strong, overall increase in the number of members. Moreover, the same party report warned that the figures probably underestimated the extent of unemployment among party members, since the figures failed to account for the underemployed and those behind on their dues and whose records had not been updated. By January 1931, of 12,752 party members in Halle-Merseburg, 6457 were unemployed (50.6 percent), and another 2791 (21.9 percent) were underemployed. As early as 1926, efforts to foment strikes or, at the very least, demonstrations, often became, in reality, demonstrations of the unemployed that had little impact on employed workers.

The KPD, well aware of the losses it was suffering in the workplace, warned its members that the establishment of enterprise cells had to proceed with "the greatest caution [Vorsicht]...The cells should only work illegally, since otherwise...the employers will throw all the comrades into the streets." In 1926, communists reported that the last three communists had just been fired from the Thyssen-Werk in Mülheim, a sign of true determination and efficiency on the firm's part. At Rheinstahl in Hilden, only eleven of 75
comrades were left in the plant following a one and one-half year purge.97 A number of firms actively promoted the right-wing Stahlhelm, sometimes forcing workers to join it in order to keep their jobs, as at Schalker Verein in Gelsenkirchen and Rheinstahl in Duisburg.98

For those who managed to hold on to their jobs, the fear of discharge and the intensification of work—the other major feature, aside from unemployment, of rationalization—only weakened the desire and ability to engage in political activism. Reports from KPD enterprise cells, drawn up at the request of the Central Committee, demonstrate the intensified exploitation that workers experienced in the mid-1920s. From Mansfeld one of the party cells reported on the immense dismay of the miners at the return of the pre-war work shift.99 Although mechanization had eased the labor intensity of some tasks, workers were nevertheless more exploited, mining two to four tons of coal where they had previously mined one to two tons. Mechanization had shifted the piecerate system to the advantage of the owners. At a brass foundry near Eisleben, the workday had jumped from eight to ten hours, the size of the work force was only 60 percent of the 1923 level, and the reporter estimated that the exploitation of the workers had increased 50 to 60 percent.100 The work had also gotten more dangerous, leading to early invalidity.

From the Ruhr came similar reports.101 A worker at a Krupp-owned mine reported that management had adopted the long-wall system (Kolonnenarbeit in the German terminology) in which groups of up to fifteen men worked a single coal face with power-driven machinery, watched over continually by a company official. The work had become more exhausting, leading to a rise in illness rates. Miners were now expected to mine a
preset amount per day, determined by management, forcing an even more intense pace of work and usually a longer day, since the miners had to fulfill their daily quota in order to qualify for their pay. Both underground and in the coking plants, more was being produced with fewer workers. At Rheinstahl in Hilden, workers were producing two to three times the number of units in the same time as compared to 1913. As a sign of almost vindictive labor policies, Rheinstahl began one of its shifts at 3:00AM, and ran it until 5:00PM. Some of the workers lived in Düsseldorf, but no night trains ran. So they slept for a few hours in the evening at home, took the last train to Hilden, and then slept a few more hours in the dusty rooms of the molding unit in order to be present for the beginning of the shift.

Battered by inflation and unemployment, exhausted by unending political struggle, workers en masse had retreated from the most public and powerful expressions of protest that had marked the first phase of the Weimar Republic. By itself, the party could do little to promote massive working-class resistance. In the autumn of 1926 the KPD called conferences of communist works councillors in mining and steel, two industries absolutely central to all party calculations. Of 40 councillors invited to the mining conference, only seven showed up. In steel, the situation was no better: nine of 32 invitees appeared, and none of them from the major firms of Vereinigte Stahlwerke. (And the Central Committee representative considered only three of the nine really capable.) At least one of the reasons for the poor showing was that the delegates feared being saddled with more tasks by the party leadership. At the end of 1927, an instructor sent out by the Central Committee attended a meeting of the party cell at Krupp, and was anything but impressed. Although the
cell had two hundred members, only 52 appeared at the meeting. "The readiness for struggle on the party of the comrades was incredibly slight," and there was no sign of any political or organizational preparation for the upcoming wage conflict in the industry. Even communists in leadership positions as works councillors were reluctant to take stands against the unions and the SPD, fearful that they would be thrown out of the union and fired. Little had changed a few months later when Arthur Vogt attended a meeting of the Krupp cell. Hardly anyone spoke during the meeting, apparently a normal state of affairs. Virtually nothing had been done to support the party's candidates in works council elections, and many comrades even failed to vote. And the KPD's local newspaper, the Ruhr-Echo, even published the results of the elections one day after the bourgeois press because comrades at Krupp had not bothered to inform themselves about the results and to communicate the information to the editors. Even the lockout of Ruhr metal workers in 1928, seemingly a fruitful opportunity for the party, failed to alter significantly the poor state of party work despite some successes in winning new party members and, in a few factories, mobilizing the workers. In some factories, the number of party members among the workforce was so small as to be almost non-existent. At the Vestag plant of Rheinische Stahlwerke, party leaders counted only ten comrades among a work force of 11,000! In mining the situation was still more desultory. At a party-called "Demonstration Day," part of an effort to activate miners for the approaching wage conflict, only 108 out of 2000 miners appeared, in Alten-Essen only five!

The Leuna chemical works, one of the major I.G. Farben plants, provides an instructive example of the successes and difficulties of communist activism in the workplace.
Throughout the early 1920s, the KPD had a powerful presence in the plant, which was renowned among workers for its horrendous conditions. In January 1924, internal KPD reports spoke still of a strong and determined oppositional mood in the factory. But some months later, the local party leadership complained bitterly about the state of the Leuna organization and of the party in general. Not only was the enterprise cell work of the party stagnating, but it was slipping backwards and the responsible leader was not up to the task.

In our district the peculiar fact prevails that in almost all of the large firms relatively few communists are employed. Although our influence on the works councils is strong—we even have a majority of the works councils in our hands—but nevertheless the enterprises are dead, hardly any workplace cells exist. ...For months now [we have] not had the slightest connection between the workplaces and the district leadership...maybe with the exception of Leuna.

In a fit of frustration, the report continued:

Given the revolutionary tradition of the population of this district it must be possible, through the foundation of workplace cells and through their politicization, to bring the largest part of the work force once again behind the party.
The story of the Leuna cell in the last months is a real drama. The Leuna-Prolet...was a pathbreaking journal in Germany. Through repressive measures, but even more because of the lack of interest on the part of responsible comrades in the district leadership...for four months the newspaper did not appear.

Only with pressure from the Zentrale and the district leadership was it finally possible to resume publication. In addition to all of these other problems, many party members held to the party’s street and neighborhood organizations rather than the enterprise cells, which since 1924 were supposed to function as the basic organizational unit of the KPD. The enterprise cells that did exist tended to ignore directives from the district leadership. Moreover, some of the most experienced party members, found with copies of the Leuna-Prolet, had fallen victim to the strict controls exercised by management and had lost their jobs. In 1931, when the ravages of the Depression added to those of rationalization, the KPD cell at Leuna lost 80 members in nine months, most of them through layoffs. The one-time stronghold of the KPD was reduced to a cell of forty members, of whom only twenty were active.113

But it was not only the actions of employers, the state, and trade unionists that weakened the communist position in the workplace. The KPD’s own ideological proclivities served also to undermine the party’s presence. The Luxemburgist-Leninist hostility to the established trade unions, disparaged as bureaucratic, reformist institutions, made it difficult to convince the membership of the importance of party work within the unions, even in the
period when official Comintern and KPD policy called upon members to join the existing
unions (predominantly, the SPD-aligned "Free Unions" and the Catholic Center Party-aligned
Christian unions). Instead, the party had always to contend with deep-seated rank and file
discontent with the unions. No matter what the official line at any moment, there existed
always a strong tendency to reject the existing unions in toto, a tendency that especially
marked the more radical KPD districts like the Ruhr. Pointedly, a large proportion of the
communist rank and file was not organized into trade unions—40 percent in the Ruhr,
according to one estimate. In March 1925, the Ruhr leadership reported, with evident
relief, that active resistance to union membership had all but ceased. Nonetheless, some 20
percent of party members had still not found their way back to the Free Unions. Moreover,
some comrades simply lied to party controllers about their supposed union membership,
while others, "mostly older comrades....refuse, and to be sure out of deeply-seated
sentiments (Gefühlsgründen), to return to the free unions." An instructor sent out to the
Ruhr by the Central Committee in the autumn of 1924 reported that no one had any idea
about the level of union organization of party members. When asked, they would always
claim to be union members, but could not produce their membership book. "It is sheer
deception," he concluded laconically.

Even when the party dominated local union organizations, it had to deal with the
more radical strivings of the rank and file. In 1924, for example, the DMV in Essen,
dominated by the KPD, wanted to secede from the parent body and organize a new,
revolutionary trade union. In Naumburg, the KPD completely controlled the
construction workers cartel [Baugewerksbund], yet KPD members still wanted to separate
from it because they believed that if they joined with the Union of Excluded [from the regular union] Construction Workers, they would be able to pursue better revolutionary activity—"a very particular point of view [eigenartige Auffassung]," according to the regional leadership, which exerted great efforts, ultimately with success, to dissuade the Naumburg workers from this course.\textsuperscript{118}

Furthermore, the hostility to established unions led the KPD in the first (1919-24) and last (1929-33) phases of the Republic to establish independent, revolutionary unions, which it hoped would replace the established Social Democratic and Christian-led unions as the major institutions of workplace representation. Instead, with this policy the party sowed confusion and discontent among workers inside and outside the party and enabled employers and the unions to move more easily against communists. In the first years of the Weimar Republic, over half of the party members in the Ruhr who were organized into unions were members of the separate Union der Hand- und Kopfarbeiter [Union of Manual and Intellectual Workers], so that "in the entire Ruhr region at the most eight to ten thousand party members come into question for trade union work."\textsuperscript{119} The Union was a rather undisciplined organization that had all sorts of radicals within its ranks, and gave the KPD no end of problems. The Union was, according to one party report, "a very clumsy body...which continually has to be pushed and directed by the party. Among these people hardly any are capable of undertaking any kind of independent steps or actions."\textsuperscript{120} As a result, one Central Committee instructor recommended moving some experienced comrades from the DMV to the metal workers' section of the Union. Construction workers complained that the
their organization was weakened by competition with the comparable body of the Union. In the mining sector, most communists were in the Union, and as a result, relatively few communists were organized in the Alte Verband. Moreover, competent personnel were always stretched thinly in the party, and the local leaders of the mining section of the Union were so incompetent that a large number of members "and not the worst" were intending to return to the Alter Verband, a cause of great concern to the party in this period. 121

Moreover, no one seemed certain whether the Union was to be an out and out communist organization, or a more radically inclined trade union that encompassed non-party workers as well. The KPD leadership tried to promote the establishment of communist fractions in the Union as well, but members were resistant to the idea, seeing it as superfluous. 122 KPD members in the Union wore their membership as a badge of revolutionary virtue, and condemned their comrades who remained in the regular unions. 123 This distinction carried over to the response to Comintern directives: The same trade union report indicated that the communist opposition in the established unions responded favorably to the decisions of the Fifth Comintern Congress [which called on communists to enter the unions], while those in the Union opposed it. Indeed, the employers' association circulated in 1924 a report that confirmed that the party was having grave difficulties convincing its own members as well as those of the Union that the Fifth Congress decision--encapsulated in the slogan "Join the free unions!"--constituted the correct line. The free unions themselves were carefully monitoring the situation and doing all that was possible to bar KPD members from entering their ranks. 124

By 1924, the situation within the Union had reached a crisis point, and relations
between the Union and the KPD leaderships had become extremely tense. By this point, both the Comintern and the KPD had realized that efforts to establish independent unions only isolated the party. The Union refused to accept the Comintern call to conquer the established unions, and instead raised its own slogan, "Out of the unions!" Relations between communist cells and Union groups in the workplace became completely fractured. The KPD then decided to break completely with the Union, which soon faded from significance.

But in 1929, the Comintern and the KPD revived the idea of an independent revolutionary union with the foundation of the Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition (Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition-RGO). This decision derived from the shift in Comintern tactics to the "third period," the strategy based on the view that a renewed escalation of class conflict and a burgeoning revolutionary wave were on the horizon. As a result, communist parties were called upon to escalate the class struggle, and to break decisively with all reformist elements of the labor movement. While the decision came from Moscow, the sentiment in favor of independent unions was widespread within and even outside of the party. The RGO absorbed the energies of many communists, but also made their activism far more insular. As the party itself reported, the RGO leadership in the Ruhr was comprised, in fact, of the KPD district leadership secretary for trade union affairs, while at the sub-district level the sub-district secretaries handled RGO matters. The RGO was no more successful than the Union in replacing the existing trade unions. Instead, it isolated the KPD still further from the workplace and from the larger group of workers outside the party's own ranks.
The KPD's essentially instrumentalist understanding of strikes also created grave difficulties for it in the workplace. For the KPD, strikes were important primarily because they elevated the "Kampfstimmung" of workers, bringing closer the decisive revolutionary movement. Since strikes were not waged for limited goals, the party did not know how to end strikes. Its own rhetoric in every strike was so overwrought that its supporters could hardly expect anything less than complete victory.

In August 1923, for example, the year of the Ruhr occupation and hyperinflation, a great strike erupted, which the KPD sought to develop into the prelude for a revolution. But then, recognizing that the timing was not yet right, the party sought to channel the strikes into an economic course. A wave of anger swept over party supporters. Strike leaders in Halle, who spoke out for ending the strike, were shouted down at a mass meeting. Within the party itself, intense anger broke out against the leadership: "An immense upset among the entire functionary corps of the party has been directed against us because of the resumption of work and because we have resolved...to end the strike," wrote the district secretary, Willy Sachse. The dilemmas of communist politics were all too evident—the continual efforts to foment and extend working-class mobilizations meant that the party had no real rationale to offer when it decided to break off the strikes.

At the same time, workers were in most instances far more ready than the party to settle strikes, and to be satisfied with material gains. Furthermore, the longstanding working-class practice of a politics centered around the state led workers and their representatives to expect state intervention on their behalf, a demand hardly in accordance with the KPD's demonization of the institutions of bourgeois society. Amid the widespread strikes of August
1923, for example, workers at the railroad shop in Delitzsch went out on strike and
demanded, first and foremost, that state officials intervene to provide inexpensive and
satisfactory food supplies. The Landrat and deputy mayor led the negotiations, with the
result that the police and Landjäger, accompanied by representatives [Vertrauenspersonen] of
consumers, would conduct a survey of the most important stocks of food supplies. With that
rather modest victory, the workers returned to their jobs.\textsuperscript{130}

Finally, the KPD's anchoring in the workplace was further undermined by factional
conflicts within its own ranks. By the last years of the Weimar Republic, the long-standing
party complaints about insufficient activism within the workplace were now accompanied by
attacks on "right-wing" and "reconciler" elements within the KPD. The KPD was fighting
on all fronts within the factories and mines--against the "social fascists," against the party
"reconcilers" who were especially strong in the unions in Halle-Merseburg, against the
fascists who were making advances among workers, and, sometimes, even against the
employers. Indeed, the party seems to have expended so much energy not just against the
SPD--the oft-repeated evaluation of KPD politics in the end phase of the Weimar Republic--
but also against factions within the party. It was not a cleverly designed strategy, and the
expectation that the Depression would almost automatically radicalize workers for the
communist revolution proved to be another KPD chimera, for the unemployed--as much
research has shown--were as prone to passivity as activism, while many of those in the
workplace feared for their jobs.

The situation was all the more vexing for party officials in Halle-Merseburg, because
there the KPD did occupy numerous positions within the unions and the works councils.

Internal party reports ran through a long list of industries in which the communists in Halle-Merseburg were strongly represented--construction, mining, wood, graphics, leather, saddle making and upholstery, chemicals, metalworking, shoemaking, stoneworking--and found only a catalogue of insufficient activism and missed opportunities. In mid-1929, with the impact of the Depression quite apparent, the party proved unable to extend its influence further in the spring union elections. Many KPD functionaries in the unions sought to keep the party at arm's distance, thinking that "the party should 'where possible not get involved' in union affairs." Partly, a generational conflict was at hand, since younger, "striving elements [aufstrebende Elemente]" were "kept at a distance [unbequem empfunden]" by older comrades who had long held union positions, and a "crass opposition" emerged over virtually every issue. Overall, "trade union legalism strongly marks almost all fractions," noted party officials. As a result, the communist fractions were often disunited in relation to the social democrats. Some party comrades in the unions misunderstood the united front tactic, and even sought to establish electoral coalitions with the SPD in union and works council elections, to the horror of the KPD leadership. The local DMV, for example, remained ravaged by conflicts among different KPD factions and between the SPD and the KPD, and the SPD regional leadership seemed particularly determined to purge communists from official positions. But worst of all to the party leaders firmly committed to the intransigent policies of the third period was the fact that union work had become the preserve of the reconcilers:
The major lack [in the party’s union work] was the complete absence of fraction work [i.e., communist cell activity within the unions]. The fact that the previous district leadership directed trade union work with the local leadership [Ortsverwaltung] and the union functionaries has gradually made the Gewerkschaftsfaktionen [the party’s trade union cells] superfluous. Trade union work, instead of being a focal point for the entire party, has instead become the preserve of so-called trade unionist. It is no accident that the trade union specialists, who have gradually taken control out of the hands of the membership, have become a center for reconciler and calcified elements in the district. For the most part they have applauded the decisions of the Fourth Red Trade Union International Congress, the Sixth World Congress [of the Comintern], and the Twelfth Party Congress, but in practice they are trade union legalists and run from the terror of the union bureaucrats and from the difficulties of mass work.135

The "depth and extent of this right opportunism in trade union work" is "catastrophic," concluded one report.136

As a result, the party leadership initiated a systematic campaign to remove the older union functionaries, associated with the right and center, and replace them a new, younger corps of party trade unionists. Many local groups simply fell apart, since it proved no easy matter to create this new leadership corps.137 The impact of this can hardly be underestimated. The KPD’s position in the workplace had already been ravaged by
unemployment and the coordinated actions of employers and trade unionists. As any number of party reports noted, "with the mass firings the influence of the opposition [i.e., der KPD] has declined," while at the same time both the "social fascists" and the fascists had had strong successes in works council elections. Now the party further weakened its position through the factional conflicts, which led to the purging of those members most experienced in the workplace and the workplace-based institutions of the labor movement. In union after union in Halle-Merseburg, the KPD eliminated its "trade unionists." In the mine workers union, where, at the time of one report, the older party unionists still had their positions, one report, expressively conveying the intransigent policies of the "third period," called for an unrelenting campaign against them:

In the mining industry union many important union and workplace positions are still held by comrades, who however strictly refuse to implement party decisions and assignments. A radical purge of these elements from the party and the construction of union fractions must put an end to this situation.

Whatever their weaknesses from the communist standpoint, they were often well-experienced and well-respected trade unionists—which, of course, was precisely the problem for the central party leadership. To destroy those cadres in the midst of mass unemployment was foolhardy at best. Shortly thereafter, the Nazis would finish the task.

4. Communists in the Streets
Sometime in the 1920s, a state official drew up a long memorandum for his superiors entitled, "How the KPD Plans to Conquer Power." Such memoranda were commonplace, written year in and year out during the Weimar Republic. In this instance, the official developed a typology of communist demonstrations, which he claimed to derive from internal KPD documents. Even allowing for some exaggeration, the official quite accurately captured the essence of the party's understanding of demonstrations, which were designed to accustom workers to active struggle against the state. The official claimed that the KPD differentiated among five different kinds of demonstrations:

1. Legally called and executed demonstrations, which serve the goals of propaganda, instruction of the masses, production of a combative mood, testing of the party's reporting and command systems, and the wearing down of the police. These demonstrations were to be held in large streets, government centers, or the neighborhoods of the possessing classes.

2. Legally called demonstration, but conflicts with the police or political opponents expected. In strikes, demonstration columns of the unemployed should be led to the factories to link the two groups, and to prevent strikebreakers from working. "By a police intervention it is characteristic, that the mass of workers at a demonstration frequently defend themselves spontaneously and use strong defensive measures against the police. It is the task of the Communist Party to use these spontaneous actions for the construction of mass proletarian protective organizations.
3. Demonstrations forbidden but take place nonetheless, and conflicts with the police to be provoked. The location of the demonstration should be changed and spread mouth to mouth to prevent the police from preparing for it.

"Determined troops are capable of bringing together great masses and, after the break up of the demonstration, of leading actions against the police. Demonstrators should form loose groups and surprise the police at different places, thereby hindering their ability to commit their forces...Small units, which hold firm against the police, inspire the masses to resistance. Red flags with short poles are excellent points of concentration for the masses. To prevent the dissolution of tightly formed demonstration columns, it is recommended that chains be formed in the lead of the marches..."

4. Demonstration forbidden, but carried out with the intention of engaging in armed conflict. Armed shock brigades should be scattered among the crowd and should shoot at police. In the confusion, they disappear into the crowd, while the masses hold off the police by throwing stones and the like. The crowd is not to disperse, but should attempt to encircle and disarm the police.

5. Demonstration with arms openly carried, which is designed to lead directly to an uprising.

While communists had an inordinately difficult time in the workplace, the streets offered a more freewheeling terrain of activism. Ironically enough, the prevailing
democratic conditions of the Weimar Republic made the streets accessible to the KPD. (In sharp contrast, authoritarian systems like fascist Italy drove communists into the workplace, which at least provided some measure of security for clandestine activities.) At the same time, the Luxemburgist celebration of mass activism in the streets—the very essence of democracy in bourgeois systems, according to Luxemburg—provided ideological support for the unending effort to raise the political stakes through the massed display of proletarian power. And the KPD’s proclivity for demonstrations accorded with a long tradition of working-class practice—the march from the factory or mine to the city center, the Mayday parade, electoral rallies—that, as so much else, became more intense, more frequent, and invested with new meanings in the Republic.

Political spaces carry their own logics, and the KPD’s elevation of the streets into the essential Kampfplatz of the revolution had a number of consequences for communist politics. Given the general militarization of public life in the Republic, the KPD’s move into the streets inevitably meant physical conflict with the police and with fascist groups. This only accentuated those militant, masculine elements of the KPD present at its founding, with the result that male physical prowess came increasingly to define the KPD’s model of revolutionary militancy. The party’s active cultivation of this image demarcated the KPD from centrist and other leftist parties in the Republic, and from other social groups, making still more difficult, and nearly impossible, the construction of cross-class and even intra-class political alliances. The SPD’s leading role in the Weimar system, and in Prussia in particular, meant that the police forces with which communists came into conflict were often under the command of social democrats. The intense communist hostility towards social
democracy had its origins, therefore, not only in ideology, but also in the hard experience of physical conflict in the politicized spaces of urban streets and marketplaces.

The party’s understanding and utilization of the streets as an arena of politics thereby contributed mightily to the creation of a communist party with a particularly intransigent cast, with an orientation deeply hostile to any forms of political alliances and highly amenable to Leninism and to Stalin’s particularly authoritarian interpretation of Leninism.

All of these characteristics of communist demonstrations were amply displayed in a major demonstration in Halle on 11 May 1924, the so-called "Arbeitertag" ("Workers' Day"). The choice here is deliberate. The date of this demonstration fell well before the rise of National Socialism and the endemic street violence of the last years of the Republic. The party district of Halle-Merseburg was also in the hands of party centrists, not the ultra-leftists who saw a potential revolution in every strike or demonstration. The activities of the party leadership in relation to the Arbeitertag indicate how the party’s strategy and culture arose almost irrespective of factional conflicts.

The KPD called for Arbeitertag in direct response to the announcement of a "Deutschertag" in Halle by a number of right-wing military bands, the Stahlhelm prominent among them. The right-wing demonstration had been called for 10 May 1924. The KPD intended to mobilize all its forces, including communists from as far away as Berlin and Thuringia. Hence, the KPD demonstration was intended to be a major display of working-class strength, and to challenge directly the ability of the radical right to make Halle "its" city, if only for a few hours. The KPD was to make its stand in one of the most left-
wing of German cities. The preparations were to be meticulous, the authorities and the right were to be foiled. The reality turned out otherwise.

With the demonstrations separated by only one day, members of both the communist and the right-wing contingents would undoubtedly cross paths in the city and the surrounding area. Indeed, conflicts between the two groups was an intrinsic element of the KPD’s strategy, a way to demonstrate its superior power. The regional party leadership therefore organized the demonstration with a strong military cast. All preparations were conducted in close consultation with the KPD’s military apparatus, and the military leader of the district was therefore charged with organizational responsibility. In militaristic fashion, the demonstrators from outside the city proper were to gather at five distinct points and the columns would then march on the city, converging in the city center (the Marktplatz)—"to enliven the city and the street scene with their march and to disturb the fascists." Reliable comrades were to be armed to protect the demonstration columns.

The organizers were well aware that this plan would lead to serious confrontations with the fascists. To prevent the police from hindering the marchers, communists inside the city were to gather early in the morning at the Marktplatz, and set off in their own march columns, thereby engaging the police and preventing them from dispatching squads to the city limits. Then the entire force would gather around noon at the Sportplatz and the Arbeiterasalbau Volkspark, followed by another march past the burial place of revolutionary militants and back to the center of the city. In the evening, the crowd would disperse—again with a march, though this time in loose groups toward the train station, from where the comrades from outside the city would depart. As the organizers wrote to the Central
The plan was adapted to the fascist march plan. Should it be accomplished successfully, then it would lead most probably to sharp conflicts with the fascists.\textsuperscript{144}

To further the militaristic hues of the entire event, the party had set up a command center in an apartment in the city, complete with a communications division. From the command center, reliable comrades were to be dispatched to each of the five marching columns to ensure contact between base control and the protestors. In order to carry the plan out successfully, the Halle party organization had also to organize food and sleeping quarters for the many comrades expected from outside the city.

Yet from the very moment of its inception, the demonstration proved to be a fiasco. The Military Leader was an incompetent who often failed to show up at planning meetings and never carried through on his responsibilities. At the last moment, the leaders of the political and organizational divisions of the local party had to take over the organizational preparations.

The vaunted effort to maintain tight lines of communication failed also in other arenas. Only in part was the central command able to maintain links with the five columns, and middle-echelon leaders lacked the instructions they were supposed to convey. The military preparations to protect the columns failed almost completely, which were a result of the "extraordinarily poor level of the military work in the district."\textsuperscript{145} These plans
included sending "select, qualified groups to Halle...to stand in the front lines, along with the
special groups of the district, in the struggle against the fascists." Presumably, this
entailed comrades with specialized military training, including special (but unspecified)
weaponry.

Efforts to interrupt the fascist demonstration also failed. The organizers had hoped to
hinder the movement of trains with fascist demonstrators aboard, but this effort utterly failed
because of the KPD's almost complete lack of influence among locomotive engineers.
Instead, the fascists marched into Halle on Saturday midday, unhindered as the greatly
strengthened police detachment simply watched. Despite a police order forbidding marches,
the fascists marched in long columns, heavily armed and with black-white-red banners and
swastikas flying. By evening time the major streets were full with fascists.

Communists from outside the city began arriving the same day, and quickly
confrontations arose with security forces. The police barred demonstration marshalls from
the train station, and simply arrested arriving communists. With fascists controlling the
major streets, delegations of communists nonetheless managed to march through the
neighboring streets to the Volkspark singing communist songs, giving the "street scene a
decisive proletarian character." All through the night and the following morning
communists continued to arrive in the city. But when they gathered at the Volkspark, it was
evident that the local communists had by and large stayed home. Moreover, to the despair
of the leaders, many of the newly arriving headed straight for their beds and provisions and
for a good time away from home. Only with difficulty, and often not at all, could they be
rounded up for the marches and demonstrations. Delegations failed to register with the
leaders of the event, hence making it impossible to bring together at the same time all of the forces for a disciplined show of strength. Some delegations were quartered far outside of the city, so the police had an easy job preventing them from getting any closer.

Moreover, the entire plan hinged on the punctual massing of all available forces in order to disturb the city. This part of the plan, however, became "a complete fiasco." Only two to three hundred workers showed up at 8:00 AM on Sunday in the Marktplatz, most of whom were party functionaries. Clearly, many workers had no intention of arising that early for a demonstration, party orders or not. At other gathering points, sometimes as few as ten or fifteen comrades appeared. The police then had an easy time closing off the Marktplatz and dispersing the demonstrators, while the marching columns, many of which lacked directions anyway, were prevented by the police from arriving in the Marktplatz. A number of bloody confrontations between the police and demonstrators occurred. In the surrounding towns, large groups of communists were also blocked from marching on the city and were arrested, also with bloody confrontations. Even had the police not interfered, many of these groups had only the vaguest ideas of where they were supposed to be--as party leaders themselves stated, "Here the absolutely unsatisfactory military preparations avenged themselves." In the city, meanwhile, the small columns of demonstrators had returned to the Volkspark after some relatively mild confrontations with the police and the fascists. Much to the disappointment of party leaders, they were unable to convince the comrades, some of whom were tired, to march again out of the Volkspark and, no doubt, to engage the police and fascists.

That turned out to be a major error, for the communists now ensconced in the
Volkspark were an inviting target for the vastly strengthened police forces. The police began to gather in the area. The party military leadership gave the order for people to leave the Volkspark, but that did not happen because of "the lack of discipline of the masses and the lacking energy of the marshalls," so those inside were now surrounded. There the mood reached near-panic levels, helped along by talk of the pogrom-like mood of the police and rumors of bloody conflicts between workers on the outside and the police. Certain hot-heads among those in the Volkspark, in disregard for the overwhelmingly superior force of the police--which included Schupo and Sipo units, armed with hand grenades and machine guns--sought to promote a confrontationist mood among the crowd and attacks on the police. The military leader had to be removed from his position, while other leaders snuck in and out of the Volkspark trying to calm the situation. Also, the weapons that many comrades carried had to be secured for fear of personal and house searches.

Negotiations began with the police, but the communists inside at first refused to leave the Volkspark under the escort of the police. But nothing could be done in the Volkspark, only in the streets and in the city. The communists inside thereby extended their confinement by at least six hours and hindered the "effective struggle against the fascists." The party leadership was in full agreement that given the strength of the police forces and their heavy arms, an attempt to break out of the Volkspark would have resulted in immense casualties and probable failure. Finally, after long negotiations, the police let the workers leave the grounds of the Volkspark in columns of one hundred. As they reached the city--after midnight--the workers' columns and the fascists engaged in renewed combat, leaving wounded on both sides. All told, in Halle, Erfurt and Leipzig,
three workers were killed and nine wounded and hospitalized during these demonstrations. Many more suffered less serious wounds. 450 workers were taken prisoner, four Schupo officers were killed in Magdeburg and Halle, six were wounded and hospitalized. A large number of fascists were wounded and two were counted as missing.152

The next day, the Monday, there were demonstrations in Halle and throughout Germany in protest against the killing of workers. Six thousand workers in Halle gathered at the Volkspark. For the KPD, the Arbeitertag, with all of the chaos and disorganization, had at least served part of its purpose—the workers were now angry and aroused.153 The police observers were forced to leave the hall, so intense was the mood inside.

At the rally the works gave no evidence of disappointment. In contrast, [they showed] a considerable excitement. The demonstrations were a success for the party.154

While communists gathered at the Volkspark, the fascists took advantage of the situation to attack the party's Produktivgenossenschaft (where its press and other resources were housed) and small groups of workers on the streets. Small groups of workers and the Schupo fought with fascist bands made up of fifty to sixty individuals. From nearby windows the attackers opened up with firearms, and were answered by communists inside the Produktivgenossenschaft, who managed to fight off the fascists.

The party then called a protest strike for 15 May at 12:00 noon to coincide with the burial of the workers who had been killed in the weekend demonstrations. In Halle, over
20,000 people followed the caskets--two thousand more than had voted for the KPD in the last election. According to the KPD report, many social democrats participated, and most large firms were forced to shut down. Even the police now prevented any attacks on the demonstrators, and "a great number of them saluted the dead."155

The confrontational intentions of Arbeittag are clear. KPD leaders planned that their supporters would encounter rightist demonstrators, and expected sharp conflict between their own forces and those of the police and the radical right. As state officials well understood, such demonstrations served a two-fold purpose: They were designed as displays of party and proletarian power, and to accustom the party's supporters to conflict, including physical conflict, with its opponents. Through physical combat workers would learn that still greater, more disciplined struggles were required. (That workers might become exhausted with such efforts, that they might tire of bloody beatings, never seems to have crossed the mind of party strategists.)

Clearly, this strategy was highly gendered. The sources make no mention of the composition of the demonstrators, but it is clear from internal evidence that males comprised the overwhelming proportion of participants. The military-like planning, the provisions for sleeping quarters, the absence of any particular efforts to attract women's support, the intention to foment confrontations with the police and the fascists--all that shows the highly masculinized nature of the demonstration, and of communist politics in general. As mentioned earlier, the confrontationist strategy was by no means the province of a particular wing of the party. The politics of street battles, the elevation of male physical prowess--all
that had become a fundamental feature of communism in the Weimar Republic.

Strikingly, despite all the failures and the anarchic situation, the party leadership considered the demonstration a great success. Those who failed in their responsibilities are depressed, claimed the local leadership. The workers in general have been aroused by the active steps of the party against 50,000 fascists and 10,000 Schupo and Reichswehr officers. Many more copies of the party's newspaper have been sold, and the demonstrations in the succeeding days show how much support the party has won.

Workers' Day has led to an immense sharpening of the relations between fascism and the revolutionary work force. Reports of intense conflicts between fascists and workers are coming in from numerous localities in the district, which for the most part have ended with serious wounding on the fascist side....Workers' Day has above all else led to the recognition on the part of workers that the bourgeoisie and the fascist bands must be opposed with weapons in hand. In sum therefore, the Fascist Day in the district and the surrounding area has had a revolutionary impact...Workers' Day has clearly shown that the Communist Party is ready with all means to lead the struggle against reaction and for the emancipation of the working class. It has brought confusion in the camp of the enemy and has decisively raised the influence of the party.156

This was an old story, the same one repeated after the defeat of every party-led insurrection.
It shows the party’s continual fixation on confrontation and violence, its belief that through the demonstration of revolutionary credentials the party would attract increasing support. But the holiday-like disorganization and indiscipline, with workers going off to find food and comradeship—at least until the situation turned violent—was evidence enough for how difficult it would be to generate solid organization and real advances out of this strategy. Instead, the tenor of party politics became increasingly militarized.

Significantly, the events in Halle constituted a major impetus to the formation of the KPD’s paramilitary unit, the RFB\textsuperscript{157}, and thereby to the general militarization—and masculinization—of party culture in the Weimar Republic. Even women were not exempt from this trend. For a brief period, there existed a women’s unit of the RFB, and the few representations of it that exist show the women marching in the same disciplined formations as the men. Moreover, reiterating its militaristic stance, the party advised women not to be passive bystanders in the inevitable civil war that will accompany the transition to socialism:

Women and children of thirteen years old struggled at the side of men during the [Paris] Commune. It cannot be otherwise in the future struggle for the crushing of the bourgeoisie. Proletarian women will not look on passively while the well-armed bourgeoisie shoot unarmed or poorly armed workers. As in 1871 they will take up arms...\textsuperscript{158}

And supposedly quoting Lenin, party propaganda leaders went on to advise mothers what to say to their children:
You will soon be big. You will be given a rifle in the hand. Take it and be
diligent as you learn the craft of weaponry. Your knowledge is necessary for
the proletariat—not to shoot your brothers, the workers of other countries, as
happened in this war, and as the traitors to socialism advise you to do—but to
struggle against the bourgeoisie of your own country, to make an end of
exploitation and poverty and wars. Not by pious wishes, but by triumphing
over the bourgeoisie and disarming it.\textsuperscript{159}

Moreover, the actual experience of armed combat seemed to produce not a revulsion
against political violence, but a desire to make the next round far more successful.
Communist cadres had experience with all sorts of military encounters, from armed combat
with the Reichswehr and police to sabotage. Indeed, the party devoted a great deal of
attention to its underground military apparatuses, and it is in these, and in the RFB, that
many workers first experienced the discipline of communist organization.\textsuperscript{160} Despite the
failure of the party’s armed efforts, they provided the KPD with its own militaristic legacy,
one sustained by the sometime violence of the KPD’s political rhetoric and by the individual
and political martyrdom ascribed to its military efforts in subsequent propaganda. In the
midst of the March Action, the \textit{Ruhr-Echo}, the local party paper in Essen, ran a banner
headline, "Thumbs in the enemy’s eyes, the knee on his chest!"\textsuperscript{161} Following the event,
\textit{Rote Fahne}, the central KPD paper, proudly trumpeted the Comintern’s pronouncement,
"You have acted correctly!"\textsuperscript{162} The workers killed at Leuna and elsewhere in central
Germany in this conflict became the martyred heroes of German communism, as were the
Hamburg workers killed in the ill-starred 1923 uprising. By glorifying its own military efforts, despite the string of failures, the KPD sought to join its traditions with the Soviet invocation of the October Revolution and the victorious Civil War as the heroic moments of Bolshevism and of world socialism.

The party press of the Weimar Republic is infused with militaristic images. The KPD’s Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung, for example, published photo after photo of uniformed men, banners flying, marching in tightly disciplined military formation. Only the uniforms and banners enable a viewer to distinguish the RFB from the Nazi SA. One sees the same determined men---women are completely absent in both the KPD and Nazi representations---the same emphasis on a muscular masculinity, and even photos of party leader Ernst Thälmann complete with jackboots and brown cap. Even KPD leaders sometimes condemned the "left romantic" fascination with illegality that was widespread among the rank and file, and that resulted all too often in the neglect of important and necessary, but fully legal, activities.

In effect, the RFB became in the latter part of the 1920s the substitute for mass mobilizations. In the process, the militaristic ethos of the RFB thereby infused the broader culture of German communism. During the 1928 electoral campaign the party had moderate successes, at best, in mobilizing workers in the workplace. In contrast:

The RFB has worked restlessly and in model fashion for the entire party in the electoral campaign. It has followed all the requests and assignments of the party.
The RFB carried out many of the mundane but necessary tasks of electoral campaigns: propaganda marches, public gatherings, agitation in the countryside, tacking up posters and distributing leaflets. In the Ruhr it helped distribute the Rote Peitsche--Red Whip, a telling name—the electoral supplement to the Ruhr-Echo. And it developed the highly effective technique of "flying demonstrations." Party activists would gather at intersections or squares with loud speakers and the music corps of the RFB. There they would give a performance, distribute leaflets, and hold an improvised rally, and then with autos would quickly move on to another place.

When the RFB was banned in 1929, the KPD sought to maintain the organization by subterfuge, as officials well knew. In a long report from the early 1930s, officials described in intimate detail the organization of other paramilitary units, and the use of supposedly "peaceful" organizations to further the military training of party cadres--Initiative Groups (or Partisan Troops) and Struggle Associations (Kampfverbände) in the workplace, Unemployed Guards (Erwerbslosen-Staffel), Struggle Unit Against Fascism (Kampfbund gegen den Faschismus), Workers Sports Association (Arbeiter-Sport-Vereine), and others. Organized in military style and often providing weapons instructions for the members, all of these organizations added to the militaristic ethos of the KPD. Remarking on the exercise of the sports clubs, state officials noted that the training was geared toward street battles rather than real military conflict--communists learned to patrol, read maps, fire small weapons, use slingshots. Officials quoted internal KPD directives on the need to turn mass mobilizations into lessens for street battles.

Significantly, the unemployed movement, which provided "superb support [glänzende
Unterstützung]" for the party, seemed to rank only second to the RFB in its electoral activism. The entire apparatus of the movement—in communist hands anyway—was placed in service of the KPD's electoral effort. The unemployed movement held rallies and demonstrations at which KPD candidates spoke. In addition, its newspaper, Der Arbeitslose, expanded its press run from 9,000 to 12-13,000, no doubt with the financial support of the KPD.

Like the party's paramilitary units, the unemployed movement was almost entirely male, which no doubt facilitated its incorporation into the KPD's masculinized political strategy of street battles and political violence. The gendered nature of the labor market had, in the first place, made the workplace and union organization inhospitable to women. Second, in the deep economic crisis of the Depression years, the household burdens on women only increased. Third, women were discriminated against in the granting of unemployment benefits, so were less likely to appear at the mobilization places. Fourth, the KPD, as discussed previously, had a highly circumscribed appeal to women.

The actions of the unemployed tended to be militant but sporadic, involving demonstrations, riots, and vandalism, especially at government offices. The KPD found such activism worthy of the "Kampfstimmung" of the proletariat, and a kind of convergence emerged between the KPD's own strategy and the nature of the political activism of the unemployed. But this convergence was a far cry from the multivariate forms and spaces of activism that connected the KPD to broad segments of the working class in the early phase of the Weimar Republic. And the overwhelmingly masculine character of the unemployed movement only further promoted the intransient and violent aspects of the KPD's strategy.
The foregoing discussion has tended to obscure the factional conflicts within the KPD, and deliberately so. It is my contention here that for all of the differences among the party factions—and they were substantial—a common political orientation, a common culture, cut through the factional divisions within the party. In the 1920s, following the most revolutionary period in European history since 1848, all party factions remained committed to revolution as the means of social transformation. Leading members of all factions had had direct experience in the revolutionary battles of the early Weimar Republic. Renowned "rightists" and "reconcilers", like Heinrich Brandler, were known to pack pistols, and, as we have seen, even Rosa Luxemburg did not shy away from the realities of political violence. To be sure, there were differences in timing, in tactics, in attitudes towards alliances among the factions. But even those willing to entertain united fronts with the SPD and the unions couched the proposals in terms that almost immediately undermined the efforts. Instead, all party factions contributed to the creation of a culture that emphasized male physical combativeness as the necessary human ingredient in the process of social transformation. This enterprise was rooted in the ideological gendering of production and politics that attained new levels of assertiveness in the labor movement of the nineteenth century, and in the brutalization of public life amid the violent upheavals of World War I and the postwar revolutionary conflicts. Most significantly, the spatial restructuring of class and political conflict in the Weimar Republic—its displacement from the workplace to the streets—decisively contributed to the intransigent, masculinized, and violent politics of the KPD. All party factions shared in this enterprise, and thereby contributed to the intransigent cast that communists carried with them into the difficult years of repression, exile, underground work,
and the creation of a state socialist regime.
By the end of the Weimar Republic, the KPD had developed into a party with substantial, though circumscribed, support. In succeeding decades, other European communist parties would also make the transition from sect to mass movement, but, unlike the KPD, with the strategies of the popular and national fronts. These strategies centered around programs of social reform and anti-fascism, and political alliances with socialists, liberals, and, in World War II, even conservative monarchists. For the French Communist Party, the Popular Front remained a cherished moment in its history, and it would periodically invoke the spirit of the "party of Villeurbane," the site of its triumphant 1936 congress. For the Italian Communist Party, the anti-fascist resistance served as its historical touchstone, the moment when it had become a mass party. In subsequent historical situations, the PCI would seek to reinvent the political coalition and the political élan of the resistance years. For the KPD, however, the historical reference was the party's emergence as a mass party in the Weimar Republic upon a political strategy, not of coalition-building, but of hard, confrontationist, male proletarian politics fought out in the streets of Berlin, Halle, Essen, and other industrial centers.

It was this historical reference that communists carried with them into the years of the underground, exile, and imprisonment under the Nazis, and onwards to the construction of state socialism in the German Democratic Republic. Yet at the same time, it would be misleading to depict the party's path as a linear progression, devoid of any turns and dips, from the culture and strategy of the Weimar period to the GDR. The profound defeat suffered by the party; the vast transformation of political and social conditions as a result of
the Nazi dictatorship and total war; and, not least, the shift in Comintern tactics in the 1930s and the emergence of the Soviet Union in the 1940s as a world power—all this forced at least some communists to reconsider the political positions held so fervently in, say, 1928 or 1932.

Briefly stated, until the autumn of 1948, when the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the KPD's successor, abandoned the attempt to forge a distinctive "German road to socialism" and fell completely in line behind the Soviet model, two political orientations coexisted in uneasy tension within the KPD and SED. The first, which I will call the politics of intransigence, drew on the party's experience in the Weimar Republic, on the Leninist-Luxemburgist ideological heritage, and on the Comintern strategy of the "third period." It was directed at the full assumption of power by the party in the immediate future, its seizure of the state apparatus as the means of engaging the construction of a state socialist system on the Soviet model. The second, which I will call the politics of gradualism, drew on the experiences of working collaboration with socialists and liberals that some communists had gained in the Resistance and exile; on the popular front strategy; and on the wartime coalition of the Allied powers. It envisaged socialism as a relatively distant goal that would be reached through a transitional phase of collaboration with non-communist groups. It implied, therefore, a gradualist transition from capitalism to socialism.

Significantly, these divergent streams were not completely identified with any particular individuals or party factions. Most often, the contending positions were embodied in one and the same individuals, and whether one strategy or the other came to the fore depended on the reading, by Germans and by their Soviet sponsors, of the larger
political context. That is, how communists judged the possibilities for revolution in Germany, the domestic and international balance of forces, the effectiveness of fascism in winning a mass base, the possibilities of cross-class coalitions—all that shaped whether communists considered it necessary to work toward the almost immediate assumption of power by the party or to engage in a relatively long term process of political development. The ultimate commitment to party power, the triumph of socialism, and support of the Soviet Union transcended the differing orientations. The particular political approach depended on the judgement of the momentary situation.

Significantly, the politics of intransigence ultimately prevailed in the KPD/SED, and not only as a result of Soviet actions, as critical as these were. Precisely because this orientation was rooted in the ideological traditions and social historical formation of the party in the Weimar Republic, it proved so deep-seated, so enduring, so solid. Indeed, the Weimar experience provided the KPD with a living historical memory that could be summoned up, molded, and developed to lend legitimacy to the creation of a state socialist regime. Soviet policymakers did not need to exert great efforts to bring the KPD/SED in line once it had opted, domestically and internationally, for its own politics of intransigence.

1. The Languages of Communist Politics

As is well known, the KPD considered the Nazi rise to power a mere temporary event that would pave the way for the communists' assumption of the reins of the state. In the summer of 1933, seven months into the dictatorship, a leading member of the party wrote to the Comintern that the KPD had succeeded
not only in beating back all the voices of panic, but has also put an end to the retreat. The party has been able to strengthen the cadres and rally the masses for the counterattack...

In the last weeks it has become clear that the entire party is on the march and that our authority in the working class is on the rise.176

Clearly, the KPD was not alone in so terribly underestimating National Socialism. But it is striking that despite the party's immense defeat at the hands of the Nazis, when thousands were already languishing in concentration camps or had scattered into exile, leading communists remained committed to the strategy that had so utterly failed.

While the KPD remained fixated on the intransigent politics of the Weimar period, the Comintern at least adopted a more realistic response to the rise of fascism and the KPD's utter defeat. With the adoption of the popular front strategy in 1935, the KPD, once the darling of the Comintern, became its bête noire. In almost ritual fashion, year in and year out, the Comintern sharply condemned the "sectarianism" of the KPD and its unwillingness to engage in popular front politics.177 Indeed, the KPD never did manage to conclude a united or popular front agreement with the SPD and other groups on the model of the French, Italian, and Spanish communist parties. The efforts in Paris exile to forge a popular front committee never got beyond the issuance of a few proclamations, and endless, wearying negotiations. The exile SPD leadership evinced no interest whatsoever in collaboration with the KPD. For the communist side, Walter Ulbricht, the KPD point man in Paris, acted in kind and played the key role in scuttling efforts at political collaboration.178
The mutual enmity of the Weimar years had survived the years of Nazi dictatorship quite well—in the underground as well as in Paris. Among many rank and file resistance groups within Germany, strong opposition existed to the notion of common action with social democrats, let alone broad, cross-class alliances. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine German communist cooperation with, say the officers and aristocrats of the anti-Nazi Kriesauer Kreis, while comparable coalitions were forged in Italy, Greece, and other European countries.

Nonetheless, in the two major conferences that the party managed to hold clandestinely in the 1930s, the KPD introduced the rhetoric of the popular front into party discussions. These departures took on more concrete form with the formation in 1943 of the National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD--Nationalkomitee ‘Freies Deutschland’) in the Soviet Union, which represented the first successful popular front-type initiative of the KPD, and of a high level Working Committee (Arbeitskommission) in the autumn of 1944, which was charged with drafting plans for a post-Nazi Germany. The programmatic positions worked out by the NKFD and the Working Committee, while not free of contradictions, pushed the party more in the direction of the gradualist orientation, a position that culminated, five weeks after the end of World War II, in the most remarkable document in the KPD’s history, the Central Committee’s Manifesto of 11 June 1945.

Issued after close consultation with the Soviets, the manifesto laid out a course that diverged sharply from the Leninist-Luxemburgist-Stalinist heritage of the KPD, and surprised even leading members of the party. Not one word of socialism graced the document. Instead, the Central Committee called for the establishment of an “antifascist democratic
regime, a parliamentary democratic republic with all rights and freedoms for the people.\textsuperscript{184} The Central Committee even declared its commitment to private property rights. Most significantly, it specifically rejected the Soviet model as "inappropriate for Germany's stage of development." It called for a completely new departure, "an entirely new way must be blazed!"\textsuperscript{185} Strikingly, the historical reference point was not the Bolshevik and German Revolutions of the World War I era, but the liberal democratic Revolution of 1848, whose legacy could now be brought to fulfillment. When it came to specifics, the Central Committee provided a catalogue of the anti-Nazi and democratic demands that had been a fixture of communist appeals since the popular front period and that were fully consonant with the functioning of a bourgeois democratic system. To implement this program, the KPD called for the creation of a block of antifascist democratic parties.

For the KPD in particular, the articulation of a moderate-sounding program, the absence of any word about socialism, the rejection of the Soviet path of development, the recognition of private property--all that represented a huge, dramatic departure from the party's ideology and practice. It represented the single greatest articulation of the gradualist orientation of communist politics. Yet the Manifesto of 11 June 1945 did not stand as an isolated example. Over the next two years the political position defined in the manifesto was further elaborated, especially through the adoption of a new political language, one that departed significantly from the confrontationist language of the Luxemburgist-Leninist tradition. The key, inextricably entwined phrases--the "German road to socialism," "democracy of a new type," "people's democracy"--demarcated the possibilities for a "third way" between Soviet-style socialism and western democratic capitalism.
KPD and SED leaders Anton Ackermann and Rudolf Appelt undertook the most sustained efforts to define the new terminology. Ackermann coined the term "the German road to socialism" in a number of speeches in the winter of 1945/46 and then in an article published in the first issue of Einheit, the KPD's newly-founded theoretical journal. Ackermann framed the argument around the discussions then underway for the unification of the KPD and SPD, and expended the greatest amount of ink marshalling quotes from Marx, Engels, and Lenin to demonstrate that the peaceful evolution from capitalism to socialism was only a pipedream, and that the proletariat could only seize power through revolution. But then Ackermann issued a notable qualification: If a bourgeois-democratic system has dispensed with the "power apparatus" of militarism and the state bureaucracy, then it could evolve towards socialism. Ackermann argued that the military defeat of Nazi Germany had accomplished just that--the destruction of the reactionary state apparatus. Whether Germany would indeed be able to evolve peaceably towards socialism depended on whether the new German state would be a state of all working people under the leadership of the proletariat. Hence, the question of a special German road to socialism was more a practical than a theoretical question, i.e., whether "the German work force, in association with all progressive strata of the productive population, does or does not win the decisive influence on the democratic character of Germany." To support this position, Ackermann was able to find (without any great difficulty, one might add) statements from Marx and Lenin indicating that divergent paths to socialism were conceivable. Following a suitable quote from Lenin, Ackermann concluded, "...we unconditionally affirm a special German road to socialism."
Appelt made in 1946 and 1947 one of the most serious efforts to define the term "people's democracy," which in its initial formulation had a much different meaning than that accorded to the Soviet-style systems of eastern Europe after 1948. Initially, "people's democracy" was used almost interchangeably with "democracy of a new type," a term that had a longer lineage. Appelt began an article in *Einheit* with the most remarkable point: People's democracy (*Volksdemokratie*) was *sui generis*, a "democracy of a new type," distinguishable from both bourgeois (*bürgerliche-kaptialistische*) democracy and the "Soviet-socialist form" of democracy. It arose out of the particular conditions of the imperialist-fascist war, which both exposed and discredited the practices of the old ruling classes and inspired a broad, popular alliance against fascism and for democracy. Its distinguishing characteristic is, first and foremost, that working people (*das arbeitende Volk*) exercise "real influence" on the state. People's democracies give the population the possibility of participating immediately in the state and public administration. The implementation of laws and decrees is run not through a bureaucracy, but through organs defined by or elected by the people themselves, i.e., elected representative bodies or people's committees, which are themselves subject to popular control. Indeed, the people's democracies mobilize the population for participation—in politics, economics, society—on a scale far surpassing that of bourgeois democracies, which are dependent on repressing the interests of the working population.

Moreover, people's democracies undertake major economic reforms, namely land reform and the nationalization (*Verstaatlichung*) of key industries, as well as steps toward economic planning. This does not mean complete socialization: private property and private
initiative are protected, but with the proviso that no one had the right to use private property "to the harm of the democratic state. Private property and the public interest must sound in harmony. With large capital that is obviously not the case." Ultimately, Appelt define people's democracy as a "development that goes in the direction of socialism." People's democracy is, therefore, a transitional system on the road to socialism, a point Appelt developed by quoting and paraphrasing Klement Gottwald, whose brief for a Czech road to socialism carried a subtle critique of the Soviet Union. Appelt, relating Gottwald's views, argued:

There exist other paths to socialism than the one full of pain, difficulty, and sacrifice that the Russian workers and peasants had to trod because of the special historical conditions of their struggle. The other path can lead to state formations that are different from the Soviet one.

Whatever the limits of Appelt's and Ackermann's views--especially the easy identification of popular activism with "the people" in an almost mystical sense and the failure (unlike Gottwald) to distinguish between popular control and statization--most striking are the new departures, and in particular the articulation, however restrained the tones, of a gradualist transition to socialism. This position entailed the rejection of the two most important elements of the Soviet experience--the October Revolution and the Stalin Revolution. "People's democracy" and "the German road" signified that socialism could be achieved without the military confrontation of the October Revolution and the subsequent
Civil War. Revolution signified no longer a singular military assault against bourgeois and reactionary power, the fundamental element in the Soviet cultivation of the myth of the heroic October. With power already in the hands of the people, there could be a gradual development towards socialism—a "growing into" socialism, as Nikolai Bukharin explained the social process in a different context. In a sense, the bloody chapter of the revolution had already been fought—in the antifascist resistance and in the sacrifices of the Red Army against the Germans. The fascists and their capitalist and landlord supporters had been eliminated. Now a more peaceful, evolutionary road towards socialism was possible.

The rejection of the Stalin Revolution of the 1930s was much less clear, the ambiguity greater. Clearly, Ackermann, Appelt, and Gottwald accepted fundamental elements of the Stalinist program, namely state control of industry and the leading role of the party. But to this model enough qualifications were added that its content changed substantively. The people's democracies permitted private peasant agriculture, at least some private entrepreneurship in industry and commerce, and other political parties. In this vision, the people's democracies looked a lot more like the Soviet NEP of the 1920s than the Stalinist model of the 1930s. Presumably, at some time in the future the full socialization of the economy would occur—but it would come as the culmination of a process, not as the near-immediate result of state mandate. Here, again, the Bukharinist position of "growing into" socialism bore fruit in the rethinking of the post-World War II period, even if the seed was unknown or unacknowledged.

By challenging the meaning of both the October and the Stalin Revolutions, the position staked out by Ackermann and Appelt marked in toto the rejection of the Soviet path
to socialism as the unquestioned model for all parties, a position articulated in Lenin’s Twenty-One Conditions for membership in the Comintern, enshrined in Zinoviev’s call for the "bolshevization" of the member parties of the Comintern, and reiterated continually by Stalin in his efforts to defame any "deviations" in the international communist movement. The gradualist orientation in the German party emerged as one example of a more general process of political development among the communist parties in the World War II era. It bore the potential for "polycentrism," the term coined later by the Italian communist leader Togliatti, which signified many national roads to socialism. The outcome could have been far more diverse and multivariate political formation than came to exist in the Soviet bloc, and a different kind of international order than that engraved in the Cold War.

But the language of gradualism was never the only communist political rhetoric, even if it was prevalent between 1945 and 1947. Other voices were raised within the ranks of the German party, and they demonstrated the persistence of the politics of intransigence. Memoirs of KPD/SED leaders and studies by GDR historians indicate that time and again the gradualist orientation had to be fought for in party gatherings. Indeed, in the Ruhr the opposition was so pronounced that the district leadership had to initiate an intensive round of instruction to educate the membership into the positions delineated by the Central Committee. The French communist leader Jacques Duclos, in a May 1945 article that was widely circulated among communists, warned against placing too much trust in the western allies, a position that reiterated warnings delivered to communist functionaries in the Soviet Union. Ulbricht himself apparently said in the very first days of reconstruction:
"Things must look democratic, but we must have everything in our hands." 199

Those who rejected the gradualist orientation remained ensconced in the language of class conflict and its international corollary, the anti-imperialist struggle. Many of these statements, echoing the communist politics of the Weimar Republic, were articulated by local communists who emerged from the underground, concentration camps, or exile. In Thuringia during the waning days of the war, for example, communists attacked the Americans as old-style imperialists, and implied that the political struggle would be directed as much against them as the remnants of the Third Reich. 200 Already during the war, communists in exile in Britain warned of the "monopoly capitalist appeasers" who would try to isolate the Soviet Union. 201 Communists interned in Buchenwald, many of whom would play important roles in the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) and the GDR, argued that the time was not yet ripe for revolution, yet hardly abandoned the language of the dictatorship of the proletariat. 202 Communists in Saxony-Anhalt (nearly contiguous with the former Prussian province of Saxony), led by survivors of Buchenwald and of the communist underground in the Mansfeld region, a center of KPD support in the Weimar Republic, issued in April 1945 a political platform that envisaged a new revolutionary wave in the world and the irreconcilable conflict between socialism and imperialism, between revolution and reaction. In tones that would not become widely prevalent in the Soviet Occupation Zone until 1948, because they implicitly drew connections between the imperialism of the Third Reich and that of the western Allies, the Mansfeld communists maintained:

By using the contradictions among the imperialist forces, the struggle of the
Soviet Union created from the outside not only the preconditions for the victorious national and social liberation struggles in the Balkans, the Danube region, and eastern Europe. This struggle has also created the preconditions for the national and social liberation of our own, German people.203

In some localities, communists resurrected the militant language and practices of the Revolution of 1918/19 and the Weimar Republic. In Berlin-Wittenau, they formed a Workers and Soldiers Council. In Meißen, they formed a Council of People's Commissars; in Pirna, the population was advised to greet the new administration with the call "Red Front!" (from the Red Front Fighters Association of the Weimar Republic) and to use "comrade" and the "du" form; in Radeburg and Schellerhau communists called for the immediate establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.204

Moreover, many communist groups, having survived the repression of the Third Reich, were loathe to abandon the conspiratorial practices that had saved them, and held on to their "Fünfergruppen" (cells of five individuals) even after the liberation of their territories. Similarly, the continued call by almost all communist groups for the examination of new members resurrected the language of a Leninist-style cadre party—even when they talked in the same breath about creating a mass party and even when such caution was justifiable in view of the corruption undergone by so many individuals in the Third Reich.205 The Buchenwald communists, for example, made a clear distinction between the party and antifascist committees. In Leninist tones, they envisaged a party with a far more selective membership, i.e., those who know that "the realization of Socialism is only possible
through the path of social revolution. Real political leadership of the masses signifies continual subordination of personal interests...to the higher goals of the party." These positions reprised those of the Working Committee in Moscow in 1944-45, which declared that the KPD "out of security grounds" had for the immediate future to remain a cadre organization rather than a mass party. When this was replaced by emphasis on the construction of a mass party, enough conditions were attached to ensure that the Leninist cadre conception would not be dissipated. Hence, Ulbricht, in guidelines placed before the party leadership in Moscow in February 1945, stated that social democrats and trade unionists would be accepted into the KPD only when they "have broken with social democracy and have proved themselves in antifascist work." Even communists from the Weimar period had to be carefully examined, especially those who had not engaged in illegal activities during the Third Reich. Furthermore, the KPD Central Committee in early 1945 called on communists and other antifascists to form commissions to set about the reconstruction of the party at the local level. Among other tasks, these commissions were to be responsible for the "examination and confirmation of party member and the applications for party membership." Clearly, the KPD leadership could not quite bring itself to dispense with the close supervision of the membership, as the Italian Communist Party, in a remarkable departure from standard communist party practice, did in 1944, opening the party doors to members without prior political examination.

2. The Places of Communist Politics

If the language of communist politics was ambiguous--reflecting the coexistence of
two differing orientations, the politics of intransigence and the politics of gradualism--this was no less true of communist activities "on the ground." As in 1918/19, the collapse of the state system stimulated an upsurge of popular activism that was not easily channeled and contained by any of the political parties that reemerged in the course of 1945/46. Popular activism pushed at the boundaries of the political norms that, in different ways, the western allies, the Soviet Union, and the German parties sought to establish. In place of the authoritarian controls exercised by the military authorities and the bureaucratic and parliamentary forms of representation favored by the emergent political elites in the west, popular activists sought to extend the range of popular influence in the workplace, the local polity, and the sphere of consumption. As in the post-World War I period, popular activism signified the broadening of the public sphere, and, at the same time, of the spaces of communist politics. Popular activism often intersected with communist party activism and provided the KPD/SED with far wider entrée into the lives of the population than it had ever achieved in the Weimar period. At the same time, the convergence of party and popular activism created the possibilities for a more wide-ranging transformation than ultimately came to exist in both parts of Germany. To be sure, the activism of 1945/46, and even of 1947/48, often reverberated with tones of desperation that arose from the harsh conditions and difficult efforts to secure the most basic means of existence. Amid the immiseration of postwar Germany, the KPD/SED lent to popular activism an enervating sense of hopefulness, of the possibility of building a new world. The umbrella of Soviet power was, of course, crucial, and not only because the Soviets limited the range of popular and party activism. Through the military conquest of Germany and the Soviets' hope that popular participation
would facilitate the construction of at least a neutralist, and perhaps a Soviet-allied, Germany, the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) and its German communist allies helped to create, at least initially, the conditions for wide-ranging popular activism.

In February 1945, Pieck, after consultations with Dimitrov, issued directives for party work in areas occupied by the Soviet armies. Significantly, these called upon party cadres not to concentrate on the reconstruction of the party organization, but to establish provisional local administrations and to engage in antifascist educational work among the population, both in collaboration with the Red Army. These concerns were formalized in the "Richtlinien für die Arbeit der deutschen Antifaschisten in dem von der Roten Armee besetzten deutschen Gebiet," issued on 5 April 1945. For the areas still controlled by the Nazis, the guidelines called on German communists to maintain anti-Nazi propaganda with the goal of weakening the military resolve of the population and the German armies. In the areas liberated by the Red Army, instructors were to be sent into the major centers. German communists and other antifascists were immediately to take over administrative functions. Without question, the exigencies of wartime destruction, the desperate conditions throughout the liberated areas, necessitated quick and decisive work to secure the basic necessities of life and to limit the effects of Nazi last-minute destructiveness.

Three so-called Initiative Groups, constituted in Soviet exile, were to be the major instruments of this policy. Led by Gustav Sobottka, Anton Ackermann, and Walter Ulbricht and directed to Mecklenburg-Pommern, Saxony, and Berlin, their tasks, however ill-defined, were to aid in the reconstruction and to support the Soviets. Ackermann's memoirs
underscore the point that the Initiative Groups were to concentrate first on establishing formal administrative structures, to the relative neglect, initially, of the party and of popular democratic committees:

Our mission as the Initiative Group was, so far as we understood, to ensure that the right people were found and that the new administrative organs be constituted in accord with the policy of broad, antifascist unity.\textsuperscript{212}

The Ulbricht Group, the most important of the three, departed the Soviet Union on 30 April 1945.\textsuperscript{213} Ulbricht himself met with Berlin communists already on 2 May 1945, and the very next day the entire Group began its work. Each member was assigned a particular district, where he was to search out communists and other antifascists and begin the task of establishing local administrative structures. (The members were provided with lists of people for whom they were to look.) In addition, various members were assigned special tasks, which they usually carried out in conjunction with Red Army detachments. With the exception of the traditional working-class and KPD districts of Wedding and Friedrichsrain, communists were not to serve in leading positions, but as deputy mayors and the like. However, in a local foreshadowing of later events, communists were to direct personnel matters, the police, and school reform.\textsuperscript{214}

While the Initiative Groups moved quickly to ensconce communists in administrative positions, formal party guidelines and structures could not themselves determine the nature of party and popular activities in the chaos and confusion of the waning days of the war and the
early months of reconstruction. In communities throughout Germany "activists of the first hour" emerged. These were the people--later heroicized in SED accounts--who set about, often on their own initiative, the very basic tasks of clearing rubble and ensuring the continued flow of water, gas, and electricity. Predominantly working class in background, many of these activists--though by no means all--were communists who emerged from the underground, exile, or concentration camps. They often formed with social democrats, Catholic trade unionists, and others Antifascist Committees (Antifas), which sprang up all over Germany, and were in some ways reminiscent of the workers councils of 1918/19.

Hence, in a number of areas communists in the waning days of the war managed to leaflet the population, calling on it not to follow Nazi directives and to greet the Red Army as a friendly force. Berliners were requested to gather in house or block associations to ensure that the buildings would not be used by the Nazis to continue the war against the Soviets. In the factories and mines, workers were called upon to prevent senseless, last minute destruction by the Nazis. In a few places--the Berlin docks, the Mansfeld region, among others--communists at last launched armed actions against the Nazis. In the concentration camps within Germany, organized communist groups had long existed, and after the liberation, many of these fanned out into the surrounding regions to take part in the reconstruction. In some cases--notably Buchenwald and Mauthausen--the communist organization helped liberate the camp itself, and secured it from the wild, last-minute rampages of the SS.215

In Halle and the surrounding region, an area at first under American occupation, communists appealed to residents to hang out white flags as the Americans approached.216
Here, as in many other communities, communists secured essential infrastructures from wanton Nazi destruction. Already in March 1945, the Antifaschistische Arbeitsgruppe Mitteldeutschland had called on workers to form armed antifascist brigades both to fight the Nazis and to protect the factories. In April 1945 the group was able to prevent implementation of a Nazi order to slaughter livestock. This resistance group in particular seems to have had a clear idea of its tasks. In internal directives, it called on its members to take in hand leading governmental offices. Where possible, this was to be done prior to the arrival of the American forces.

Positions of state power...[the] police, mayoral offices, administrative functions of all kind, provision and transport facilities [should be taken in hand]. The mistakes of 1918 should not be repeated. Fascists must be ruthlessly eliminated. The immediate constitution of antifascist committees stands in the forefront. The forms of administration, their structure and competence...should be secondary. The crucial issue is political power. [Es kam auf die politische Macht an.]

Indeed, in some towns, such as Eisleben, the first Americans discovered that the communist-dominated Antifa had managed something of an armed uprising and had taken over local power. The Americans and their British allies were not pleased. They sought instead to rely on social democrats or middle class individuals untainted by association with National Socialism, though often, it seems, they allowed Nazis to remain in office. This led to some
serious conflicts with workers and their representatives. The Halberstadt Antifa wrote to the American commander:

The Popular Front [the antifascist committee of Halberstadt] has received many complaints from the population concerning the fact that the entire administrative apparatus remains occupied by Nazi officials.\textsuperscript{220}

Only under this kind of pressure did the Americans agree to restructure the personnel of the local administration.

In the Ruhr, communists and others prevented the Nazis from blowing up a number of mines, and took charge of production as employers and managers either fled or otherwise vacated their positions.\textsuperscript{221} In numerous Ruhr cities, communists moved into the city administrations and took over leading positions in the departments of transport, food, housing, social welfare, and personnel.\textsuperscript{222} Many of these positions were formalized in parity agreements or through the decisions of the Antifas. Communists also led the purge of local administrations. Already in the first weeks of April, communists in the Ruhr organized works council elections in the mines, and convened a committee to begin reorganizing the miners’ union. At a number of mines workers struck to force the firing of active Nazis who had managed to hold on to positions as foremen or managers.\textsuperscript{223}

Popular and communist activism in the localities entailed far more than securing the infrastructures and the means of existence for populations, as important as these activities were. Through their actions workers lay claim to a decisive voice in the functioning of the
factories and mines and the local polities. Rarely articulated in a clear programmatic or theoretical manner, these actions nonetheless challenged the distanced, bureaucratic models of representation that prevailed in the Weimar Republic, and would come to prevail in both the GDR and the FRG.

The involvement of communists in these activities linked the party to the daily concerns of workers and led to growing support for the KPD and then the SED. In the autumn of 1945, the KPD scored decisive victories in elections for works councils in the Ruhr, and again at the end of 1946, when communists won 666 out of 1716 seats, somewhat over 38 percent. Still desperate conditions in the first half of 1947 led to waves of strikes and demonstrations, which provided the KPD with a fruitful arena of activity. Rising discontent with the political, economic, and social conditions also led to increased support for the KPD at the polls. In April 1947 Landtag elections were held in the British zone, and the KPD won 14.0 percent of the vote, a significant increase from the 6.7 percent that it had garnered in September 1946. And party membership increased. In an August 1945 census taken in the Soviet Occupation Zone, every party district showed a substantial increase in members over its 1933 level. Pieck remarked on 1 August 1945 that half of the party in the SBZ was composed of new members. Significantly, the KPD won increasing support in agrarian regions as well as the old party centers of the province and state of Saxony. Günter Benser is not wrong when he argues about the immediate postwar period: "The KPD had successfully begun to develop a communist mass party."

The KPD/SED's active involvement in the reconstruction, its new political language, and its increasing support led to a growing mood of optimism, a sense that the party and the
society were moving forward together. The quiet confidence exuded in internal local and regional party reports is a far cry from the litany of complaints expressed in comparable reports of the Weimar period. This mood seems to have transcended political differences within the KPD/SED. Communists in the workplace or in the administrative structures could be more or less intransigent in their activities. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that the language of gradualism helped to broaden the appeal of German communism.

Moreover, the broader base of support and involvement in a variety of institutions of public life in postwar Germany bore at least the potential of a significant, longterm transformation in the nature of German communism. The many-webbed connections to society and to the institutions of working-class life—the workplace, local political structures, the sphere of consumption—if maintained in a multi-party system might have served to entrench the gradualist orientation, as happened, for example, with the French and Italian communist parties, whatever their revolutionary rhetoric. Just as the politics of the streets in the Weimar Republic had its own logic, which accentuated masculinized, confrontationist politics, so the logic of implantation in the multiple spaces of political and social life after World War II might have accentuated the gradualist orientation. It is possible to envision a KPD/SED acting as a militant defender of working-class and more generally popular interests within the confines of a democratic-capitalist system, as a "tributary party" that through its ability to mobilize support in strikes, demonstrations, and elections extracts concessions from economic and political elites. Indeed, the more stalinist-minded leaders of the KPD/SED were well aware of this possibility. They were saved from its dangers by the intervention of
a different logic, that of the Cold War, which served to entrench the politics of intransigence and a state socialist system that would prove relatively impervious to reform. The formation of the Socialist Unity Party as a "party of a new type" and the foundation of the German Democratic Republic signified not just "stalinization," but the recreation of the intransigent communist politics of the Weimar Republic in the altered circumstances of the post-World War II world.
3. Towards the German Democratic Republic

In the course of the period of reconstruction the KPD/SED and the Soviet Union step by step abandoned the gradualist orientation for the politics of intransigence and the incorporation of the Soviet Occupation Zone into the emergent Soviet bloc, a process fulfilled with the establishment of the German Democratic Republic on.... The steps along the road are clear enough and require here only brief summary. Intrinsic to this process was the adoption of one language—the language of intransigence—and the significant narrowing of the spaces of popular activism and its replacement, in the Soviet Occupation Zone, by specifically party activity and, in the western zones, by the decline of communism into near insignificance. Significantly, this process was not linear in nature and not pre-determined. At least until 1948 the politics of intransigence and of gradualism coexisted.

In the late autumn of 1945, the Soviets and the KPD leadership rather suddenly, and in opposition to their earlier position, launched the effort to unify the SPD and KPD. The reasons for the reversal seem clear. Leading members of the SPD began to express severe reservations about unity or even collaboration with the KPD, rejecting even proposals for joint celebrations (as on the anniversary of the 1918 Revolution). Communist fears of an autonomous, independent, and popular SPD rose, especially in light of the major electoral defeats suffered by the Austrian and Hungarian communist parties in November 1945. Meetings began in the early winter of 1945 between the SPD and the KPD in the Soviet Zone. The SMAD exerted strong pressure on the SPD, but there also existed powerful sentiment for fusion, especially in the workplace.

Ultimately, however, the character of unification undermined the democratization process in the SBZ, and marked a major step along the road to the formation of two German states. The forced nature of unification, and the strong resistance to it on the part of many
social democrats, undermined lingering sentiments for labor unity in the west, and strengthened the strongly anti-communist hand of the western SPD leader, Kurt Schumacher. Moreover, it led to an alteration in British policy, because the British now viewed communist activity in their zone as a threat and therefore drew closer to the United States. Great difficulties arose for communists as social democrats and Christians in the west intensified their efforts to curb communist influence in the works councils and the unions.235

Following unification, the acceleration of undemocratic practices in the SBZ only enhanced suspicions in the west. The leadership of the SED sought to move rapidly towards the formation of a separate socialist state, while the Soviets, with larger strategic and international interests, sought to maintain a certain openness in relation to the German question in the hopes of establishing a unified, neutralist Germany. The acceleration of the Cold War, however, pushed the Soviets closer to the claims of German communists for their own state, even in a truncated territory. The critical western moves towards the Cold War--the Marshall Plan; the Truman Doctrine; the removal of communists from the governments of France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Luxemburg, Norway, and Iceland; the failure of the London foreign ministers' conference in December 1947--encouraged the Soviet side to tighten its hold on central and eastern Europe, including its occupation zone in Germany.

Hence, in June 1947, the four SED leaders, Pieck, Grotewohl, Fechner, and Ulbricht were called to Moscow for negotiations with Stalin, Molotov, Beria, Zhdanov, and Suslov. Stalin informed the SED leaders that the efforts at German unity had run aground, and that it was now the task of the SED to eliminate the reactionary forces in the economy and administration of the SBZ.236 This was soon followed by the foundation, in September 1947, of the Cominform and by Zhdanov's famed remarks about "two camps," which marked the end of the allied coalition. From that point, events rapidly accelerated. The
Czech coup came in February 1948. The Allied Control Council collapsed the next month. The Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission in the SBZ assumed greater powers, and the U.S. instituted currency reform in the western zones. In April 1948 the Soviets blocked access to Berlin, and in June the American airlift began. In conjunction with these developments, all the worst characteristics of Stalinism came to the fore in the SBZ and elsewhere in central and eastern Europe—-the suppression of other political groups, party purges, expanded secret police powers, establishment of planned economies, declarations of military support for the Soviet Union, enhanced powers of Soviet advisors throughout central and eastern Europe. As party power expanded in the SBZ, the spaces of independent popular activism narrowed. Walter Ulbricht as early as the July 1945 had condemned the Antifas, and they were rapidly eliminated or transformed into regular administrative bodies. As Franz Dahlem put it at the beginning of 1946:

> The antifascist committees had their rationale so long as no parties existed.
> The moment that the parties were reestablished, one had to find the means to lead the movement through the common resolve of the antifascist parties.\(^{237}\)

By the mid-summer of 1945, communists in the SBZ were already well ensconced in administrative posts at the local, regional, and provincial level.\(^{238}\) They exercised power over land reform, schools, and purges of ex-Nazis. Alongside the local administrations, the Soviets very quickly reestablished administrative structures at higher levels. Before the Potsdam Conference, they established state (Land) administrations for Mecklenburg, Saxony,
and Thuringia, and provincial administrations for Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt. During
the Potsdam Conference the SMAD also created eleven (fifteen in 1947) German central
administrations as support mechanisms for Soviet power and as the bases of the ministries of
a future German central government. While at the local, provincial, and state levels
non-communists occupied the leading positions—often as window dressing—in the central
administrations KPD representatives had a relatively stronger presence. 239

Ironically, the initial communist evaluation of the postwar situation as non-
revolutionary provided communists in the SBZ and elsewhere with the institutional bases
from which they would then carry out the full seizure of power in 1948 and 1949. In other
words, at the end of the war communists did not seek to establish institutions of dual power,
such as the workers and soldiers councils and workers militias, on the model of the Russian
Revolutions of 1917. Instead, communists implanted themselves within the existing or
reconstructed institutions of the state. Not the party, but the bureaucratic levers of power
were most important. In central and eastern Europe, this strategy provided communists with
influential positions that could then serve as the nucleii of the full assumption of power once
Soviet calculations had changed. As Christoph Kleßmann points out, the Soviets’ policy
amounted to reliance on the traditional state administrative structure, marking strong lines of
continuity with the German past. As a consequence, alternative, popular democratic
conceptions, notably the various forms of peoples’ committees, were either abandoned or
assimilated into the traditional structure.

Similarly, in the economic sphere the Soviet model of top-down administration and
central planning soon prevailed over the more democratic and chaotic models of workers’
control or co-determination. A rather drawn-out struggle took place in the SBZ against the works councils, one that paralleled developments in the west but that had deeper irony, perhaps, in the east. The campaign created grave difficulties for rank and file communists in the factories and mines, who found themselves forced to defend the suppression of working-class power by a self-proclaimed workers’ party. The struggle culminated with SMAD Order Number 234 issued in October 1947, which drastically curtailed the scope of the works councils. At the same time, more stringent factory codes and new wage incentive schemes were introduced, which dramatically increased the pressure on workers. The new measures included the extensive application of piecework systems of pay, sharp wage differentials and particular advantages for people in technical and intellectual occupations, and various prizes and awards for highly productive workers. The most grotesque aspect of the new labor regime involved the so-called "Activist Campaign," modelled on the Soviet Stakhanovite program. Its model hero was a Saxon miner named Adolf Hennecke, who supposedly surpassed his plan output by 387 percent. Slogans honoring his achievement blanketed the SBZ, but even Hennecke was soon bested by workers who claimed to have outdone their norms by 1025 percent.

The ever tightening grip of the party signified a decisive change also in the language of communist politics. At the time of the unification of the SPD and KPD in the spring of 1946, the language of gradualism still prevailed. KPD leaders defined the unified party as something sui generis, a new party that would be neither the KPD nor the SPD of old. Ackermann at the last KPD congress, which approved unification with the SPD, defined the SED as an independent party
because it will be completely free to make its own decisions. It will adapt the basic teachings of Marxism to specific German relations and to the specific German path of development.\textsuperscript{242}

Pieck declared:

We communists have often applied the experiences of the October Revolution to Germany in a schematic manner. In this way we ignored to a significant extent the national particularities of Germany and of the German labor movement.\textsuperscript{243}

SPD and then SED leader Otto Grotewohl declared that the new society led by the SED would result in the "the unfettering of the human personality."\textsuperscript{244}

Yet in August 1948, the slogan of a "German road to socialism" was condemned as false and as hostile to the party (\textit{parteifeindlich}), a sure sign of the triumph of the politics of intransigence. Ackermann had to do penance and was demoted, never again to reach the heights of power. In \textit{Neues Deutschland} he published an article, "Concerning the single possible road to socialism," which labelled the theory of the German road false and dangerous. In contrast, he now elevated the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to the model for all Marxist-Leninist parties, a position reiterated in all sorts of KPD (of the western zones) and SED documents around this time. At the Sixth Meeting of the KPD Executive (of the western zones), which met in October 1948, the party declared that "there
is only one road to socialism, namely that of Marxism-Leninism, and it has been blazed by the CPSU... The attitude towards the Soviet Union is the test for every socialist. In place of the German road, the SED adopted the slogan, "To learn from the Soviet Union means to learn victory." Concurrently, democratic centralism was reaffirmed as an abiding principle of the party. In the autumn of 1948, the principle of parity between SPD and KPD members in the leading organs of the SED, adopted at the party’s founding, was abandoned, soon to be followed by a purge of the SED that disproportionately, but not exclusively, affected former SPD members. And to seal one phase of postwar history and initiate the new, the SED also abandoned discussion of the "democracy of a new type." In a very significant rhetorical shift, the SED adopted the phrase "party of a new type," a reversion to "pure" Leninist terminology, at its First Conference in January 1949.
Epilogue: State and Society in the German Democratic Republic

The foundation of the German Democratic Republic marked the culmination of a drawn-out process of political definition. It was fully inscribed neither in Soviet policy from the outset nor in German communist practices. The Soviets probably would have been content with a neutralist, independent Germany, and they certainly would have been able to contain those German communists who were determined to establish a separate socialist state. The logic of the Cold War, however, led the Soviets to affirm the position advocated by Pieck, Ulbricht, and other intransigent types in the KPD/SED leadership. American policy abetted these developments. Without revisiting the entire debate on the origins of the Cold War, suffice it to say that American policymakers, through their determination to construct a world order centered on the U.S. and a U.S.-dependent western Europe, contributed to the narrowing of political possibilities in the SBZ (and in eastern Europe in general).

In opting for the foundation of the GDR and a state socialist system, the Soviets and their German allies abandoned the politics of gradualism and inscribed as the lodestar of communism the intransigent politics that had characterized the KPD in the Weimar Republic and that served as the solvent of German-Soviet collaboration. Without question, Soviet power functioned as the ultimate arbiter in East Germany, especially in the early years. Certainly, the GDR’s location on the front-line of the Cold War and its constant competition with West Germany--over human resources as well as over the more ethereal but no less significant claims to history and nationhood--contributed greatly to the intransigence of the SED and to the system’s relative imperviousness to reform.

But the policies of the SED-state had historical roots that reached far back to the
Weimar Republic and even beyond to the formation of the labor movement and to the specific contours of Germany’s political and social economy in the modern era. The East German state took to Stalinism with alacrity, in some instances going further than its Soviet mentor. Its tendency gründlicher zu sein [to be more Catholic than the pope, in colloquial English], as Germans are wont to say about the character of the GDR (and many other matters as well), is not known to be a genetically inherited trait; it has to be explained historically. The significant issues, for Germany as well as for the other areas of Soviet-dominated Europe, involve delineating how Soviet power interacted with the individual parties and with the social and historical realities that the Soviets found in central and eastern Europe. Few, if any, forms of power are simply imposed out of whole cloth. When scholars like Hermann Weber explain the historical development of the GDR as resulting from the particulars of the dual-state competition and the "imposition of forms of rulership and society, namely Stalinism, that arose out of the backwardness of Russia," they are not wrong. But they fail utterly to account for the rootedness of German communism in its own social-historical setting; they move German communism—as party, movement, and state—out of the course of twentieth-century German-history, only to find its way back—the prodigal son returning—in 1989/90.

For the SED, the construction of state socialism involved not only the absorption of the language and practices of "high Stalinism," but also a reversion to the strategy and culture of communist politics in the Weimar era. Absolutely essential to the SED’s politics after 1947 was the clear and conscious reassertion of the legacy of the KPD. This was, to be sure, a carefully constructed reassertion—the "invention of tradition." Luxemburg’s
democratic sensibilities were silenced or condemned. Dissident communists were written out of historical memory, their living embodiments, from Anton Ackermann to Robert Havemann, purged from leading positions. But the intransigent policies of the SED state resonated with the lived experience of many German communists who had come of age in the Weimar Republic, and who then helped recreate the culture of the KPD in the altered circumstances of the post-World War II world. The politics of the SED-state endured for so long—without the alterations and reforms and challenges experienced in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and even Rumania—precisely because they were not merely imposed from outside after World War II, but could draw upon the history of the party as a mass movement in the Weimar Republic. Moreover, many features of German communism reprised essential elements not just of the communist past. The central role accorded the state in the construction of society is central to the entire course of German history in the modern era, and is a position that the KPD/SED shared with many other German political movements.247

Hence, in the GDR the party brought to fruition the KPD’s elevation of central state power as the agent of socialist construction. The remaining political parties were transformed into subservient “Blockparteien.” The secret police apparatus became highly developed, the extent of its reach only evident since 1989. The state, of course, retained command of the economy until the bitter end. Indeed, the construction of a centralized state over society was far more thorough in the GDR than elsewhere in central and eastern Europe. The Polish leadership resigned itself to private agriculture. Hungary after 1956 slowly introduced market incentives and a range of private-property measures.
Czechoslovakia, of course, experienced its own reform process generated from within the party. The GDR experienced none of these deviations from the Soviet model. It remained firm in its commitments to the pre-Gorbachev Soviet Union and to centralist direction of the economy and polity. In fact, the final nationalizations were carried out in the mid-1970s, a feat of "real existing socialism" that had, by that point, presumably abolished all need for private property.

The language used in the "construction of socialism" recalled the discursive formation of the KPD in the Weimar Republic, with its evocations of the battlefield and the military dimension of the class struggle. "Storm the fortress of science" proclaimed the FDJ at its 1950 conference, signalling changes in higher education policies.248 "For us art and literature are weapons for socialism," trumpeted Kurt Hager, Sekretär für Wissenschaft, Hochschulen und Volksbildung, in 1957.249 When the party talked about the U.S. and its intentions to "enslave" German youth, or the plans of the American and English monopoly capitalists to enslave Germany,250 it revived the language with which communists discussed the German bourgeoisie and the western imperialist powers in the 1920s. Similarly, the calls for "proletarian vigilance" or "class vigilance," the attacks on the SPD and Schumacher in particular as a spy and saboteur251—all of that differed in degree perhaps but not in kind from the attacks Rosa Luxemburg levelled against the SPD in 1918/19 and her calls for the proletariat to act "with all the brutality necessary" against the class enemy.

Even on gender issues the social policies of the GDR harkened back, if in ironic form, to the KPD of the Weimar period. Economic necessity led the SED to create a society with the highest formal female labor participation rate in the world. By the 1970s, this was
accompanied by a well-developed system of social support, including state-run daycare centers, generous maternity leaves, and pronatalist policies that offered larger allowances to families with a greater number of children. The social benefits were considerable; they also demonstrated the long-standing German propensity to look to the central state for social solutions, whether it be the welfare states of Weimar or the GDR. These social programs echoed the claims upon the state raised by the KPD (and other parties) in the Weimar period. Still more significantly, the SED rationalized high labor participation rates by invoking the standard Marxian and Marxist-Leninist arguments that women's emancipation would proceed in tandem with their participation in the productive sphere. As such, women's paid employment in the GDR was seen as a sign of progress towards socialism--"socialism in the colors of the GDR," as the slogan went beginning in the 1970s--despite the labor market segmentation that consigned women to lower-paid, less responsible positions.252

In cultivating its past, in honoring the tradition of the KPD of the Weimar Republic, the SED drastically limited its own ability to undertake new departures. It created its own iron cage built out of the discursive formation and political strategy and culture of communism in the Weimar era. Significantly, the SED leadership remained the most intact of any in Soviet-dominated Europe and had the longest cohesive historical experience, one that stretched back to the Comintern and the KPD of the 1920s and early 1930s. While other Soviet bloc states undertook serious efforts to modify the model of strict central direction of the polity and economy, the GDR's history was marked by fitful efforts at reform and quick retrenchments.253 The party proved incapable of innovations on the order of the Czech, Hungarian, and even Rumanian parties precisely because its efforts to construct legitimacy
were built upon a commitment to state domination, the leading role of the party, and a
discursive formation centered on the language of militant, intransigent struggle—all essential
features of the KPD of the Weimar Republic.

Hence, the origins of regime breakdown in East Germany lay deep in the past, a
factor often ignored in recent commentary on the revolutionary transformations in central and
eastern Europe. Even historians observing the breaching of the Berlin Wall and the rapid
moves toward unification have limited their analyses to reflections on such factors as the
structural economic crisis that—as is now clear—developed in the GDR since the late 1970s,
the stagnation of the SED leadership, the emergence of civil society and citizens’ politics, the
activities of the West German parties and state, and the impact of Gorbachev's domestic and
international reforms. It would be pointless to dispute the importance of these more or less
immediate factors in the rapid breakdown of the GDR, or to question the realities of Soviet
domination. Yet even the best of recent work has suffered from a narrowly truncated
historical vision and an overly materialistic explanation for the collapse.254 The issues
relating to the collapse of communism in Germany are far deeper and more complex than the
fact that the GDR (and the other socialist economies) remained wedded to an economic
system of central planning and "heavy metal" (in Charles Maier’s phrase) that could no
longer manage increasingly sophisticated and interconnected economies or satisfy consumer
wants.

Ultimately, the collapse of the GDR stemmed from the long-standing popular hostility
to the signature policies of the regime—strict central direction of the polity and economy and
sharp demarcation from the west. The politics that drove these policies were forged in the political and social history of both the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union and in the Luxemburgist-Leninist ideological matrix. In the German Democratic Republic, however, politics lost their grounding in the real life circumstances of society. Instead of a politics shaped and limited by societal influences, politics in the GDR became largely the means of making, or trying to make, society--politics became unhinged from society. The politics of the SED-state were, to a substantial degree, the ossified remains of the KPD's strategy and culture, the politics forged in the 1920s and early 1930s, recreated in the late 1940s, and then preserved in time.

The breaching of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent political developments closed the books on many accounts: the GDR citizenry's claims against the regime under which it lived; some of the territorial divisions that resulted from World War II; the lingering, if only titular, claims of the four powers over German sovereignty. But these events also closed the books on the last, direct political legacy of the Weimar Republic--the formation of a mass-based communist party committed to continual confrontation with the institutions of bourgeois society and to a political project at whose core lay the construction of a central state with massive powers of direction.
Footnotes


3. Flechtheims's Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik, for example, hardly mentions anything about Luxemburg after her death. Hermann Weber's brief essay, "Die SED und Rosa Luxemburg," in Weber, Aufbau und Fall einer Diktatur: Kritische Beiträge zur Geschichte der DDR (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1991), pp. 154-57, demonstrates the ambiguities in the SED's appropriation of Luxemburg. But Weber sees only the democratic aspects of her politics, not the revolutionary elements that facilitated her incorporation into the official ideology of the KPD/SED.


5. The Russian Revolution, pp. 71-72, 75.

6. The Russian Revolution, p. 69 and "Zur russischen Revolution," GW:4, p. 359. This crucial passage was placed in a footnote in the GDR edition of Luxemburg's complete works, along with the comment that it was written in the margins without a mark indicating its placement in the text. The passage was widely known, however, so GDR citizens must have read footnotes. They might also have encountered the passage in Fred Oelßner's attack, Rosa Luxemburg: Eine kritische

In the manuscript, the paragraph with the phrase "Freiheit ist immer Freiheit der Andersdenkenden" is in the margins, but does have an insertion mark at the end. However, there is no corresponding mark in the text, a practice Luxemburg followed with other marginal comments that she meant to be included in the body of the text. My guess is that Luxemburg simply forgot to place the mark in the text. I looked at photocopies of the original in the Luxemburg papers, Institut für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Zentrales Parteiaerichv NL 2/15, "Zur russischen Revolution," Bl. 100. A photo of the important page is included in Rosa Luxemburg und die Freiheit der Andersdenkenden: Extraausgabe des unvollendeten Manuskripts "Zur russischen Revolution" und anderer Quellen zur Polemik mit Lenin, ed. Annelies Laschitza (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990), p. 152.


8. To put her views in other (anachronistic) words, "democracy is in the streets."

9. Her contributions to the mass strike debate prior to World War I are perhaps the best-known example of her enthralment with popular activism. In English, see "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions," in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, ed. Mary-Alice Waters (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), pp. 153-218 and esp. pp. 181-82. But note also that in her Gesammelte Werke, vols. 2-4, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972-74) and in Rote Fahne, the KPD daily, under her editorship, the emphasis is on strategy and tactics and contemporary events rather than extended theoretical analyses.


12. Hence, Hermann Duncker: "For me electoral participation is a tactical, issue, not one of principle." Gründungsparteitag, p. 107.

13. Levi in Gründungsparteitag, pp. 89-90. Levi went on: "Comrades, about all this [the character of the Constitutional Assembly] we are completely clear. There is not the slightest difference between you and us." (90) And in his concluding remarks, he stated: "In terms of participation in the election we see nothing else than the liveliest possibility to struggle for the collapse of the Constitutional Assembly." (134)


15. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" RF 14 December 1918, GW:4, pp. 440-49, and Gründungsparteitag, pp. 197-98. See also the speech by Lange at the founding congress introducing the discussion on the economic aspects of the program, in Gründungsparteitag, pp. 138-49 and especially pp. 147-48.

16. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" GW:4, pp. 442.

17. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" point II:5, in GW:4, p. 446.

18. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" point II:3, GW:4, p. 446.


30. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" GW:4, p. 443.

31. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" GW:4, p. 443. See also her article, "Ein gewagtes Spiel," RF 24 November 1918, GW:4, pp. 411-14.

32. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" GW:4, pp. 443-44.

33. Liebknecht gave the game away at the founding congress of the KPD during the debate on the use of terror. Liebknecht noted that while Luxemburg’s text blankly rejected the use of terror, it also immediately readmitted its possibility:

> It says in the program: The proletariat as such, when things go its way, does not want terror, does not need terror. But it also says that we have to expect that the ruling classes will defend their positions of power tooth and nail, and that it is the task of the proletariat to smite with all recklessness, with iron fist, this resistance of the ruling classes and all counterrevolutionary efforts. (Right! Bravo!)
> With that is expressed the point that we are not thinking of making a lemonade revolution,
> (Very good!)
> but that we are determined to raise the iron fist and to crush whoever resists the social revolution of the proletariat.
> (Lively applause.)

See Gründungsparteitag, p. 222. Other delegates, like Paul Fröhlich, were less perceptive than Liebknecht and criticized what they saw as Luxemburg’s blank rejection of terror. See Gründungsparteitag, pp. 202-04, as well as other contributions to the debate on pp. 207-08 and 216-17.

34. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" GW:4, pp. 444-45.

35. "Was will der Spartakusbund?" GW:4, p. 449.


37. Gründungsparteitag: Luxemburg:

Our next task is to instruct the masses, in order to fulfill these tasks [of the revolution]...I say to you that it is thanks to the unripeness of the masses, which until now has not understood the importance of bringing the council system to victory, that the counterrevolution has succeeded in constructing the Constitutional Assembly as a bulwark against us.(101)

Liebknecht:

...presently the great majority of the proletariat is not yet thoroughly educated in a revolutionary way. We are then compelled to use all means to win over and to
enlighten the masses. (126)


41. See Weber's introduction to *Gründungsparteitag* and the conclusion to *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus*, in which he states, in overly neat and simplistic fashion: "From the radical marxian-socialist party founded by Rosa Luxemburg developed the stalinist bureaucratic party [Apparatpartei], which oriented itself around the interests of Moscow." (vol. 1., pp. 350-51.)


46. "Der 15. Januar," RF 15 January 1929, p. 2. The article was followed by tributes to Luxemburg and Liebnecht from communist parties around the world, and with reports on the demonstration in Berlin.


48. As in Josef Lenz, "Das Programm des Spartakusbundes":

From social democracy to the Spartacist Group, that was a decisive step forwards. From the Spartacist Group to the Bolshevik mass party, that is an even greater, an even more significant step...We remain true to the legacy of our great leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, whose entire life was devoted to unceasing struggle, relentless self-criticism, the surmounting of all illusions, and restless pressure forwards, when we help to lead the cause of the working class, for which they sacrificed their lives, to victory. But we can only do this when we follow Lenin’s path, the way of the Communist International. (RF 30 December 1928, p. 4)


49. Weber only sees one side, the condemnations of Luxemburg, not how her legacy was mobilized effectively by the party: "...Luxemburgism came to signify a ‘deviation’, about which all discussion was forbidden...After the exclusion of Ruth Fischer-Maslow, the attempt to do justice to Rosa Luxemburg’s theories ran aground, ‘Luxemburgism’ remained...a ‘dangerous deviation.’" (Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus, vol. 1, p. 97)


54. RF 13 January 1929. The KPD used the occasion to launch yet another attack on social democracy.

55. RF 13 January 1929 (by Edwin Hoernle).
56. RF 15 January 1933.

57. RF 15 January 1930. Here again readers were warned of Luxemburg’s "mistakes" on the issue of party organization and nationalism (in "The Mass Strike" and the "Junius" brochures respectively), and the advances made through Lenin’s ideas. Communists were advised to read "Junius" in conjunction with Lenin’s critique in "Gegen den Strom."

58. RF 15 January 1933.


60. Thälmann at a meeting of the Central Committee in February 1932, quoted in, "In ihrem Namen...," RF 15 January 1933, p. 2. Thälmann did go on, however, to reiterate the criticisms of Luxemburg:

    But does this mean weakening the necessary clarification in our party in relation to the mistakes of Rosa Luxemburg?...Today, when the Comintern exits, when the proletarian dictatorship of socialism is being realized in the Soviet Union, every effort to revive Luxemburgism or any aspect of Luxemburgism would in no way serve as a bridge to Marxism-Leninism, but to social fascism, to the ideology of the bourgeoisie.


63. Oelßner, Rosa Luxemburg, pp. 6-7.


65. Pieck, "Das revolutionäre Erbe Rosa Luxemburgs."

66. Pieck, "Das revolutionäre Erbe Rosa Luxemburgs." Thälmann’s actual words, as cited above, were: "Rosa Luxemburg und die anderen gehören zu uns..."("In ihrem Namen...," RF 15 January 1933, p. 2)

67. Agitprop Abteilung des ZK der KPD, "Lenin, Liebknecht, Luxemburg: Rede-Dispositionen für LLL-Feiern und -Kundgebungen 1933," Bundesarchiv Kobenz R45 IV/39, Bl. 196ff., here Bl. 5 of
pamphlet.


71. Party reports from Zeitz, however, called the festivals "Luxemburg-Lenin-Feiern." Probably, this was a mistake on the part of the reporter. In any case, the festival attracted around 800 individuals. "Tätigkeitbericht der Kommunistischen Partei, Kreisleitung Zeitz, für den Monat Februar 1946," Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt der PDS, Landesparteiarchiv Halle 1/2/3/3a Bl. 176.


73. "In ihrem Geiste vorwärts! Auf nach Friedrichsfelde!" RF 15 January 1933.

74. This in itself is not a contentious point, but few writers on German or European communism have made the social forces and political context explicit, critical, and formative of communism in their studies. Some of the recent work on the social history of the Russian Revolution and on the Soviet period are important pathbreakers here, such as Lewis Siegelbaum, Soviet State and Society between Revolutions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg, and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); and Moshe Lewin, The Making of the Soviet System: as well as the work of Eve Rosenhaft on the KPD: Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929-1933 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

75. Note, for example, the comments of Bernhard Koenen:

In relation to the toleration of people who in general were not sympathetic to the labor movement because they do not agree with its political or economic direction: there have often been arguments with them. I must say, however, that the behavior of the
work force in this question has not been any different from the way we organized workers acted before the war. We have claimed the right, in a workplace where the majority of the workers are organized, to exercise a certain pressure on the others to bring them into our organization. We viewed them as a hindrance to the progress of our movement. In today's conditions it is necessary that a clean break be made between those who want to organize themselves and those who do not. I can say that this conflict [Auseinandersetzung] has never been conducted to the extent that a worker became unemployed.

(Prussian Landtag investigative committee of 1921 March Action, sitting of 16 September 1921, Zentrale Staatsarchiv (hereafter ZStA) Merseburg, Rep. 169 DIX D3 Bd. 4 Beiheft 2, Bl. 650.)

76. For some examples, Polizeipräsident Essen to Regierungspräsident Düsseldorf, 17 October 1919, Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf 15976.

77. Testimony of Leuna-Werke Director Dr. Oster to Prussian Landtag investigative committee of 1921 March Action, sitting of 15 September 1921, ZStA Merseburg, Rep. 169 DIX D3 Bd. 4 Beiheft 2, Bl. 505.

78. See Essen police reports in Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf 16573 and 17076, and for one other typical example, Landrat Delitzsch to Oberpräsident Provinz Sachsen, 10 October 1923, Staatsarchiv Magdeburg C 20 Ib 4648/2, Bl. 23.


81. I am drawing here in particular on yearly reports from the archive of the BASF, after 1925 I.G. Farben, Leuna-Werke, especially reports of the firms Abteilung für Arbeiterangelegenheiten, Betriebsarchiv der Leuna-Werke 1321ff.

82. A women's auxiliary existed for a brief time.


84. See the Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (hereafter AIZ) 9 May 1928.

85. These examples are drawn from various sources, including: "Lagebericht," 4-10 December 1920, Staatsarchiv (hereafter StA) Magdeburg C20 Ib 4648/51, Bl. 3; IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/55, Bl. 11; report of BL Halle-Merseburg, IGA, ZPA 3/11/13, Bl. 28-29; BL KPD Ruhrgebiet, "Gewerkschaftlicher Monatsbericht, für die Monate Februar und März," (König) 27 April 1923, IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/55, Bl. 17-21; Ruhr-Echo (hereafter RE) 23-25 July 1923;
86. In the Mansfelder Seekreis in June 1921, for example, the party won her 6,719 votes compared to 3,334 for the USPD, 4,535 for the SPD, 1,007 for the Zentrum, and 9,560 for the bürgerliche Parteien. In the Kreistag, 7 communists sat with 3 Independents, 5 Social Democrats, and 11 bürgerliche representatives. "Aus dem Bericht vom 16. Juni 1921 des Bezirkes Halle-Merseburg, IGA, ZPA 3/11/13, Bl. 21.

87. "Politischer Bericht Bezirk Ruhrgebiet," 4 March [1924], IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/11, Bl. 33. Though the figure certainly receded in the course of the year. According to another party report, the demand for skilled labor forced firms to re-hire communist workers, but some of these had found alternative sources of income, such as small shopkeepers and the like, and refused to resume their jobs—much to the chagrin of the party with its emphasis on organizing in the factories and mines. At least some party leaders called for disciplinary measures against members who refused to resume their proletarian jobs. See "Bericht über Besprechung mit Genossen aus wichtigen Grossbetrieben des Ruhrgebietes," (Lothar) [undated, presumably 1924], IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/20, Bl. 32.

88. "Bericht über den Bezirk Ruhrgebiet," [undated, presumably late 1925 or early 1926], IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/12, Bl. 95.

89. BL Ruhrgebiet to Zentralkomitee, 5 January 1926, IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/11, Bl. 131-39, quote Bl. 131.


92. "Entwicklung der Mitgliederbewegung im Ruhrgebiet," [undated, received at the Comintern 8 January 1931] (Pfeiffer), IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/14, Bl. 94. The balance was composed of the unemployed, house wives, members of the middle class, etc.

93. "Entwicklung der Mitgliederbewegung im Ruhrgebiet," [undated, received at the Comintern 8 January 1931] (Pfeiffer), IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/14, Bl. 94.


96. UBL Essen KPD to all cell leaders of the Blocks- und Arbeitsgebiete, 30 September 1924, HStAD 16934, Bl. 121.


the rise of right-wing influence within the workplace.


114. Abschrift, BL Gewerkschaft Ruhrgebiet to the Zentrale, Abt. Gewerkschaften (Hermann), 4 September 1924, IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/55, Bl. 36-38, here Bl. 37.


116. "Bericht vom Bezirk Ruhrgebiet," (Kaasch), 4 Oktober 1924, IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/12, Bl. 43-53, here Bl. 49.


121. BL KPD Ruhrgebiet, "Gewerkschaftlicher Monatsbericht für die Monate Februar und März," (König), IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/55, Bl. 17-21, here Bl. 19.

122. Abschrift, BL Gewerkschaft Ruhrgebiet to the Zentrale, Abt. Gewerkschaften (Hermann), 4 September 1924, IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/55, Bl. 36-38.

123. Abschrift, BL Gewerkschaft Ruhrgebiet to the Zentrale, Abt. Gewerkschaften (Hermann), 4 September 1924, IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/55, Bl. 36-38.

124. Arbeitgeberverband der chemischen- und Sprengstoff-Industrie, Rundschreiben G.Nr. 8, 2 October 1924, HIA, NSDAP 41/807.

125. For the following, see "Bericht über das Verhältnis der Partei und Union im Ruhrgebiet," 6 March 1924, IGA, ZPA 3/18-19/12, Bl. 13-18.


130. Abschrift, Polizeiverwaltung Delitzsch to Landrat Delitzsch, 17 August 1923, StA Magdeburg C20 Ib 4648/2, Bl. 12.


139. "Bericht der Bezirks-Gewerkschaftsabteilung [Halle-Merseburg]," [undated, presumably 1930 or 1931], IGA, ZPA I 3/11/52, Bl. 146.

140. The following is drawn from "Wie denkt sich die K.P.D. die Eroberung der Macht im Staat," HIA, NSDAP 41/807, Bl. 7-8 (of report).

141. The discussion that follows is drawn from a long, internal party report, presumably from the BL Halle-Merseburg to the ZK, "Bericht über den Arbeitertag," IGA, ZPA I 3/11/13, Bl. 186-200, and from the secondary account in Karl-Heinz Leidigkeit and Jürgen Hermann, Auf leninistischem Kurs! Geschichte der KPD-Bezirksorganisation Halle-Merseburg bis 1933, ed. BL Halle der SED (Halle: Druckhaus "Freiheit", 1979), pp. 201-04.

142. The fascist demonstration was called in conjunction with the dedication of a monument to Moltke, which had on 1 January been destroyed.

143. [BL Halle Merseburg to the Central Committee], "Bericht über den Arbeitertag," IGA, ZPA I 3/11/13, Bl. 187.

144. Ibid., Bl. 188.
142

145. Ibid., Bl. 189.
146. Ibid., Bl. 189.
147. Ibid., Bl. 191.
148. Ibid., Bl. 192.
149. Ibid., Bl. 193.
150. Ibid., Bl. 194.
151. Ibid., Bl. 195.
152. Ibid., Bl. 196.

153. "It took a bloody struggle against the reactionaries by a segment of the communists to arouse the workers." Ibid., p. 196.

154. Ibid., Bl. 196.
155. Ibid., Bl. 197.
156. Ibid., Bl. 198.


160. See Kurt G.P. Schuster, Der Rote Frontkämpferbund 1924-1929: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Organisationsstruktur eines politischen Kampfbundes (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1975). The memoirs of Erich Wollenberg (typescript, Hoover Institution Archives), who was active in various revolutionary efforts and in the KPD’s clandestine military apparatus, is quite illuminating on the military activities and ethos of party militants in the 1920s.

161. "Dem Feind den Daumen aufs Auge, das Knie auf die Brust!" Ruhr-Echo, 29 March 1921. The line was taken from the KPD program, written by Luxemburg. The headline and article were scheduled to appear in Rote Fahne, the main party daily, but the entire issue was seized by the authorities.

162. Rote Fahne 14 April 1921. After a period of reflection, the Comintern became more critical of the KPD’s actions.
163. And were so honored down to the very end of the German Democratic Republic. See the text and pictures of the yearly commemorative ceremonies at the Leuna plant in Geschichte der VEB Leuna-Werke 'Walter Ulbricht' 1916 bis 1945 ed. Kreisleitung der SED des VEB Leuna-Werke 'Walter Ulbricht' (Leuna, 1989), pp. 1-8.


165. These impressions are based on reading the AIZ from 1926 to 1932. Some especially revealing photos can be found in the following issues (the paper variously used volume and issue numbers, dates, or a combination of the two): 10 (1926), 5 June 1927, 19 June 1927, 25 April 1928, 9 May 1928 (the photo of Thälmann), 4 (1930), 31 (1930), 49 (1931), 24 (1932).


175. Nor should the two orientations be seen as completely sequential in nature, as Wolfgang Leonhard does, despite some disclaimers, in "Der Kreml und die Gründung der DDR," in Leonhard, Das kurze Leben der DDR: Berichte und Kommentare aus vier Jahrzehnten (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1990), pp. 45-59.

176. "Für unsere Freunde zu Hause," 18 August 1933, IGA,ZPA I 6/3/96, Bl. 22-28, quote Bl. 22. This is presumably a clandestine communiqué from an unidentified Politbüro member. It was not received in Moscow until December 1933.
177. The following is drawn from an undated and untitled document which, based on internal evidence, is a transcription of a meeting of the ECCI with the Politbüro of the KPD. See IGA, ZPA I 6/3/109, Bl. 3-24. Participants were Knorin, Pieck, Florin, Bronkowski, Ercoli (Togliatti), Manuilski, Kuusinen, Wan-Min, and Voss. See also "Resolution über die sektiererischen Fehler der KPD," adopted by Political Secretariat and confirmed by Präsidium [of ECCI] IGA, ZPA I 3/110, Bl. 12-16 and EKKI (Sekretariat Ercoli), "Resolution zu den nächsten Aufgaben der KPD," 17 March 1937, IGA, ZPA I 6/3/84, Bl. 85-95. The attacks on the KPD were often spearheaded by Togliatti, who must have felt sweet revenge for the savaging of his own party and leadership at the hands of German communists, Ulbricht prominent among them, in 1929 at the ECCI's Tenth Plenum. The Comintern criticisms carry a tone of exasperation and frustration that became more pronounced in the course of the 1930s as the war loomed closer and the German population appeared mired in passivity.

178. Even Franz Dahlem, leading KPD figure in the 1930s and then after World War II, political commissar of the International Brigades, and Comintern observer at the show trial of Bukharin professed dismay, when he left Spain for Paris and Moscow, at the KPD's lack of progress towards a popular front. See Dahlem, Am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges, 1938 bis August 1939: Erinnerungen, vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1977), p. 68.

179. On all of these efforts, see Horst Duhnke, Die KPD von 1933 bis 1945 (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972), who provides sometimes numbing and depressing details of the party and factional maneuvering in exile and in the underground. See also Weber, Kommunismus in Deutschland, pp. 173-75, who, summarizing the literature, shows how some of the most important wartime communist resistance groups held to the intransigent conceptions of the KPD of the Weimar Republic.

180. Note Anton Ackermann's comments in Vereint sind wir Alles: Erinnerungen an die Gründung der SED (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966): "The KPD continually sought a rapprochement and collaboration with the social democratic class brothers. From 1935 the party began, with greater resolution and determination, to cast aside all roadblocks along the way to the unity of the working class."(72) Yet even the popular front resolutions of the 1935 "Brussels" conference reiterated many of the standard conditions of the various offers tendered to the SPD during the Weimar years, and therefore vitiated much of the new departure. The KPD demanded that a new party could be formed only if it were: 1) fully independent of the bourgeoisie, 2) recognized the "necessity of the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the creation of a dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of soviets"; 3) gave no support to the bourgeoisie in an imperialist war; 4) was based on democratic centralism. (Günter Benser, Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1985), pp. 12-13.

181. Wolfgang Leonhard argues that the effectiveness of the NKFD was vitiated by the almost concurrent establishment the Working Committee, which reaffirmed the party as the crucial locus of decision-making and signified the demotion of the NKFD. See his account, "Die 'Gruppe Ulbricht': Erste Schritte zur Macht 1945/46," In Leonhard, Das kurze Leben der DDR, pp. 13-44.

182. See especially Horst Laschitsa, Kämpferische Demokratie gegen Faschismus: Die programmatische Vorbereitung auf die antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung in Deutschland durch die Parteiführung der KPD (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1969), and Benser, Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung.


188. Ackermann, "Gibt es einen besonderen deutschen Weg zum Sozialismus?," p. 30.

189. Ackermann, "Gibt es einen besonderen deutschen Weg zum Sozialismus?," p. 31.


194. Appelt, "Volksdemokratie--ein Weg zum Sozialismus." Significantly, Appelt also invoked the Italian experience as a model--one of the few times German communists ever spoke admiringly of the PCI. Ackermann's talk of a "German road to socialism" predated Togliatti's simialr coinage after 1956, while Ackermann adapted, consciously or not, Togliatti's definition of the Spanish Republic as a "democracy of a new type." "Volksdemokratie" bore clear similarities to another term, democrazia progressiva, that Togliatti coined to describe the transitional regimes of the post-fascist period.


197. Mannschatz and Seider, Zum Kampf der KPD im Ruhrgebiet, p. 47.


205. Again, see Benser, *Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung*, pp. 79-86 and *passim* for many examples drawn from local histories and memoirs.

206. Quoted in Benser, *Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung*, p. 84.


208. Leonhard, "Die 'Gruppe Ulbricht,'" p. 15.

209.


212. Ackermann, "Der neue Weg zur Einheit," p. 79.

213. The standard source has been the very interesting eyewitness account of Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entläßt ihre Kinder* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1955), translated into English as *Child of the Revolution*, which has now been supplemented by archival-based studies, notably that of Benser, *Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung*. See also Leonhard’s briefer and more recent discussion in "Die 'Gruppe Ulbricht.'"


222. Mannschatz and Seider, Zum Kampf der KPD im Ruhrgebiet, p. 27.

223. Mannschatz and Seider, Zum Kampf der KPD im Ruhrgebiet, pp. 51-52.

224. Mannschatz and Seider, Zum Kampf der KPD im Ruhrgebiet, pp. 52-53, 208.


226. Mannschatz and Seider, Zum Kampf der KPD im Ruhrgebiet, p. 228.


228. Benser, Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung, pp. 276-77, 279, 306-08, 311-15. Other interesting data on the social composition of the membership: In the first weeks and months after the end of the Third Reich, most of the new members came from family members of existing communists, those who had participated in the antifascist struggle, or others who had joined the ranks of the "activists of the first hour." Quite a number of social democrats, disappointed with their own party's policies, crossed over to the KPD. Also, the party had aged, having recruited few new members during the Third Reich, and at least initially had a difficult time attracting support from women and youth.


238. Benser, *Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung*, pp. 264-74. Ackermann notes that almost all the members of his Initiative Group were involved in the administration by the middle of May. See "Der neue Weg zur Einheit," p. 79.

239. Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 73.


242. Quoted in Leonhard, "Die ‘Gruppe Ulbricht,’" p. 41. As Leonhard observes, Ackermann did not even mention Lenin or Leninism.


244. Quoted in Leonhard, "Die ‘Gruppe Ulbricht,’" pp. 41-42. Grotewohl also declared that with the formation of the SED, there was no longer any need for Russian bayonettes, a line greeted with stormy applause.


252. Marilyn Rueschemeyer remarks in passing that the policies of high female labor participation "were also flavored at least by ideologies of the Weimar period." See "East German Women in Transition," Program on Central and Eastern Europe Working Paper Series #12, (Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Harvard University, 1991), p. 3.

253. See especially Meuschel, Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR.