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From Social Democracy to Communism
Recent Contributions to the History of the German Workers' Movement 1914-1945

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REVIEW ESSAY/NOTE CRITIQUE

From Social Democracy to Communism:
Recent Contributions to the History of the German Workers' Movement 1914-1945

Larry Peterson

Heinz Wohlgemuth, *Die Entstehung der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands*. Überblick (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Marxistische Blätter 1978).

Volker Ullrich, *Die Hamburger Arbeiterbewegung vom Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Revolution 1918/19*, 2 Bände, Geistes — und Sozialwissenschaftliche Dissertationen, 37/1 (Hamburg: Hartmut Lüdke Verlag 1976).

Wolfgang Ruge, *Novemberrevolution. Die Volkserhebung gegen den deutschen Imperialismus und Militarismus 1918/19* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Marxistische Blätter 1978).

Reinhard Rürup, ed., *Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte im rheinischwestfälischen Industriegebiet. Studien zur Geschichte der Revolution 1918/19* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag 1975).

Erhard Lucas, *Zwei Formen von Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Roter Stern 1976).

Hartfrid Krause, *USPD. Zur Geschichte der Unabhängigen Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt 1975).

Larry Peterson, "From Social Democracy to Communism: Recent Contributions to the History of the German Workers' Movement 1914-1945," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (Spring 1980), 161-181.

David W. Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution. A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party 1917-1922* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1975).

Robert Wheeler, *USPD und Internationale. Sozialistischer Internationalismus in der Zeit der Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Vienna: Ullstein Verlag 1975).

Freya Eisner, *Das Verhältnis der KPD zu den Gewerkschaften in der Weimarer Republik*, Schriftenreihe der Otto Brenner Stiftung 8 (Köln-Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt 1977).

Eva Cornelia Schöck, *Arbeitslosigkeit und Rationalisierung. Die Lage der Arbeiter und die kommunistische Gewerkschaftspolitik 1920-1928* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag 1977).

Steffen Lehndorff, *Wie kam es zur RGO? Probleme der Gewerkschaftsentwicklung in der Weimarer Republik von 1927 bis 1929* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Marxistische Blätter 1975).

Ilona Duczynska, *Workers in Arms. The Austrian Schutzbund and the Civil War of 1934* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1978).

Jörg Bremer, *Die Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAP). Untergrund und Exil 1933-1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag 1978).

Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism*, trans. by Martin Sohn-Rethel (London: CSE Books 1978).

Timothy Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936-1939*, Schriften des Zentralinstituts für sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung der Freien Universität Berlin Band 22 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 1975).

———, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich. Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 1977).

GERMANS HELPED pioneer labour history. Historians such as the socialist Franz Mehring, in his history of German Social Democracy and biography of Friedrich Engels, initiated the historiography of the German labour movement by concentrating on its early organizations and its most illustrious leaders. Those who followed them continued to separate labour history into two streams, one made up of intellectuals active in the labour movement, the other of academic historians who ventured into labour history despite the disdain of the bourgeois historical profession. The period of Nazi rule deepened this division. Left-wing historians were forced into exile or underground resistance, while academic historians dissociated themselves from the traditions of the German labour movement.

In the past ten years a series of major studies of the German workers' movement has appeared to challenge this division. Labour historians have begun to question conventional interpretations of the German workers' movement, to widen the range of subject matter, and to explore new methodologies. Moreover, partisan and academic historiography have tended to converge; in both German nations historians who a generation ago wrote as party intellectuals are now integrated into the academic community. Equally important, the political struggles of World War I and the Weimar Republic have faded with the passage of time. The younger generation of German labour historians is no longer satisfied with the explanations of those historians who participated in the conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, the revival of Marxism since the late 1960s has produced a new group of historians with no commitments to either the SPD or KPD. They have begun to re-examine German labour history from a position critical of (though not necessarily hostile to) these parties, and their work has challenged academic, social democratic, and communist historians to reconsider their opinions, too.

The books under review represent first, questioning efforts in this direction. They deal with the history of the German workers' movement from the eve of World War I to the beginning of World War II. Although historians have begun to investigate working-class life in the nineteenth century, before the expansion of the organized workers' movement, the bulk of labour historiography is still concentrated on workers' parties, labour unions, revolutionary movements, and state social policies. Hence the concentration of most recent studies on the workers' movement in the period of its greatest political turmoil, from 1910 to 1940. The studies fall into four broad categories: the workers' movement during World War I and revolution of 1918-19, the history of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), the KPD, especially its policies toward the labour unions, and labour and the rise of fascism. Notable by its absence is the problem of the labour movement in the period from 1928 to 1933. The workers' movement at the end of Weimar is apparently still too politically sensitive to attract historians. Some of the works under review, especially those dealing with the KPD and fascism, are nevertheless laying the groundwork for future studies of the end of Weimar.

What distinguishes these works from traditional labour historiography is their use of new methodological, especially social historical approaches and their revisionist interpretations. The two, of course, go hand in hand: critical reinterpretations stimulate methodological innovations, while new approaches necessitate the rethinking of conventional views. Before turning to the studies themselves, I would like briefly to summarize the major innovations made by the new German labour historiography in these two areas.

The key methodological innovation of the new labour historiography is the systematic investigation of the movement of workers from "below." That is, historians have begun to examine the actions of workers independent of official labour organizations. They also go beyond the pioneering work of Jürgen Kuczynski on wages, hours and employment to relate the movement of workers concretely to changes in social and economic conditions generally and at the workplace. The emphasis on history from "below" has led to intensive local and regional studies, where the history of workers "below" can be brought into direct contact with the role of organizations, leaders and ideologies "above." Nevertheless, many aspects of the new labour historiography are in fact not new at all. Labour historians continue to rely on newspapers, party and union records, government statistics and documents, and police reports as their primary sources: the use of quantitative methods is still very

much the exception. Moreover, they focus their subjects on labour organizations and government social policies. In particular, German labour historians rarely lose sight of the question of power. They therefore recognize the importance of labour organizations and the state and do not attempt to investigate the culture, condition or movement of workers in isolation from politics. But this emphasis on power, on organization and the state, is precisely what makes the new aspects of labour historiography so fruitful. For the younger generation of labour historians attempts to analyze the policies of the labour organizations and the state in light of the social movement of workers "below."

Thus, unlike the older school of German social historians (associated with the name of Hans-Ulrich Wehler), the new labour historians avoid a one-sided emphasis on state power, while subjecting the movement of workers to rigorous empirical research and avoiding abstract model-building. Likewise, the new German labour historiography, through its recognition of the central importance of power, is able to avoid the *ouvriérisme*, the exaggeration of spontaneity, that characterizes much labour history in France and North America. It does not attempt to separate the culture or consciousness of workers from their formal organizations and ideologies. Finally, the best of the new labour historiography sees the development of the labour movement in terms of historical processes. It combines analysis with empirical research to uncover the determinants of labour history and to posit the range of possibilities that were open to the labour movement. It is interested in neither an atemporal historical sociology nor an historicist explanation of discrete events, but rather in the social, economic, and political determinants of seemingly isolated "events."

The new German labour historiography is also revisionist in interpretation. Traditionally, German labour historians have written from well-defined partisan positions. These interpretations are being challenged with new research and alternative (though tentative) explanations in all four of the broad categories dealt with by the books under review. The revisionism of the new labour historiography is expressed in a variety of ways. Only a few works perpetuate the traditions of extreme partisanship (Wohlgemuth, Ruge, Eisner). Some are critical from the viewpoint of professional (largely liberal) historians, independent of the labour movement (Bremer, Morgan). The largest number are critical of social democratic, communist and bourgeois interpretations from an independent left wing position (Ulrich, Lucas, Schöck, Sohn-Rethel, Mason, Duczynska). Finally, an increasing number of historians — social democratic, communist — have adopted revisionist positions from within their own political traditions (the collection edited by Rürup, Krause, Wheeler, Lehndorff). The historiography of the German labour movement is in a state of flux, and the variety of positions from which it is being re-examined has led to a particularly fruitful questioning of the development of the German labour movement.

I

THE GERMAN labour movement during the Weimar Republic was divided into two mass parties which competed with each other as much as or more than with their bourgeois opponents. Historians have consequently turned their attention to the origins of the division in the German labour movement, and since the publication of Carl Schorske's *German Social Democracy 1905-1917. The Origins of the Great Schism* in the 1950s, it has generally been accepted that the post-1917 divisions grew out of pre-war controversies in the SPD. Still, the process of division in the German labour movement was more complex than a mere extrapolation of pre-war factionalism, and it was decisively altered and conditioned by the experience of World

War I and the revolution of 1918-19.

Heinz Wohlgemuth, in a revised and updated version of his *Entstehung der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands*, concentrates on one aspect of Schorske's thesis, the emergence of the German Communist Party from the pre-1914 left in the SPD. Wohlgemuth's subject matter and methodology are traditional. This is a party history, and he is primarily interested in the leaders and groups which eventually coalesced in the Spartacus Group and KPD. What distinguishes this study is Wohlgemuth's detailed examination of the historical process by which the German left developed into an organized opposition to the war which eventually culminated in the founding of a Marxist-Leninist party, a party of a "new type." Whether the belated development of such a party explains the failure of the German revolution, is a much disputed thesis. However, Wohlgemuth directs his attention not so much at this question as to the objective political and social forces which drove the German left in the direction of a new party despite their grounding in the traditions of pre-1914 social democracy. The danger in such an analysis is the temptation to read history backwards from the vantage point of the KPD, that is, to turn a determined historical process into a fatalistic historical teleology with Marxism-Leninism as the inevitable result (and the question why the German left resisted Leninism so long the main question). It is to Wohlgemuth's credit that he avoids the temptation.

He starts with the observation that, although the emergence of communist parties was a necessary part of the response of the labour movement to capitalism in its monopoly capitalist-imperialist stage, nevertheless such parties were founded at different times and under differing national conditions. It is his task as historian of the KPD to analyze concretely how the founding of the KPD was determined by the intersecting of both general historical trends and specific German conditions. Wohlgemuth tends to overemphasize the proto-leninist features of the German left, which confirm his thesis, and to underestimate its persistent reluctance to accept bolshevik tactics and organization. He also describes the diffuse influence of the Spartacists during the war in more coherent, organized terms than was probably the case. But if one understands Wohlgemuth's use of abstraction to isolate and analyze a specific theme, then the reader can easily put such exaggerations into perspective. Both as a detailed chronology of the left-wing opposition to the war and as an analysis of the emergence of the KPD, *Die Entstehung der KPD* is essential reading on the background of the politics of the German left during the war and revolution.

Although Wohlgemuth describes the emergence of the KPD as the response of the German left to the development of German imperialism and monopoly capitalism, he does not prove such an interrelationship through an analysis of socio-economic changes in Germany. By contrast, Volker Ullrich places the growth of the revolutionary left in the context of working-class life during the war years through concrete investigation of the labour movement in Hamburg. By concentrating on a major industrial city, Ullrich is able to write a well-rounded work in which he pays equal attention to both party and labour union history and to the movement of workers and economic conditions, thus producing a case study with which to test generalizations that have been made about the development of the SPD nationally during the war. For example, Ullrich is skeptical about the role of a "labour aristocracy" in the growing conservatism of the pre-war SPD. The Hamburg party was overwhelmingly working-class in composition with little petty bourgeois influence or infiltration, and the best-paid workers (*such as skilled metalworkers*) *tended to be* more, rather than less, radical. If the theory of a "labour aristocracy" is valid for Germany, then it is in relation to the growth of a party and labour union bureau-

cracy. Control of labour organizations by conservative officials also helps to explain the split in the German labour movement: opponents of the war had no choice but to organize mass unrest over economic conditions and the prolongation of the war outside of the traditional labour organizations. Close examination of social and economic changes during the war will also dispel illusions about the alleged reformist consciousness of German workers. Structural changes in the work force and the impoverishment of workers through inflation, food shortages and the deterioration of working conditions forced workers to adopt new modes of action and led eventually to political opposition to the war. It is indeed wrong to view the consciousness of workers in static reformist or revolutionary categories; rather one is dealing with a dynamic process of increasing struggle in which workers gradually formulated new demands for changes in their social conditions and political status. The emergence of a left-wing opposition was halting. Whereas Wohlgemuth judges its development nationally, pointing out the inadequacies of the non-Spartacist opposition, Ullrich delineates the difficult political and economic conditions under which practical work had to be carried out and therefore makes the slow evolution of the German left comprehensible. Despite its chronological format, Ullrich's study is no mere history of local events, but rather an examination of the impact of the war on the labour movement which puts its development toward the revolution of 1918-19 on a firm material foundation.

The mobilization of mass unrest paved the way for the revolts of sailors, soldiers and workers in the first two weeks of November 1918, and the divisions in the labour movement became one of the determining factors in the outcome of the German revolution. The East German historian Wolfgang Ruge sees these divisions as the single most important reason for the failure of the revolution, and he points especially to the lack of a revolutionary party that could have exploited the upheavals in November-December 1918. Ruge's *Novemberrevolution* is a well-written, illustrated popular history of the revolution from a communist position. It is a useful introduction to both the revolution and the East German interpretation of it. Ruge's work is most effective in singling out key issues, and, by lucidly presenting the East German view, he helps to clarify the main points of contention among German historians. These include the extent of Spartacist and KPD influence; the role of the SPD and labour union leadership in braking the revolution; the indecisiveness of the USPD leadership; the reasons for the failure of the revolution; and the overall nature of the revolution. In particular, Ruge characterizes the SPD-USPD government in November-December 1918 as a "counterrevolutionary revolutionary government," attacks the SPD for suppressing the revolution, and describes the USPD leadership as objectively counterrevolutionary because of its failure to pursue a revolutionary strategy. Likewise, he characterizes the revolution as bourgeois-democratic in content, though carried out largely with proletarian means, and attributes its failure to move from anti-imperialist and anti-militarist to socialist goals to the absence of a revolutionary party. Throughout Ruge bases his judgements on the question of power, assessing the attitudes of socialist leaders in light of the objective function of their actions. The main weakness of his study, despite his use of the most recent secondary literature, is his overemphasis on leaders and organizations. He does not pay adequate attention to the mass movement of workers in the councils, nor does he analyze the strengths and weaknesses of mass action in a revolutionary upheaval.

The five studies directed and edited by Reinhard Rürup provide answers to precisely these questions. Like Ruge, these studies of workers and soldiers councils argue that the failure of the 1918-19 revolution was not inevitable. Like Ullrich, the authors have chosen to explore this thesis

concretely through local and regional studies, in this case the revolutionary movement in the industrial region of Rhineland-Westphalia. The studies consist of an analysis of the spread of the councils movement from the North Sea ports to Rhineland-Westphalia; case studies of three cities in the industrial region, carefully chosen for comparison; and a concluding article that explores, through the soldiers councils, the role of armed struggle and power in the revolution. The cities selected were Barmen-Elberfeld, textile towns in which the SPD and USPD initially cooperated in the councils movement; Mülheim, a coal and steel town in the western Ruhr where the Spartacists were the dominant political force on the left; and Dortmund, another coal and steel centre where the right wing of the SPD dominated left-wing politics. These comparative studies substantially revise the picture of the 1918-19 revolution. Socio-economic structure and the impact of the war on the local economy played decisive roles in determining which socialist faction would dominate the revolutionary movement. The extreme increase in production of war matériel and the influx of workers into Mülheim formed the background of radicalism there, whereas the more established populations of Dortmund and Barmen-Elberfeld became radicalized more slowly. Nevertheless, the founding and evolution of the councils was basically similar in all three cities, and all experienced a steady radicalization of workers as the issues of the revolution became clarified and as the SPD failed to fulfill the expectations of workers. Only the timing of the radicalization depended on local circumstances. The German revolution began with primarily anti-militarist, not clearly socialist, goals, and the old order capitulated so rapidly to the councils that workers at first did not see the need to consolidate their revolutionary gains. Nevertheless, the movement developed in the direction of economic, democratic and socialist reforms, especially after the national SPD-led government began to move to the right. These studies also refute the view that the councils were violent, dictatorial or ineffective: they prove conclusively that the councils dealt effectively with questions of public order, food supplies, and even local social reforms. Rürup, summarizing the results of the studies, argues that the councils offered a realistic alternative, a middle road, between bolshevism and the repressive Ebert-Noske government. They failed, not because of the local weakness or ineffectiveness, but because of the superiority of military power of the national government that allied itself with the Kaiser's generals to suppress the revolutionary movement. The USPD and KPD, and in some cases the SPD, effectively led the movement locally. But the outcome of the revolution was decided nationally, and neither the USPD nor KPD provided the national leadership or strategy that could have turned the local councils into the mass base of a revolutionary government.

Erhard Lucas adds to the research into the local history of the labour movement in Rhineland-Westphalia in his *Zwei Formen von Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*. Lucas is already the author of a monograph on the Ruhr city Hamborn during the 1918-19 revolution and of a multivolume history of the Ruhr uprising of March 1920. He puts his extensive knowledge of the region's socio-economic structure and labour movement to good use in this essentially analytic comparison of two Rhenish-Westphalian cities in the 1918-19 revolution. Lucas goes further than any recent German labour historian in his innovative use of local history, his questioning social historical methods, and his reinterpretation of the November revolution. *Zwei Formen von Radikalismus* is an open-ended essay in which Lucas relates the socio-economic structure and labour traditions of two carefully selected cities, Remscheid and Hamborn, to the development of revolutionary movements in 1918-19. Remscheid and

Hamborn were perhaps the most radical towns in Rhineland-Westphalia. Hamborn was the chief centre of syndicalist organization in the Ruhr, and Remscheid's labour movement was dominated by the non-Spartacist left wing of the USPD. Hamborn mushroomed as a coal and steel city in the generation before 1914; it represented the most extreme characteristics of rapid industrialization in all of Germany: rapid population growth, large numbers of foreign workers, overcrowding, inadequate city services, corporate control of the local economy, a transient labour force, an excess of single young males, crime, and the lack of a stable working-class culture. The war accentuated Hamborn's reputation for the extreme. Remscheid, on the other hand, was already a centre of metal production before the industrial revolution. It grew slowly throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century; workers built a well-organized labour movement before 1914; and newcomers were integrated quickly into a stable working-class culture, bolstered by local traditions and effective labour organizations. Remscheid's small ironwares industry underwent a complete mechanization in the generation before 1914, but workers responded to industrialization and its intensification during the war by drawing upon their traditions of organizations and local solidarity. Whereas the USPD seized power in Remscheid in November 1918 through councils that were dominated by the party and labour unions, the workers in Hamborn lacked all such traditions of organization. They turned instead to mass action — particularly wildcat strikes and mass demonstrations — moving from immediate economic demands to a program for the socialization of mining, and they turned for leadership to the local syndicalist organization, the only political group that willingly accepted the mass movement of workers without trying to impose party controls.

Two of Lucas' conclusions should be given special mention, for they touch directly on the main controversies about the failure of the 1918-19 revolution. The tragedy of the revolution, in Lucas' view, is that the strengths of the revolutionary movement were divided in different localities: the organized radicalism of Remscheid's metalworkers, rooted in working-class life and traditions, and the mass action of Hamborn miners were equally essential to the revolutionary movement. Yet they failed to complement each other in a positive way, for Hamborn's miners lacked effective organization while Remscheid's metalworkers tended to rely passively on USPD leaders. Lucas doubts that this fatal division of organization and spontaneity could have been overcome by a party of a "new type." He points to the failure of the KPD in Hamborn to exert effective leadership and to its belated attempt to channel the miners' strikes into a party-dominated movement for socialization. While the socialization movement gave the miners organization and leadership, it also cut short the development of mass action, the revolutionary party's only source of power. Lucas suggests instead that a synthesis of organization and spontaneity, of Remscheid and Hamborn, would have been necessary to change the outcome of the revolution, but his social analysis of German industrial structure and working-class life points to the decentralization and divisions of the revolutionary wing of the labour movement. In sum, Lucas succeeds in combining the analysis of socio-economic structure, local traditions of labour organization, and forms of mass protest to demonstrate the complex interaction of factors which determined the course of the 1918-19 revolution. His analytic use of comparison, his attention to the movement of workers in and outside their organizations, and his local research should serve as a model for historians who want not only to describe but to explain the development of the workers' movement.

The recent literature on the German workers' movement in war and revolution

revolves around the problems of the splits in the German labour movement, the emergence of spontaneous mass action, and the possibilities and limitations of the November revolution. These are essentially critical histories which refuse to accept the outcome of the revolution as an inevitable fact. Especially in the local studies, they undermine traditional interpretations of the war and revolution literally from below, by showing the complexity of social and political factors at work, the nature of dynamic historical processes, and the problematic nature of working-class protest. References to rigid "reformist" and "revolutionary" alternatives, attempts to "define" the revolution of 1918-19 in static terms, undocumented assumptions about the moderation of German workers, are no longer acceptable now that these studies have demonstrated the diversity and dynamism of the German workers' movement.

II

THE INDEPENDENT Social Democratic Party of Germany stood at the centre of the labour movement during the war and revolution. Created in 1917 by opponents of the war, it briefly united most of the German left in one of the major parties of the revolution, profited from disillusionment with the SPD in 1919-20 to become Europe's largest revolutionary party, then split in its turn over the decision of the majority to adhere to the Third International. Eventually the Independents were absorbed into the KPD and SPD. Because of its failure, the USPD has traditionally received harsh treatment from German historians. Until the last decade, hardly a single major history was devoted to the USPD, despite its role in the wartime opposition and revolution. For historians brought up on the Weimar experience, the choice in the labour movement was between communism and social democracy, and the USPD was at best an ill-fated, utopian attempt at a "third way."

Three historians, Hartfrid Krause, David Morgan and Robert Wheeler, have finally begun to fill this gap in German historiography. Their works complement each other; together they provide the first well-rounded picture of the USPD. Could the USPD have offered an alternative to the SPD and KPD in the revolution? Why did it fail to act more effectively during the revolution? Was the split over adherence to the Comintern inevitable, or was it engineered by the Bolsheviks?

Hartfrid Krause's work, the last of the three to be published, is also the most basic. Exploiting as primary sources the reports of party conferences and congresses, Krause provides a chronological history of the national politics of the USPD, especially of the controversies in the party and the way they were discussed and resolved. In one sense, this is a very traditional history — social historians have long railed against labour histories based exclusively on party congress reports and official publications — but in the case of the USPD Krause's study is a necessary starting-point because of the way all historians, political or social, have ignored its history. Moreover, Krause is familiar with the methods of social history (he has also written a case study of the German town Hanau in the 1918-19 revolution), and he writes his study with social historians in mind. In particular, Krause poses questions about the USPD in order to point to problems for future research, and he exploits his consciously limited subject matter and sources to analyze the political choices and turning-points of the party. This is no simple chronological survey, but rather a rigorous analysis of the development of political strategies in the USPD.

Perhaps the most important conclusion of Krause's study is that the USPD tended throughout its history to react to events. The USPD was founded in 1917 only because the left-wing opposition was expelled from the SPD. The party held together at first, not because of agreement over political goals and tactics, but because of the mutual opposition of

diverse factions to the war. In the 1918-19 revolution, the USPD repeatedly reacted to events and never developed a coherent political strategy to achieve either democratic or revolutionary socialist goals. In 1919-20 the party was again held together by negative factors, especially opposition to the SPD and Weimar system. At no time did the USPD take the initiative, even (or especially) at moments of political crisis. On the other hand, Krause argues that the strength of the USPD lay in its political heterogeneity. The decentralized structure of the party gave room to many different groups and the party grew strong on the internal disagreements and free and open discussions that characterized party life. The tragedy of the USPD was that, when the party finally voted on a clearcut political strategy through adherence to the Third International, the party's internal freedom of criticism and disagreement hardened into the lines of open schism. The party's greatest strength — internal democracy — became its fatal weakness, while the overcoming of its greatest weakness — lack of a coherent political program and forceful leadership — meant the destruction of the party itself.

David Morgan's *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution* is the first narrative history of the USPD. Morgan is a liberal historian who skeptically views the thesis that the USPD offered a viable democratic socialist alternative in the 1918-19 revolution. In addition to writing a party history and a background study to the later political history of the Weimar Republic, Morgan tries to place the USPD in the traditions of the German socialist movement. He is interested in the continuity of the USPD with the pre-war SPD and in the political assumptions and perceptions which limited the political choices of the party leadership. In effect, the passivity of the USPD in the revolution was a continuation of pre-war patterns. Moreover, as a minority party, the USPD could not win power through democratic means, and to implement its socialist goals it would have had to discard its democratic profession in favour of dictatorial power. Nor did the councils offer a viable revolutionary alternative for the USPD. In Morgan's view, political parties and labour unions continued to play a dominant role throughout the revolution. The councils never replaced the workers' parties; they achieved their goals through party organization. Like Krause, Morgan concentrates on national politics and leadership. He is aware of recent social history and includes a number of sections on the USPD in the provinces during the strikes and civil war of early 1919, but such references to the influence of workers "below" on USPD politics are not integrated into the body of Morgan's study. On the other hand, there is much to be said about Morgan's emphasis on the constraints of tradition on German revolutionaries. The leaders of the USPD were trained in the SPD and clearly found it difficult to conceive of organizational alternatives, different political programs, or new modes of action. Yet the fact remains that a new generation of revolutionary socialists passed through the USPD and left it after 1920 in order to break decisively with the party's social democratic past. Through his conservative emphasis on the hold of socialist political culture on the USPD, Morgan fails to explain convincingly how or why a left-wing opposition adopted new political strategies, programs and forms of organization and succeeded in attracting a majority of Independents to vote for adherence to the Comintern. It is a truism to say that the USPD grew out of the past, but the history of the USPD is also one of sharp controversy, development and change. Labour politics during the Weimar Republic were different from those of Wilhelmine Germany. By overemphasizing the continuity of political culture, Morgan in the end fails to explain what took place between 1917 and 1922 in the USPD to transform them.

Robert Wheeler's *USPD und Internationale* attempts to answer these questions by concentrating on the issue which eventually split the party, the question of

the International and adherence to the Comintern. Wheeler argues that only on this issue did the Independents fail to reach a compromise. Wheeler follows the discussions and controversies over the International from the beginning of opposition to the war to the vote in favour of adherence to the Comintern at the Congress of Halle in October 1920. Of the three historians of the USPD, he is the most innovative in terms of methodology. He rigorously integrates analysis of this question "above" and "below," alternating between national discussions, conferences and congresses and intensive scrutiny of local reaction to the International among party members and lower-level functionaries. He is also one of the few German labour historians to use quantitative methods, by analyzing the social background of the delegates to party congresses who voted on this question. Through this combination of approaches, Wheeler has written a model study which should be placed alongside the works of Ullrich and Lucas as required reading for all German labour historians.

The question of the International grew slowly in importance, from a secondary issue at the founding of the USPD to a major theme of party discussions after the failure of the 1918-19 revolution. Still, it did not become the overriding issue of party politics until very late, in fact, after the June 1920 Reichstag elections when the USPD's enormous gains challenged the SPD's supremacy in the labour movement. Adherence to the Comintern became an important issue after the failure of the revolution and growth of the USPD made reconsideration of the party's strategy and goals mandatory. As to who favoured adherence, Wheeler creates a profile of a generally young male, often with relatively less experience in the labour movement, who came from a major industrial centre, and especially from certain basic mass production industries such as coal mining, chemicals and sections of the metal industry. However, Wheeler's most important conclusion is his devastating critique of how the Comintern manoeuvred the split in the USPD through the 21 Points. Whether or not one accepts the view that schism was inevitable, it is hard to escape Wheeler's conclusion that the Comintern was too rigid and doctrinaire in its attempt to isolate the "centrist" leaders of the party. The timing, content, and dictatorial manner of the 21 Points forced a schism much farther to the left than was necessary. The Comintern not only destroyed the USPD by splitting it virtually in half (and disillusioning a full third of party members, who dropped out of the organized labour movement), it also artificially restricted the potential membership of the KPD and alienated a large mass of Independents who were sympathetic to the Bolshevik revolution. The manner in which the schism was carried out left the KPD with a legacy of distrust and bitterness from which it never fully recovered.

Nevertheless, questions about the split in the USPD remain to be answered. Wheeler (not to speak of Krause and Morgan) does not convincingly prove that the Comintern was responsible in "forcing" the schism. The Comintern engineered the *manner* in which the schism occurred, but it played on existing divisions in the USPD. What is needed are more social histories of the USPD which concentrate on local history and which investigate such problems as mass unrest, labour union politics, and relations with other workers' parties and organizations. How far did the divisions in the USPD really go? To what extent was the division over adherence imposed as an external issue from above? Did USPD members and workers turn to the Comintern in a utopian attempt to escape from their failures in the German revolution, or did they look to the Comintern with increasing sympathy in the course of class conflicts, revolutionary action, and mass unrest? Wheeler merely asserts that these other issues did not contribute to the schism, but, since neither he nor any other historian has attempted to analyze them, his assertion cannot be taken uncritically. Finally, the

USPD disintegrated suddenly in the short space of two to three months. At the end of June 1920 it came out of the Reichstag elections a united party; by the beginning of September it had divided into two irreconcilable camps. The decisions of the *Second World Congress of the Communist* International alone cannot account for this amazingly quick turnabout. Why did party unity appear so solid until June 1920? What behind this deceptive façade caused the split to occur with such vehemence?

Krause, Morgan and Wheeler have only begun to write the history of the USPD. Yet, after reading their studies, one is hard put to accept the thesis advanced tentatively by Krause and Wheeler (though rejected by Morgan) that the USPD offered an alternative in the German revolution. The USPD met *none* of the tests it faced. It was incapable of providing leadership in either crisis or "normal" situations. It reacted to events rather than seizing on them to achieve its goals. It lacked a clear revolutionary program, not to speak of coherent tactics. It became the largest revolutionary party in Europe, not through leadership or positive goals, but as a catch-all party of opposition, a negative reaction to the SPD. It never knew what to do with its mass support, but instead fell quickly into the sterile role of a permanent political opposition, much like the pre-1914 SPD. It maintained unity and integrated diverse factions into its organization only at the cost of an aggressive revolutionary policy. Did not the USPD fall apart so suddenly in summer 1920 in the face of the Comintern's pressure because the USPD in fact offered *no* alternative? The Comintern, not the USPD, had the revolutionary program, and the determined elements in the USPD seized on it once a choice could no longer be postponed.

III

AFTER A majority in the USPD voted for adherence to the Third International, the party's left wing formally merged with the KPD in December 1920. However, the fact that the split in the USPD was so far to the left, with almost half of the party opposing adherence, meant that the unified KPD still had to win over the mass of USPD supporters to its side. The KPD employed many methods to achieve this goal, but by far the most important was agitation in the labour unions. Here was organized fully half of Germany's industrial proletariat, and well before the Comintern put out the slogan "To the Masses" the KPD entered the labour union movement in full force. Until recently, the historiography of the KPD, particularly in the West, has concentrated on general political histories of the party — on the party's relations with the Comintern, leadership, factionalism, tactical swings, national organization, and ideology. To the extent that historians have mentioned communist work in the labour unions at all, they have merely summarized national and international decisions. The recent studies of three historians on the policies of the KPD in the unions thus form a real broadening of the historiography of the KPD and labour union movement.

Research into communist work in the labour unions is particularly interesting because it shifts attention away from the grand political strategy of the KPD and Comintern to the party's daily political practice and its relationship with its followers. Moreover, this is a perfect subject with which to unite history from "above" (national and international party strategy and tactics) and "below" (the role of socio-economic factors, mass unrest, the concrete practice of the party), for communist labour union work was both guided by national and international decisions and tempered by the degree of unrest and the responsiveness of industrial workers. Methodologically, the study of KPD union policies is innovative not in terms of model techniques (such as quantitative methods), but rather through the selection of a particularly telling area of party work where

all the various strands of the party's social and political history intersect. Labour union work was crucially important to the KPD. It expanded its mass support largely through agitation in the unions, elaborated its most important political strategies concretely on union questions, and used economic unrest to fuel a revolutionary movement in the short run. What was the relative importance of social, economic and political conditions in Germany in influencing communist policies? How were the two broad factions (or political tendencies) in the KPD expressed in union policies, and to what extent did practical work in the unions in Germany contribute to tactical disagreements nationally and internationally? Finally, was the communist united front tactic, as developed in the first instance in unions, a viable and sincere political alternative in the German workers' movement after 1920? Or was this merely a tactical manoeuvre to discredit and undermine the SPD? And how did the failure of the united front contribute to the KPD's divisive and sectarian union policies after 1928?

Freya Eisner's *Das Verhältnis der KPD zu den Gewerkschaften* offers a general overview of the relationship of the KPD to the free (socialist) unions. The greater part of the book deals with the early periods of communist history, from the party's origins to the mid-1920s, with little of substance about the closing years of the Weimar Republic. This is a very traditional history in all respects, and therein lie its limitations. It is a strict narrative history, organized so much around events that it lacks analytic rigour in defining the major problems of communist union work. The study is written strictly from the top down. Eisner is totally insensitive to the role of mass movements in the formulation and implementation of communist union policies, and she therefore misses the dynamic interaction of party organization and forms of mass unrest through which the KPD developed its political strategy in the unions. Moreover, the study is based on inadequate sources. Eisner has a weak grasp of the secondary literature and uses only published primary sources for a subject which requires archival research, for only in the archives can one find the necessary documents, collected by the political police, which pertain to party policy and to the practical work of communists in unions and strikes. The reporting of the communist and labour union press was simply too propagandistic to offer more than a highly superficial (and very unreliable) view of communist policies, and it is inexcusable that Eisner repeatedly cites highly biased, social democratic labour union newspapers as sources for KPD policies. However, this merely points to the most serious shortcoming of Eisner's study. Eisner has written an old-fashioned partisan history, an *apologia* of the labour union leadership, in which the author repeatedly loses sight of the ostensible subject of her study, the KPD. Long passages of her work are not on the KPD at all but are a defense of the policies of the labour union leadership. The reader can gain a general sense of the evolution of communist union policies from Eisner's work, but it is too unreliable on details, too lacking in a sense of the process and determinants of historical change, and too politically biased to render an adequate picture of German communism and the unions.

Eva Schöck tries to overcome such difficulties in a variety of ways in her study of communist union policies from 1920 to 1928. First, she concentrates on an empirical reconstruction of the development of communist policies, thus laying the factual groundwork for any serious analysis or interpretation of communist tactics. Second, she isolates one major socio-economic problem, rationalization of production and unemployment, against which she can judge purposes, effectiveness, and results of KPD union work. Finally, she probes the relationship of KPD union policies to the conditions and actions of workers by selecting three major industries (coal mining, chemicals, and metalwork-

ing) for more detailed investigation. Schöck argues that Comintern and KPD decisions on union policies can only be interpreted accurately in light of social and political conditions in Germany. She then demonstrates how the problem of unemployment persistently limited communist options in Germany and reinforced the two tactical lines in the party over union (and more general political) questions. The KPD faced a crucial choice between building a united front with labour unionists in the factories and relying on an alliance with unskilled, unorganized and especially unemployed workers. The wave of rationalization in the mid-1920s and resulting structural unemployment reinforced these alternatives. Unemployment was both the strength and weakness of the KPD: its strength in attracting the mass support of impoverished workers, but its weakness in isolating the KPD from unionized workers in the factories and in contributing to worker passivity.

Schöck's study is convincing because of her attention to the social and economic conditions of workers in key industries and her extensive research into a wide range of printed and archival sources. She is informative on the miners and tantalizing in her discussion of the chemical industry (for which more study is urgently needed). However, despite Schöck's attention to party history, social and economic conditions, and the interaction of party and workers, her study has a number of weaknesses. Her section on chemical workers clearly could have been expanded, and her treatment of metal workers is too brief to say anything substantive. Schöck does not follow the KPD's union tactics in relation to economic conjunctures, strikes, or official labour union policies, all of which played determining roles in the elaboration of communist policies. Her failure to discuss economic conjuncture leads her to overestimate the importance of unemployment in the early 1920s (in fact it did not become a major issue until the spring of 1923). Moreover, she oddly says nothing about communist attempts to organize unemployed workers into councils and committees of the unemployed, an integral part of communist union tactics. Most problematic is Schöck's attempt to relate the development of KPD union tactics (the first two chapters) to economic conditions (the last three chapters). She juxtaposes her analysis of the problem "above" and "below" but fails to integrate the two in a satisfactory manner. This is a difficult problem of both methodology and composition, for which no easy solutions exist. Lucas, using an open-ended essay technique, succeeds better than Schöck, but the problem remains for future historians to resolve. *Arbeitslosigkeit und Rationalisierung* is nonetheless a rich and suggestive study which opens the way, in several directions, for the reassessment of German communist policies.

Steffen Lehndorff, in an analysis of the change in communist labour union tactics between the years 1927 and 1929, also argues that the development of KPD tactics can only be understood if placed in their German context. Lehndorff chooses the years 1927-29 because this was the moment when the left-wing tendency on union questions gained ascendancy through a complex interplay of economic and political factors in Germany and the change of strategy in the Comintern. Lehndorff asks the question, why an extreme left-wing, sectarian policy of opposition to the labour unions was adopted by the KPD. Like Eisner, Lehndorff relies on printed sources — reports of communist conferences and congresses, official decisions, inner-party discussions, newspaper reports, and official assessments of strikes. He at best sketches the relationship of the KPD to union members and workers. The strength of Lehndorff's work, like that of Krause who used similar sources, is his rigorous analysis and argumentation. Lehndorff concentrates on specific economic movements, strikes, and labour union questions according to their political importance in

the development of KPD union tactics and KPD-union relations. Though inadequately documented (especially in terms of socio-economic changes and the movement of workers, both crucial to his argument), Lehndorff's study presents a thesis which can serve as the basis for future discussion and research.

If Schöck concentrates on rationalization and unemployment, Lehndorff emphasizes the economic conjuncture, the boom cycle and impending depression of the latter half of the 1920s. Schöck explores the effect of structural economic changes on communist strategy, whereas Lehndorff analyzes how the dynamics of the economy influenced the change in KPD union policies. The disagreement between the two tendencies in the KPD intensified in 1927 and 1928 as the development of the economic cycle posed new questions in the labour unions. In particular, increasing economic antagonism and the revival of unrest among workers over economic questions led the left wing of the KPD to demand a more aggressive strike strategy against employers, with a more organized communist opposition in the unions; and the repressive reaction of labour union leaders to the growth in support for the communist opposition convinced many KPD leaders that it should adopt a policy of leading grassroots economic movements (including strikes) even if this meant confrontation with the labour unions. However, once such a strategy gained Comintern backing, the KPD still had to face the enduring strength of the unions among workers. It could not both work in the unions and organize an independent labour union opposition. Lehndorff confirms Schöck's analysis: by building a revolutionary labour union opposition outside the unions, the communists succeeded in winning passive mass support (for example in works councils elections) but failed to mobilize or organize the masses because the party cut itself off from unionized workers.

Even more than the recent works on the USPD, the studies of KPD union policies by Eisner, Schöck, and Lehndorff are first attempts to investigate this subject and to broaden the perspective from which German communism is viewed. They offer few conclusions. Lehndorff's work is particularly interesting as a critical analysis, by a communist, of a problematic and contradictory period of his own party's history. Although he is at times too uncritical in assessing communist union policies in light of real possibilities and tends toward historicist arguments in showing how the policies of the Third Period grew in part out of German economic and political conditions, he nevertheless shows that a communist can write critically of his party's past. Schöck's study is even more useful in that she subjects KPD union policies to a systematic (though not unsympathetic) critical review and attacks the problem of KPD-union relations from several angles. Through concentration on union policies, the historian can get to the heart of problems of KPD history — the interaction of local, national, and international, of social and political factors — and investigate these problems concretely. The major lesson of the studies of Schöck and Lehndorff is that the history of the KPD cannot be explained from Moscow alone; German conditions must be taken into consideration. The next task of historians of the KPD is to take this insight and apply it to the policies of the Third Period and the *Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts-Opposition*.

IV

THE KPD failed to win leadership over the German workers' movement, and the left faced the rise of fascism with a divided front. The position of labour during the rise and then rule of German fascism is still a little researched field. Recent literature on the subject is in fact very diverse in terms of methodology and subject matter. The literature does not form a coherent group of works, such as the studies of the war and revolution, USPD, or KPD, but rather deals

with widely different aspects of the subject.

One of the most interesting works on the attempts of labour to defend itself against the rise of fascism deals, not with Germany, but with the closely related case of Austria. Ilona Duczynska's *Workers in Arms* is a study of the evolution of the Schutzbund, the workers' paramilitary organ in Austria, up to the Civil War of 1934. The Austrian case is particularly interesting in comparison with Germany because Austrian Social Democracy remained united after 1918 and because the Austrian working class chose to fight the fascist coup. Nonetheless, it too failed to mount effective resistance to fascism. Duczynska's study of the Schutzbund is also of special interest because she belonged to the Schutzbund and to the Austrian Communist Party. She writes her study from the independent position of a "democratic Bolshevik," but her work is in fact a well-researched history and not a political memoir. Duczynska's political experience and commitment give her analysis an added political insight without losing in scholarly precision or critical judgment.

Her central theme is the role of the military in a revolutionary movement. Duczynska follows the history of the Schutzbund from its origins in the revolution of 1918-19, through its integration into Social Democracy as a body to defend the democratic republic, to its increasing militarization, subordination to social democratic leaders, and formal separation from its urban working-class base of support. Despite its superficial unity and activist left-wing leadership, Austrian Social Democracy suffered from many of the same failings of its German counterpart: factionalism, failure to resist encroachments by the right, faith that the mere presence of a mass workers' movement (rather than its effective deployment) would protect the republic from attack, and reliance on democratic legality in an increasingly authoritarian state. As far as the Schutzbund is concerned, the social democratic leadership of Austria opted for military technique and command structures, with membership passivity as the necessary consequence. Yet the Schutzbund was hopelessly inferior to the professional military if it chose to fight on the latter's terrain, and with a command structure based on obedience any factionalism or indecisiveness on the part of Schutzbund or party leaders further reduced the chances for effective resistance. The Schutzbund chose to fight in 1934 to save the honor of the Austrian workers' movement, but it was an effort doomed from the start to failure. Thus, Duczynska amply demonstrates both the peculiarities of Austrian Social Democracy and its fundamental similarities with Germany.

Once the Nazis came to power, the German workers' movement tried to organize an underground resistance in Germany and to reconstitute a national leadership in exile. Jörg Bremer analyzes one side of this history in a study of the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAP) from 1933 to 1945. The SAP was founded in 1931 after the expulsion of a section of the SPD-left. It was a small group with little mass backing. For this reason, and because of the atomizing conditions of underground work and exile, Bremer's study concentrates on questions of personality, political strategy and organization. Despite widespread attempts to build an underground SAP in Germany, by 1935 most of the opposition groups had been broken up through arrests and imprisonment. The SAP's political survival fell to the exile groups, which spread from Prague to Paris to Oslo and Stockholm. The SAP is interesting as a party which avoided sectarianism by developing political strategies to reunify the workers' movement around anti-fascist and revolutionary goals. It formulated three such strategies, seeing itself in the early 1930s as a "point of crystallization" around which a new workers' party could develop,

after 1935 as an integral part of a popular front in which the SAP could cement an alliance with the SPD on the right and the KPD on the left, and from the late 1930s as the initiator of a "movement of concentration" of the numerous factions of the socialist left (excluding the communists only because of their unwillingness to cooperate). All three strategies failed because of the refusal of both the SPD and KPD to join any alliance which compromised their organizational integrity or claims to leadership of the labour movement. Having exhausted strategies and lacking a mass following with which to pressure the KPD and SPD, the SAP ultimately dissolved itself, with its members drifting back to the older workers' parties.

Bremer writes a well-documented account of the SAP underground and in exile. In itself the SAP was not an important or influential party. But it served as a catalyst in attempts to reunite German labour around a revolutionary program. Its failure marked the end of a revolutionary tradition and the permanent division of the German workers' movement. The SAP's strength was, in fact, in the quality of its leaders, men like Jakob Walcher, Paul Frölich and August Enderle (from the KPD), Max Seydewitz and Kurt Rosenfeld (from the SPD), and younger activists like Willy Brandt. For historians, the SAP is most interesting because it stood at the crossroads of the German labour movement from 1931 to 1945. Through the SAP one can analyze the major problems, political strategies, opportunities, and limitations of German labour in its opposition to fascism.

The most innovative work on German labour in the period of Nazism does not deal with the organized workers' movement, but rather explores the parameters of Nazi economic and labour policies. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, through an analysis of class forces and the Nazi economic system, and Timothy Mason, in a detailed examination and documentation of the underside of Nazi economics — labour policies and their relationship to social, economic, military, and foreign policy — both contribute to the revision of our view of Nazi totalitarianism.

Sohn-Rethel's *Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism*, based on articles he wrote after fleeing Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s, is part memoir, part history, and part critical Marxist analysis of the structure of German fascism. Sohn-Rethel worked for a Berlin-based research organ of German business, the Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftstag, at the end of the Weimar Republic and in the early years of the Nazi regime. His loose journalistic style makes for neither a tightly structured argument nor an empirically documented history. Instead, the work is most interesting as an historical source in its own right and as a set of theses about the divisions within the German ruling class and the role of Nazism in bridging them. According to Sohn-Rethel's analysis, the Nazi economic system was a "viable system of dysfunctional capitalism," a response to the depression in which the state intervened to increase production and reduce unemployment while keeping overproduced commodities from reaching the open market. The key to such an economic policy was militarization, and the long-range solution to the crisis of German industry, an expansionist foreign policy. Sohn-Rethel sees Nazi economic policies as an attempt to secure control over absolute surplus value, mainly by reducing unemployment and increasing the hours worked from the low level of 1932, while preventing workers from taking advantage of increases in relative surplus value (the result of technological change and rationalization) by suppressing the workers' movement. Such policies could not be simply imposed, but necessitated a balancing act among the different classes and social groups within Germany, and especially within the ruling political and economic groups. Sohn-Rethel pays a good deal of attention to the

clash of interests between industrialists and large landowners. This question is of secondary importance in dealing with Nazi labour policies. What is important, is Sohn-Rethel's analysis of the Nazi regime in terms of conflicting interests and forces, with the Nazi state intervening as arbiter. He concludes that "the result is a state-run economy for private profit. The contradiction reaches such a level that a fascist rule of terror is needed to master it."

Timothy Mason takes up some of these same problems and subjects them to systematic investigation in his work on Nazi labour policies. Mason has written two different kinds of work: a massive documentation of Nazi labour policies from 1936 to 1939 and a history of Nazi labour and social policies from the founding of the party to the start of the World War II. The latter serves as an introduction to the former and has been published separately in revised and expanded form. Mason has fulfilled three tasks in these two volumes. He has written a general history of Nazi social policies which complements Ludwig Preller's history of social policies during the Weimar Republic; he has attacked the problem of the Nazi economy by subjecting its highly illuminating labour problems to detailed empirical research; and he has revised interpretations of Nazi foreign policy by analyzing the move toward war in terms of the social forces and socio-economic pressures that conditioned the political decisions of the Nazi state.

Mason's historiographical approach deserves special mention. First, he does not start with the theories that have been advanced to explain the German economy under Nazism but instead conducts an empirical study of the functioning of the Nazi economy, including its political as well as economic determinants. Second, Mason analyzes the formulation of state policy through the social forces beyond direct Nazi control. In his own way, Mason combines history from "above" and "below" to show that, even under as centralized and totalitarian a regime as the Nazi's, the working class continued to make its own history, maintain its identity, and affect state policy. Mason documents the movement of workers "below" in three basic ways: through the social and economic trends of the labour market (wages, hours, employment), that is, the spontaneous responses of workers and employers to labour conditions which, taken together, form part of the objective processes of the capitalist economy; through the reaction of state and Nazi party officials to labour problems; and through the reports of the Gestapo on socialist and communist resistance in relation to the dissatisfaction of workers over labour conditions. Such "objective" and "negative" documentation is the only method possible when dealing with a regime which suppressed the organized workers' movement. Finally, Mason's documentation of Nazi labour policies from 1936 to 1939 is a documentary history with a thesis. Mason argues that there were two major tendencies inside the Nazi regime on how to deal with labour and social problems, a military-employer faction which wanted to push remilitarization without regard to its impact on social and working conditions and the "populist" strain in the Nazi party which insisted on minimal social concessions to workers to neutralize mass discontent. Mason carefully selects a limited range of questions on which to develop this thesis, and he backs his argument with evidence drawn from a variety of government sources. In short, Mason's documentation demonstrates the multiple determinants of Nazi policies through the voices of the Nazi state itself.

Mason's history of Nazi social policies is particularly useful in demonstrating the failure of the Nazi party to win decisive influence among German workers before 1933 and to neutralize worker discontent from 1933 to 1936. Thus, when the economic problems of militarization began to emerge after 1936, the Nazis could not rely on the acceptance of the regime by workers but had to offer concessions to avoid unrest. In his documentation Mason is par-

ticularly informative on three levels: general socio-economic conditions (a mine of details for future historians), the pressures on the labour market in the course of remilitarization, and the disagreements and tensions within the government in formulating economic policy. This latter problem is the most fascinating part of Mason's work, for internally the Nazi state was not monolithic but instead subject to multiple pressures, determined by social forces. Mason demonstrates an intensification and deepening of crisis symptoms from 1936 to 1939 as remilitarization strained the German economy to its limits. With the elimination of unemployment and the emergence of a shortage of skilled workers, the differences between the two tendencies on social policy were expressed more and more clearly, especially in attempts by the state to regulate wages and to control the supply of metal and construction workers and miners. Political as well as strictly economic considerations affected the uneasy compromises of Nazi social policies, as Mason shows through the "populist" stance of the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* and Reich Labour Ministry in "defending" workers' interests. Still, the Nazi regime objectified workers; government policy, even when "populist," was always instrumental in the sense that it sought to control the labour force for the regime's long-range economic and military goals. The Nazi regime never ceased to be capitalist. It did not eliminate private property or market relations but rather used an interventionist state to manipulate, redirect, and eventually control the market (especially the labour market). This kind of pragmatic backdoor regulation and planning tried to balance conflicting social forces in the short term while concentrating all efforts, through militarization, on a long-range expansionist solution to German social and economic problems. Mason thus goes far to reintroduce social antagonism, conditioned economically but mediated politically, as a driving force in the development of the Nazi regime toward war. The Nazis never went beyond a social balancing act, and the rapid move toward war, even though the regime was militarily unprepared for it, has to be seen in this context. Conflict between classes, and because of this within the ruling class and the Nazi state, never ceased to play a determining role in the complex and contradictory history of German fascism.

If there is a theme that runs through all the recent works on labour and fascism, then it is the class struggle, and especially the divisions within social classes and political movements. Duczynska and Bremer concentrate on divisions within the labour movement and the effects of these divisions on the resistance movement against fascism. Sohn-Rethel and Mason deal with the divisions within the German ruling class and the Nazi party and with the role of the Nazi party in smoothing out these differences in pursuit of long-range solutions. In both cases the internal class divisions have to be seen in the context of socio-economic conditions and class conflict. History from "below" can very easily dissolve the analysis of the labour movement into a myriad of particular problems and empirical details. But through the dissolving of hitherto accepted generalizations, it also broadens knowledge of the range of determinants of working-class history. In particular, it shows that there are always alternatives to any political strategy, that no state or party, no matter how superficially powerful or monolithic, can escape the objective social forces which it seeks to control, that one can manipulate, dominate, defeat or suppress the organized workers' movement but that one cannot destroy the movement of workers itself.

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THE MOST important conclusion one can draw from the recent historiography of the German workers' movement in the twentieth century is that German labour history has finally gone beyond the rigid political

camps that dominated historical thinking from the 1920s to the cold war. The new labour historiography is critical and tentative in its conclusions. It is essentially empirical and non-dogmatic. And it points to key areas of future research while introducing new methods and definitions of subject matter to guide this research. The new labour historiography is critical in a double sense. It introduces a new level of analysis of the organized labour movement from "below," especially through intensive local and regional studies, and it uses this new perspective to test generalizations about the history of the labour movement and to advance new theses to explain the development of German labour. The critical approach to labour historiography is most apparent in the work of social democratic and communist historians who, alongside historians independent of Germany's traditional labour parties, have rejected political interpretations of the past in favour of a re-examination of the historical process by which the German labour movement was divided and defeated from 1914 to 1933.

Nevertheless, German labour historiography continues to be political in a broad sense. With rare exceptions, the younger labour historians are politically committed; most stand in some relationship to German Marxist traditions, and many are explicitly associated with political parties, movements or ideologies. Those, such as David Morgan, who are not associated with German labour traditions nevertheless declare their allegiance to other political standpoints, in this case liberalism. In short, German labour history is still very much a part of German labour and socialist politics. However, instead of defending or apologizing for the politics of the past, the new generation of labour historians asks why the German workers' movement failed to achieve its goals from 1914 to 1945 and what alternatives were realistically available. In one sense, this history analyzes the past, not only to understand how the labour movement developed, but to learn from and avoid its mistakes. Lucas' critique of the Leninist party and his analysis of spontaneous unrest have obvious implications for current revolutionary strategies. Rürup's defense of democratization through workers' participation should be read in light of West German political alternatives. And Schöck's and Lehndorff's dissection of communist union policies is explicitly directed at the development of a left-wing strategy in today's unions. Partisanship, in the broad, positive sense of the word, is both the strength and weakness of German labour historiography. It has led to the investigation of new subjects, to the re-examination of old themes from new perspectives, and especially to the clash of interpretations. But it also carries with it the danger of dogmatism, of writing history backwards from today as an *apologia* for one's political faction or party. It is to the credit of most of the new labour historians that they have avoided this temptation.

Finally, the new German labour historiography is an attempt to integrate history from "above" and "below." Through this dual approach, it avoids the romanticization of workers' culture and revolutionary spontaneity, while adding a new dimension to the history of labour leaders, organizations, and ideologies. German historians rarely lose sight of the question of power, and thus of the objective function of political actions whatever the subjective intentions or sentiments of those who carry them out. But, by examining the consciousness, unrest, and actions of the broad mass of workers, they counterpose non-organizational social and economic factors to the role of organizations and thus work against any reification of the power of the state or of labour organizations. In the best of the recent histories — in the works of Ullrich, Lucas, Wheeler, Schöck and Mason — German labour historians realize the full complexity of labour history, the role of worker spontaneity and formal organization, of mass unrest and

grand political strategy, of ideological debate and daily political practice, of conscious, goal-oriented action and the socio-economic forces which lie beyond the control of leaders and parties. The historical process by which the labour movement grows and develops comprises all these factors. Consequently, the methodological approach, definition of subject matter, and empirical research of the labour historian should take the multiple levels of the workers' movement into consideration.

German labour historiography finds itself at the start of a general re-evaluation of the history of the German workers' movement. As long as German historians keep their central focus on the question of power, objective historical processes and the structural factors determining them, they will continue to avoid a romantic emphasis on spontaneity or "natural" revolutionary consciousness. By the same token, as long as they write from broadly partisan positions, they will of necessity contribute to an ongoing clash of critical opinions. Finally, because German labour historians continue, in their majority, to identify themselves with the workers' movement, they can be expected to elaborate and expand their dual approach of investigating both the movement of workers "below" and of the workers' movement "above." Definitive conclusions cannot be expected at this stage, but the recent German labour historiography has defined the types of questions and methodologies which will contribute to future syntheses.