

What Does the Spartacus League Want?

I

On the ninth of November, workers and soldiers smashed the old German regime. The Prussian saber's mania of world rule had bled to death on the battlefields of France. The gang of criminals who sparked a worldwide conflagration and drove Germany into an ocean of blood had come to the end of its rope. The people—betrayed for four years, having forgotten culture, honesty, and humanity in the service of the Moloch, available for every obscene deed—awoke from its four-year-long paralysis, only to face the abyss.

On the 9th of November, the German proletariat rose up to throw off the shameful yoke. The Hohenzollerns were driven out; workers' and soldiers' councils were elected.

But the Hohenzollerns were no more than the front men of the imperialist bourgeoisie and of the Junkers. The class rule of the bourgeoisie is the real criminal responsible for the World War, in Germany as in France, in Russia as in England, in Europe as in America. The capitalists of all nations are the real instigators of the mass murder. International capital is the insatiable god Baal, into whose bloody maw millions upon millions of steaming human sacrifices are thrown.

The World War confronts society with the choice: either continuation of capitalism, new wars, and imminent decline into chaos and anarchy, or abolition of capitalist exploitation.

With the conclusion of world war, the class rule of the bour-

geoisie has forfeited its right to existence. It is no longer capable of leading society out of the terrible economic collapse which the imperialist orgy has left in its wake.

Means of production have been destroyed on a monstrous scale. Millions of able workers, the finest and strongest sons of the working class, slaughtered. Awaiting the survivors' return stands the leering misery of unemployment. Famine and disease threaten to sap the strength of the people at its roots. The financial bankruptcy of the state, due to the monstrous burdens of the war debt, is inevitable.

Out of all this bloody confusion, this yawning abyss, there is no help, no escape, no rescue other than socialism. Only the revolution of the world proletariat can bring order into this chaos, can bring work and bread for all, can end the reciprocal slaughter of the peoples, can restore peace, freedom, true culture to this martyred humanity. Down with the wage system! That is the slogan of the hour! Instead of wage labor and class rule there must be collective labor. The means of production must cease to be the monopoly of a single class; they must become the common property of all. No more exploiters and exploited! Planned production and distribution of the product in the common interest. Abolition not only of the contemporary mode of production, mere exploitation and robbery, but equally of contemporary commerce, mere fraud.

In place of the employers and their wage slaves, free working comrades! Labor as nobody's torture, because everybody's duty! A human and honorable life for all who do their social duty. Hunger no longer the curse of labor, but the scourge of idleness!

Only in such a society are national hatred and servitude uprooted. Only when such a society has become reality will the earth no more be stained by murder. Only then can it be said: This war was the last.

In this hour, socialism is the only salvation for humanity. The words of the *Communist Manifesto* flare like a fiery *menetekel*¹ above the crumbling bastions of capitalist society:

¹ The reference is to the famous biblical story (Daniel, v, 25-29) of the handwriting

Socialism or barbarism!

II

The establishment of the socialist order of society is the mightiest task which has ever fallen to a class and to a revolution in the history of the world. This task requires a complete transformation of the state and a complete overthrow of the economic and social foundations of society.

This transformation and this overthrow cannot be decreed by any bureau, committee, or parliament. It can be begun and carried out only by the masses of people themselves.

In all previous revolutions a small minority of the people led the revolutionary struggle, gave it aim and direction, and used the mass only as an instrument to carry its interests, the interests of the minority, through to victory. The socialist revolution is the first which is in the interests of the great majority and can be brought to victory only by the great majority of the working people themselves.

The mass of the proletariat must do more than stake out clearly the aims and direction of the revolution. It must also personally, by its own activity, bring socialism step by step into life.

The essence of socialist society consists in the fact that the great laboring mass ceases to be a dominated mass, but rather, makes the entire political and economic life its own life and gives that life a conscious, free, and autonomous direction.

From the uppermost summit of the state down to the tiniest parish, the proletarian mass must therefore replace the inherited organs of bourgeois class rule—the assemblies, parliaments, and city councils—with its own class organs—with workers' and soldiers' councils. It must occupy all the posts, supervise all functions, measure all official needs by the standard of its own class interests and the tasks of socialism. Only through constant, vital, reciprocal contact between the masses

on the wall which read: "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting."
A *menetekel* is thus a sign of impending doom.

of the people and their organs, the workers' and soldiers' councils, can the activity of the people fill the state with a socialist spirit.

The economic overturn, likewise, can be accomplished only if the process is carried out by proletarian mass action. The naked decrees of socialization by the highest revolutionary authorities are by themselves empty phrases. Only the working class, through its own activity, can make the word flesh. The workers can achieve control over production, and ultimately real power, by means of tenacious struggle with capital, hand-to-hand, in every shop, with direct mass pressure, with strikes and with the creation of its own permanent representative organs.

From dead machines assigned their place in production by capital, the proletarian masses must learn to transform themselves into the free and independent directors of this process. They have to acquire the feeling of responsibility proper to active members of the collectivity which alone possesses ownership of all social wealth. They have to develop industriousness without the capitalist whip, the highest productivity without slavedrivers, discipline without the yoke, order without authority. The highest idealism in the interest of the collectivity, the strictest self-discipline, the truest public spirit of the masses are the moral foundations of socialist society, just as stupidity, egotism, and corruption are the moral foundations of capitalist society.

All these socialist civic virtues, together with the knowledge and skills necessary to direct socialist enterprises, can be won by the mass of workers only through their own activity, their own experience.

The socialization of society can be achieved only through tenacious, tireless struggle by the working mass along its entire front, on all points where labor and capital, people and bourgeois class rule, can see the whites of one another's eyes. The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.

III

During the bourgeois revolutions, bloodshed, terror, and political murder were an indispensable weapon in the hand of the rising classes.

The proletarian revolution requires no terror for its aims; it hates and despises killing.² It does not need these weapons because it does not combat individuals but institutions, because it does not enter the arena with naive illusions whose disappointment it would seek to revenge. It is not the desperate attempt of a minority to mold the world forcibly according to its ideal, but the action of the great massive millions of the people, destined to fulfill a historic mission and to transform historical necessity into reality.

But the proletarian revolution is at the same time the death knell for all servitude and oppression. That is why all capitalists, Junkers, petty bourgeois, officers, all opportunists and parasites of exploitation and class rule rise up to a man to wage mortal combat against the proletarian revolution.

It is sheer insanity to believe that capitalists would good-humoredly obey the socialist verdict of a parliament or of a national assembly, that they would calmly renounce property, profit, the right to exploit. All ruling classes fought to the end, with tenacious energy, to preserve their privileges. The Roman patricians and the medieval feudal barons alike, the English cavaliers and the American slavedealers, the Walachian boyars and the Lyonnais silk manufacturers—they all shed streams of blood, they all marched over corpses, murder, and arson, instigated civil war and treason, in order to defend their privileges and their power.

The imperialist capitalist class, as last offspring of the caste of exploiters, outdoes all its predecessors in brutality, in open cynicism and treachery. It defends its holiest of holies, its profit

² At the Founding Congress of the German Communist Party (Spartacus League), this passage was attacked by Paul Frölich and others as being a veiled criticism of the Bolshevik Revolution.

and its privilege of exploitation, with tooth and nail, with the methods of cold evil which it demonstrated to the world in the entire history of colonial politics and in the recent World War. It will mobilize heaven and hell against the proletariat. It will mobilize the peasants against the cities, the backward strata of the working class against the socialist vanguard; it will use officers to instigate atrocities; it will try to paralyze every socialist measure with a thousand methods of passive resistance; it will force a score of Vendées on the revolution; it will invite the foreign enemy, the murderous weapons of Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Wilson into the country to rescue it—it will turn the country into a smoking heap of rubble rather than voluntarily give up wage slavery.

All this resistance must be broken step by step, with an iron fist and ruthless energy. The violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be confronted with the revolutionary violence of the proletariat. Against the attacks, insinuations, and rumors of the bourgeoisie must stand the inflexible clarity of purpose, vigilance, and ever ready activity of the proletarian mass. Against the threatened dangers of the counter-revolution, the arming of the people and disarming of the ruling classes. Against the parliamentary obstructionist maneuvers of the bourgeoisie, the active organization of the mass of workers and soldiers. Against the omnipresence, the thousand means of power of bourgeois society, the concentrated, compact, and fully developed power of the working class. Only a solid front of the entire German proletariat, the south German together with the north German, the urban and the rural, the workers with the soldiers, the living, spirited identification of the German Revolution with the International, the extension of the German Revolution into a world revolution of the proletariat can create the granite foundations on which the edifice of the future can be constructed.

The fight for socialism is the mightiest civil war in world history, and the proletarian revolution must procure the neces-

sary tools for this civil war; it must learn to use them—the struggle and to win.

Such arming of the solid mass of laboring people with all political power for the tasks of the revolution—that is the dictatorship of the proletariat and therefore true democracy. No where the wage slave sits next to the capitalist, the rural proletarian next to the Junker in fraudulent equality to engage in parliamentary debate over questions of life or death, but where the million-headed proletarian mass seizes the entire power of the state in its calloused fist, like the god Thor his hammer, using it to smash the head of the ruling classes—that alone is democracy, that alone is not a betrayal of the people.

In order to enable the proletariat to fulfill these tasks, the Spartacus League demands:

I. As immediate measures to protect the Revolution:

1. Disarmament of the entire police force and of all officers and nonproletarian soldiers; disarmament of all members of the ruling classes.

2. Confiscation of all weapons and munitions stocks as well as armaments factories by workers' and soldiers' councils.

3. Arming of the entire adult male proletarian population as a workers' militia. Creation of a Red Guard of proletarians as an active part of the militia for the constant protection of the Revolution against counter-revolutionary attacks and subversions.

4. Abolition of the command authority of officers and non-commissioned officers. Replacement of the military cadaver-discipline by voluntary discipline of the soldiers. Election of all officers by their units, with right of immediate recall at any time. Abolition of the system of military justice.

5. Expulsion of officers and capitulationists from all soldiers' councils.

6. Replacement of all political organs and authorities of the former regime by delegates of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

7. Establishment of a revolutionary tribunal to try the chief criminals responsible for starting and prolonging the war, the Hohenzollerns, Ludendorff, Hindenburg, Tirpitz, and their accomplices, together with all the conspirators of counter-revolution.

8. Immediate confiscation of all foodstuffs to secure the feeding of the people.

II. In the political and social realm:

1. Abolition of all principalities; establishment of a united German Socialist Republic.

2. Elimination of all parliaments and municipal councils, and takeover of their functions by workers' and soldiers' councils, and of the latter's committees and organs.

3. Election of workers' councils in all Germany by the entire adult working population of both sexes, in the city and the countryside, by enterprises, as well as of soldiers' councils by the troops (officers and capitulationists excluded). The right of workers and soldiers to recall their representatives at any time.

4. Election of delegates of the workers' and soldiers' councils in the entire country to the central council of the workers' and soldiers' councils, which is to elect the executive council as the highest organ of the legislative and executive power.

5. Meetings of the central council provisionally at least every three months—with new elections of delegates each time—in order to maintain constant control over the activity of the executive council, and to create an active identification between the masses of workers' and soldiers' councils in the nation and the highest governmental organ. Right of immediate recall by the local workers' and soldiers' councils and replacement of their representatives in the central council, should these not act in the interests of their constituents. Right of the executive council to appoint and dismiss the people's commissioners as well as the central national authorities and officials.

6. Abolition of all differences of rank, all orders and titles. Complete legal and social equality of the sexes.

7. Radical social legislation. Shortening of the labor day to control unemployment and in consideration of the physical exhaustion of the working class by world war. Maximum working day of six hours.

8. Immediate basic transformation of the food, housing, health and educational systems in the spirit and meaning of the proletarian revolution.

III. *Immediate economic demands:*

1. Confiscation of all dynastic wealth and income for the collectivity.

2. Repudiation of the state and other public debt together with all war loans, with the exception of sums of certain level to be determined by the central council of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

3. Expropriation of the lands and fields of all large and medium agricultural enterprises; formation of socialist agricultural collectives under unified central direction in the entire nation. Small peasant holdings remain in the possession of their occupants until the latter's voluntary association with the socialist collectives.

4. Expropriation by the council Republic of all banks, mines, smelters, together with all large enterprises of industry and commerce.

5. Confiscation of all wealth above a level to be determined by the central council.

6. Takeover of the entire public transportation system by the councils' Republic.

7. Election of enterprise councils in all enterprises, which, in coordination with the workers' councils, have the task of ordering the internal affairs of the enterprises, regulating working conditions, controlling production and finally taking over direction of the enterprise.

8. Establishment of a central strike commission which, in constant collaboration with the enterprise councils, will furnish the strike movement now beginning throughout the na-

tion with a unified leadership, socialist direction and the strongest support by the political power of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

IV. *International tasks:*

Immediate establishment of ties with the fraternal parties in other countries, in order to put the socialist revolution on an international footing and to shape and secure the peace by means of international brotherhood and the revolutionary uprising of the world proletariat.

V. *That is what the Spartacus League wants!*

And because that is what it wants, because it is the voice of warning, of urgency, because it is the socialist conscience of the Revolution, it is hated, persecuted, and defamed by all the open and secret enemies of the Revolution and the proletariat.

Crucify it! shout the capitalists, trembling for their cashboxes.

Crucify it! shout the petty bourgeois, the officers, the anti-Semites, the press lackeys of the bourgeoisie, trembling for their fleshpots under the class rule of the bourgeoisie.

Crucify it! shout the Scheidemanns, who, like Judas Iscariot, have sold the workers to the bourgeoisie and tremble for their pieces of silver.

Crucify it! repeat like an echo the deceived, betrayed, abused strata of the working class and the soldiers who do not know that, by raging against the Spartacus League, they rage against their own flesh and blood.

In their hatred and defamation of the Spartacus League, all the counter-revolutionaries, all enemies of the people, all the antisocialist, ambiguous, obscure, and unclear elements are united. That is proof that the heart of the Revolution beats within the Spartacus League, that the future belongs to it.

The Spartacus League is not a party that wants to rise to power over the mass of workers or through them.

The Spartacus League is only the most conscious, purposeful part of the proletariat, which points the entire broad mass

of the working class toward its historical tasks at every step, which represents in each particular stage of the Revolution the ultimate socialist goal, and in all national questions the interests of the proletarian world revolution.

The Spartacus League refuses to participate in governmental power with the lackeys of the bourgeoisie, with the Scheidemann-Eberts, because it sees in such collaboration a betrayal of the fundamentals of socialism, a strengthening of the counter-revolution, and a weakening of the Revolution.

The Spartacus League will also refuse to enter the government just because Scheidemann-Ebert are going bankrupt and the independents, by collaborating with them, are in a dead-end street.³

The Spartacus League will never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany, never except by the proletariat's conscious affirmation of the views, aims, and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League.

The proletarian revolution can reach full clarity and maturity only by stages, step by step, on the Golgotha-path of its own bitter experiences in struggle, through defeats and victories.

The victory of the Spartacus League comes not at the beginning, but at the end of the Revolution: it is identical with the victory of the great million-strong masses of the socialist proletariat.

Proletarian, arise! To the struggle! There is a world to win and a world to defeat. In this final class struggle in world history for the highest aims of humanity, our slogan toward the enemy is: Thumbs on the eyeballs and knee in the chest!⁴

THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE

Translated by Martin Nicolaus

³ The independents—the USPD—had joined the Scheidemann-Ebert government in November. They withdrew from that government on December 29, 1918.

⁴ This was a well-known slogan of Lassalle.

Our Program and the Political Situation

Comrades! Our task today is to discuss and adopt a program. In undertaking this task we are not motivated solely by the formal consideration that yesterday we founded a new independent party and that a new party must formulate an official program. Great historical movements have been the determining causes of today's deliberations. The time has come when the entire Social Democratic socialist program of the proletariat has to be placed on a new foundation. Comrades! In so doing, we connect ourselves to the threads which Marx and Engels spun precisely seventy years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*. As you know, the *Communist Manifesto* dealt with socialism, with the realization of the ultimate goals of socialism as the immediate task of the proletarian revolution. This was the conception advocated by Marx and Engels in the Revolution of 1848; and it was what they conceived as the basis for international proletarian action as well. In common with all the leading spirits in the proletarian movement, both Marx and Engels then believed that the immediate task was the introduction of socialism. All that was necessary, they thought, was to bring about a political revolution, to seize the political power of the state in order to make socialism immediately enter the realm of flesh and blood. Subsequently, as you are aware, Marx and Engels undertook a thoroughgoing revi-

This is the text of a speech to the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus League), made on December 31, 1918. The text is from *Politische Schriften*, II (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), pp. 171-201. Notations of audience response are from H. Weber, *Der Gründungsparteitag der KPD*, pp. 172-201.