

# Communist Difficulties in Germany and Italy

By LUDWIG LORE

The recent history of the Communist movements in Germany and Italy is so interwoven and so closely related to one another, that it is practically impossible to deal with one without entering largely upon the other. They are confronted with the same problems. Both have gotten to that stage of the revolutionary class struggle where the conflict between the capitalist class and its exploited proletariat has reached the stage of active and aggressive struggle. There the text-book of proletarian revolution is being written, so that the comrades in other countries may see and profit by their mistakes.

Following the second Congress of the Third International, bringing in its wake the split in the Independent Social Democracy, came the unification of the Left Wing of the Independents with the Communist Party, under the name of "United Communist Party of Germany." Germany now had a Communist Party that could lay claim to political consideration, a party of more than 500,000 members, with numerous daily and weekly newspapers, with representatives in the Reichstag and in almost every Landtag, with majorities and strong minorities in countless cities and smaller communities. With one stroke the Communist movement in Germany had become a factor to be reckoned with, it had become a political power within the nation.

Nothing could have been more disquieting to the reactionaries on the one hand and to the Noskes and the Scheidemanns on the other. The masses had ceased to associate the name Communism with bloody revolts and violent uprisings. They began to realize that here had come a healthy movement that was going toward its final goal, determined not to be provoked into actions that would hinder rather than help it in the fulfillment of its purpose. An "Open Letter," in which the United Communist Party called upon the German proletariat to unite upon a program of fundamentals in order to create a solid proletarian front, found astonishing and enthusiastic response. The purpose of this letter, that is, the unification of the German proletariat by separating it from its reactionary and its reformistic leaders, was accomplished with astonishing ease and thoroughness. Large unions, entire districts, responded to their call. Unions that had formerly regarded every Communist with grave suspicion, now joined whole-heartedly with the Communist movement. Public opinion in favor of union with Soviet Russia grew with leaps and bounds, and revolutionary understanding seemed in a fair way to be penetrating into the very heart of the German labor movement. As the movement toward the Left grew apace, the alarm of the reactionary "socialist" labor union leaders became painfully evident. Communist trade unionists were summarily thrown out of their organizations, and discussions on Communism versus Socialism were the order of the day. Another year of uninter-

rupted educational revolutionary propaganda would have brought the masses who once stood in a solid phalanx behind the German Social Democracy, into the Communist movement.

In the meantime, however, dark storm clouds were gathering in Italy, rending asunder the only party in Europe that had weathered the gales that disrupted the socialist organizations in every other nation. The international significance of the Italian crisis had its effect upon the German revolutionary movement as well. It led to the resignation of Klara Zetkin, Adolf Hoffman, Paul Levi, Däumig and Brass from the Executive Committee, and brought these comrades into direct conflict with the Executive Committee of the Third International, whose position the United Communist Party in Germany had adopted.

In the next issue of *The Workers' Council* the reader will find a portion of the report presented by Comrade Zinoviev to the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party on the international situation which deals with the Italian situation. He presents the matter very simply, stating that the entire situation was precipitated by the refusal of Serrati to separate from the 11,000 opportunists, the supporters of Turati. As a matter of fact, the whole incident is not quite so obvious. Those who have followed the recent history of the Italian movement know that it was due chiefly to the influence of Serrati that the Italian party was the first large party to declare its allegiance to the Third International, that Serrati has always been the leader in the fight against Italian opportunism as represented by Turati and his followers. Clearly, there are other reasons than those which Zinoviev chooses to put into the foreground.

In short, the rock that wrecked the unity of the Italian movement, and which threatens the unity of the Communist movement all over the world is the difference of opinion that has arisen between the representatives of the Third International on the one side and Serrati and a strong contingent in the Italian party on the other concerning the possibility of a social revolution in Italy at the present time. Lenin, Zinoviev, and the representative of the Third International at the Italian Congress, the Bulgarian comrade, Kabaktschieff, are of the opinion that in Italy the revolution is knocking at the door. Serrati, and with him a great majority of the Italian comrades, are of the opposite opinion. This difference in the conception of the political ripeness of the Italian labor movement reflects itself in the tactics that must be adopted. If it is a fact that the Italian working class will, in the near future, be prepared to take over the political power and the industries of the country into their own hands, then the Italian working class must embark upon an era of aggressive struggle against the capitalist class in order to weaken its power of resistance and its grip upon the industrial life of the nation. If

this period has been reached, then it is the duty of the Italian movement to apply the methods that were so effectively used in Russia in July, 1917, the method of offensive mass action against the bourgeoisie. If, however, Serrati and his followers are right, if there is, at the present time, no promise for a successful revolution in Italy, then it becomes the immediate duty of the party to strengthen its organization, to educate the working class to an understanding of its revolutionary aims, and to turn the passionately excited proletariat of Italy into a class-conscious power that will be ready to carry out great and decisive revolutionary actions. Serrati was not opposed to the expulsion of the opportunists. But he vehemently opposed the Third International when it—or rather its Executive—presumed to dictate the time and the number to be expelled. And for certain very definite reasons. A group of Communists that we learned to know in the Left Wing movement here in the United States, of the well-meaning but headless and impetuous type, under the leadership of Bordiga, had organized a Communist Party before the Livorno Convention met. Just as the Left Wing organization, by its passionate aggressiveness, made it impossible to withdraw from the Socialist Party more than a fraction of those who were at heart in accord with its position—and the Third International to-day realizes only too well how gravely this Left Wing was mistaken in its tactics—so it was impossible for an Italian Communist Party to create a strong revolutionary labor movement so long as it stood under the control of these impetuous elements. For this reason Serrati was unwilling to break with Turati at the present time, as the latter, whose influence in the party was, after all, comparatively small, would act as a counterpoise to the superenthusiasts of the Bordiga group. In other words, he believed that it would be possible to create a strong revolutionary movement, against Turati, in the same party with Turati, much sooner than this could be done in a separate organization made up of and controlled by elements whose spasmodic irresponsibility is always repellant to the slower thinking masses. The opinion recently expressed by the leaders of the Third International concerning the American "split," namely that the methods used by the American Communists to divide the Socialist Party were wrong, is even more true in the case of Italy. With this difference, that there this grave mistake is being made with the sanction and under the instructions of the International Executive itself.

What followed in Italy after the Livorno conference is well known. The new Communist Party immediately embarked upon an offensive campaign. It believed that the Italian revolution was imminent, and adjusted its tactics to meet this situation. The first immediate result they achieved was the resuscitation of the Fascisti, a comparatively unimportant nationalist organization, founded and led by socialist renegades, who answered the offensive campaign of the Communist Party with such vicious brutality that Communists and Socialists were driven from the offensive into the defensive. What we see in Italy to-day is not a civil war, con-

ducted by a mighty proletariat to win or to hold itself in political power, but a fight that has been forced upon it by its enemies, that threatens to choke the whole labor movement in its own blood. Not the Red Terror, but the White Terror rules in Italy to-day, and how thoroughly these counter-revolutionary elements control the situation may be seen from a cable message from Florence that appeared in the New York Globe sent by its correspondent, Hiram K. Moderwell, who is well known for his reliability as well as for his sympathy with the radical labor movement.

Florence, Italy, May 4.—When the writer attempted to enter the office of the Florence Labor Union Federation to ask about the Fascisti anti-Bolshevist campaign the office was locked, and a nearby shoemaker explained that the labor men rarely visited it.

"They are afraid of the Fascisti," he added.

"Where is the Communist deputy, Caroti, who once organized the restaurant waiters' strike in New York?" I asked.

"He has had three different addresses in the last three weeks," was the reply. "He is now hiding from the Fascisti."

"Where can one attend a Communist election meeting?"

"There are no such meetings. The Communists cannot meet because of the Fascisti."

In this city there are none of the "Viva Lenin" or "Viva Revolution" signs, which a year ago covered all the walls of Florence. This is the result of the sensational Fascisti campaign. The Socialist and Communist labor unions do not dare hold propaganda meetings or take part in the elections, as their leaders and agitators are in constant danger of death. The Fascisti organization, which three months ago was confined to a small bitter-ender Nationalist organization in Romagna and Tuscany, is now a nation-wide organization, with branches in nearly every city and village in Italy. The leaders claim 2,000,000 members. "Ever ready" action squads are prepared to go at any moment to undertake any violence at command.

In this connection, the fact that possibly neither Socialists nor Communists will participate in the elections that are about to take place in Italy, speaks volumes.

Paul Levi, at that time chairman of the United Communist Party of Germany, attended the Livorno Conference, and upon his return published an article in the "Rote Fahne" (the Red Flag), the Berlin official organ, in which, in carefully and diplomatically chosen words, he took sides with Serrati. He insisted that there is, in the Italian Party, an overwhelming Communist majority, divided from each other by differences of only secondary importance, that these groups were being torn asunder by the impossibilist attitude of the Italian "100 per cent Communists," as it was being inspired and supported by the Executive of the Third International, and that the more moderate group, instead of being won for the revolutionary movement, was being driven into the ranks of the Opportunists.

But the Italian incident has assumed proportions that spread far beyond the confines of the Italian movement. Levi, and with him Clara Zetkin, whose revolutionary determination has always been above criticism, see in the occurrence at Livorno a dangerous entering wedge, that will inevitably split every one of the parties now allied with the Communist International. The Italian party was present at the birth of the Third International

and has ever since been one of its most important members. If what happened in Italy should be repeated in Germany, in France, or elsewhere—and the Berlin representative of the International indicated quite unreservedly that this will be the case, then the Communist movement will inevitably be disrupted, again and again and the forming of Communist Mass Parties which could become a power in the country, would be an obvious impossibility. There is only one alternative, that we return to the already thoroughly discredited theory that a small minority of class-conscious and determined Communists can overthrow the capitalist government and establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. To accept this theory as the highest wisdom of revolutionary socialism means, however, that the methods, and practice of violent uprisings, and secret organizations must make all agitation on a large scale not only impossible but unnecessary.

While all of these considerations were of paramount importance to Paul Levi, who was chairman of the Spartakus Bund and who, after the death of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, held the reigns of the German Communist movement in his capable hands, while they influenced Klara Zetkin, Adolf Hoffmann and the others who stood upon the same ground profoundly, there were other considerations that practically made their resignation from the Executive Committee of the U. C. P. of Germany a necessity. First among these was the recognition of the Communist Labor Party of Germany by the International as a "sympathetic party" (a party with a voice, but no vote). We have previously shown that the dominant characteristic of the C. L. P. of Germany is its pronounced syndicalist anti-parliamentarism, that it was numerically at the time when the Third International adopted its decision, of practically no importance, that the leaders and the organs of this party concentrated their activity mainly upon a series of vile personal attacks upon Levi who had become the nucleus against which their entire propaganda was directed. On the other hand it had been extremely sharp in its attacks upon the Third International, accusing it of compromising, of political cretinism, of opportunism. The recognition of this party could, in view of these facts, be regarded only as an intentional unfriendly act against the U. C. P. of Germany and particularly against the person of Levi, its chairman. Furthermore it seriously hindered the effective work that had been accomplished by the "open letter" in the labor organizations, by strengthening the influence of the syndicalist elements. This recognition of the C. L. P. permitted but one interpretation, it was virtually an order on the part of the Executive of the Third, to the U. C. P. to approach the C. L. P. and in order to perfect a union between the two parties, to sacrifice Paul Levi and the other "opportunist" leaders who shared his views. This interpretation is strengthened by the statements made by Zinoviev concerning Levi in his report to the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communists.

In short, the recognition of this numerically unimportant party was an open endorsement of the

"more aggressive" methods by the International Executive as against the systematic mass-propaganda that the "Open Letter" had inaugurated.

The resignation of the five from the Central Committee at its meeting of February 22 to 24, was therefore only logical. No Communist who could think clearly and independently, who was honest with himself and with the movement, could have acted otherwise in the given situation. Having recognized that the authoritative organs of the International were no longer in accord with their conception, that their methods were being regarded with suspicion and open opposition, they withdrew from the leadership of the organization. Under the circumstances neither a Levi, nor a Zetkin, nor a Hoffmann could hope to win their point. Every attempt in this direction would have been futile. They have been accused of desertion and cravenness. This accusation is as unfounded as it is incorrect. They knew that the party was on the point of launching new tactics, tactics that they could neither fight nor tolerate. They refused to be responsible for the occurrences that would inevitably follow, occurrences which, they are convinced, would end tragically for the Communist movement and for the proletariat.

The happenings of the weeks that followed confirmed their worst fears. The new tactic was ordained to a trial by fire only too speedily. It failed. Miserably, hopelessly.

The class struggle in Germany had been becoming steadily more intense. The counter-revolution had striven to use the crisis through which Germany was passing for their own purposes. The London negotiations, with their open enmity between France and Germany, the plebiscite in Upper Silesia, preceded as it was by months of intensely nationalistic propaganda and chauvinistic hatred, and finally the increasing horror of unemployment had kept the masses in a fever of nationalistic prejudices. In this crisis the U. C. P. called to arms. It called upon the masses to answer the London negotiations with their own action. The final answer, they cried to the people, lies not in London, but with you. Say what you want, and you will get what you want. We have talked long enough! The time for action has come. The language in these proclamations became more and more unmistakable, more determined, more powerful. At the same time, the industrial crisis was assuming dangerous proportions. Negotiations in London were broken off. The bourgeoisie of Silesia and of Poland were coming to blows over the Silesian question, while the counter-revolutionary "volunteer" organization, the Orgesch, showed an increasing readiness to take up the fight against the working class.

Certainly, the U. C. P. had no reason to warn its supporters to grin and bear these intolerable conditions in silence. It is no pacifist organization like the Independent Social Democracy. It cannot play the traitor, as did the Social Democracy. It had undoubtedly become the duty of the U. C. P. to call the masses to revolt, to turn the desperation that was taking possession of greater and greater portions of the nation, into conscious revolutionary determination. The situation offered an unparalleled

opportunity for revolutionary education. The time had come for intensive agitation against the rulers who had brought Germany into this terrible predicament, an agitation that must increase daily and hourly in strength and open determination, an agitation that must grow, step by step, with the growing revolutionary understanding of the masses. But nothing was further from their thoughts. On the contrary, when Hoersing, the social-democratic president of the Prussian Province Saxony, sent a few hundred Sipo police and sharpshooters in full fighting regalia into the strongly communistic industrial districts of Central Germany, ostensibly to quell the crime wave that he insisted was making itself felt in that territory, a communist climax was the answer. The working class was called to arms.

The first proclamation that followed upon the Hoersing invasion was already aflame with threats of forceful and violent retaliation. "Every workman must stand in his place, where he belongs, on the side of the fighting proletariat. Every weapon at the disposal of the working class must be used if we would help our hard-pressed brethren in Middle Germany. The working class must arm, prepared to meet the foe. The weapons in the hands of the working class." And shortly after there followed another which ended, "Every workman must take his weapon wherever he can find it."

The "Rote Fahne" of Vienna, recently characterized by Lenin as the best communist newspaper, comments upon this action of the U. C. P. as follows:

"The U. C. P. was right in taking up the challenge. But it made a grave mistake when it allowed itself to be carried away by the bitterness that was rampant in the masses, instead of leading this infuriation into the channels of consciously revolutionary determination. The first proclamation, with its words, 'Every workman will take his weapon wherever he finds it,' could only add to the influence of the revolutionary romanticists and desperados of the movement, for, though, this may have been from the purpose of those who wrote it. A partial strike, demanding the withdrawal of the Hoersing troops; simultaneous demonstrations all over Germany to arouse interest and sympathy for the cause of the workmen in the Mansfeld district, blow upon blow, increasing in strength and determination, constant appeals to the supporters of the majority socialist and the independent camps for sympathy and support—only thus could they have hoped to galvanize the masses into conscious action. The counter-revolution has come prepared for a small, unimportant outpost skirmish, the Central Committee of the U. C. P. believed that it could spread the fight, over night, along the entire battle front, to bring, in a few short hours, an entire army corps to the barricades. That was their great mistake. The call, 'Every workman must take his weapon wherever he finds it!' should have come at the end of a long, well-prepared and gradually intensified campaign, instead of at its beginning."

That, in a few words, is the crux of the matter. The Executive Committee of the U. C. P. used the

first opportunity that presented itself to put its new, more aggressive methods to the test. It puffed up a purely local upheaval into an offensive against capitalist Germany, and hoped to sweep the whole country in one bold attack, only to find that they had woefully overestimated the strength, the influence and the readiness of their organization, that they had no conception of the real sentiment that existed among the German working people at that particular moment, i. e., that they neither knew, nor were able to judge the actual balance of power between capitalist and proletarian sympathy that prevailed at that time.

In the nationalist excitement that had taken possession of a large part of the working class, they saw revolutionary spirit. They hoped, by a spontaneous, powerfully inaugurated movement, to sweep the masses that stand behind the social democracy and the independents into revolutionary action, and failed to understand that their headlong plunge was having exactly the opposite effect; that the masses who had begun to demonstrate a marked sympathy for the party so long as it showed promise of returning to sane and consistent activity, were turning in disgust from this new outbreak. By their hasty outbreak they had chained the very men and women whom they hoped to win, more firmly to their opportunist and reform leaders. The spirit of the C. L. P., nursed by the Executive of the Third International, had taken possession of the new members of the Central Committee, and had brought them to this desperate mistake.

The U. C. P. failed all along the line. At first the masses in the industrial Central Germany answered its call. But the party soon lost all control over the movement it had started, and its leadership went into the hands of more than questionable elements, such as, for instance, that well-known revolutionary romanticist, or perhaps robber chieftain would be the more fitting term, Max Hoelz, whose "Robin Hood" escapades in Saxony have spread his fame far beyond his own fatherland.

Outside of Central Germany their call to arms met with practically no response. In Berlin everything was quiet, the large industrial centers were apathetic, except for a few individual "deeds of heroism" that were neither communistic nor revolutionary. Such acts, we all know full well, cannot be prevented. They are bound to occur in times of revolutionary upheaval. But when they occur where there is not a sign of mass action, they sink down to the level of every-day crime.

The fight was broken off unwillingly, and far too late. The leaders of the movement must have seen, after the first few days had passed, that the movement was absolutely hopeless. They must have realized that the prize they were paying was far too high, that not even the withdrawal of the Hoersing troops was an adequate return for the hundreds that were killed and for the White Terror that would inevitably follow. The struggle ended with defeat. But this defeat need not have been without value to the International revolutionary movement if it had known enough to learn the lessons that it taught, if it had recognized and admit-

ted the errors that had been committed. But such was not the case. On the 6th of April the Executive of the Third International directed a proclamation "To the revolutionary workingmen of Germany," in which they call to the German proletariat: "With you we mourn the death of those who fell as heroes in the cause of proletarian freedom. With you we tremble in fury at the thought that our comrades, who are suffering in prison cells, will be delivered to the dry, guillotine of democratic military courts. The first attack of the German proletariat was repulsed. The bourgeoisie and its lackeys will try to carry dissatisfaction into the ranks of the retreating troops. **The Communist International tells you that you were right!** The victory of the working class can not be won with the first blow. You have turned over a new leaf in the history of the German working class. Prepare for new struggles. Review what this fight has taught, learn from it, close your ranks, strengthen your legal and your illegal organizations, intensify the proletarian discipline and the communist understanding of your fighters!"

In short, the Executive sanctions the March uprising from start to finish, and backs up the leaders of the U. C. P. Paul Levi, in a pamphlet which appeared on the 6th of April, entitled "Wider den Putschismus" (Against Irresponsible Revolts), vehemently attacked and bitterly condemned the uprising, detailing a number of incidents connected with its inception, concerning the truth of which we here in America cannot judge. We know Paul Levi only through the Communist press, and we know that, until recently, he stood high in the graces of our comrades in Moscow. We do not know what motives led him to publish this pamphlet at a time when it must necessarily encourage the White Terror of class justice in inflicting severe penalties upon the Communists who are in jail as a result of this ill-starred attempt. We can imagine, however, that the dread of another similar attempt in May or in June forced him to speak; that he felt that only the sharpest criticism and ruthless exposure of the cancer sores that were infesting the very heart of the movement could save the German movement. Furthermore he may have speculated upon the probable effect that his exposure, at this time, would have upon the third Congress of the Communist International that is to begin in Moscow on the 1st of June.

Whatever his motives may have been, we have no right to accuse him of having acted dishonorably or consciously against the best interests of the party. He was expelled from the party for the publication of this pamphlet on the 15th of April. This was to be expected, for no party will tolerate so flagrant a breach of discipline. But it is also a fact that Klara Zetkin and Adolf Hoffmann and others have come out openly in support of Levi's declaration, and have been ordered by the Central Committee, in consequence, to refrain from fulfilling their duties as representatives of the party in the Reichstag and in the Landtag sessions until the next meeting of the Central Committee. The statement made by Klara Zetkin begins as follows:

"The Central Committee has deserted the

straight line of Communist principles laid down by the Third International, and has thrust the party into a confusion of violent and forceful action. In so doing it has gravely weakened the fighting spirit of one of the most important European sections of the Communist International at a moment when the world situation more than ever before demanded, and had the right to expect powerful demonstrations of international solidarity from the proletarian masses in Germany. In order to avoid open and unsparing criticism, which is the duty of every party member and a necessity to the health and life of the movement, the Central Committee has sought to bury the highly uncomfortable altercation by creating a case against Levi. The undersigned protest indignantly against this attempt, which we regard as seriously injurious to the party. The conception voiced by Comrade Levi is fully in accord with the policies of the Third International and with the decisions adopted at its second international conference on tactics and principles of the Communist movement. The differences between the undersigned and the Central Committee are not passivity on the one hand and activity on the other, as the Central Committee would have it believed. On the contrary, the undersigned believe that increased and intensified revolutionary activities are urgently needed in our movement. The question before us at the present time presents itself as follows:

"Shall this increased and intensified revolutionary activity be conducted upon the basis laid down by the Third International, or shall our movement submit to a reversion to Bakunistic coup d'états?"

In closing, the eight signers, all ex-members of the Executive Committee, demand the immediate convocation of a party convention, a demand which, for the present, has been turned down by the Central Committee. On the other hand it took up the matter in a session that lasted two days and adopted long declarations with 26 against 14 votes which were subsequently published in the "Rote Fahne" of Berlin to show that the March uprising was necessary and that it is **but the first of a series of offensives that are still to come.** They demand that the offensive be continued along the same line and that the Central Committee be empowered to readjust the party organization to meet the requirements of this new aggressive tactic.

"Regarded superficially," the Central Committee says in one of its declarations, "the revolutionary offensive has ended with a defeat for the U. C. P. For a time the U. C. P. will be isolated from large portions of the working class. But in reality, this occurrence bears within it the fruitful germs of new, broader revolutionary action. It has opened up new fields for revolutionary propaganda, and in the end will strengthen the faith of the workers in the U. C. P., and in so doing strengthen the motive power of the working class. The struggles of December, 1918, of January and March, 1919, were failures, and yet in them and through them the onward march of Communism in Germany was born. But while, at that time, the advance guard of the class-conscious proletariat fought in the defensive, to-day it is the attacker, and carries on the fight

against the enemy. Herein lies the great progress that has been made. The March uprising is the first step, deficient, of course, in many vital features, but it is the first step on the path along which the U. C. P. will lead the German working class into the revolutionary offensive."

What are the real facts concerning this offensive and the strengthening of its revolutionary motive power? The "Kommunistische Arbeiter Zeitung" (Berlin), the organ of the C. L. P., writes in an article on "The Lessons of the March Uprising": "But we must recognize that German capitalism is to-day in a position—far more so than it was a year ago—to meet the attacks of the proletariat with a well-prepared and consistently carried out counter-offensive. The welding of the entire counter-revolutionary mass has become an accomplished fact."

It may be stated in justice to the German Syndicalists that they and their organ, "Der Syndikalist," were most emphatically opposed to the U. C. P. action and attacked it just as vigorously as Clara Zetkin, Paul Levi and others.

Capitalism stands more firmly intrenched, and

counter-revolution is more arrogantly sure of its power than ever before. Only the battalions of the revolution are weakened and broken and their ranks thrown into confusion. The offensive of which our comrades of the Executive speak with so much pride is but a weakly infant, that seems to be infested with all the "infantile diseases" of Communism.

In Italy the Fascisti, personified counter-revolution, are complete masters of the situation. In Germany Stinnes and Company and their capitalistic brethren are increasing in power and firmness from day to day. A Bolshevik Germany is becoming more and more unlikely, and the solid ranks of Communism are beginning to waver.

As yet little has, however, been lost. The stupidity of the counter-revolutionary powers and the treachery of the secretly counter-revolutionary "socialist" tools of capital will finally force the masses into the ranks of the Communist movement—in spite of all the mistakes it may make.

That is the only ray of light in these disheartening times.