

Strike—or Putsch?—in the Ruhr

By LUDWIG LORE

When the French took possession of the Ruhr district at the beginning of the year a rapid denouement, both socially and politically seemed inevitable. Yet it did not occur, because the French authorities as well as the Cuno government and the German bourgeoisie gave the working class of the occupied district its bitter medicine with a sugared coating. The French tried desperately to pacify the Ruhr population, in order to win it away from the sabotage problem of the German bourgeoisie. Their occupation therefore at first assumed an exceptionally mild aspect. Only railroad workers and officials directly implicated in active sabotage and Prussian and Federal authorities were accorded a treatment similar to that meted out to the Ruhr workers by Noske in 1919.

The German officials and manufacturers, to offset the allurements of the French, immediately granted a one hundred per cent wage increase,
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and unemployment compensation equivalent to two-thirds of the regular wage, and encouraged the men in the mines to reduce production to the lowest possible minimum.

These studied advances to the Ruhr workers did not augment, but rather released the tension. Certainly there was nothing remotely resembling a fighting mood in the Ruhr at that time. Partly this was due, as well, to the fact that the German iron and coal barons had no desire for a military rencontre with imperialistic France, and was striving to secure better terms for itself by striking a bargain with the French bourgeoisie at the expense of the German people.

Undoubtedly the German bourgeoisie is preparing to capitulate. It cannot fight and will not pay. There is only one other possibility—to unload the burden of a new capitulation to Entente capitalism on top of the fulfillment expenditures and sabotage costs upon the producing masses of Germany. Furthermore German capital has earned enough to satisfy even its rapacity. It has plundered the treasury of the nation to exhaustion. In the last five months the national debt of Germany was increased from 1 1/2 thousand to 10 thousand billions, the gold reserve of the Reichsbank, however, fell from 900 to 600 million goldmark. Further more the French have managed to solve the difficulties of coal and coke transportation, despite the statements of the German press to the contrary, and are already preparing to carry off the reparations coal that has been the

bone of contention during all these sorry months.

In view of these facts the German bourgeoisie has lost interest in passive resistance. The means by which the change of front is being accomplished is characteristically capitalistic. The Mark is falling from hour to hour, until it has become practically valueless. Prices have risen almost 250 per cent but wage increases are bluntly refused. The workers of the Ruhr distrust the heroes and the saviors of Germany only a few weeks ago have turned into traitors overnight in the eyes of the rulers. High prices and low wages drive them to desperation. And then, when disturbances break out, when hunger revolts arise, when hot tempered individuals follow the lead of capitalist and fascist provocateurs, German capital disowns them and with a theatrical appeal to the world it disavows all responsibility for the "communist putsch."

The capitalist press took up the news with varying emphasis. A number of newspapers were honest enough to admit that the uprising in the Ruhr was inevitable in view of occurrences there. Others suspected, and even openly accused the communist movement of Germany of inciting the revolt. Here in America the latter version—being the most sensational—was generally given credence. But we must confess that we have nowhere seen a more brazen and more rotten piece of editorialism than that which appeared in the N. Y. Call on June 12th.

This is the article—

"Failure of the Ruhr Commune"

"We have several times discussed Ruhr as an imperialistic and economic battleground between the French and German capitalists, with the British standing close to the sidelines, if not supporting the Stinnes group. Few would ever think that owing to the huge military forces scattered thru the Rhineland there would be a Communist uprising in the Ruhr. Yet it happened, altho all the cards were stacked against them. Here we cannot help asserting that audacity ceases to be a virtue and becomes positively criminal.

"All lines of communication were in the hands of the enemy. The union movement was divided between the regular organizations and the Catholic unions, while the most powerful group in the Rhineland, the Socialist party, withheld its approval, knowing well that all the so-called revolutionists could do would be to prepare a butchery for a Franco-German capitalist holiday. This made the Communists a mob without leadership, purpose, direction or goal, unless general demoralization of the labor movement can be called goal. When they got partial control in one place they were compelled to organize a police force to put down the very mobs their own incapacity and wildness created.

"Certain leaders are now disclaiming all responsibility for the madmen's work. The Putsch again with fortunately less slaughter. Yet by a freak the crazy enterprise only for a day succeeded there would be loud boasting about the brilliant tactics of the 'proletarian battalions' and the 'proletarian dictators.'"

What has actually happened in Germany?

On the 25th day of May the general strike movement of the Ruhr miners began. The "Rote Fahne" (Berlin), of May 25th, commented on the strike on its first page in a two column heavy typed article entitled "Agents Provocateurs at Work."

"The occurrences at Dortmund should commend the serious attention of the communist movement. The German working class and the Communist Party are in great danger. If we do not succeed in making the workers realize the significance of what is going on, we will run headlong into a decisive defeat.

"The capitalist papers admit that large masses are engaged in the Dortmund movement. That, in itself, shows that the uprising is not being fomented from without, that it is the outgrowth of a situation that has been created in the Ruhr thru its occupation by the French and the attitude of the German bourgeoisie.

"The bourgeoisie is crying for national defense and national resistance. It pays for this resistance with billions out of the national treasury, billions that the working class must be bled white to replace. At the same time it is exploiting the workers shamelessly. In the Ruhr prices are even higher than in the rest of Germany. Wage increases are in no relation to the increase in prices. In this situation what is more natural than that the workers should rise in self-defense? It is a crime on the part of the Social-Democracy and the labor union movement that they do not stand, to a man, behind these utterly justifiable demands of the work-

ers. It is a crime not only against the life of these workers, against the national existence of Germany as well, that national existence at whose altar the Social-Democracy and the bourgeoisie do lip service!...

"By its so-called protective organizations the German bourgeoisie has been provoking proletarian resistance in order to club it down relentlessly. The bourgeois press shamelessly accuses the desperate workmen of taking weapons from the French. It is not entirely impossible that French agents are working hand in hand with German Fascisti, and that serious attempts are being made to draw headless elements among the workers into open opposition with promises of French support.

"The Communist Party stands firmly behind every struggle of the working class and will help in this struggle too, with every weapon at its command. But at the same time it is its duty to warn the working class that it is madness to go into the conflict without arms. It is the duty of every Communist to join in this mass movement to persuade the workers to evade every show of force, and to make use, only, of the powerful weapons of strike and political demonstrations. It is to be feared that these spontaneous demonstrations of the working class will sooner or later take on an aspect that will make it easy for the bourgeoisie to choke them in blood unless the workers keep their heads. It is up to the workers to refute by their actions, the accusation that they have capitulated before French imperialism. The provocative intention of the French and German bourgeoisie

must be frustrated. The Party must proceed with iron energy and force."

Who dares to speak of Communist Putschism in the face of this determined declaration?

Is this the language of men who would drive a whole people into almost certain annihilation in order to win political power for themselves?

The following brief excerpts from various sources underscore the above statement from the Rote Fahne.

On May 27th the representative of the Prussian government declared at the press conference:

"It must be said in the interest of truth, that the Communists are not implicated in the occurrences in the Ruhr. It is simply a strike movement born of bitter need and low wages."

Concerning the alleged terror by Communist Hundertschaften (defensive squads), the bourgeois democratic "Frankfurter Zeitung" on May 27 writes:

"It must be reiterated, that, in the opinion of experienced labor leaders, the sentiment among German workers has become extraordinarily acute during the last few weeks. The opposition of manufacturers to a wage increase commensurate to the depreciation of German currency has aroused extreme dissatisfaction."

On the 26th of May the "Vorwaerts" (Berlin), the spiritual brother of the N. Y. Call, wrote concerning the "communist" uprising:

"That will, we hope, put an end to sensational headlines in the Berlin press about 'communist rebellions' and 'red rule,' that have been cha-

ng bleak showers up and down the backs of our honest bourgeois.

In reality this is not a communist strike, but an explosion of the Ruhr workmen.

"This constant harping on the Communists cannot do away with the fact that other elements, much more closely related to the German Nationalists, have played a significant role in the uprising, and that, when all is said and done, the root of the evil lies in the shameless exploitation of the masses and in the uneconomic and unsocial policies of both our government and our industrial chiefs."

No one can foretell the outcome at the present time. The broken tumble of the Mark has created conditions that force even the most conservative labor leaders to favor a general strike of all workers as the only possible protection against the ravages of capitalist price boosters.

It is not the "terror" of the Communists that drives these men out of their minds, but the terror of these bosses, who are tightening the screw until their workmen, out of sheer desperation, are turning upon their oppressors, giving them the opportunity for which they have been longing, to close the deal with their "enemy," the French bourgeoisie.

No one sees thru these machinations more clearly than the Communists of Germany. Their position from beginning to end, has been one of helpfulness in this strike for mere existence, but one of earnest warning against political uprising that would deliver the working class of Germany into the hands of their merciless enemies at the present time.