

Communism in Alsace

by Jay Lovestone

"Please take me to 56 Rue Jacques Kable", I told the taxi-driver in my best French, as I reached the railroad station upon my arrival in the city of Strasbourg, capital of Alsace-Lorraine. "No. You mean Steinwallstrasse 56, headquarters of the Communists of Strasbourg and editorial office of 'Die Neue Welt', our fighting paper," answered the taxi-driver in his best Alsatian German dialect.

In this exchange of a few words we have a graphic picture of the storm-centre Alsace-Lorraine is today—as it has been for centuries. But in the few words of the chauffeur we also see the new force which has come into the arena of imperialist combat—the rising power of Communism.

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A SMALL PLACE—A BIG SCHOOL

Alsace-Lorraine is a small place. But for the workers of the world it is a big school. We can all learn and learn a lot from the role that this strip of territory with but 5,000 square miles—somewhat larger than Connecticut—and about 2,000,000 people has played in the history of Europe. And now we can all learn from the position and experience of the Communists in this province which is virtually in a state of semi-martial law, under the iron heel of French imperialism. The great mineral wealth, the bountiful agricultural resources, the strategic military position, all have gone into making this land a home of bloody contention between the profit-hungry French and German imperialists. But today, there is a new force on the scene, a revolutionary force which will play the decisive role in the final settlement, and finally in the genuine liberation of this war-torn country—the workingclass and poor peasantry led by the Communist Party (Opposition) of Alsace-Lorraine.

The Communist Mayor of Strasbourg



Comrade Charles Hueber, leader of the Communist Party of Alsace, which is affiliated to the International Communist Opposition.

There is a very tense atmosphere in Alsace-Lorraine. It is especially noticeable in the big cities of Alsace, Strasbourg, Colmar, Mulhausen. The French bourgeoisie are working overtime to "win" Alsace, as they have won the war. French imperialism always speaks of Alsace-Lorraine as "the liberated provinces", "reintegrated into the French fatherland by the Versailles treaty." This is empty talk. In the eyes and hearts of the masses Alsace-Lorraine is very far from being integrated into the sphere of French imperialist culture and politics—even less than it was in the German Empire. No one knows this better than the French Army General Staff which realizes the crucial importance of Alsace-Lorraine in the "French system" of military domination on the European continent. Desperate and ruthless is the French administration of the regained provinces in the untiring efforts of the Quay d'Orsay to win and hold the provinces.

Under such critical conditions the magnificent strength of the Communist Party (Opposition) as shown, for instance, in the election victory of the Communists in Strasbourg, a city of about 200,000, is a thorn in the side of French imperialism, a red dagger at the heart of French imperialist plans.

France maintains ten to twelve thousand troops in the "liberated" provinces to keep them free. Strasbourg itself is "host" to about eight thousand made up of peasant boys from the "Midi", from the rural sections of Southern France, long a stronghold of capitalist reaction. The Poincares, Tardieus, and Boncours, the "Comite des Forges" will take no chance with other troops in Alsace. Day and night French military engineers, with an army of select French and other workers—but no Alsations—are working on constructing the mightiest military fortifications in the world. The vast stretch of concrete and steel electrification that I have seen in the new ramparts are the last word in modern military defense.

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FRENCH "DEMOCRACY" AT WORK

The French capitalists rule thru a strongly centralized government apparatus, with power far more concentrated than under the German federative system. Hence, for this reason, in addition to military reasons, French imperialism is taking away rights from the Alsatian municipalities where the Communists in bloc with the fighting autonomists are especially powerful. Thus, the taxes paid go to the Prefecture appointed by the Paris bankers and it is the military prefecture which has veto power over the municipal budgets voted by the city councils. The various city police forces, while paid from the tax funds collected in the cities, are strictly under the control of the military prefecture and not in the least subject to the mayors or municipal councils. Paris has even decreed that all government buildings must fly the French tri-color. This is aimed especially at our comrades who have time and again dramatized their loyalty to the red flag of international working class solidarity by raising it over the government buildings over which they have won

control (City Hall in Strasbourg, etc.).

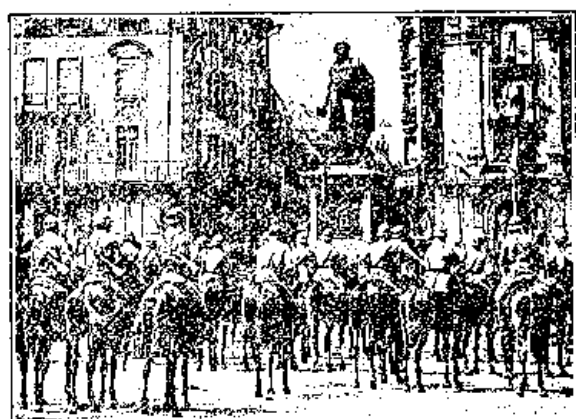
With every conceivable device and every ounce of energy French imperialism is working to root out all remnants of German influence and imprint indelibly the French stamp on the country. In the elementary school only French is taught and German is prohibited. The children's parents speak only their native German dialect and don't know a word of French. Here we have lots of burning resentment engendered.

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THE PRICE OF CAPITALIST "LIBERATION"

Until our comrades forced the issue, the municipal theatre could perform plays only in French. In its

French Imperialist Troops in Strasbourg



vandalism, the French capitalist conquerors destroyed German paintings in the Strasbourg City Hall and tore down the beautiful railroad square in the Alsatian capital and transformed it into a barren, dismal military parade ground. The charming fountain at "La Place Broglie", built by the Germans, has been replaced with heavy concrete and asphalt for the same reasons. To add culture and beauty, there has been placed on the walls of the magnificent City Hall of Strasbourg a hideous bronze tablet bearing the "greetings" of the City of Milwaukee (largely German population) to the Alsations and congratulating them on their newly-won "freedom"!

But the French imperialist "liberators" go even further. They go out of the way to foist oppressive taxes on the Alsations and to rob them of rights they had gained thru decades of the heaviest sacrifices. For example, individuals with annual incomes of \$600 (15,000 francs) pay per year in the French city of Epinal a tax of 189 francs, Nancy 207 francs but in the Alsatian cities of Colmar 828, Strasbourg 855 and Mulhausen 895 francs. Pretty expensive freedom!

Before the Versailles Treaty, there was much sympathy for France in many sections of the Alsatian population. Today this is gone. Alsace-Lorraine now knows that the French imperialist "democratic" bayonet is no better than the German "cultured" imperialist sabre. Today, the pro-French sympathies of pre-war days are being transformed into violent anti-French feelings. The Alsace-Lorraine question is far from settled. Alsace-Lorraine has yet to be liberated!

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COMMUNISM IN ALSACE

The Communist Party has always been a powerful force in Alsace. Just as the Socialist Party in Alsace is really the most eager exponent of French imperialism influence in the "liberated provinces", so have the Communists been the banner-bearers and recognized leaders of the Alsatian workers and peasant masses in the economic and national struggle against French imperialism. The bloc of the Communists and the militant national-autonomists has won the support of the decisive sections of the toiling population in Alsace. The repeated election victories of the anti-imperialist bloc, under the leadership of the Communists, is a direct evidence of this. Comrade Hueber, one of the outstanding Alsatian Communists, whose father was a Communist and who himself fought side by side with Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg against the imperialist war, is mayor of Strasbourg; other Communists occupy important positions in Strasbourg and other municipalities. In the trade unions, fraternal societies, and other labor organizations, the influence of the Communists is very great.

The ultra-left course of the Communist International expressed itself in a grossly sectarian line on the national question in Alsace: the insistence upon "Soviet Alsace" as the immediate and only slogan and the demand for a break with the autonomists. The entire Party organization in Alsace resisted this suicidal course and as a result it was "expelled" as a body by the bureaucrats in Paris! The Communist Party of Alsace immediately took up the struggle of the International Communist Opposition, of which it is one of the best sections today.

In the coming imperialist war, the workers of the United States, can look with confidence and hope to our comrades in Alsace-Lorraine, to our comrades in arms in these "liberated" provinces which will play such an important role in the impending imperialist world conflagration. In this battlefield of centuries there is now a mighty arm for peace, the militant workingclass, with a red dagger at the heart of French imperialism—the growing Communist movement of Alsace-Lorraine.

BANQUET AND DANCE

NEEDLE TRADES UNIT

COMMUNIST PARTY U.S.A.—Majority Group

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1931, 8 P. M.

at

NEW WORKERS CENTER

63 Madison Avenue

To celebrate the installation of Needle Trades Unit

To welcome Comrade Lovestone back to U. S.

Admission 50 Cents