Trotskyism in occupied France

The Trotskyist paper
Arbeiter und Soldat
1943-44
Introduction

By DAVID BRODER

World War Two created extremely difficult circumstance and political challenges for internationalist Marxists. In German-occupied Europe the Trotskyist Fourth International mounted a heroic struggle against the Nazi occupation and for revolutionary illusions in the defeated democracies of Britain and the United States. Aiming to win German soldiers to a common struggle against imperialism, in summer 1943 the French Trotskyists turned to organising amongst the German troops occupying France. Given the strict discipline of the Wehrmacht and the murderous anti-communist of the Gestapo and the Milice, the MI6 operation was incredibly dangerous, but important both for teaching the French workers to replicate the revolutionary attitudes promoted by the Communist Party and for encouraging dissent among the German ranks. The Comités de la De Internationale (Fourth International Committees) produced German-language leaflets as well as a monthly newspaper Arbeiter und Soldat (Worker and Soldier) to build links with German soldiers.

1943: the situation in Europe

By summer 1943 the Axis war machine was suffering enormous damage and defeat, and had completed a total occupation of France in November 1942, and still held on to his conquests in the Low Countries, Denmark, Norway, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Greece, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States and parts of western Russia, the Axis powers no longer looked able to win the war. The German defeat at Stalingrad and the subsequent loss of much of south-western Russia; the Allies' conquest of North Africa; the Anglo-American invasion of Italy; the southern defeats in the Pacific; the taking of much of Macedonia, southern Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and part of Slovenia; the evacuation of the mounting German resistance were all bad omens for the Nazi leaders and their satraps.

Weakened by the new, continuing losses, Allied bombing and mounting military disasters, there were significant stirrings in the occupied countries. German officers moved to remove Hitler and take charge of the war effort, but in Rome the Fascist Grand Council voted on 27 July 1943 to no-confidence Benito Mussolini, who was summoned to King Victor Emmanuel III, arrested and taken in an ambulance. This manoeuvre on the part of the King and Marshal Pietro Badoglio was a ‘revolution from above’ mounted to save the ruling class from the threat of working-class uprisings. As the Trotskyist Partito Comunisti Italiano commented:

"The bourgeoisie, the monarchy and the Church, who created and supported Fascism, who today are throwing Mussolini to the people to avoid going down with him, and who demonized popular and politic clothes in order to con- tinue the exploitation and oppression of the working class, have no right to say anything in today’s crisis. This right, exclusive property of the working class, the peasants and the soldiers, the eternal victims of the imperialist occupation."

The late World War Two period is usually compared unfavourably with the wave of revolutionary struggles pro- voked by World War One, such as the February and October Revolutions in Russia; anti-war demonstrations in Germany; soviets in Bavaria and Hungary; and a series of revolutionary opportunities in Germany until 1923, con- trary to Trotsky's prediction that it would cause a greater revolutionary crisis. However, during this period there were significant working-class struggles in several belligerent countries and in the occupied zones in Eastern Europe, Italy, France and Belgium, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and small-scale mutinies in the German armed forces.

For these courageous activists the class struggle never stopped: even having been arrested and taken to the Buchenwald concentration camp and in April 1944 it managed to release a manifesto calling for "revolutionary fraternisation with the workers in the arms of occupation. For a Germany of workers' councils in a Europe of workers' councils! For the world workers' revolution!" But the sad fact was that many of these activists would soon be murdered by the Nazis. In reality the task with which the Trotskyist movement was confronted, lifting the world working class from the abyss of imperialist war, fascism and Stalinism, proved to be far beyond their numbers and means. Not only the crushing of the German workers' movement by fascism but also Stalinist misleadership and the ensuing co-optation of working-class and dem- ocratic struggle by the Allied imperialists made working-class revolution high on impossible: Despite all these diffi- culties the Trotskyists fought to promote the internationalist Marxist tradition, and here we reproduce the surviving fragments of the Tsarist International's organised activity in France in 1943-44, both the collection of Arbeiter und Soldat and the sole extant fragment of Zeitung für Arbeiter und Soldat im Westen.
What does Arbeiter und Soldat stand for?

No. 1 July 1943

IS PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION COMING?

Once again the spectre of communist revolution haunts the globe. In Germany Goering invites his SS and German police battalions to eliminate any German worker who speaks out about the coming proletarian revolution. Goebbels writes that “this war is synonymous with social revolution”. He uses exorcisms like this and others to try and escape the abyss of the now inevitable revolution. In Britain even the Tories, hoping to calm the proletarian tide, are talking of projects to improve the well-being of the masses after the war. In the United States high finance warns “If Stalin goes over to the Trotskyist theory of revolution” – or, more precisely, if communist revolu- tion breaks out – “we will crush it with arms”. In the name of the capitalists of the United States and the rest of the world, Roosevelt demanded that Stalin dissolve the Comintern. In Russia – yes, in Russia! – the Stalinist clique has indeed dissolved the International. The Russian bureaucrats have called for revenge against the German people and they have made great pains to prove to their dear allies their honourable intention to crush any communist revolution in the egg.

This is how these gentlemen view the danger of commun- ist revolution, and this is how they prepare to greet it. But what are the facts? The hundreds of millions of exploited? Most importantly, what of the German proletariat? Are we really on the threshold of communist revolution, or will the ruling class have more to show for itself than the bloodbath of peoples it hasorganised in its quest for profit? The question must be posed ever more sharply. These gentlemen would have no objection to an uprising against Hitler’s clique which ushered in victory for the Anglo-Saxon imperialists: on the contrary. It is with this goal in mind that working-class districts are bombed day and night with the aim of heightening exasperation and thus pushing the de- sperate masses into revolt. Any uprising would have its place in these gentlemen’s programme, as long as it brought some- thing of the sort: a worst-case scenario, some place of “democratic” regime, which they would simply require to respond to the wishes of Anglo-American capital. But revolutions are a dangerous thing, and a lot can change. If millions of workers took to action they may well go beyond that and fight for their own objectives, creating a Soviet Republic as the basis for socialist construction. But is there any sign that the leaders in Washington, London and Moscow will not get their way? Didn’t the German prole- tariat let the revolution slip through its fingers once already? Haven’t Himmler’s terror and Goebbels’ brutal propaganda broken the German working class and completely destroyed its faith in its own revolutionary strength? Can anyone really believe that the European revolution will go beyond the tight confines of the Anglo-Saxon imperialists’ plans? That is the question posed.

HAVE WE GONE FORWARD SINCE 1917?

The 1917 Revolution failed because of three main errors. First and second millions of workers were still full of illusions about the capitalist system and the democratic republic. Third millions of workers who did want to fight for socialism still trusted the old Social Democrat Party which had been degen- erate for many years and whose bureaucrats only had one idea in mind: pass the power they held into the hands of the bour- geoisie. This was achieved on the basis of open struggle these groups will unite into a revolutionary layer which came to power after Lenin’s death constituted a danger for the Stal- inist party, which calls itself Communist, will deny the German workers their right to determine their own future. In Russia this right was achieved in 1917, when power passed to the soviets. In Germany, however, the soviets were not able to seize power, and the government continued to rule. The German workers’ movement was therefore unable to develop a workers’ government, and the government remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

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TROTSKYISM IN OCCUPIED FRANCE

The misery of the Russian masses and the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets. They saw greater capitalist crisis than the workers of almost any other country; they saw at close quarters the rottenness of bourgeois democracy; they learned to dis- trust parties and to be careful in choosing their leaders. All this recently won experience will only be made clear in the struggle itself. When the rumour against the capital- ists responsible for the war sweeps away the layer of shut- ry laid down by the fascists’ lying propaganda, it will not take the workers much time to learn and gain experience in struggle, since it will only be necessary to rediscover memories of the past and teach the knowledge of the older generation to the young. This is a sure thing. Gentlemen of London and Washington, Berlin and Moscow, although it is threatened by many dangers, the proletarian revolu- tion you see in your nightmares is at the door and closer still.

REVOLUTION AWAITS

It is impossible to predict on precisely what day revolution will come. But it will begin to ripen long before it breaks out. When after its quick victories over the less well-prepared and well-armed peoples the German army first met with serious resistance, the fascist attempt to smother the worldwide class struggle was also shown to be impossible. Fascism did succeed, using massive terror, to banish it from the surface for some time. But it came back again! A process of decomposition began both at the front and in the rear. The differences of victory lapsed, the spirit of combativity was dampened, and the founding of speed-ups and sabotage in the factories became more and more widespread, the bloodiest terror was sufficient to keep the front and the economy afloat.

But there are few who know what the goal to be reached is. The curtain of smoke of fascist propa- ganda has not yet completely disintegrated. For the moment the lessons the German worker in uniform has learnt in Russia bring him more confusion than they do clarity, more doubt than they do hope. Already, however, groups are aris- ing everywhere to answer the questions posed. Old cells which survived the years of terror by keeping themselves to themselves are being organised. Light is being cast on the issues in discus- sion and in writing, in papers and in leaflets. On the first day of open struggle these groups will unite into a revolutionary communist party. Arbeiter und Soldat is geared for this process of destroying fascist rule and all bourgeois rule, undermining the capital- ist war front, rebuilding the proletarian class front and preparing for the communist revolution. These are the goals it has set itself.
On the dissolution of the
Third International

The Stalinist bureaucrats have dissolved the Comintern. "Warning," declares the Axis propaganda, "this is just a massive bluff. We are not afraid of death." "Hurrumph!" the Anglo-Saxon imperialist press cries with joy: "our allies are not communists; they do not understand revolution!" "Of course this is a manoeuvre" is the rationalisation the communist world-wide, committed to the Third International. Despite all the difficulties used to re-establish the movement, the World Congress has dissolved itself, folding up the flag only to unfurl it again in the future. Such manoeuvres, he tells himself as he reflects, can and must be used. But to do so in Barcelona; it is a question of the survival of the workers, the peasants, and the community. The bureaucratic, the Stalinist bureaucrat has always portrayed himself as a sort of intellectual and the world-wide "socialist." He will thank you a thousand times, said Roosevelt, "if you will dissolve the International." 

A thousand thanks and the confidence of Roosevelt, the German and British capitalists, and the nascent revolutionary movement and the confidence of the masses.

But these days no politics are "realistic" apart from the politics of revolution. The methods of revolution, the methods of struggle, in which they have betrayed and sold out to Anglo-American capitalism, through their dogged chauvinism and their barbarous treatment of their prisoners, the bureaucrats have only succeeded in exasperating the German soldier, masking the possibility of revolution and so throwing him disarmed into the hands of Goebbels and his propaganda: in so doing they have prolonged the war. One German worker, upon receiving revolutionary propaganda from a comrade, said: if these publications were distributed widely it would surely take only a few days before revolution broke out in Germany and the war was over. This worker had a more "realistic" political outlook than that of the bureaucrats over their corrupt party, the KPD.

The German media, which tries to pass off the rapacious war of capitalists like Knupp, Kloeckner, Roehling and others as a crusade against "fascism," must of course do all in its power to exercise this "manoeuvre." Thus it is another of the solved Third International will just dance into a Fourth International. The first part of this story serves to flatter the Stalinist bureaucracy — the second part is an admission that the organ of the coming revolution is the Fourth International has indeed been created, but as a rallying point for authentic revolutionary communist. It follows for the followers of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Revolutionary communists welcome the dissolution of the Comintern. Of course, at first it will serve to discourage the workers and sow confusion among their ranks. However, in German and European revolutions we must take account of these two lessons. Peace! Bread! Freedom!

The working class in the war

The Belgian workers, the majority of whom saw in advance that the war was fought solely in the interests of the wealthy capitalists, entered the war reluctantly. That was one of the main reasons for Belgium's quick defeat, saving the lives of many of its people. However, the workers' movement suffered a heavy blow from the German victory. A wave of nationalism and the alliance for the Royal Air Force swept over the country and had a significant effect even over the working class. The main reason for this was the deterioration of living standards caused by the decline of imports and the export of basic goods and coal to Germany. One of the first German demarcations was workers, forcing poverty on the working class. The workers and their families tried to make the best of things with Sunday trips to the countryside where basic goods were not so expensive. Those unable to do so could only "freely" travel to Germany. Despite the poverty of the working class, or indeed because of it, the Belgian and German industrialists producing armaments made a roaring trade. Prices went up, but wages did not. This was the Belgian proletariat's first experience of national socialism. During winter 1942 the German authorities started mass deportations of workers to Germany. A protest strike broke out in a large farm of around 10,000 workers in Liége. After a three-day strike the authorities postponed the deportation of the workers until February 1943. The Liége province was the main theatre of a feverish revival of workers' organisations. Unfortunately, they did not have a workers' party which could have given the masses' struggle direction. The movement was decapitated by the French. The struggle for the resettlement and the war was crushed into the ground. The defeat of the revolutionary movement broke the cornerstone of the resistance against France. The workers, peasants and militia committees were dispersed and their leaders were already brokered. The GPU hunted down revolutionary workers' organisations and reports.

The proletariat masses rose up against this anti-working-class agenda one more time in Liége, Aragon and Valencia in May 1937. During their three-day uprising the masses took control of the streets and neutralised the Communist and Republican organisations. Unfortunately, they did not have a workers' party which could have given the masses' struggle direction. The movement was decapitated by the French. The struggle for the resettlement and the war was crushed into the ground. The defeat of the revolutionary movement broke the cornerstone of the resistance against France. The workers, peasants and militia committees were dispersed and their leaders were already brokered. The GPU hunted down revolutionary workers' organisations and reports.

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capitalist owners helping the German authorities break the strike. The workers thus saw that all the chatter about national unity was just bluffing, and it only took a few days to collapse when profits and good business were threatened. The workers feared that if there was any trouble or any demonstration the German soldiers, under the control of the military authorities, would open fire. A leaflet circulated among the workers calling for fraternisation with the German workers in uniform who wanted to go back to their homes just as much as the Belgian workers wanted to stay in theirs. There had not been any fighting or any fraternisation, but the leaflet had a profound impact on the workers. They had realised who the real enemy was and where they could find their real ally. At the start of the fighting the artificial front of national unity was replaced by the class front of national unity. The defeat of the action the party won the confidence of the best working-class militants. Despite this there was soon a massive campaign of lies. The Bolsheviks were falsely accused of being agents of Ludendorff. Lenin and Zinoviev were forced into hiding. Trotsky, Lunacharsky and others were thrown into prison. However, three months later, they seized power and the Second Congress of Soviets could take charge. 2. That in July 1932 the von Papen government sacked the Prussian Social-Democrat ministers Braun and Severeing! The Social-Democrat bureaucrats held back the workers. Indeed, the Reich government had acted in a perfectly “legal” fashion, and there would soon be elections. In place of the armed struggle, the ballot paper. The KPD called a general strike. But no-one listened. Why? Because less than one year previously it had called for workers to vote with the Nazis in a referendum against these same Prussian ministers. Because its policy of splitting the unions (RGO) had isolated it from the workers in the factories. Because its theory of social-fascism had divided it from Social-Democrat workers who wanted to fight. That was how it prepared the worst of all defeats, defeat without a fight. Once again, feed your mouth with their promises “Dear comrades, nations will now be increased further still. The excess in the Ukraine which already exists... etc,” Thus spoke the party propagandists, Hitler, Goering, Gobbelins and others last winter. Long-term continuation of the war and continuing military adventures. This is growing. There have indeed been other isolated strikes in big factories to prevent fresh attacks on living standards. Didn’t the bourgeoisie already have a tough time in 1918-19? But promising something and having the means to supply it are not the same thing. Now they have cut the meat ration by 10g a week, net of course without rubbish excusations. Workers are tightening their belts and clutching their fists with which, when the time is right, they will one day feed their mouths. Peace! Freedom! Bread! Peace: only world proletarian revolution can bring us peace and the end of all wars. Freedom: this is not possible for all the exploited except in the framework of a Socialist Republic of Soviets. Bread: only the expropriation of capital and the establishment of a socialist planned economy can guarantee bread for all and an end to economic crises.

AN APPEAL FROM MOSCOW

The Moscowsi transmitter has announced the creation of a “National Committee for a Free Germany”. This Committee is composed of an émigré poet (its chairman), some captured generals, etc. The ex-Communist poet and the ex-fascist generals have published a manifesto, with five particular points of interest to the workers — who will have made clear their interests and their lies and false promises, dressing one part of the class against another and little by little destroying the gains of the revolution. But this was just the tip of the iceberg for the Social-Democrat bureaucrats. In 1933, after Hitler’s seizure of power, they showed the German workers their true colours. This time around, global capital needs someone else to inject poison into the workers’ blood in Germany and Europe: it is now the task of the bureaucrats in Moscow, brought to power by the isolation of the victorious October revolution. Despite all the little lies and false promises, the bosses know that there still is power, and that they may have left as much trace in the minds of the wealthy capitalists as they have in the memory of the global working class. What has changed over the last 25 years? The British working class has been radicalised. In 1926, betrayed by the union bureaucrats, the miners held a year-long strike. During the capitalist crisis the American paradise was transformed into a hell for 13 million unemployed workers. Even during the war there has been news of strikes by miners, armaments workers and transport workers in Britain as well as a 600,000-strong strike in America. Will the British and American workers want to fight the revolutionary workers — who will have made clear their interests and their real objectives — after having frustrated them with their false promises? The problem is not as simple as Messrs Churchill and Roosevelt would have us imagine. They know that perfectly well themselves, which is why they do not want to confront the revolutionary masses of Europe, above all those of Germany, with tanks and machine guns alone, but with a much more effective weapon: poison. The poison to whose effect we refer is that which the bourgeoisie used to parcelise the revolutionary struggle of the German working class in 1918. It was the Social-Democrat leaders themselves who disoriented the working class with their lies and false promises, dressing one part of the class against another and little by little destroying the gains of the revolution. But this was just the tip of the iceberg for the Social-Democrat bureaucrats. In 1933, after Hitler’s seizure of power, they showed the German workers their true colours. This time around, global capital needs someone else to inject poison into the workers’ blood in Germany and Europe: it is now the task of the bureaucrats in Moscow, brought to power by the isolation of the victorious October revolution. Despite all the little lies and false promises, the bosses know that there still is power, and that they may have left as much trace in the minds of the wealthy capitalists as they have in the memory of the global working class.

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1. They claim that the terrible hardship the German workers have suffered is the work of one man, Hitler.
2. All partisans of Hitler who distance themselves from him will be pardoned.
3. The German soldiers on the front should — under the
We the soldiers and the events in Italy

German soldiers have received the Nazi press's parri- monious news on events in Italy with bewilderment and with anxiety. But through the intermediary of comm- rades returned from Italy who report on the goings-on there, they know that they have been denied the right to know the truth about the collapse of this most pitiful of fascist regimes in case the parallel which jumps to mind might lead them to more clearly understand the situation in their own country.

Fascism has collapsed because of its inherent weakness, its totally corrupt system of party chieftains which can have no objective other than to exploit the Italian people, above all the Italian workers. When the British and Americans landed in Italy tens of thousands of fascist militiamen threw down their weapons and fled. Is this all there is to the fascist force so often trum- pedet? What exists in Russia today — marches on Berlin and over- throw Hitler.

Editor's comments: We wholeheartedly agree with the comrade's letter. But we would go even further. There can be no question of the 'blame' of the Italian people, but only its merit. If in this war — fought not in the interest of the workers but in the inter- ests of big capital — the proletariat revolts, whether that be in Russia as in Germany, or in Italy as in France, there can hardly be any talk of betrayal. We must not talk about the faults of the Italian workers but rather the weakness of the German workers who are still letting themselves go under the butcher's knife in the name of Hitler and in the interests of the Krupps and Borsigs of this world.

All of you who are in contact with our comrades, tell Arbeiter und Soldat about your opinions and your experi-ences. It is your paper!

Talk of politics forbidden!

The closer we come to the end of the war, the quieter are the men up above — Adolf, Hermann, Joseph and co. But more and more clearly do those down below, the work- ers and soldiers, raise their voices in protest. Everywhere people are talking about what is going to happen tomor- row when the war is over. The high authorities themselves who, according to Goebbels, know everything, have now commented on this. They are trying to make use of tried and tested methods, banning soldiers in various units from talking about politics. But the old charm is not working any more. They are talking about politics more and more angrily, now more than ever before. This murmuring and chatter is the distant echo of the coming revolution. Peace! Freedom! Bread!

Soviet Germany: how we want it and how we don’t

The degeneration of the Russian revolution of 1917 resulted from numerous particularities of the situation in Russia. The fact that it was a backward agricultural country with a political- ly weak bourgeoisie with shallow roots in society and the exis- tence of a Bolshevik Party of fierce will and unbreakable energy facilitated the working-class seizure of power. Once power was won these circumstances showed themselves to be obstacles too. The heavy social weight of the huge, ignorant peasant masses made the industrialization and politics of the country difficult. The postponement of the European revolution, partic- ularly in Germany, added to the difficulties. The Bolshevik Party was torn apart by internal feuding. It gave birth to a bureaucra- cy which rules over the masses just as the Tsarist clique used to. What exists in Russia today — the absolute rule of a bureaucracy which appropriates the guise of Bolshevism as a claim to tradition — has nothing in common with socialism.

But the conditions of the German revolution and the con- struction of a socialist society in Europe are not the same as what existed in Russia. Below we outline how we conceive of this different type of system developing in Germany.

We do not want the soviets to be the powerless tools of a party, which is itself the submissive stage army of a clique. We oppose the subjection of the rule of the state bureaucracy
and its party for the rule of the working class. We want the greatest democratic freedom for the workers, with the right to form their own state, including the right of religion, freedom of the press or freedom of speech, with unlimited rights of association and coalition for all parties who work within the soviet system.

We do not want the tyranny of a party. We oppose the repression, the dictatorial party which stands in favour of a workers' government through the soviet system.

We want people's tribunals composed of workers which deliberate and make their judgements publicly.

We do not want a GPU which arbitrarily throws people in prison, deports and shoots them in secrecy. We do not want a legacy of terror which we cannot forget, but only bestow.

We want workers' control of all public officials, who should be subject to recall at any moment.

We do not want the arbitrary rule of a bureaucracy which does not care for any democracy.

We want the workers themselves to manage production and distribution. The organizations of the workers' state will carry out the production and distribution plans drawn up by the unions and workers' associations in collaboration with the administration.

We do not want dictatorial management of production and distribution by a bureaucratic caste which pockets whatever it so pleases. This is however what exists in Russia.

Hamburg: and next it’s Berlin’s turn

There were fronts in the last war. But now there is another front: back home. That is the bitter experience of the workers. In every industry we see the struggle between pounds of worth, profits, of the British planes drop thousands of shells on the Workers' Government and their families. But we should have no illusion. Our own exports and the war-waging hyenas are no better: far from it. If the German High Command had been able to do so it would have done exactly the same to the workers in London. If we want to put a final stop to such horrors we must march alongside the London Commune in the abolition of military and British capital. We have not yet achieved this goal. Down with the Nazi bureaucrats! Down with the war! Down with capitalism!

One less, but only one

According to one comrade’s report the mayor of Wuppertal has been sacked. He fled to the country in the evening, hearing the alarm, and in the morning returned to the ruins sozzled. That is why the Nazi clique sacrificed him. But how many of those men who escape into the night are so cunning as to come back to the town in the morning and still go unnoticed? One of them has been sacked, but how many such men are left? Time to send the whole Nazi clique to hell.

Do you remember...?

1. That when the First World War broke out in the opening days of August 1914 on the one side they said “Fight the Kaiser”. But why? Because they were not only economic interests, but also the masters of the working class. They were capitalism. They used inflation to lump the costs of the war and reconstruction.

2. That the Constitution of the Weimar Republic was drawn up in August 1919 as a grand plan for ‘national unity’. In this Constitution of lawyers, professors and party bureaucrats etc. there was much talk of freedom. But it also included the clause that it must be forbidden to all these fine freedoms dependent on the mood of the Reich President. The 1938 emergency decrees were thus prepared in 1919. It was not to be expected that Hitler, or even Hindenburg, or even the French in the Interwar period, should be able to bring all these freedoms and rights to the people.

3. That the Constitution of the Weimar Republic was drawn up in August 1919 as a grand plan for ‘national unity’. In this Constitution of lawyers, professors and party bureaucrats etc. there was much talk of freedom. But it also included the clause that it must be forbidden to all these fine freedoms dependent on the mood of the Reich President. The 1938 emergency decrees were thus prepared in 1919. It was not to be expected that Hitler, or even Hindenburg, or even the French in the Interwar period, should be able to bring all these freedoms and rights to the people.

4. That it was a German worker.

5. That if a German factory and German capital had filled its huge pockets with the profits taken from the exploitation of the semi-colonies, [illegible] that would still have meant oppression and exploitation for the German worker. Certain, some people argued [illegible] that “in reality both sides were capitalist, fighting over profits and markets and looking to carve up colonial territory between capitalist slave owners.” This time round however it is not so.

The food and content of the war are exactly the same again: it is a war for colonial profits, a war for the exploitation of hundreds of millions of colonial slaves, that would still have meant oppression and exploitation for the German worker. Certain, some people argued [illegible] that “in reality both sides were capitalist, fighting over profits and markets and looking to carve up colonial territory between capitalist slave owners.”

We want the defeat of our own ruling class in this war. The hope of the ruling class is that the war will end in a second world war. We want the defeat of our own ruling class. We want the defeat of our own capitalists, preparing for its victory.

The imperialist war is not a war which serves the interests of ordinary people: It is a war of big capital, on both sides of the front. After the last war people talked of victorious peoples and defeated peoples. This was a lie: The “victors” were the capitalists of all countries; the “defeated” were the workers of all countries.

In the so-called defeated countries — we German workers were well placed to see it — the masters of industry used inflation to lump the costs of the war and reconstruction on the workers and the middle classes. Even in the worst moments the big capitalists and the underhand speculators were able to achieve this. On the other side, in the victorious countries, the working class had to fight hard struggles to win itself a bearable standard of living.

But the imperialists’ victory over the working class was not only economic, it was also political. The capitalist class (and all ruling classes in general) have always been able to take advantage of their military success to put new chains on the oppressed classes. Think back a little! In its two years of conquests over the peoples of Europe, did the national socialist state lose its chains even a millimetre? Did we have even the slightest freedom to express what we think and [illegible]? Were our brothers in the Gestapo any less than the Gestapo who are here ourselves?

So let us read what Goebbels admits in one of his rare flashes of honesty: “The freedom which one people denies another will necessarily mean a certain degree of constraint back home” (Dzu Reich, 29 August 1943). Could that be any clearer? The freedom denied the foreigner, that is to say the oppression of the French, Poles, Russians, Blacks and Hindus, is a “certain degree of constraint”, which we all know means the Gestapo and the Nazi whip for the German worker.

Yes, even if Germany had won the war and German capital had filled its huge pockets with the profits taken from their exploitation of the semi-colonies, [illegible] that would still have meant oppression and exploitation for the German worker. Certainly, some people argued [illegible] that “in reality both sides were capitalist, fighting over profits and markets and looking to carve up colonial territory between capitalist slave owners.” That is why Lenin stressed this one principle for workers of all countries: in a revolutionary war, the revolutionary class must wish for the defeat of its own governmen...
The real face of the war

The Weihemade High Command reports: "We were stationed around Wielen from Charkow. After a difficult fight we made a forward path for ourselves. One morning we took over the post office. There was a newspaper there, and to our surprise it announced the end of the war and Charkow [lirel]. It was only eight days later that we took Charkow."

From the front: "My brother had several frozen fingers and similarly his feet were freezing. That didn't stop the bastards sending him back to the front. That is where I'm living..."

Extract from a letter from Hamburg: "The dead were piled up in a huge mound and burned with flame-throwers. I can only say: don't come back here, you won't recognize the place..."

The birth of children brings joy to the fatherland. "We had to stay in the line of fire for fourteen days. Then we had eight days' rest. Many were those who stayed back after wards. Sch. and K. learned the news of the birth of their children just when they had to go back to the front line. Halfway then, they turned on their heels. I never saw them again: soon after they were shot..."

The family is the cornerstone of the national socialist state: "My two brothers were killed, one in Russia and the other in Africa. My wife and my son also perished in the last bombardment of Berlin. I knew nothing about the fate of my par ents. When I went to the lieutenant to ask for information his only response was: we have more important things to do. Now I only know: my wife and mother are dead..."

From a soldier's paper produced by Fourth International comrades we reproduce one comrade's appeal: "We know, comrades. Have Hamburg suffered the most violent of attacks on 25 July 1943. Not only once have these criminals with their iniquities attacked: no, it has been five times. This is no longer a war: it is just murders and more murders. 280,000 women, children and workers lost their lives..."

I have lost everything. And for what? Just so that these capitalist bastards can have a better life and laugh in their own gain..."

"Dear comrades, we must put an end to this murder and tell people that none of it makes sense. They made us promises which they still haven't fulfilled. Dear comrades, we can't go on like this. So join us. Together we will finally put an end to this war..."

Can things go on like this? My wife and children write me letter after letter to complain about the situation, and I can do nothing for them. They can't even console themselves with the idea that the end of the war is near. It breaks my heart when I read that..."

"I believe that we must put an end to this appalling war. And we soldiers on the front can do something about it. I know a sure means of doing so, which will be good for you too. Alone I can do nothing, but you can cooperate and work with me. Listen carefully and think about what follows..."

I am a member of the Fourth International and my main priority is to put an end to the war. We fight against capital ism and for frazerisation the world over. Fighting for this goal we will make it impossible for any state to rule or exercise its dictatorship over Germany, which would result in the partition of the country and massive tax increases. Comrades, the Fourth International fights for peace, freedom and bread.

by a German soldier

Zeitung für Soldat und Arbeiter im Westen

No. 2 SUMMER 1943

[illegible] I came back from leave a few days ago and I was amazed by the situation in Germany: What I saw is not easy to describe.

First off, the town where I grew up has been totally destroyed. Only very few houses are still habitable — so you can count them — and only a few have been spared by bombs thus far. Nor, the morale of the population. You can only imagine what has happened. Our women and daugh ters have been totally morally corrupted by the many work ers from abroad [illegible].

And then there are the trafficfiers, who have set them selves up almost openly in the streets to run their black mar ket, offering their seedy wares with price increases of 500% or 1,000%. So the situation in Germany is catastrophic. It is clear to everyone that morale is sinking day by day.

In brief, the people want an end [illegible] to the war. Comrades, the Fourth International has shown me the way forward, and you too can participate in it and add your contribution to the effort to bring an end to the war without delay.

Listen to what I say, because things are not getting better for your wives and children back home. Join us, join the Fourth International. We are fighting for peace, freedom and bread.

by a comrade

The famished and martyred proletariat of Europe cannot put a rapid end to its distress unless it makes a clear break with world imperialism, avoiding any collaboration with its own bourgeoisie and rejecting Stalin's so-called "union sacrée". Destroy fascism by destroying capital.

For the real freedom of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only under the banner of the Fourth International will the masses be able to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat across the world, in Germany, Poland, Spain, Belgium, [illegible], Greece and above all [illegible] in Italy and in France. [illegible] sections of the Fourth International [illegible] for the building of the struggle for socialism in Europe and proletarian revolution across the world.

by the Fourth International.

Comrades! It is rather difficult to understand all this at a glance, but fundamentally it is quite simple. These are nothing other than the ideas of the Fourth International. Above you will see the little cartoons representing our German capitalists. There are not many of them, but they are some of the biggest ones. These rascals, who have set up a system of such capitalists whose main aim is to fill their wallets with our money. The government is under their thumb and produces the propaganda these capitalist demands need. To prolong the war, for more and better armaments, etc. Do we soldiers want to fight for these people? No. Think about it. Join the Fourth International. Fight for peace, freedom and bread.

A day of significance for the German workers

May 1944

The SPD leadership's treachery in the First World War left its mark, the SDP leadership's treachery in the Second World War left its mark. The workers of the world, the whole of the world, are not going to let it remain so. The period which saw a series of adjustments and compromises, which were attributed to Germany's weapons advances — is over. We can still not say exactly how many victims the second world imperialist war will have claimed among the German workers. They have been led into the abattoirs in the four corners of Europe, while their families and homes have been pal versed by bombs.

If the war — which had already been lost in advance given the Americans' technical superiority in several fields — does not last ten or fifteen years, as German, British and American capital would have liked, then for this workers across the world will be indebted to the Russian workers who, despite the enormous burden represented by the ar stocratic role of the bureaucracy, have repulsed the capitalist aggression against the first workers' state and have thus saved the great conquest of the October revolution, the world's armed economy.

WE MUST REBUILD THE CLASS FRONT!

Today, in May 1944, the greater part of the people of Europe is still under the German jackboot. Both the course of events, both a home and abroad, and the final reckoning is imminent. It may arrive one day or the next. But that does not mean that it will just "happen". The Nazi regime and its capitalist backers are ready to fight down to the last German worker. Like in 1918 only the working class itself can bring an end to the reign of terror and fascism. They can only achieve peace under a socialism that is founded on peace. And what revolution? For the real freedom of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Stalinist parties, enter the scene hoping to put the brakes on the revolution as soon as possible. They have formed a so-called liberation committee in Moscow, mainly composed of captured Nazi generals.
The main task set for this committee is to suffocate the revolution like in 1918, installing a bourgeois government and saving the capitalist system. If they succeed in doing so Anglo-American capital and the Russian bureaucracy will dictate a peace to Germany alongside which Versailles will look charitable. And German capital for its part would dump the entire burden on the workers.

In this desperate situation the German proletariat does not mean Churchill and Roosevelt, the City and Wall Street, but rather that they are good. That is because they now see that Britain and America are in uniform, will link arms and march together against the real enemy, capital and its agents in our country.

In this vein, we must build secret four-comrade cells in every workplace and in every army unit! This should bring about the formation of sabotages, among which will emerge the strongest class consciousness. They must follow the latest political developments with the greatest diligence. Everything where workers act to resist the apparatus of repression, action groups must go straight to the site of struggle.

The Fourth International is established before the dissolution of the Third International, and indeed in a long and unforseen period. In the struggle to lead the revolution to victory the construction of a revolutionary party is indispensable. The Fourth International was established after the defeat of the Third International, and in a long and unforeseen period. The German train drivers show the way

A train full of 85 returning from Russia denoted "Terrorism, or an accident? That hardly mattered to the 56 officer. He needed revenge, so he put the French train drivers in charge up against the wall, sent troops to arrest all the men who could be found in the village, and had them shot. What did a few human lives matter to this professional killer, accustomed to mass graves of workers?

But he had not counted on the fact that despite five years of war the German workers haven’t lost their good sense and still have some idea of solidarity. The German train drivers helped many Frenchmen to escape, thus saving their lives.

When an inquest later found that the accident was caused by sabotage but rather the poor condition of rolling stock, revolts hold the French and German train drivers. They declared a one-hour strike to protest against the murder of innocent workers.

The trains stopped for an hour on this line, with the German train crews supporting the French workers and their protest strike.

With their courageous action the German train drivers showed that they are not afraid of discipline and that their sense of solidarity knows no national boundaries. When all the workers come to realise this and when they have the courage to act on their convictions, the officers can always shout "fire", but the workers, whether or not they are in uniform, will link arms and march together against the common enemy.

The Fourth International on the march!

There has already been a great deal of talk about the news of strikes in Britain, which are said to have broken out against the will of the union bureaucrats and on the instigation of the German Finance Minister. These so-called "Trotzkyists", our comrades on the other side of the Channel, have therefore made recourse to the tried and tested method of financing the war. It relies in its greatest part on the savings made by the German people. So, the money the worker takes to the savings bank is taken by compulsion by the state in exchange for a "savings bond" with no value (a bond on a treasury with no money). The state hands the money over to the armaments factory owners so that they can do their great work. All of this has a wonderful name: the discreet financing of the war. All you need to do is to call it stealing, and he is right. Pickpockets work "discreetly" too!

But war! When the war is over, surely everything will be reimbursed, mark for mark and pfennig for pfennig? Indeed. "The German saver who does not today spend his money on unnecessary items but takes it to the savings bank is not only helping the war effort but is also acting in the best and soundest manner" declared the Finance Minister. He added that the usual promises of paradise the Nazis make... to be fulfilled only 'the discreet financing of the war'. But what does our dear Finance Minister see?

At the same time the police were ordered to make the necessary arrests. Poor Interior Minister! Trying to wipe out the coming revolution and the growing revolutionary party off the map with a broad brush he tried to conjure up a tidal wave with a child's rattle.

The British workers are on strike today because they cannot bear their poverty, the other side of the coins of the capitalists' billions in profits. It is easy to understand why the union bureaucrats are opposed to this. The same goes for the British Stalinist party. The Stalinist bureaucracy has for a long time been selling out workers across the world in the interests of its ally, Anglo-American capital. The Fourth International, the Trotzkyists, the British section of the Fourth International, have taken sides with the British workers’ struggle. They must not just use their active role and make the German workers part of the coming revolution, which they must prepare for by uniting their ranks.

The Fourth International makes fun of Mr Bevin. It has no right to. It has still not "observed" that the Trotzkyists are playing an active role and making the German workers part of the struggles occupied by the German Gestapo. It believes that police tyranny and Gestapo terror will succeed in crushing forever the class struggle in Germany and preventing the creation of a revolutionary party. These illusions will not last for long.

The Finance Minister’s speech

The Fourth International on the march!
The future is in our hands!

SOLDIERS! Comrades! A new and decisive phase of the Second World War has begun. Anglo-American capital has launched its troops on the offensive on the European continent. With 4,000 warships, 33,000 planes and half a million soldiers they have begun landings on the French Atlantic coast.

“We are ready for all eventualities” lied the Nazi press, trumpeting itself as ever. They are indeed prepared for a torrent of military disasters. The German military machine will be forced back, more or less slowly, since American war production alone is much greater than German production. The “Allies” could have finished off the war long ago had they so wished. But the British and German production. The “Allies” could have finished off the war. But they also know that the proletariat of Europe will rise up together against the party responsible for its poverty, capital and its lackeys. They imagine that they will be able to stop this formidable revolution with the same old methods as usual.

That is why they want to replace the Gestapo executioners with a Scotland Yard expeditionary force. That is why they want to nail our traps shut, tie our hands and impose all the post-war suffering on us. Comrades! Soldiers! Faced with this situation Hitlerite propaganda calls on us to hold out and defend ourselves. They have decided to do so themselves.

From Hitler in his headquarters far from the front lines to Goebbels in his bombproof office and Goering in his Marshal’s villa, all the party clique and the officer caste know that the German workers, exploited to the limit, will have to sweat out profits twice over, both for German and Russian soldiers, and to defend “order”, by which they mean the capitalist system at its roots and which would put an end to Germany, Europe and the world, which would kill the socialist movement of long journeys on paper-money. All that for profits for the capitalist hyenas.

Eisenhower, replacing one pest with another. That is why they want to replace the Gestapo executioners with a Scotland Yard expeditionary force. To do this it will not be enough to use the repressive apparatus inherited from the old Nazi formations themselves.

What is left for the German soldier to defend? Gestapo terror? The socialism of long journeys on troopships, people’s soup kitchens, overtime at work, working on Sundays, wage cuts, speed-ups, the most shameful capitalist exploitation, militarism, great promises and the Second World War?

So why don’t Hitler and the Krupps, Goebbels and Siemens defend their paradise themselves? We want to go back home!

But if we do not want to fight this hopeless struggle, does that mean that we want to give the reactionary Eisenhower a free ride to Berlin? Hitler or Eisenhower? Are those the only two choices?

There does exist a third: workers’ revolution in Germany, Europe and the world, which would kill the capitalist system at its roots and which would put an end to war and crises, which alone can bring the working masses peace, freedom and bread.

Of course, the British and American bourgeoisie intends to drown this revolution in blood. To do this it will not blush at using the repressive apparatus inherited from German capital, whether that means police, special troops or the old Nazi formations themselves.

But there is a gap in these gentlemen’s register! They have not accounted for the British and American workers. In the first three months of 1943 the British workers had 200,000 strike days. In the same period this year the figure was almost 2,300,000.

Soldiers! Comrades! Listen to these figures! Understand what they mean! They are a salute from our class comrades on the other side of the Channel, who are shouting to us “We, British workers, understand each day a little better that the capitalists are not fighting this war to get rid of Hitler and the Gestapo but rather in their own imperialist interests and for profit.”

The British workers have also taken up the struggle against poverty, war and capital. Faced with a proletarian Germany the Churchills and Roosevelts would be keen to unleash the hounds of reaction. But they would need them to keep down their own workers.

The question posed is not: Hitler or Eisenhower, but who will defeat Hitler?

Back home their loved ones have been massacred by bombs, the little property they afforded through their labours has been destroyed and their wives have to do terrible jobs just to get a little to eat and some worthless paper-money. All that for profits for the capitalist hyenas and the empty slogans of their Nazi lackeys.

Our soldiers! Our workers! The workers of every country! The workers of every factory! Our army! Our navy! Our air forces! Our mobilization! Our Red Army! Our workers! Our soldiers! Let us attack with all our might! Let us fight to the finish! Let us fight! Let us fight!
Eisenhower in the German proletariat?

The German proletariat defeats Hitler before the final military defeat and occupation and establishes its own power across the territory. The workers and soldiers' councils, the American and British military cliques would then have to openly show before the eyes of the world the reality of the situation but the executives of the European revolution and the American dictatorial American-Imperialist dictatorship. The American and British workers' march towards revolution would thus make a huge step forward.

The German revolution as a response to the Anglo-American invasion would give the proletariat of Germany, Europe and the whole world a massive advance against world reaction!

But revolutions do not fall from the sky. They are prepared by innumerable small struggles fought by the revolutionary class. But today there are almost no such struggles in Germany. Struggles over basic demands, for food, for wages, for the most basic rights and freedoms to protest, strike and demonstrate have been crushed by Hitlerite reaction with the bloodiest of terror.

We can only speak one language, the language of weapons.

The German workers hold these weapons in their hands already.

But individuals or small units throwing themselves into struggle out of desperation is not very effective. They just make themselves into the disarmed victims of the most brutal of terror. The struggle must be planned and organised with sufficient size that it can become the signal for revolution across Germany. When the British and Americans invade the revolutionary temperature will reach boiling point. In this situation an uprising by one garrison, in one town or one province, or in one section of the fleet could be the spark which sets off the social explosion.

The time of the Kiel sailors and dockworkers will return! But this time around the German revolution will be followed by proletarian uprising across Europe!

Therefore the most important slogan now is: organise to prepare revolutionary struggle!

Form secret cells of three or four people! Bring into these groups all workers who understand the need for revolutionary struggle and want to participate in it!

Comrades, you who believe in your unity, form committees for revolutionary struggle!

On each ship, in each barracks, in each trench, we must create revolutionary cells and committees for struggle!

Build links with comrades in other units! Encourage them to form their own cells!

Make contact with the local workers, with the French, Belgian and Dutch workers in the West! Our struggle is a common struggle!

Keep up contacts! Do not go into struggle without your comrades' agreement! When struggle breaks out, have the courage to build it as much as possible! Spread news of the struggle by all means to all countries!

As much as we want a repeat of the Kiel days we must not allow the creation of a second Weimar. The workers' and soldiers' Soviets which at the time of the revolution spread far and wide at home and on the front must not again be dissolved; on the contrary they must be the foundations of workers' power. But in the struggle for the establishment of workers' power the revolutionary proletarian party is indispensable.

The Second International and the former Third International, the reformists and the Stalinists, are planning, on the orders of world capital and the Moscow bureaucracy, to destroy the proletarian revolution from within, as they have in the past. We must fight this project!

The Fourth International, the Trotskyists in America, Britain and the occupied territories of Europe, are holding fast on the side of the working class in its struggles, despite the...
Class conscious workers and the USSR

Soldiers who fought in Russian remain confused about the contradictory character of Soviet life: on the one hand, great industrial growth and modern government;

The workers of all countries can give but one answer: to engage in a common international class struggle against the capitalist régimes of the world, and against the exploitation of the working class; at home and abroad it serves the interests of junkanism, of capitalism, and of imperialism.

“Stalin’s political régime. That is to say, class-conscious workers both fight to defend the USSR and criticise Stalin’s reactionary policies, encouraging the Soviet masses to overthrow the bureaucratic caste which rules over them. They do not however allow any let-up in the class-struggle in the countries allied to the USSR, declaring the necessity of overthrowing the capitalist régimes of Europe and the world.

Workers’ Liberty

Oral history project: a walk back in time...