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ERNST THAELMANN
The Leader of the German Workers
By R. GROETZ

FROM time immemorial the city of Hamburg, where Ernst Thaelmann was born, has been a city of the most acute class contradictions. The grandfathers of the present shipowners took advantage of the convenient situation of the port of Hamburg to secure themselves stupendous super-profits at the expense of the hinterland, at the expense of localities far removed from the sea. The Hamburg patricians competed with the Dutch in the African slave trade, and in supplying alcohol to the colonial peoples and robbing them. And the Draconian regulations regarding naval service, the Draconian system of fining, which remained valid in the Weimar Republic even after the November Revolution, helped them to exploit the sailors. Their most usual deal was to send good-for-nothing, heavily insured “floating coffins” to sea precisely in anticipation of their loss at sea and the subsequent receipt of high insurance premiums. These exploiters of hired slaves at the same time speculated in real estate; the proletarians of the port were stifled in slums near the wharves which attained a sad world fame for the terrific cholera epidemics which broke out there.

The Hamburg exploiters tried on one hand to bribe and subject the army of trading employees to
their arbitrary will by means of delusion: the prospect that they might become merchants, or reach the highest office posts. On the other hand it was with ruthless force that these exploiters used the entire apparatus of the Free City of Hamburg against the struggling workers.

After the bitter struggles lost by the workers due to the reformist trade union leadership in 1896, 1906, and 1911, the shipowners and the metallurgical magnates established a monopoly in the hiring of labor power, which the exploiters throughout the whole of Germany took as a model. This system was established for the purpose of purging the enterprises of class fighters and of attracting to Hamburg a reserve army of labor which beats down wage rates.

**Hamburg's Traditions Betrayed**

Hamburg was proud of its long time traditions as "bulwark of the labor movement". Such names as Weitling, Heib, York, Hasenklewer, Ignatz Auer, Jakob Auderf, and others, and later on Bebel, were connected with the history of the Hamburg working class movement. But the house decorated with the old and faded laurels has long since become a house contaminated with the ulcer of reformism. Fossilized old men dominated in the party, and strange as it may sound, they were still regarded as Left fighters in many parts of Germany. They were so regarded despite the fact that, for instance, after serious clashes with the police, they reduced to naught and disrupted the struggle against the brazen offensive upon suffrage rights (1906) by their declarations that in principle they respected all the laws of the bourgeois state.
The squabbles and bickerings between the social-democratic bureaucracy and the bureaucrats of trade union and co-operative movements were settled in secret as far as possible. Efforts were made to wash their dirty linen at home. All attempts to spread discussion on burning questions were very rapidly suppressed as obnoxious infringements of order. The far-famed “party education” section disposed of cheap wares at classes and in talks. The publication of a series of pamphlets, including *The Mass Strike* by Rosa Luxemburg, and the *Path to Power* by Kautsky, which the Lefts in Germany credited so undeservedly to the philistines in the Central Committee, bore no fruitful influence over the mass of members, insofar as the scornful name of “literary bickerings” was permanently and regularly attached to the controversies and disagreements in the country which prevailed between the Lefts, the Centrist bog, and the Revisionists in Hamburg. The standard was very low.

When war policy exposed the German Social-Democratic Party as the social insurance of the bourgeoisie against the proletarian revolution, the organ of the Hamburg social-democrats became the central organ of the “re-educators”. Social-patriotism and social-imperialism raged in its columns.

This cursory review of the history of the labor movement in Hamburg explains why the factors, which during and after the war handicapped the formation of the Communist Party, had a particularly strong influence precisely in Hamburg, and shows how great are the merits of Ernst Thaelmann in solving this problem.
A Revolutionist at an Early Age

Ernst Thaelmann was born in Hamburg on April 17, 1886. Even during the period of the anti-socialist law his father belonged to social-democracy. Already, at the age of 16, Ernst Thaelmann became a member of the Social-Democratic Party, and at the age of 17 joined the German Transport Workers’ Union. Ernst began work first in the port, then he was a sailor, and later he worked on transport. He began to fulfill responsible functions in the Party and in the trade union movement early in life. When he had to fulfill military service he already had the reputation of being a “politically unreliable fellow”, who did not recognize his fatherland. As a revolutionary social-democrat, he had to suffer all the mockery of Prussian militarism.

When he finished his military service, Ernst Thaelmann became a member of the Transport Workers’ Committee and later a representative of the Hamburg Trade Union Council. At the same time he was successively the first organizer in the laundry drivers’ section, member of the drivers’ branch committee, leader of the Dockers’ Branch and a reporter of the Hamburg Bureau of the trade union.

In 1912, the Hamburg transport workers delegated Ernst Thaelmann to the Eighth Congress in Breslau, where he made a speech against the reduction of the trade unions to the role of relief agencies and against the growing pretensions of the upper trade union bureaucracy.

“It has been mentioned further, that district fees are to be raised from five to ten pfennigs. I consider this excessive. The district leaders should try
to cut down their expenses. . . . As regards doles, I will point out that our organization is becoming more a relief organization than an organ of struggle. This should not be so."

Resolution No. 27 called for a further curtailment of the rights of trade union members and proposed that in definite cases the right of settling questions should be given to the "local committee" disregarding the local membership meeting's power to make decisions. Thaelmann declared:

"I move that motion 27 be turned down as the local committee cannot enjoy such confidence and the members of the organization sometimes have a quite different opinion than the committee."

**Fights for Youths in Trade Unions**

It was not the political acumen of the social-democratic and trade union leaders that created the youth organization in Germany, but exclusively the initiative of the exploited youth who received support from Karl Liebknecht and other representatives of the Left Wing. And it was only later that the social-democratic leaders began to interest themselves in the youth in their own way, their only care being that they should not perpetrate any political "stupidities". It was only under the pressure of the mass of the membership that the trade union leaders proceeded to create youth sections, in the trade unions. Ernst Thaelmann and the revolutionary youth of his circle rallied to the general meetings of the Transport Workers' Union first 300, and later about 1,800 young workers. Finally the reformist bureaucracy resorted to repression against this revolutionary
youth section. At the Breslau Congress in 1912 Ernst Thaelmann stated:

“We have youth sections only in Berlin and Hamburg. And we still need to plough this field. The young people in our trade are left to their own devices more than in the qualified trades. This is the reason why much more should be done for the youth... I consider it unjust that, despite higher membership fees, the youth should be given less rights than the adults, and I move that this point be rejected.”

At the Ninth Congress of the Transport Workers’ Union in 1914, held in Cologne, Ernst Thaelmann again spoke in favor of the election of trade union officials by the members of the union, in favor of the elective principle in the trade unions, against transferring discussions and decisions to the narrow bureaucratically limited circle of functionaries, and against the neglect of the masses of the members and for short-time wage agreements.

The reformist trade union bureaucracy, who for the sake of appearance, waged a sham struggle against the employers, attempted to bribe the young revolutionary, and so did the employers. The owner of a large laundry establishment, for example, offered Ernst Thaelmann a permanent position if only he ceased his “undermining work” in the capacity of the chairman of the workers’ committee. By his rejection of this dirty transaction, Ernst Thaelmann gained the honor of being included in the employers’ black list, and was “rewarded” with a long period of unemployment. The bureaucrats of the Transport Workers’ Union made plans to somehow
"gag the mouth" of this inconvenient leader of the revolutionary opposition by providing him with a soft job in the union. But they soon learned how hopeless it was to attempt such things.

**Joins Ranks of Revolutionary Opposition**

After the betrayal by social-democracy at the outset of the war, Ernst Thaelmann passed into the ranks of the opposition, which forced the leaders of Hamburg social-democracy to bring their treacherous policy for discussion at a number of stormy delegate meetings. Already in 1914 Ernst Thaelmann was called to the army. Not a day of furlough did he get for two and a half years; and the only interruption was a period of imprisonment following a war tribunal sentence. During this whole period Ernst Thaelmann maintained his connections with the revolutionary circles in Hamburg and received opposition newspapers and illegal propaganda material. In 1917, while spending his short furlough in Hamburg, he became a member of the newly founded Independent Social-Democratic Party. He used his furlough to discuss methods of illegal activity in the army.

When the November Revolution broke out, a strong Independent Social-Democratic Party was already in existence in Hamburg alongside of the old social-democracy, as well as an illegal, numerically much weaker, "Left-radical" grouping, which was exceptionally imbued with syndicalist elements. Anybody who wanted to join the "Left-radical" "organization of unity", was asked to resign from his trade union. Participation in parliamentary elections was rejected "in principle". This sectarian line excited
sharp discussions in the “Left-radical” organization, which joined the Communist Party of Germany (at that time the Spartakus Bund), until its split in March, 1920.Luxemburg, the leader of the “Left-radicals”, who gained revolutionary prestige during war time, was acting chairman of the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies (formed on a party basis ![1] of representatives of three parties and of the trade unions) and carried on a menshevist policy in the Soviet. Under such confused circumstances it was no wonder that the attractive power of the Communist Party of Germany in Hamburg was not particularly great among the best sections of the working class.

Upon his return from the war, Ernst Thaelmann intentionally remained in the ranks of the Independent Social-Democratic Party, with the idea of going over to the Communist Party of Germany, not by himself alone, but with as many comrades as possible. He did not limit himself to the systematic and stubborn struggle against the Right leaders of the Independent Social-Democratic Party. Together with other sincere, revolutionary functionaries he was constantly involved in struggle, often above the heads of the Central Committee elements who were afraid of struggle in accordance with the course of events. We quote a few examples:

1919 in Hamburg

In the middle of January, 1919, in Bremen, Noske’s agents were kicked out of the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, and workers’ armed platoons were set up. In vain did Noske threaten and in vain did he send a division to the Lower
Weser at the end of January. The revolutionary workers sensed that after the January massacre in Berlin it would constitute the beginning of a countervoluntary drive throughout the country. Telegrams of protest showered in torrents on Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske. The Soviet of Soldiers’ Deputies of the Twelfth Army Corps, which had its seat in Hamburg-Altona, threatened to come to and render armed assistance to Bremen. The miners of the Ruhr threatened a strike.

With the determined armed support of Hamburg, the "Herstenberg division" sent by Noske to Bremen could easily have been crushed. This example would have kindled the fire of revolutionary struggle throughout the country. And it was precisely for this reason, in order to avert this decisive step, that the Hamburg social-democratic leaders transformed the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies into an endless talking shop. The leaders of the Independents (Right) and Laufenberg caught the bait. While debates and controversies were renewed on February 3, debates which lasted until late at night, about 1,000 Independent and Communist workers, under the leadership of Ernst Thaelmann proceeded to the barracks, and armed themselves so as to go to the aid of their brothers in Bremen. The news of such an "independent" act exploded like a bombshell at the session of the Soviet. The session was adjourned. In the meantime the armed workers were already marching to the railway station. But Noske’s agents sabotaged their departure by all possible means. Thus only part of the workers succeeded in reaching Bremen, and their action failed in its purpose. Despite the heroic resistance of the work-
ners, Noske’s troops seized Bremen on February 4. Bremen was followed by Central Germany, then by Berlin once more, then by the Ruhr, Wuerttemberg and Bavaria. Noske’s White bandits gradually restored bourgeois “peace and law and order”, after brutally murdering 15,000 German workers. In Hamburg in June, 1919, the guard detachments, the last bearers of arms of the November Revolution, were replaced by absolutely reliable police officers. The voluntary detachments composed of the sons of the bourgeoisie were brought to full readiness. The exposures of the vile doings in the Hamburg Food Supply apparatus gave rise to big workers’ demonstrations. It was then discovered that the guard detachments, who were threatened with dissolution, were unfit for struggle against the workers. The voluntary detachment attacked the demonstrators, but it was smashed by the workers who had promptly procured arms. Then the social-democratic government of the Free City of Hamburg called in the help of the imperial executive power, i.e., of Noske.

The revolutionary circles of the workers firmly rejected the idea of immediately accepting the challenge to fight Noske’s White gangs, which had in the meantime grown stupendously. Then, news was received that a regiment of North German troops was marching on Hamburg. When the regiment entered the city, the alarmed workers with their wives and children filled the streets, and closely followed the troops, talking with them in the local dialect and explaining the real state of affairs in Hamburg to the soldiers who had been deceived by all kinds of fables about the horrors being perpetrated there. Ernst Thaelmann was busy in the
midst of the throng. He himself entered into conversation with the soldiers, and at the same time gave instructions to the active workers who were continuously going and coming. The soldiers had not expected such a reception. They began to waver. Their train got stuck near the Main Station, and soon the arms voluntarily surrendered by the soldiers found their way to the hands of the workers, men and women. The officers were helpless, and they left the city with the almost completely disarmed soldiers. Then Noske drew a great number of troops to Hamburg, and in a week's time these troops seized the city at sunrise.

Under the leadership of Ernst Thaelmann, the Hamburg Independent workers, almost without exception, joined the Communist Party of Germany in 1920. Only a handful of petty-bourgeois elements remained outside, who very soon dissolved in the Social-Democratic Party. Ernst Thaelmann was a member of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Germany and chairman of its Hamburg organization.

Severing's offensive against the workers of Central Germany received a rebuff from the revolutionary workers of Hamburg. The police were on the point of cutting off the road taken by the workers who were marching from the wharves. The police opened up machine-gun fire upon the masses. But in spite of the obstacles which barred the streets, tens of thousands demonstrated in the very heart of the city. An officer shouted the order to disperse, from the turret of an armored car which cut straight into the masses. But the workers did not retreat. And it was Ernst Thaelmann who was marching in the
front ranks, coolly deliberating on how to repulse this police provocation.

**Leads the Struggle for a Mass Bolshevik Party**

Ernst Thaelmann indisputably came to the forefront in all the economic and political fights of the Hamburg proletariat. He represents the type of proletarian leader who has grown up in the process of revolutionary struggles, and who is always closely bound up with the thoughts and feelings of his class. The great confidence which the class-conscious workers had in him extended far beyond the confines of the Hamburg organization of the Communist Party of Germany, and helped him in his struggle to transform the Communist Party of Germany into a true Bolshevik mass party.

"The tragedy of the German revolution in 1918, of the January battles in 1919, of the battles in 1920 after the Kapp putsch, of the March battles in 1921 and up to the last upsurge of the acute revolutionary situation, of this first period in October, 1923, consisted, on one hand, in the lack of co-ordination between the objectively matured revolutionary situation, and on the other hand in the subjective weakness of the German proletariat, due to the absence of the purposeful Bolshevik Party."

(Thaelmann, *Militant Speeches and Articles.*)

The fact that he understood this already determined Ernst Thaelmann’s action in the years 1921-1923 against Brandler and the then opportunist policy of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany, and against the "Left" deviations of Urbans, who was then the chairman of the Maritime organization of the Communist Party of Germany.
From the period of the Unity Congress of 1920, Ernst Thaelmann was the representative of the Hamburg organization in the Supreme Control Commission of the Communist Party of Germany, whose duty it was to check the work of the Central Committee in the intervals between the congresses. In June, 1921, Thaelmann came as delegate to the Third Congress of the Comintern, and, as later at the Jena Congress of the German Communist Party, he took an active part in the discussions and in the preparation of the resolutions, which separated the policy of the Party both from the renegade Levi group and from the "theoreticians of the offensive" of that time, Thalheimer, and others.

The increasing inflation, the growth of the cost of living, and of the burden of taxation in 1922 not only revolutionized the working class with greater intensity, but also assisted the first onslaught of the fascist wave. On the night of June 19, 1922, swastika terrorists attached two hand grenades to the window of Ernst Thaelmann's living quarters which were situated on the ground floor. Part of the apartment was destroyed by the explosion of the grenades, but the main blow failed to affect the inside of the apartment. The plot to destroy the leader of the Hamburg proletariat failed. The social-democratic press was brazen enough to assert that the attempt was staged. However, when the fascist culprits were discovered after further attempts upon the Communist Party headquarters and the Communist book store, and were formally sentenced to imprisonment, the social-democratic government of Hamburg reduced the sentences they received and soon released them altogether.
Stands for a Revolutionary Policy in the Trade Unions

The events of 1923 were approaching. As early as the Tenth Congress of the Transport Workers' Union, held in Stuttgart in 1919, Ernst Thaelmann declared that "it was impossible to eliminate political questions from the trade unions". The Hamburg transport workers elected him in 1924 to represent them at the Eleventh Congress of the union, which convened in Berlin. Among other things, Ernst Thaelmann stated the following at this Congress:

"It is true, that in the present circumstances the economic struggles and strikes for wages are the surest means to prevent the further worsening of the conditions of the working class, but the character of the trade union struggle must be extended and changed. The struggle against the impoverishment of the masses cannot be confined to economic struggles alone. We have every reason to state outright at the trade union congress that it is not use expecting any measures in the interests of the proletariat from the capitalist governments. We have seen these last few days that Stinnes, as the representative of capitalism and the big bourgeoisie, has approached the government with a firmly outlined program, while the A.D.G.B. [reformist German General Federation of Trade Unions] replies to this with modest proposals and weak suggestions, which do not give the proletariat the required practical improvement of their conditions. In the last paragraph, the memorandum demands from the German government, i.e., from the capitalist government, that a law or a decree be issued forbidding all kinds of speculative transactions and establishing rigid control of prices
fixed by concerns and syndicates. But he who believes that a capitalist government is in a position to do so has learned nothing since 1918."

In this speech Comrade Thaelmann declared himself for a revolutionary policy in the trade union movement, a policy which does not stop before the artificial obstacles of paragraphs and clauses piled up by the reformist bureaucracy—as was called for by the legalist theses of Brandler and his adherents—but, on the contrary, recognized the full importance of struggle for the everyday interests and needs of the proletariat. Ernst Thaelmann fought against the absurd contention of the Brandler leadership in 1923 that it was necessary to put a brake on the partial struggles of the proletariat—who were up in arms against the ruinous consequences of the catastrophic inflation—and that it was necessary to put such a brake on them so as to concentrate their revolutionary energy. Thaelmann fought against this as an attempt to evade struggle altogether. October of 1923 soon proved how correct was his estimate of the Party leadership of that time. This is what Ernst Thaelmann wrote about October 1923:

"It was with incredible rapidity that in October, 1923, we approached the moment when the movement burst through its narrow framework with irrepressible, elemental force and generated the supreme form of struggle, the uprising. An outright revolutionary situation was present. All the conditions requisite for the victory of the revolutionary class were at hand, with the exception of one, namely the existence of a clear, iron, monolithic Communist Party, indissolubly bound to the widest masses, and ready and capable of embracing
the spontaneous struggle of the working masses, of organizing and leading it.

“At the decisive hour, the leadership of our Party proved to be bankrupt.

“Our Party as a whole was too unripe as yet to prevent the mistakes of the leadership. Thus, in autumn of 1923 the revolution suffered defeat due to the absence of one of the most essential prerequisites, namely, because there was no Bolshevik Party.”

And Thaelmann was able to add with full justice:

“But does this exhaust the whole history of October, 1923? No, not by any means! Later again errors were committed in resolutions and articles, and even in the speeches made before the bourgeois tribunal, in that reference was made to Saxony alone, when it was a question of October, 1923. But not only Saxony existed. There was Hamburg as well.

“Hamburg corroborated the Leninist thesis on a very large scale, to the effect that the movement bursts through its narrow framework with irrepressible elemental force and generates the supreme form of struggle, the uprising! As stated in the Theses of the January Executive Committee in 1924, the Hamburg uprising was the opposite pole to Saxony.”

**Draws Lessons of the Hamburg Battles**

Those, who see nothing but bankruptcy, treachery, and opportunism in the history of the whole of our Party up to Frankfurt, forget the great lessons of the Hamburg struggle. They forget that the rank and file of our Party by no means remained in a state of passive impotence, but were ready to stake
their lives in the struggle for power. The Hamburg workers, more than all others, can declare that not only the Hamburg workers, but the Berlin, Saxonian, and all other Communist workers in Germany expressed their readiness for the struggle.

And we can add, that the heroic October battles of the Hamburg proletariat would not have been possible without the many years of struggle by Ernst Thaelmann for the introduction of Bolshevik clarity, for internal and external consolidation of the forces of the Hamburg Organization of the Communist Party of Germany.

The Hamburg example made it possible to rapidly overcome the spirit of depression and dejection which prevailed in connection with the October defeat. The illegal Communist Party persistently called for a change of the opportunist Party leadership. And from this period Ernst Thaelmann takes his place at the head of the Communist Party and strives for the realization of the point which he formulates as the "Lessons of the Hamburg Uprising", on one of his programmatic articles. We quote herein below the following lines from his article:

"In order to gain victory in the inevitably impending repetition of the Hamburg battles, but on a much larger scale, we must imbed ourselves in the masses, and bind ourselves to them by thousands of threads, creating a genuinely proletarian united front with the millions of workers. A great revolutionary wing must grow up in the trade unions, and in all the non-Party organizations of the working class, which jointly with the Communists will become the bearer of the oncoming battles."
“The seizure of power by the proletariat is not the act of a single moment. It consists not only of a military struggle against the army of the bourgeoisie, but must be prepared by years of work carried on by the Communist Party and the whole proletariat. The future conquerors of the bourgeoisie must be educated, trained and organized in countless partial struggles. Such is our chief task at the present period.

“The Hamburg fighters enjoyed the full sympathy of the workers in the enterprises, but they had no organizational links with these workers. The entire inadequacy, the fatal backwardness of our old social-democratic organization according to the territorial principle, stood revealed. The election machine is of no use for barricades. The biggest gap in the Hamburg fighting front was the absence of Communist nuclei in the factories and mills.”

**Fighting on Two Fronts**

The Bolshevization of the Communist Party of Germany soon called for struggle against the Ruth Fisher and Maslow groupings, these petty bourgeois, who hid behind “Left” phrases, and who, by their sectarian line, prevented the Party from waging a struggle for the majority of the working class. Ernst Thaelmann’s great merit lies in the fact that, in the full consciousness of his purpose, he struggled firmly and stubbornly against this sectarian group, thus ensuring its rapid liquidation. In his fight on two fronts, against the “Left” and the Right deviations, Ernst Thaelmann succeeded in consolidating the Bolshevization of the Communist Party of Germany to an ever greater degree. In 1928 he successfully
repulsed the attempt of the Brandlerites, who had the support of the conciliatory elements, to gain influence in the Party leadership with a view to reducing the role of the Communist Party in the class struggle of the German proletariat and to forcing the Communist Party to follow the lead of social-democracy and the trade union bureaucrats.

Thaelmann, the pilot of the Communist Party of Germany, took the helm ever more firmly into his hands, and elevated the Communist Party of Germany to the level of a mass Party for which six million German workingmen and women voted at the elections. It was only under his leadership that the Communist Party of Germany grew into a Bolshevik mass Party and found its way to the Leninist policy of the united front, to the policy of the revolutionary trade union movement, of the independent leadership of the struggles of the working class. It is only under his leadership that the Communist Party of Germany has fought against the treacherous policy of social-democracy, and with ever growing success has fought for the winning over of the social-democratic workers, our class comrades, and has learned more and more to master the problems of correctly estimating social-fascism and fascism, and of the alliance of the workers and peasants.

Upon Ernst Thaelmann’s proposal, the Central Committee issued a fiery programmatic declaration in August 1930 on the “social and national liberation of the German people”, a platform which proved to be a terrible weapon in the struggle against the nationalist demagogy of Hitlerite fascism, as well as against the entire nationalist policy of the bourgeoisie and of social-democracy. And even now this platform
serves again and again in the underground publica-
tions of the Communist Party of Germany as a guide
showing the masses the road to emancipation through
the establishment of Soviet Power.

The very fact that whenever Thaelmann under-
took a tour, tens of thousands always gathered to
hear Ernst Thaelmann, the leader of the Communist
Party and the leader of the Red Front Fighters (the
organization prohibited by Severing—but nevertheless
still continuing to exist), is undoubted proof of
their confidence in the Communist Party of Ger-
many, of their sympathy for Soviet Power, of their
desire to follow the great revolutionary example of
the workers and peasants of the U.S.S.R. At the
same time, the workers knew, or understood by in-
stinct, that the leader of the German Communist
Party is one of their own in the best sense of this
word, flesh of the flesh of the working class, bound
closely and directly to the working masses. Thael-
mann perceived and caught on to every least little
movement among the masses. This political sense,
his understanding and knowledge of the life of the
workers, clearly combined with theoretical clarity, as
well as his intrepidity and bravery in the political
struggle, made Ernst Thaelmann the leader of the
German proletariat.

Takes Determined Course for Independent
Leadership of Economic Struggles

In 1928 and 1929 the German Communist Party
took a most determined course for the independent
waging of economic struggle in ruthless struggle
against social-fascism.
The Comintern and the Profintern in those years anticipated the forthcoming world economic crisis. Bourgeois "scientists" and the reformists, blinded by the prolonged "stabilization" of market conditions, started to talk about "crisisless economy". At the Kiel Congress of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany, Hilferding spoke of the period of peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism, of the growing stability of economic conditions, declaring that the economic crisis was of less danger; and that due to the greater planning of capitalist economy the workers were being less and less affected by it. At the Hamburg Congress of trade unions, Naftali sang the praises of "economic democracy" as a form of the peaceful co-existence of the employers and the workers.

In contrast to these prophecies the Communist International predicted the oncoming crisis, and orientated the tactics of the Communist Party to meet this period of crisis.

The Brandlerites and the conciliators inside the C.P., on the other hand, were up in arms against the theses of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern regarding the shattering and the approaching end of temporary stabilization. They also turned down the tactical conclusions, particularly those drawn in the sphere of trade union work.

Despite the strongest opposition of Brandler and Thalheimer, and ignoring the personal attacks made by the Brandlerites and conciliators, Ernst Thaelmann fought both these groupings without mercy. The Communist Party of Germany came out with Red revolutionary lists at the elections of the factory committees: the revolutionary trade union opposition came into being.
Bureaucrats Expel Thaelmann from the Transport Union

When success was attained in firmly consolidating the revolutionary trade union opposition under the leadership of the Communist Party, the trade union bureaucrats of the Central Transport Workers Union seized this opportunity on March 18, 1931, to expel Ernst Thaelmann from the union to which he had belonged for 28 years. But if it was formerly considered the greatest disgrace among the workers to be expelled from a workers' organization, the reformist defenders of the capitalist order have long since turned this disgrace into a supreme honor by expelling revolutionary workers in masses. In his reply to the letter informing him of his expulsion, Ernst Thaelmann wrote, among other things, that the

"Bureaucracy, now dominating and violating the gigantic organizations of the German proletariat, has been forming in the trade unions for decades. This bureaucracy feels itself independent of the will of the wide masses of members. These bureaucrats have secured their well-paid jobs for life; they have blood-bonds with capitalism, with the capitalist State.

"But anybody who does not want to fight against this system, must also oppose the economic strike and must become a scab on principle. Such is the iron logic of capitalist development. Such is the course of German reformism.

"The revolutionary trade union opposition springs up as a force which will restore the stronghold against exploitation which has been destroyed by the trade union bureaucracy. A new force is springing up from factories, from mines, from construction jobs, and landed estates, which makes
it its object to create powerful organizations against the employers and fascism. The revolutionary trade union opposition is once more regenerating the best traditions of the trade union class struggle in Germany which is over sixty years of age. The revolutionary trade union opposition wishes to and must—and this is its duty before the German working class—restore the class front, which you have destroyed.”

Those who expelled Ernst Thaelmann have long since been thrown overboard, after having cleared the road for fascism. This has only been the case if they did not promptly and openly rush to the fascist “ground of real facts” and did not become Hitler’s chained dogs, in the same way as when they wagged their tails before all former capitalist governments of Germany, wearing dog-collars with the legend of the “lesser evil”. As an organized parliamentary party they were thrown overboard together with all the forms of bourgeois-democratic parliamentarism, which once yielded plenty of advantages to the bourgeoisie, and have now become a hindrance to it. But the masses of social-democratic workers, who long before Hitler’s advent to power were torn with doubts, but could not decide to make an organizational break with their party, are now learning from their own experience that the liberation of the working class is possible by revolutionary means alone. This was pointed out to them by the Communist Party of Germany headed by Ernst Thaelmann, and is the path which the Party will pursue in the future as the vanguard of the German proletariat, until victory has been secured over the fascist dictatorship and until Soviet Germany has been established, despite all stupendous sacrifices.
Thaelmann Shows the Way How to Struggle Against Fascism

The first big electoral victory of the National-Socialist Party in September, 1930, signalized the growth of the fascist danger in Germany. The social-democrats, Brandlerites and Trotzkyites declared the fascist dictatorship to be the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie. What was needed here was complete clarity introduced as sharply as possible. In his report to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany on January 15, 1931, Ernst Thaelmann said:

"Wherein lies the class content of the idea of the fascist dictatorship? If we examine this problem we discover that the class content of the fascist dictatorship is undoubtedly the dictatorship of finance capital, just as is bourgeois democracy. That is to say, it is not the class content that has changed, but only the methods. The forms of domination are changed, and not the content of this domination."

How to struggle against fascism? There is only one force that can beat down and smash fascism, and this is the force of the working class united under revolutionary leadership.

"In our resolution we point out that the revolutionary policy of the united front represents the main link in proletarian policy in Germany. Comrades, this formulation is of great weight. We have chosen it after ripe deliberation, so as to stress the ever-growing importance of the revolutionary policy of the united front from below for the development of the mass struggle and
to strengthen the prerequisites of the revolutionary crisis in Germany.” (Thaelmann, The Revolutionary Way Out and the C.P.G.—German edition.)

The nationalist and social demagogy of the national-socialists had to be exposed with the greatest energy. The masses had to be shown that the Nazis are the party of finance capital, establishing a regime of bloody terror against the working class in the interests of the moneybags. Ernst Thaelmann stated in the same report:

“It is only by bringing to the consciousness of the masses of the employees, petty bourgeoisie, officials and rural population, who are the main mass of adherents of Hitlerite fascism, that it is not national-socialism, but we, who are the only Party in which millions of fighters are struggling for the emancipation of Germany from the Versailles yoke and capitalist bondage, and from the enslavement of the Young Plan, that we will become their deliverers, and win them to the side of the class struggle.”

But the German working class will be able to struggle successfully against fascism only insofar as the Communist Party will succeed in destroying the mass influence of social-democracy. The following excerpt from the same report still remains a practical guide for immediate action:

“We must create a clear understanding of the fact that it is impossible to smash Hitler’s party, without smashing the mass influence of social-democracy, particularly among the proletariat. We must achieve a clear understanding of the fact that it will be impossible to overcome a possible future government of Hitler, unless, in good time,
we direct the main blow against social-democracy for the purpose of winning over the most important strata of the working class. For it is precisely social-democracy which is catching or is already holding the wide masses of the working class captive in the interests of the bourgeoisie, and is thereby evading the class struggle, or coming out directly against it."

In the spring of 1932, three candidates were nominated for the post of president of the German Republic: Hindenburg, Thaelmann, and Hitler. In this election Thaelmann embodied the united fighting front of the German proletariat. Even the workers, who for one or another reason gave their votes to Hindenburg, were forced to see in Ernst Thaelmann the candidate of the German proletariat. His tour throughout Germany during the electoral campaign was a special kind of triumph of the idea of the united front.

The Protest of the World Workers Can Save Thaelmann

During the first days and weeks of Hitler’s advent to power the Welses and Leiparts did all they could to betray the gigantic organization of German workers to the arbitrary will of fascism and thus to secure for themselves a warm spot in the sun of the Third Empire. The Welses and Leiparts negotiated with Goering and Frick. This was at the time when Ernst Thaelmann was arrested.

There is not a single worker’s dwelling in Germany, not a single enterprise, where the terrible tortures and mockery exercised by the fascist hangmen over near friends, comrades of each worker, have not
sown indelibly fierce hatred against the fascists, and where the proletarians are not suffering fears for the life of one dear and near to them.

During the whole of these fourteen months that the fascist beasts have held our Ernst Thaelmann in their clutching talons, the anxious question as to what is the latest regarding Ernst Thaelmann never ceases to be uttered. This question is asked not only by Communists who are alarmed about the fate of their favorite leader. This question is being and has been asked with no less sympathy by members of the Reichsbanner, with whom we have chanced to discuss either the joint anti-fascist struggle or their joining the Communist Party of Germany. This question has been asked by the social-democratic comrades, workers in whose apartments we have frequently found shelter, and felt ourselves safest when hiding from the fascist police. Nor did this question cease to sound even when the brave speeches of Comrade Dimitroff at the Leipzig trial made the hearts of millions of German toilers beat faster. In this question we hear the alarm not for the life and health of one man, but the alarm for the true genuine leader of the Communist Party of Germany, reflecting the fact that both the social-democratic workers, and the millions of all the toilers who are not inclined towards fascism, place their only hope in the Communist Party of Germany, which no brutal, bloody terror will succeed in throttling.

When speaking about Bolshevik cadres at the Wedding Congress of the Communist Party of Germany, soon after the blood bath organized by Zoergiebel, Comrade Thaelmann called for the
"... greatest readiness in our own ranks to make sacrifices not only in the political but also in the material sphere. In the struggle against our class enemy, we must defend our positions to the very end. Not a single Communist should leave the post assigned to him by the Party. Even in the conditions of the most bitter struggle we must fulfill our revolutionary duty without hesitation."

In letters of blood written in the annals of history, the Communist Party of Germany has given proof that the prerequisites for the fulfillment of the tasks of the Bolshevik Party are still alive within it. The merit of having forged the steeled and tempered Communist Party of Germany belongs in the first place to Ernst Thaelmann who, by his conduct in the torture chamber of the secret police as well, sets an example to the revolutionary workers. The fascist henchmen of German monopolist capital, overcome with the lust for revenge at the heroic struggle of German Communists against the Hitlerite dictatorship which is more and more losing ground in the midst of political and economic difficulties, wish to makes an end of Ernst Thaelmann, to wreak their vengeance on him. In the person of its great and intrepid leader, they want to deal a blow at the Communist Party of Germany and to sow downheartedness in the ranks of its heroic fighters. Only the further development and intensification of the anti-fascist mass struggle and the protest of the many millions of the proletariat throughout the world can save the life of Ernst Thaelmann and the lives of the thousands of revolutionary workers who are wasting away in the torture chambers of the fascist butchers.