

KAPD, Theses on the role of the party in the proletarian revolution (1921)

Reichenbach presented this text in retrospect as follows:

The K.A.P.D. had well recognized that there were some good and reliable revolutionaries in these ranks, who had often fallen into the extreme of rejecting the party altogether only through disappointment over the failure of the great parties built on the leader principle, but thus already anticipating for the preparatory period of the revolution a condition which can only be realized with the classless society. The position of the K.A.P.D. on the question of the party was summarized in the "Guiding Principles on the Role of the Party in the Proletarian Revolution" in July 1921. Because of the principle importance of this question, the main points are excerpted as follows: (until here Reichenbach)

Theses on the role of the party in the proletarian revolution

I.

1. It is the historical task of the proletarian revolution to bring the disposal of the wealth of the earth into the hands of the working masses, to put an end to the private ownership of the means of production, thus rendering impossible the existence of a separate, exploiting, ruling class. This task involves freeing the economy of society from all fetters of political power and is, of course, posed on a world scale.

2. The ending of the capitalist mode of production, the taking over of this production, and putting it in the hands of the working class, the ending of all class divisions and withering of political institutions, and building of a communist society is a historical process whose individual moments cannot be exactly predicted. But, as regards this question, the role which political violence will play in this process is nevertheless settled on some points.

II.

3. The proletarian revolution is at the same time a political and economic process. Neither as a political, nor as an economic process can it be solved on a national scale; the building of the world commune is absolutely necessary for its survival. Therefore it follows that until the final destruction of the power of capital on a world scale, the victorious part of the revolutionary proletariat still needs political violence to defend, and if possible attack, the political violence of the counter-revolution.

4. In addition to these reasons which make political violence necessary for the victorious part of the proletariat, there are additional reasons relating to the internal development of the revolution. The revolution - looked on as a political process — has indeed a decisive moment, the taking of political power. The revolution, viewed as an economic process, has no such decisive moment, long work will be necessary to take over the direction of the economy on the part of the proletariat, to eradicate the profit motive, and to replace it by an economy of needs. It is self-evident that during this period the bourgeoisie will not remain idle, but will try to regain power for the purpose of defending their profits. It follows that in the countries with a developed democratic ideology - that is, in the advanced

industrial countries - they will seek to mislead the proletariat with democratic slogans. It is thus essential that the workers wield a strong, unwavering political violence till they have taken over, in concrete terms, the control of the economy and broken the grip of the bourgeoisie. This period is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

III.

5. The necessity for the proletariat to hold political power after the political victory of the revolution confirms, as a consequence, the necessity for a political organisation of the proletariat just as much after as before the seizure of power.

6. The political workers' councils (Soviets) are the historically determined, all-embracing form of proletarian power and administration: at all times they pass the individual points of the class struggle and pose the question of complete power.

7. The historically determined form of organisation which groups together the most conscious and prepared proletarian fighters is the Party. Since the historical task of the proletarian revolution is communism, this party, in its programme and in its ideology, can only be a communist party. The communist party must have a thoroughly worked out programmatic basis and must be organised and disciplined in its entirety from below, as a unified will. It must be the head and weapon of the revolution.

IV.

8. The main task of the communist party, just as much before as after the seizure of power, is, in the confusion and fluctuations of the proletarian revolution, to be the one clear and unflinching compass towards communism. The communist party must show the masses the way in all situations, not only in words but also in deeds. In all the issues of the political struggle before the seizure of power, it must bring out in the clearest way the difference between reforms and revolution, must brand every deviation to reformism as a betrayal of the revolution, and of the working class, and as giving new lease of life to the old system of profit. Just as there can be no community of interest between exploiter and exploited, so can there be no unity between reform and revolution. Social democratic reformism — whatever mask it might choose to wear — is today the greatest obstacle to the revolution, and the last hope of the ruling class.

9. The communist party must, therefore, unflinchingly oppose every manifestation of reformism and opportunism with equal determination in its programme, its press, its tactics and activities. Especially it should never allow its membership to expand faster than is made possible by the power of absorption of the solid communist nucleus.

10. Not only in its entirety, but in its individual moments, the revolution is a dialectical process; in the course of the revolution the masses make inevitable vacillations. The communist party, as the organisation of the most conscious elements, must itself strive not to succumb to these vacillations, but to put them right. Through the clarity and the principled nature of their slogans, their unity of words and deeds, their position at the head of the struggle, the correctness of their predictions, they must help the proletariat to quickly and completely overcome each vacillation. Through its entire activity the communist party must develop the class consciousness of the proletariat, even at the cost of being momentarily apparently in opposition to the masses. Only thus will the party, in the course of the revolutionary struggle, win the trust of the masses, and accomplish a revolutionary education of the widest numbers.

11. The communist party naturally must not lose contact with the masses. This means, aside from the obvious duty of indefatigable propaganda, that it must also intervene in the movement of the workers caused by economic needs and attempt to spiritually clarify such movements and develop them, by encouraging appeals for active solidarity so that the struggles are extended and take on revolutionary and, where possible, political forms. But the communist party cannot strengthen the spirit of opportunism by raising partial reformist demands in the name of the party.

V.

12. The most important practical performance of the communists in the economic struggle of the workers lies in the organisation of those means of struggle which, in the revolutionary epoch in all the highly developed countries, are the only weapons suitable for such struggle. This means that the communists must therefore seek to unite the revolutionary workers (not only the members of the communist party) to come together in the factories, and to build up the factory organisations (Betriebsorganisationen) which will unite into Unions and which will prepare for the taking over of production by the working class.

13. The revolutionary factory organisations (Unions) are the soil from which action committees will emerge in the struggle, the framework for partial economic demands and for the workers fighting for themselves. They are forerunners and foundation of the revolutionary workers' councils.

14. In creating these wide class organisations of the revolutionary proletariat, the communists prove the strength of a programmatically rounded and unified body. And in the Unions they give an example of communist theory in practice, seeking the victory of the proletarian revolution and subsequently the achievement of a communist society.

VI.

15. The role of the party after the political victory of the revolution is dependent on the international situation and on the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. As long as the dictatorship of the proletariat (the political violence of the victorious working class) is necessary, the communist party must do all it can to push events in a communist direction. To this end, in all the industrialised countries it is absolutely necessary that the widest possible amount of revolutionary workers, under the influence of the spirit of the party, are actively involved in the taking over and transformation of the economy. Being organised in factories and Unions, schooled in individual conflicts, forming committees of action, are the necessary preparations which will be undertaken by the advanced guard of the working class itself and prepare them for the development of the revolutionary struggle.

16. In as much as the Unions, as the class organisation of the proletariat, strengthen themselves after the victory of the revolution and become capable of consolidating the economic foundations of the dictatorship in the form of the system of councils, they will increase in importance in relation to the party. Later on, in as much as the dictatorship of the proletariat is assured thanks to being rooted in the consciousness of the broad masses, the party loses its importance against the workers' councils. Finally, to the extent that the safeguarding of the revolution by political violence becomes unnecessary, in as

much as the masses finally change their dictatorship into a communist society, the party ceases to exist.

Source: Bernhard Reichenbach (Hamburg), Zur Geschichte der K(ommunistischen) A(rbeiter)-P(artei) D(eutschlands), ersterschiene in Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus, "Carl Grünberg Archiv", XIII, Leipzig, 1928, hier nach die Wiedergabe in <http://www.left-dis.nl/d/berreich.htm> mit einige Korrekturen nach dem Original *Die Arbeit der k.a.p.d. auf dem Moskauer Kongress* [Dritter Kongress der Komintern], a) *Leitsätze über die Rolle der Partei in der proletarischen Revolution*, in [Proletarier : Monatsschrift für Kommunismus, Jahrgang 1 \(1920-1921\), Heft 7 \(Juli 1921\)](#).

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