Käthe Leichter

The Best Defense

„Die beste Abwehr“ [1933]

Followed by:

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> "*The experience of Germany has shown above all that the heaviest, most fearful sacrifices the working class is required to make in the struggle against fascism are still easier to bear than the sacrifices imposed by unresisting submission."* Otto Bauer at the International Socialist Conference.[1]

The German catastrophe has imposed upon all workers of the world an obligation to review their tactics. This is not merely a question of confirming that a particular turning-point was missed or a particular situation exploited correctly; that a particular decision was the wrong one; that the leaders or the masses failed to show initiative or energy. This approach to critical debate, so commonplace today, grasps the surface appearance of the fascist overthrow of the workers' movement but not its deeper causes. Only by conscientiously reviewing whether the causes of many a failure lie deeper, whether the perspective that guided the workers' movement from within bourgeois democracy in the post-war years is the one that will enable us to fight fascism — only by acknowledging the inevitable consequences can we succeed in making the inner change required at this moment. Since the counterrevolution will

[1] Otto Bauer, de facto head of the Austrian Socialist Party (*SDAP*) at the August 1933 meeting of the LSI [*Labor and Socialist International*] convened to discuss the rise of Nazism and fascism in Europe. See Commentary, p. 26.

not appear everywhere in one stroke as entirely fascist, the workers' movement now threatened by fascism in other countries has been given a breathing space which, if correctly exploited, will determine if the decisive assault can be successfully repelled. Self-criticism, then, not to produce internal splintering to the point of irreparability but to avoid that dangerous paralysis which we now know can be the fate of even a large, powerful working class, and to gain that ability to act that alone can successfully fend off fascism.

To do this, it seems necessary to wean the Socialist movement from automatism, the belief in the inevitability of economic and historical processes, which over the last decades has been all too dominant. In the progression from Utopianism to Science, recognition of the conditions of historical process in the Socialist movement was a step forward.[2] Today, when the movement should be passing from insight to execution, it's apparent that we were mesmerized by the determining processes and lost our faith in the creative power of the workers' movement itself, our confidence in their own ability to organize and act.[3] Isn't it shocking when Wels, at the international conference of the Labor

[2] Friedrich Engels, in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (1880), draws a distinction between sentimental social movements and movements like Marxism that base their activities on rational theories of historical development. Over-reliance on the descriptive aspects of Theory had blinded the leadership to conditions on the ground.

[3] "Determining process" [*Entwicklungsbedingtheit*]: literally, "Condition for the process of development." From the *Communist Manifesto* on Marx and Engels consistently use the expressions *bedingen* and *Bedingtheit* to suggest that historical developments provide the conditions that make change possible, but not necessarily inevitable.

and Socialist International states: "We were merely the product of the process?"[4] Is it fair to baldly let the errors of 1918 slip behind "objective historical factors," as Bauer does in the August issue of *Der Kampf*?[5] And isn't it characteristic that the time of this first great shock of the world economic crisis, the time to unleash anti-capitalist enthusiasm, has been chiefly spent discussing whether this is only one crisis of capitalism or the last one, without finding the courage to tell the masses that *we*, the Socialists, are going to make it the last by releasing all the enthusiasm of anti-capitalism and reshaping it as enthusiasm for Socialism? To the masses shaken by the first shock of the crisis we have offered academic explanations, so that they slipped into resignation, the more so as they'd been hurled out of the productive sector and into the anti-capitalist demagoguery of the Nazis, either directly or after persistent periods of unemployment, without a socialist perspective.

Of course we have always contrasted our economic programs with our opponents'; but didn't ours always conscientiously strive to remain within the realm of the possible — from a genuine sense of our responsibilities, of course? But then was any part of what was objectively possible achievable once we'd proposed it? Dared we deceive ourselves, since in this world of

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[4] Otto Wels, Chairman of the German Socialist Party [*SPD*] since 1919. Committed to the survival of a constitutional republic in Germany, he continued to advocate for peaceful constitutional resistance in the face of the collapse of Parliamentary legalism. See Commentary, p. 25.

[5] Otto Bauer. „Der deutsche Faschismus und die Internationale". *Der Kampf*, Jahrgang XXVI, Heft 8/9 (August 1933, pp. 309-322) [*Author's note*]. *Der Kampf* ("The Struggle") was the major theoretical organ of the Austrian and German-speaking Socialists. Like the SDP, the SDAP had passed up the opportunity to institute a socialist constitution for Austria after the collapse of the Hapsburg Monarchy in 1918. See Commentary, pp. 25-26.

heightened political antagonisms it was enough for an economic program to come from us for it to be ruled out by our enemies? Based on this realization, wouldn't it have been a hundred times more clever to lay out socialist demands that weren't going to be met of course, but that would leave no doubt among the disillusioned, especially the downward-mobile masses, that we're fundamentally different from all the others because we realize that nothing can be gained on the basis of this sick economic order except by overcoming it? With our deep-seated socialist awareness and convictions, did we have to abandon the anti-capitalist masses to pseudo-socialist demagogy? Yes, they say, but unlike Hitler we didn't want to make promises we couldn't keep afterwards; consistent with our responsibilities we had to keep asking ourselves what we could accomplish if we were in office.[6] But isn't precisely that the fundamental mistake, that we never thought of the power we were to exercise as socialist power, but from the outset only as that of a coalition government within the framework of the capitalist order? Oh, sure, we strive for Socialism. That was never lacking in our programs, articles or speeches; but it became a petrified phrase, worthless for agitation as long as we never dared to rise beyond the premises of capitalism in our demands, our programs and our concrete proposals. Less faith in the automatic nature of capitalism and the inevitability of its cycles from crisis to recovery; more boldness to stress our uncompromising will to exploit the crisis for the collapse of capitalism;

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[6] On March 23, 1933 Hitler had demanded and obtained extraordinary powers from the German Parliament claiming they were needed to resolve the economic crisis. Meanwhile Otto Bauer argued that the Socialists, were they to take power, would be held responsible for the crisis.

more bold concepts for those economic programs that will shift socialist economics from a fantasy of the future to the task of the present generation: much has been neglected, but not all, and that is our task today.

The overvaluation of the role of automatism in economic life, at a time when the automatic functions of the capitalist economy have been disrupted, corresponds to faith in democratic automatism in a time when democracy itself is being smashed by the class enemy.[7] The Austrian Social Democrats certainly can't be reproached for failing to anticipate the situation. No other socialist program anticipated the smashing of democracy with as much clarity as the Linz Program of the Austrian Social Democrats, which established, not as a possibility but a certainty, that "The bourgeoisie will not voluntarily relinquish its position of power."[8] And yet today we know there is a yawning gap in their conceptualization of the seizure of power. The takeover of the State by violence was to be in self-defense only, conceded only if all efforts to permeate the Military and to take over the State by democratic means should fail. But don't we now know from our experience of these past years that if we have our strategy for revolution, the bourgeoisie has its own well-founded strategy for counter-revolution? Only at those times when the working class is weakened, either by self-directed political dismemberment as in Italy; weakened

[7] On March 4, 1933 Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß dissolved the Austrian Parliament on a technicality.

[8] *Linz Program*: published in November of 1926, it threatened a military response to aggression. However, in the "Julitage," the July Days of 1927, the Party failed to respond militarily to a State-sponsored massacre in Vienna.

before all else by the Crisis, by the depleted potential of the unions as instruments of struggle, weakened by politically unfavorable international configurations, will the bourgeoisie smash democracy.[9] The enemy knows full well when the political situation favors them: only then will they go for the establishment of a bourgeois dictatorship, unconstrained by ideological scruples. Indeed, they are all the more certain to do so if they have not only illegal combat troops at their disposal but segments of the state apparatus as well — in short, if the prospect of victory beckons.[10] By postponing our decisive struggle to the time when our opponents smash democracy, we postpone it ourselves to that point in time in which we are the weaker ones economically, internationally and domestically: when the risk of drawing the short straw is greatest.

Today no doubt, when democracy's destroyed in large swaths of Central Europe, it seems worth striving for to many. And yet today, while restoring this democracy is repeatedly presented as our main task, there are many in the Party who feel that was not the intent of the Linz Program; that we are mourning the loss of democracy while our enemies have already smashed its foundations, instead of confronting them on the ground onto which they have forced us by smashing democracy. Of course we were thinking about a different economic and international situation, but that was an illusion, even then.

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[9] "Self-directed political dismemberment:" a reference to the *biennio rosso*, the "Two Red Years" of 1920-1922, when a widespread movement of workers and peasants in Italy turned against itself.

[10] Like the SA in Germany the Austrian Heimwehr were non-governmental militias allied with the State and funded by large industrial combines.

So long as we structure our tactics as defensive tactics against our enemy's aggression we will necessarily fall into a vicious circle that prevents us from fighting, one moment because our enemies haven't sufficiently provoked us, the next because their attacks are too successful. De Man seems to me quite correct when he traces this attitude to an "economic determinism exacerbated by fatalism" with which a "spiritless and passive opportunism is only too happy to justify its flight from the risks of offensive action by relying on political and economic processes, with their natural succession of historical phases that justifies inaction in times of prosperity because the workers lack the motivation to struggle, and in times of crisis because they lack the opportunity."[11]

The feeling that for every situation we have our reasons grounded in "objective criteria" to justify passivity makes the working class suspicious of our will to socialism — and of course such objective criteria are never lacking, either in normal times or in times of crisis. But the danger above all else is, that the masses, too, will lack energy at the decisive moment so long as democratic automatism is shown to be the norm while powerful actions against the enemy are the exception, mere tactical threats in fact. The masses, too, are getting used to relying on the power of threats alone, and to no longer believe in the use of revolutionary means as a reality. As the Belgian Spaak very aptly told the International Conference:

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[11] Hendrick de Man: „Die sozialistische Idee." Diederichs. Jena 1933. [*Author's note*]. Hendrik [Henri] de Man: Belgian Socialist economist who would head the Belgian Workers' Party. Committed to centralized planning over Socialism, he collaborated with the Nazis during the Occupation. His nephew was the literary critic Paul de Man.

> "It's a mistake to believe that a party that for years held fast to the rules and methods of a purely democratic struggle, can switch at one stroke to armed defense through extra-legal struggle when fascism comes."[12]

Over the past months we have experienced the difficulties of this process of transition.

Thus an optimistic fatalism emerges, potentially as dangerous as the pessimistic. He who fatalistically believes that fascism is unpreventable will certainly not summon the strength to oppose it. But he who thinks fascism is only one form of reaction like many others; that all of this has happened before, that it's not so bad, we need only wait until "our time" has come; he who hopes as well for the internal disintegration and self-destruction of fascism without the need for the working class to go into action; or who's indifferent to other forms of counter-revolutionary activity because they don't show themselves to be one-hundred-percent fascist — he commits himself to a fatalistic optimism, expecting everything from historical events and nothing from the strength of the working class.[13] But in doing so he practically removes the working class as an active agent in the evolutionary process, an error just as serious as the one that considers fascism to be unpreventable. Here economic determinism, which only asks what this crisis means and not how to exploit it, has its ideology in the superstructure: in a political fatalism that awaits,

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[12] Paul-Henri Spaak: Socialist lawyer and politician, represented the Left wing of the LSI at the Paris Conference. After the War Prime Minister of Belgium and architect of the European Union.

[13] "The self-destruction of fascism:" One theory held that fascism was not intrinsic to capitalism, and that the bourgeois elements that promoted it would eventually turn against it. See Commentary, pp. 27-28.

fascinated, the coming and disappearance of fascism without raising the question: "What should the working class do, first to forestall fascism from growing at all or, should it still 'break out,' to take it down again?"[14]

Is it out of contempt for democracy that its mere recapture, with its civil liberties and parliamentary system, arouses little enthusiasm? Of course, today thousands are learning for the first time to appreciate the value of democracy, a condition a hundred times more desirable than a fascist dictatorship. It's the dynamics of the democratic process that's disappointing. According to our Marxist convictions bourgeois democracy was sure to work for us too, as a result of the increase in wage labor, the proletarianization of ever greater strata of society who must come to us on the open ground of democratic struggle. Here, too, however, the process did not run so mechanically, automatically. Proletarianization has developed on an enormous scale, but not in the form of a rise in wage work, on the contrary: by ejecting ever greater masses out of the production process; by downgrading the middle strata to the level of paupers, not wage-workers. The outcome of the postwar period, of rationalization and the world economic crisis was not the consolidation of the proletariat but its economic splintering. Social strata emerged that by no means increased the ranks of our movement automatically, quite the opposite in fact: they handed fascism an opportunity to infiltrate the working class at

[14] Since then, at the Vienna Party Congress, Friedrich Adler has sounded a warning. The turn away from a purely defensive policy was proposed at this Party meeting as well. [*Author's note*]. Friedrich's speech at the Austrian Party Conference on October 16 dismissed the right and left's reliance on automatism. This note was inserted at the last minute and may be out of place. See Commentary, pp. 33-34.

its upper and lower margins with pseudo-socialist rhetoric. Surely this would not have been so easy without negligence from our side. At a time when the crisis was already well under way we were still basically pursuing policies for the benefit of salaried workers whose wages, workplace rights and social policy we championed before all else. This, certainly, is why you can't reproach the Austrian movement for not recognizing the problem: a great part of our energy in recent years has been committed to winning over the middle strata and fighting for insurance for the unemployed. But in doing so we failed to assess either group, psychologically. We were convinced that the middle strata are so tightly linked to the Capitalist Order that we approached them with demands that in substance assured them of the preservation of the capitalist economy, meanwhile overlooking their gut-level anti-capitalism, typical of the downward-mobile.[15] From the start we held the unemployed to be so revolutionary that we were practically afraid to release their revolutionary enthusiasm and fell back on our belief that our parliamentary struggles in their support would bind them to us regardless. But these parliamentary struggles became more and more unproductive, they brought worsening conditions for which we ourselves were held responsible. Besides, long-term unemployment, as we now know, does not always revolutionize, all too easily it brings resignation.[16] Here, too, there was socialist enthusiasm to waken. Wherever we

[15] There was a strong tendency in the Second International to believe that white-collar workers were not "true" proletarians and hence could not be approached with the same arguments as workers.
[16] An argument made by Marie Jahoda, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld und Hans Zeisel in *Marienthal*, a groundbreaking study of the psychological effects of unemployment. See Commentary, p. 24.

neglected to do so indifference kicked in, the best breeding ground for fascism. In this way democracy, if not properly exploited, even with increasing proletarianization can very well produce in place of an automatic enlargement of the socialist ranks the "enemy from within," "fascism" on the contrary, sustained in the marginal layers of the workers' movement. It's not democracy that's poorly viewed among the workers, it's the experience of the process of bourgeois democracy in most countries, where as soon as we grow stronger the capitalists bestir themselves to summon their financial resources, seeding a fascist mass movement to overpower Marxism, so that democracy works against us in the end, all the more so today as our enemies obviously have far greater instruments of power and far fewer inhibitions about distorting democracy as they please. Once these instruments of power have been deployed and extended to the level of fascism, is it likely they will be wrested away without the strongest pushback? Most of all, should the working class break free from the terrifying embrace of the fascist danger, is it likely above all, after their previous experience, that they will give their oppressors the freedom and leeway to regroup and start the game all over again?

Thus enthusiastic hope arises in the working class as the end-goal of our struggle against fascism: not bourgeois democracy again but the socialist conquest of power. Thus a strong desire rises as well: not just to seize this power but to guarantee a safe path to socialist democracy by means of an "educational

dictatorship" [Aufhäuser].[17] When Otto Bauer in *Der Kampf* and at the International Conference took the view that the democracy to be fought for must be socialist, grounded in economic rights, that was a step forward. But that alone is not enough. The altered economic foundation, the new form of government, must be secured against the inevitable counteractions of the bourgeoisie. Power must be asserted by dictatorial means to safeguard against backlash and to avoid the appearance that the seizure of power by the proletariat is a mere continuation of the "see-saw politics" of bourgeois democracy in which even a socialist government is infallibly replaced by a bourgeois one; meanwhile counter-agitation against the socialist administration is allowed free play, and only late is the question first raised: why did the working class so "magnanimously and graciously deal with that same opponent at the hour of victory?" (Bauer at the International Conference).

In the August issue of *Der Kampf*, Bauer opposes this commitment to dictatorship, in substance because it might hinder us from bringing over the middle strata. But a few pages later, Dan impressively demonstrates that we have falsely judged this group in psychological terms, and that they've been far more likely to be won over with open socialist agitation than with cautious words.[18]

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[17] Siegfried Aufhäuser: German Socialist deputy and union leader, on the left wing of the Party, a speaker at the LSI conference. "Educational dictatorship" [*Erziehungsdiktatur*]: tutelary rule by the Party in order to ensure a transition to Democratic Socialism; not to be confused with *Herrschaft der Proletariat* [Dictatorship of the Proletariat], the cultural and political domination by the working class in the period of transition to Communism. See Commentary, pp. 29-30.

[18] Theodor Dan. Die kleinbürgerliche Rebellion und das Proletariat. „Der Kampf." Jahrgang XXVI. Heft 8/9. [*Author's note*]. Theodor [Fyodor] Dan: Russian Menshevik leader in exile. Despite their small numbers the Mensheviks had considerable prestige in the international Socialist movement.

And hasn't Hitler's ascension actually taught us that the uncompromising will to power, the relentless emphasis on dictatorship, can have the greatest effect among those cast out strata seeking attachment to a strong power?[19] If we are resolved among ourselves to resort to this dictatorship only as far as absolutely necessary and only as a lead-up to Socialist Democracy; to safeguard self-determination in the workers' movement, even under a dictatorship; if above all we ourselves do not confuse dictatorship with a reign of terror and like Karl Kautsky reach for the juxtaposition of Humanity with Bestiality, then we can confidently claim this path as our own.[20] This will undoubtedly strengthen the feeling among the masses of our party members and supporters presently shaken by fears that "the Revolution could go under" again as easily; that a new uprising in Central Europe doesn't mean a new 1918.

And let us not delude ourselves that our enemies hate us for our radicalism in words! "Austrobolsheviks:" that's what we are in the eyes of the Austrian bourgeoisie, not because of the Linz Program or any of our strong words in speeches and writings, but because of tenant protections, Breitner luxury taxes, shop committees and social charges.[21] Our revolutionary words

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[19] The psychoanalytic theory that followers of Nazism were motivated by their need for attachment [*Anlehnung*] was at odds with Wilhelm Reich's argument, published the same year in *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, that they were motivated by sexual repression. On Reich's involvement with the SDAP see Commentary, p. 34.

[20] Karl Kautsky. Die blutige Revolution. „Der Kampf." Jahrgang XXVI. Heft 8/9. [*Author's note*]. Karl Kautsky was considered the most important Social-Democratic theoretician of the Second International. His virulent rejection of the Russian Revolution along with his opposition to any type of extra-legal action made a united front against Nazism difficult. See Commentary, p. 36.

[21] Breitner luxury taxes: direct taxes on luxury services and goods in support of Vienna's communal housing program, after Hugo Breitner, Financial Advisor of the City of Vienna and the subject of vicious attacks from the right.

wouldn't have much troubled them, it was our reforms that shrank the entrepreneurs' profits and their sphere of influence in the business that roused their anxiety. Even the most careful framing and phrasing of the Party program wouldn't have shielded the German Social Democrats from the enemy's hatred, which in fact was roused by their routine political reforms: the drafting of a new labor law and the administration of the Prussian State.[22] If we had to take their counter-agitation into account we wouldn't renounce our socialist objectives, just our routine activities. In fact, we see that everywhere the first onslaught of fascism eliminates those social gains before all else. So the reformists have run into a cul-de-sac. When they advise us, as is the case in every country, to stand still and not to take a big risk with social institutions, meaningful values, and all the workers stand to lose in a confrontation with the enemy, that certainly, according to past experience, is the surest way to sacrifice these gains. Gradually but purposefully, the counter-revolution dismantles social policy and social insurance, the right to self-determination in the workplace and the right to decision-sharing in the unions, local autonomy and housing policy. The institutions and values that in many ways today limit the fighting ability of the workers for fear of losing them, are most surely lost as soon as the enemy no longer fears a counter-offensive. "The goals of de-

[22] A reference to the *Preußenschlag* [Prussian Coup] of July, 1932, when German Chancellor von Papen dismissed the Socialist administration of Prussia by decree, paving the way for the Nazi takeover. See Commentary, p. 20.

fensive action can only be won by offensive action," says de Man. "The principles of Democracy preclude remaining an absolute democrat." (Irlen).[23] One might as well say that reforms can only be maintained by revolutionary means and their very preservation prohibits reformism.[24] The enemy's assault on our social positions will only fail to materialize because he fears us, not because we rely on good-faith cooperation.

When confronting the enemy face-to face one needs to ask uncompromisingly where the gaps are in one's own ranks. For Socialists today that means many an internal adjustment, painful for those who see a difficult path away from the peaceful evolution of the immediate post-war years, full of hope for those who have always viewed socialist self-satisfaction and rigidity as the greatest danger, and the constant struggle for the right path as the safest guarantee for socialism. In Germany today this regeneration of socialism must be carried through under the terrifying repression of fascism. Let's ensure it's not imposed on us by fascism beforehand, but instead empowers us to repel it.

Translated and annotated by Paul Werner.

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[23] Irlen, „Marx gegen Hitler." E.-Prager-Verlag, Wien-Leipzig. [*Author's note*]. Irlen: Pen-name of Boris Sapir, Menshevik leader in exile.

[24] Reformism: tendency within Marxism that argued that the historical movement toward Socialism was bound to be inevitable, incremental, and peaceful.

COMMENTARY
Käthe Leichter. "The Best Defense."
by Paul Werner.

Connecting the rise of fascism in the nineteen-thirties to the collapse of liberal democracy today is a popular sport. It's rare, however, to find an analysis that places responsibility as clearly on the side of liberalism itself as Käthe Leichter's 1933 article „Die beste Abwehr" [*The Best Defense*]. Leichter's arguments are troubling, not simply for their applicability today but for her insights on the ways that fascism can erupt from within the institutions of a purportedly democratic society.

Born in Vienna in 1895, Leichter (*née* Pick) studied Political Science at the University of Vienna after overturning the departmental ban on women students. She attended the lectures of Carl Grünberg, future Director of the Frankfurt Institute, with whom she developed a lasting friendship. Grünberg would eventually invite her to join the Institute, an offer she turned down (Leichter 1997, 357 sqq). In 1918 she obtained a Doctorate in Political Science from Heidelberg under Max Weber despite being barred from entering Germany for her anti-war activities. At War's end she supported the Workers' Councils movement as a district and national representative and participated in the New Left [*Neue Linke*] Faction, attempting to bridge the chasm between Social-Democrats and Communists (Hautmann 1987, 336-37, 482-83). In 1918-1919, during the brief period of Social-Democratic dominance in Austria, she worked alongside Otto Bauer, head of the Foreign Ministry and de facto leader of the SDAP [*Sozial-Demokratische Arbeiter Partei Österrreichs*, the Social-democratic Party of Austria]. In 1919 she was consultant to Joseph Schumpeter in the Finance Ministry. In the years that followed,

as a regular contributor to the Party daily, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and to its theoretical organ *Der Kampf*, she represented the interests of working-class women in Vienna, paid and domestic. From 1925 to 1934 she was Consultant for Women's Work at the Chamber of Labor in Vienna (*Referentin für Frauenarbeit, Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte*), denouncing the economic and social inequities imposed on working women and housewives as emblematic of low-wage work in general (Steiner 1997, 135-136; AGSO 2008).

As in Austria and Germany so too today, the movement toward social justice in civil society was increasingly thwarted by the courts, the police and by right-wing intimidation, a single "chain of acts of violence against the working class masked by constitutional forms" (Dimitrov 1935). Far from acting as impartial arbiters, the institutions of the new democratic states were complicit in shifting the balance of forces to the right. Comparing that era to ours, a German journalist recently recalled the "anti-democratic unscrupulousness of the conservatives" [*antidemokratische Skrupellosigkeit der Konservativen*] as an "object lesson" for today (Walter 2007). In Germany and Austria between the wars, the instruments of bourgeois democracy were prepared to jettison democracy to ensure their dominance. The intellectual architects of this strategy were the same authorities read and cherished by American conservative and conservative-Christian coalitions today (Mises 1927; Schmitt 1934, 17, 19). As the "Knight of Neoliberalism" Ludwig Mises put it,

> "Fascism will never be able to free itself from the power of the ideas of liberalism."
>
> „Der Faschismus sich niemals […] von der Macht der Ideen des Liberalismus zu befreien vermögen wird." (1927, 43).

Soon, and in collaboration with the future Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, Mises was putting liberalism to work, advocating violent intervention by the State against the workers' movement and justifying the abrogation of parliamentary and legal norms (Mises 1931, 17-18; Hülsmann 2007, 614-621). The result was a spiraling cycle of repression and social regression sanctioned by neo-liberal theory. Systematic dismantling of social programs created impoverishment among the working class, leading to political apathy on one side, on the other to resistance from labor unions and the workers, leading in turn to government repression, leading to an escalation of measures of self-defense from the Socialist militia, the *Schutzbund*, on one side and on the other escalating aggression from the State allied with right-wing militias funded by large industrial conglomerates. At its 1926 conference in Linz the Party leadership warned that it would defend the Republic by force if necessary. The emptiness of the threat — its irrelevance at least — was demonstrated a few months later, during the *Julitage*, the July Days of 1927 in Vienna, when, following the acquittal of the murderers of two activists, a popular riot was met by a civilian massacre. In response the Socialist leadership adopted what might be called an Atticus Finch strategy, staying within the strict limits of the legal, parliamentary and electoral system despite the fact that the system had shown itself to be structurally weighted against the vulnerable classes whose protection formed the Party's mission and appeal. The Party claimed the moral high ground and the enemy claimed real victories, while the leadership's insistence on compromise gradually sapped the workers' spirits and weakened their will to resist in the face of growing encroachments (Rabinbach 1983). Unobtrusively the Party program shifted from Social Democracy to Democratic Socialism; from the rational if contestable proposition that the democratic process was only a stage in the evolution toward Socialism, to the naïve belief that the material interests of the proletariat could be safeguarded and enhanced through the processes of bourgeois

democracy itself. Since those material gains increased the numbers and political strengths of the middle and lower-middle strata of society the politicians of the left and left-of-center were primarily focused on preserving the good will and support of that group — what politicians and pundits today would call the "average voter." The leadership's position, then as now, was to defend a "good life" that many had never seen and others were seeing slip away.

When forced to choose between the protection of its bureaucratic structure and the defense of its own clientele, a bureaucracy will inevitably choose the former. The Party's reaction to the rise of fascism was overwhelmingly defensive, at once protective of the social gains it had achieved and therefore overwhelmingly protective of the institution which, it had come to believe, was the sole guarantor of these gains. Hitler's rise to power was not so much a repudiation of the bourgeois/liberal parliamentary system as its logical outcome, a dictator "created by democracy and appointed by parliament." (Craig 1978, 578).

Those were the problems Leichter confronted at the SDAP Party Congress of November 1931. Capitalism, according to Leichter, had shifted "from an economic crisis to a spiritual crisis" [„*von einer Wirtschaftskrise zu einer seelischen Krise*"] or, as we might say today, to an epistemological crisis (SDAP 1931, 37). The Party itself was being dragged into this crisis; its tactic of accommodation was no longer viable as the Party itself was progressively tainted by its association with the defenders of capital. The *Vertrauensmänner*, the Party loyalists who connected the members with the leaders, were increasingly frustrated while the confused and disenchanted workers turned to far-right movements, drawn by radical demands that the Social-Democrats themselves had long abandoned as unrealistic within the framework of parliamentary democracy. Like American unions the Party had neglected to prepare the workers politically, convinced as it was that the one and

inevitable path to Socialism was through the Party itself. Like many American parties and organizations of the left today the Party was convinced that the Millennium would be achieved merely through the process of gaining political power. It was imperious, said Leichter, to empower the proletariat for political action, and political action must begin with political education. Leichter's speech was met with "thunderous, sustained applause" and earned her the honor of being singled out for rebuttal by Otto Bauer in his concluding remarks (SDAP 1931, 37-38, 66-67).

It was in Germany, however, not Austria, that the boot dropped first, with the *Preußenschlag*, the Government-initiated Prussian Coup. The State [*Land*] of Prussia, the largest, most economically developed member of the German Federation, was under the administration of the German Social-Democratic Party [*Sozial-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands* or *SPD*]. On July 20, 1932, German Chancellor Franz von Papen used the pretext of a lack of a majority in the Prussian Parliament to dissolve the SPD Administration; Hermann Göring was subsequently appointed Prussian Minister of the Interior, with predictable results. Ever concerned to stay within legal bounds, the SDP filed suit with the *Staatsgerichtshof*, the equivalent of America's Supreme Court. By September of 1932 there could be little doubt that Austria was heading in the same direction, as Chancellor Dollfuss put the head of the right-wing militia, the *Heimwehr*, at the head of Internal Security, a Göring for Vienna.

On October 25, 1932 the Supreme Court (the German one) declared Papen's action unconstitutional while refusing to reverse it. The case for the State was argued by Carl Schmitt, the Catholic jurist who in recent years has become a standard reference for the American right. Contrary to the proposition that the Constitution offered equal protection to all, the Court sided with Schmitt to rule that such protections could be discarded by executive fiat. As in post-World War II America, the

role of Government was not to mediate and unite the warring factions but to marginalize and expel its enemies, the Communists and Socialists. As Schmitt made clear, the designated enemies of the State had no rights the State was bound to respect (Dyzenhaus 1999).

When the SDAP reconvened in November of 1932, Leichter no longer spoke from the periphery, she stood side-by-side with a coalition of younger Party members and *Vertrauensmänner* increasingly alarmed by the obliviousness of the leadership to the situation in the factories, in the public housing complexes, among the unemployed and young, and in the provinces where, as the critic and writer Ernst Fischer had explained earlier, "The Republican Constitution is a piece of paper, fascism a reality." [„*Die Verfassung* [der Republik ist] *ein Fetzen Papier, der Faschismus eine Realität.*"] (Fischer 1932, 9). Others backed Fischer's comment with denunciations of class-based Justice and increasing police violence (SDAP 1932, 20). Comrade Strasser from Lower Austria observed that resistance to the right could not be expected from workers abandoned to poverty and despair (SDAP 1932, 66). To which Comrade Kraus ("industrial worker") added:

> "Democracy can be the path, but we should not forget that democracy should never be the goal. The goal must be Socialism, which we can reach on the path of Democracy."
>
> „Die Demokratie kann der Weg sein, aber wir dürfen nicht vergessen, daß die Demokratie nie das Ziel sein soll. Das Ziel muß der Sozialismus sein, zu dem wir auf dem Weg der Demokratie gelangen können." (SDAP 1932, 45).

It was left to Leichter to face the leadership head-on, and to propose solutions:

> “At a time when we are threatened by Dictatorship by Law, the problem is not limited to the confrontation between Democracy and Dictatorship. It is not enough to say that Democracy has failed, our task as working class is not to cede the field of Democracy and to prove that it is compatible with this field of struggle to use revolutionary means of power… In this day and age we must be clear that only a power-conscious policy will attract the masses. (Great applause).”

> „In einer Zeit, in der eine Rechtsdiktatur droht, erschöpft sich unser Problem nicht in der Gegenüberstellung: Demokratie oder Diktatur. Es genügt nicht, zu sagen, die Demokratie habe versagt, sondern es ist unsere Aufgabe als Arbeiterklasse, auf dem Kampfboden der Demokratie nicht zu versagen und zu beweisen, daß es mit diesem Kampfboden vereinbar ist, revolutionäre Machtmittel anzuwenden… Wir müssen uns in der heutigen Zeit darüber klar sein, daß nur eine machtbewußte Politik Anziehungskraft auf die Massen ausübt. (Großer Beifall.)“ (SDAP 1932, 47.)

Addressing Karl Renner, the Socialist leader in the National Assembly, she added:

> "I have the impression that in many places where we are in control, we see our function too much as an administrative one and too little as position of power.”

> „Ich habe den Eindruck, daß wir an vielen Stellen, wo wir verwalten, diese unsere Funktion zu sehr als Verwaltungsfunktion und zu wenig als Machtposition ansehen.“ (ibid.)**.**

That must have hurt. “Freedom and the Rule of Law!” [„Freiheit und Recht!“], responded Renner; this probably struck the comrades as an oxymoron (SDAP 1932, 48). Besides, asserted Otto Bauer, the best defense of Democracy was Democracy itself:

> “The defense of Democracy against reaction and fascism is our most important task at present. ... The immensely difficult, immensely great, but also immensely glorious task of the Austrian proletariat is to maintain an island of democratic freedom here.”
>
> „Die Verteidigung der Demokratie gegen Reaktion und Faschismus im Augenblick unsere wichtigste Aufgabe ist… Die ungeheuer schwere, ungeheuer große, aber auch ungeheuer ruhmvolle Aufgabe des österreichischen Proletariats [ist] hier eine Insel demokratischer Freiheit zu erhalten.“ (SDAP 1932, 38-39).

A Party loyalist chimed in that the workers would never abandon the Party as they had in Germany. The issue was no longer what the Party must do to defend the People but what the people would do to defend the Party.

In all these interventions one senses more than an underlying theme: an underlying theoretical basis. Comrade’s Kraus’ comment is a close paraphrase of Max Adler, University Professor and the major theoretician of Left-Wing Austro-Marxism, known today as a purveyor of highly abstract philosophical disquisitions, usually ignored for his far more accessible sociological and political tracts. Likewise, there is a striking similarity between the observations of Comrade Strasser from Lower Austria and the scholarly observations shortly to be published in *Marienthal*, a breakthrough sociological study of unemployment in a small factory town outside of Vienna (Jahoda 1933). The project had been initiated in 1931 and the main contributor, Marie Jahoda, had begun to write up the report in the Summer of 1932. The *Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte* of which Leichter was a senior member had been one of the initial co-sponsors.

On January 30, 1933, the day Hitler was appointed Chancellor, the top leadership of the SPD met to discuss the future. Like a chorus in a Greek tragedy, the

majority were more concerned with voicing their powerlessness before Fate, than in changing it. As one delegate put it: “Nothing meaningful can be done as long as Hitler and Papen run the Cabinet on constitutional lines.” [„*Wenn Hitler und Papen zunächst auf verfassungsmäßigem das Kabinett führen, sei dagegen nichts von Bedeutung zu machen“*] (Schulze 1975, 134). Fate, according to the Social-Democratic leadership, had the stern visage of legal respectability. Only the labor leader Siegfried Aufhäuser called for the mobilization of the rank-and-file and its paramilitary organization, the *Reichsbanner*: “He thought it was now impossible to resolve the situation by constitutional means.” [„*Verfassungsmäßig scheine es ihm unmöglich zu sein, diese Situation jetzt zu lösen“*] (Schulze 1975, 133).

On March 5th, parliamentary elections were held in Germany. The polls were protected by the SS, the Proud Boys of the day. The question was resolved by constitutional means and Hitler was the answer. A few days later Dollfuss followed Papen and taking advantage of gridlock over the Government’s attempt to suppress a railway workers’ strike, dissolved the Austrian Parliament and ruled by decree. Within days political meetings and marches were banned, the Social-Democrats forced further and further on the defensive and rapidly losing ground. This time the right-wing judges of the Austrian Supreme Court (*Verfassungsgerichtshof*) were induced to resign and a few others removed so that the Court, lacking a quorum, was unable to rule on the matter. The compliant ones were reinstated shortly thereafter. Two weeks later the German Parliament (*Reichstag*), with its Communist deputies under arrest or in flight, passed the Enabling Act that gave Hitler virtually unlimited powers. The People had spoken.

Today’s mythologies of parliamentary liberalism present the Reichstag session of March 23,1933, the last session of the Weimar Republic, as a heroic, tragic struggle of “Democracy against Dictatorship,” of “Democratic Ideals,” strong on

feelings but evasive in the details (Fromm 2013, Slagman 2013, Wels 1933, Introductory Note). For many, Leichter included, Wels' intervention had less positive implications. First came Wels' acceptance of Hitler's claim that the proposed dictatorship was intended to protect the German economy — presumably from its enemies the Communists. Mises would have approved. Second came a curious self-defeating argument:

> "The Weimar Constitution is no socialist constitution. But we stand by the founding principles of a state based on the rule of law, of equal rights, of social justice that are established in it."
>
> „Die Verfassung von Weimar ist keine sozialistische Verfassung. Aber wir stehen zu den Grundsätzen des Rechtsstaates, der Gleichberechtigung, des sozialen Rechtes, die in ihr festgelegt sind." (Wels 1933).

Wels' speech boiled down to an apology for the failure of his own party to go beyond the strict legality that the Party itself had helped to fashion. The same might have been said of Otto Bauer, Wels' Austrian counterpart, and his defense of the Austrian Constitution of 1919. Socialists in both countries had allowed for a situation where a strong executive could take the reins in case of parliamentary gridlock — three countries actually, if America is included. In Germany and Austria the leadership's excuse for allowing the Party to be steamrolled by the right in 1933 was, that they'd let themselves be steamrolled by the right back in 1918. Like American centrists today they'd let themselves be steamrolled because they were more fearful of their own left wing than of fascism itself (Kolb 2005, 19-20, 162).

After August 23rd the SDP leadership scattered abroad — those who hadn't been arrested. In Paris the worldwide meeting of the Labor and Socialist International was rescheduled for August of 1933 to address the crisis of international fascism. The LSI or SAI [*Sozialistische Arbeiter-Internationale*] was a loose federation of Social-Democratic and Socialist parties struggling to rebuild the Second International after its collapse in World War I, hence its nickname, "The Second-and-a-Half International." The gathering was attended by delegates and observers from some thirty countries, including a young Walter Reuther, future President of the United Auto Workers of America, with his brother Victor.

For anyone inebriated by fine phrases about Islands of Democracy and Rule of Law the conference was an invitation to fall off the wagon. International 2.5 had the impossible task of presenting a united front for action against the worldwide rise of fascism while struggling to paper over the divisions that had caused the collapse of International 2.0 at the outset of World War I, divisions based on widely divergent party orientations from nation to nation and widely divergent priorities or, as each imagined, diverging rates of progress toward the inevitable triumph of Socialism. As today, so then, Socialists at the LSI were hopelessly divided, not by theoretical issues as they imagined, but by wildly divergent pragmatic considerations to which, by their own institutional logic, they were forced to bend their theorizing. Because of the urgency of the situation each representative was free to express his or her individual opinion regardless of the stated position of their national party, but the proceedings were closed to present a façade of unity. As Recording Secretary, Otto Bauer set the tone and controlled the narrative, issuing press reports that were widely distributed in the international press (Bauer 1933). The introductory address to the Conference was read by Friedrich Adler, Secretary

General of the LSI and son of Victor Adler, the founder and father of Austrian Social-Democracy. Friedrich proposed a framework for discussions: one could not, he argued, apply a single theoretical framework to the variety of situations confronting Socialists in various countries. Once again the Movement was hamstrung by its own cleverness, or at least by Friedrich's own. Each national branch was left to define what kind of fascism they themselves were fighting, or should fight, or needn't. At one extreme stood the Swedish socialist leadership who, "safely ensconced in a Keynesian-inspired politics that anticipated the Welfare State after 1945," dismissed as "dogmatism" all talk of revolution or class (Vergnon 1994, 450). At another extreme stood Austria, where the factions within SDAP had developed competing definitions of fascism to dovetail with their own hopes and fears, and these definitions in turn determined how they evaluated the present danger. All sides adhered to the Marxist view that fascism was a product of bourgeois capitalism at bay. However, Otto Bauer and the Party center held that fascism was an attempt to overcome the balance of forces in a democratic society, which presupposed that such a balance existed to begin with (Botz 1976, 130-132). The leadership thought of Hitler, Mussolini and the likes as marginal figures, "condottieri," hired hands of the bourgeoisie who were not of the bourgeoisie and against which the bourgeoisie would eventually turn. Austria at that time was caught in a three-way struggle between the reactionary Government, the Socialists, and Hitler's Nazi movement. Since the Nazis were a greater threat to the Austrian State than the Social-Democratic Party itself the SDAP leadership recognized that it was in the interest of the State to preserve the balance of forces; hence, they believed, the State would act in its own best interests, not the interests of the bourgeoisie since those interests, according to Bauer's pet theory, were not those of the State. Bauer and others could not fathom that the State would risk destruction from the far right so long as it was assured of removing Socialists and Communists

from the body politic, much as American liberals, progressives and Democratic Socialists are willing to overlook or encourage attacks on their own left flank today.

The left wing of SDAP had a different conception of fascism, more simplistic but more flexible. According to Max Adler the State constituted a “Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie,” with all the forms of dominance and control available to a dictatorship (Adler 1922, Adler 2019):

> “Political Democracy provides the exact democratic model for the ‘democratic’ assault on a minority.”
>
> „Die politische Demokratie eben die demokratische Form zur Verfügung stellt, durch welche eine Minorität ‘demokratisch‘ vergewaltigt werden kann.“ (Adler 1926, 105).

Whatever truth these words might have held in in 1922 or 1926, by 1933 they must have passed for Gospel among those workers who, having endured unremitting, escalating aggressions from the State, had come to realize that the State did not represent their interests in any form or fashion. The Party leadership, as Leichter pointed out, had vowed only to resist the State at some undefined point in the future. The workers’ movement was forever on the defensive, waiting for an attack to begin that in fact had never let up, while the State was biding its time, waiting for the moment to strike with all the forces at its disposal.

These theoretical divergences within the SDP provide the background to Leichter’s article but not its content. Each of the sources quoted in ”The Best Defense” is from someone who had been present in one way or another at the Paris Conference, but not every source comes from a speaker, or from the conference

itself (Bauer 1933; Dan 1933; de Man 1933; Kautsky 1933; Sapir 1933). By providing a wider synopsis of the views of the leading thinkers of the Socialist movement as a whole, Leichter undermines Bauer's attempt to control the narrative, reconfiguring these fragments of discourse in a context that by necessity was unspoken: that of Austria under near-fascist conditions in which freedom of expression was limited. Like a skilled dialectician, Leichter's lays out the arguments of her intellectual antagonists in order to synthesize and transcend them. The exception, once again, is Siegfried Aufhäuser, whose statement and after-statements at the Paris Conference were widely published, widely discussed, and very widely criticized by the right and center of the LSI; they provide a context and a theoretical justification for Leichter's argument (Spalek 1994, 111; Olberg 1933). Aufhäuser's response to his critics in *Der Neuer Vorwärts*, the journal of the SPD in exile, goes a long way to clarify Leichter's article, especially her use of his expression, *Erziehungsdiktatur* ["Educational Dictatorship"] (Aufhäuser 1933). [***see Appendix A, p. 35.***].

Aufhäuser and Leichter shared a common outlook shaped by common experience and, most important, a shared and consistent theoretical foundation. Like Leichter, Aufhäuser had joined the left of the Social-Democratic movement at the end of the First World War and had, like Leichter, participated in the Workers' Council movement. At War's end he had joined the *USPD* [*Unabhängige Sozial-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*, "Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany"], halfway between the Communists and the Social-Democrats. Like Leichter he rejoined the Socialists as a conscientious member and functionary, rising high as a labor leader and deputy to the Reichstag. Like Leichter and unlike many among the Social Democratic leadership he refused to consider the *Mittelschichten*, the white-collar workers, to be a class apart from the workers, one

that must be coddled but would never join the struggle. Democracy was a "battleground for Socialism," not a perfect incarnation of social harmony (Smaldone 2009, 29-38). Whatever one might have imagined that battleground to be in the preceding years, it was clear, with Hitler's ascension, that the Weimar Republic had become a dictatorship – the term did not have a negative connotation in traditional German Jurisprudence and political thought, which borrowed heavily from Ancient Roman Law. It simply meant that a leader could temporarily assume extraordinary powers with the authorization of the Roman Senate. That was the meaning many among the Socialist leadership innocently imagined it would retain under Hitler. Not until July of 1934, again with the blessing of Carl Schmitt, did Hitler formally move beyond mere dictatorship to terror.

For their theoretical premises Leichter and Aufhäuser owe a large intellectual debt to Max Adler, even more so, one suspects, than their rank-and-file comrades. One cannot read Leichter or Aufhäuser without reference to Adler who, too, had supported the Workers' Councils movement after World War I (Adler 1919); denounced the sacrifice of economic democracy in exchange for mere political democracy (Adler 1926); considered the republican form of the State a battleground, not an ideal (Adler 1922, etc.). In addition, Adler rejected Max Weber's functionalist vision of society as a static entity perpetually seeking and achieving balance (Bauer's "balance of forces"), and therefore impervious to upheavals, be they political revolutions or economic catastrophe, an approach that has much in common with American systems theory today (Botz 1976, 134). In the end, what distinguishes Adler from theorists of Social Democracy and Leninism alike, is that Adler's approach was founded on a Kantian belief in the relative autonomy of the individual, neither "mechanical Materialism nor dialectical Spiritualism" [*mechanische Materialismus oder dialektische Spiritualismus*] (Adler 1933, 112). Marxism

was not a *Fachwissenschaft*, a technical science based on objective criteria, but a sociology, a constant movement from observed social event to theoretical intervention and back again (Adler 1933, 112 sqq.). Adler and Leichter refused to ascribe to working-class people an idealized consciousness beyond historical determination — the old game of "Pin the Consciousness on the Proletariat" (Lukács 1923). Decades later the French theorist Lucien Goldmann, who had studied under Adler in Vienna, took up, cited, and endorsed Adler's argument, an argument that connected on the deepest level with the prevailing philosophy in France:

> "Scientistic and anti-ethical 'Marxism' – the concept of socialist politics as a social technique founded on an objective science – was for a very long time the philosophical basis of the apparently revolutionary but in fact reformist attitude of the orthodox, or if you will, the 'centrist' wing of the parties of the Second International; in fact it has been taken up in our time, on a much lower theoretical level, by that tendency, revolutionary in appearance but reactive and conservative in fact, that is Stalinism."
>
> « Le "marxisme" scientiste et anti-éthique — la conception de la politique socialiste comme technique sociale fondée sur une science objective — fut pendant très longtemps le fondement philosophique de l'attitude en apparence révolutionnaire, mais en réalité réformiste, de l'aile "orthodoxe " ou, si l'on veut, "centriste" des partis de la IIe Internationale ; elle a été d'ailleurs reprise de nos jours à un niveau théorique beaucoup plus bas par ce courant en apparence révolutionnaire, mais en réalité défensif et conservateur, qu'est le stalinisme. » (Goldmann 1959, 286-87).

Max Adler's influence, it has been argued, was minimal in Red Vienna. That may well be. But his international influence in the years following the failure of social-democratic incrementalism appears to have grown significantly, and his

books were issued in a number of languages, including French, Dutch, Spanish and Hebrew. Goldmann's article, cited above, was published in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Temps Modernes*, and there are striking parallels between Adler's thought and Sartre's philosophy that realizes itself in action, « l'homme lui-même, non comme objet du Savoir pratique mais comme organisme pratique produisant le Savoir comme un moment de sa praxis. » [*Humankind itself, not as the object of practical knowledge but as an active organism that produces knowledge as a moment in praxis.*] In Sartre's text that statement is immediately followed by an Adler-like denunciation of traditional Marxism as « une métaphysique dogmatique » (Sartre 1985, 131, 132). The two might have diverged over Adler's conviction that a social consciousness can never arise spontaneously from historic experience, and least of all from the shared historic experience of a class. This conviction was shared by a wide swath of Viennese thinkers, and it goes far in explaining the importance ascribed to Education (*Erziehung*) as "the production of knowledge as a moment in praxis" in all facets of thought in Red Vienna. It was certainly shared by Leichter, whose article attempts to respond to a fundamental practical problem: "What type of *Erziehung* — what type of social engagement with the working class — would be possible or necessary in the emerging political conjuncture determined by the fascist onslaught? It's a question as urgent today as it was then.

The question of the possible and the necessary overshadowed the Party Conference in Vienna between October 14 and 16, 1933. By then the SDP was near the breaking point; one suspects its potential dissolution was of greater concern to the leadership than the near collapse of Austrian democracy itself. The young and the *Vertauensmänner* were in open rebellion against the perceived passivity of the leadership, but not rebellious or strong enough to take the decisive step of breaking with it altogether. This was a testament to the strength of the Party as a smoothly

functioning, all-encompassing bureaucracy. Leichter's old teacher Max Weber, who put his faith in the irresistible powers of bureaucracy itself, would have felt vindicated. On the other hand it was a damning indictment of Weber's conceptualization of social movements as a spontaneous balance of forces.

In the closing hours of the October conference Friedrich Adler chose, once again, to theorize the problem into nothingness. Friedrich carried immense prestige among the Austrian workers for hastening the end of the First World War and assuming the leadership of the workers' councils immediately afterward. Once again he used his prestige to good effect. Just as there was a fatalism of the right, there was a fatalism of the left, he argued. The leadership believed resistance was useless, while the opposition believed — or so Fritz claimed — that resistance was inevitable (F. Adler 1933, 4; Rabinbach 1983, 144). This last was the standard argument of Leninist Communism; it was the argument as well, of biological determinists like the Freudian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich who earlier had attempted to organize a militant opposition and had been expelled from the Party for his pains (Rabinbach 1973, 92 sqq). It was not, however, the position of the opposition, whose major concern was not whether despair was spontaneous, or whether hope was spontaneous, or both. The issue, as Leichter saw, was the leadership's own responsibility in the past, the present and the future: that of the Party, and her own.

On February 21, 1934 Karl Kautsky, the great theoretician of Bureaucratic Marxism, wrote with some satisfaction to a friend that he had over the past week received "fresh breakfast rolls and milk" every day (Kautsky 1934). He was referring to the events of February 12th, when the long-delayed uprising was crushed by the Army and the right-wing militias. Cannon and airplane were brought in against Vienna's workers housing complexes, and bodies lay in the streets. In the working-class district of Floridsdorf, the Schutzbund held out for a week, long after

the Party leadership had fled the country. Karl Renner quickly made his peace with the new fascist regime, vindicating Weber's Law which states that a bureaucracy always lands on its feet.

Under these conditions, how to continue the process of building Socialism? In June 1936 *Der Kampf* published an article by "Anna Gärtner," a pseudonym (Leichter 1936). The author, who had gone underground after the February Coup, explained how the illegal Party school she'd helped to found in the Fall of 1934 had been forced since then to adapt its educational program to the worsening circumstances, abandoning all hope of a return to power. A few months later Leichter assumed the leadership of the Education Committee of the Revolutionary Socialists of Austria (*Revolutionären Sozialisten Österreichs*). In late May of 1938 she was picked up in Vienna by the Gestapo and sent to Ravensbrück. She was murdered on March 17, 1942. Her husband and sons escaped to America. In 1970 her younger son, Franz Leichter, was instrumental, as State Assembly member from the Upper West Side of Manhattan, in passing the first law legalizing abortion in the United States.

What goes around comes around. Not in a bad way, necessarily.

Appendix A.

Siegfried Aufhäuser. "Parisian Aftershocks. Why an Educational Dictatorship?"

Siegfried Aufhäuser. „Pariser Nachklänge. Warum Erziehungsdiktatur?"
***Neuer Vorwärts* no. 15 (Karlsbad) Sunday 24 Sept. 1933, p. 5.**

> *Comrade Oda Olberg's article about the Paris Conference has provoked strong opposition and brought a number of comrades into the polemic. Since it's impossible to include all of these responses we have chosen the most important ones. Discussions will continue*.[25]

In her article "Critique of the Critique" Comrade Oda Oldberg has expressed a number of opinions with which there can be no disagreement. She, too, believes the intent of the Paris conference could not have been "conventional appeals for the defense of Democracy and Peace." She, too, speaks repeatedly of "unfinished work from the past." She, too, correctly analyzes those economic power relations that favor fascism. Indeed, she calls my statement that "political power can only be maintained with the determination to provide an economic basis from the outset" a golden rule. She even admits that our revolutionary will has "prematurely slackened in the past." And yet the entirety of her dissatisfaction with the Paris Conference culminates in a single accusation against those comrades who want to address the revolutionary situation

[25] Oda Olberg: Foreign Correspondent for the Austrian *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. See Oda Olberg, „Kritik der Kritik. Ein Beitrag zur parteidiskussion", *Neuer Vorwärts* (Karlsbad) no. 14, 17 Sept. 1933, p. 4 [*Translator's note*].

by revolutionary means! In doing so she gives the word "educational dictatorship," as used by me, an interpretation according to which "dictatorship" can only mean "disciplining the masses." And, finally, in accordance with this willful and forced reading, she calls my concept a "sin against the Holy Ghost."

With such an attitude there's no reason to complain about the Paris Conference. The Conference clarified too little, certainly, but it brought more clarity than can be found in Comrade Olda Olberg's article.

This conference was not meant to deliver old wine in new bottles; rather, it was tasked with working out a clear definition of the problem in order to plan our future actions. Also: in Paris, the blame for the whole catastrophe was not dumped on any one person, and it is utterly superfluous to insist over and again that "a considerable part of the blame rests on every one of us," either among the leadership or the opposition. All the same, in our Paris deliberations we could not exempt ourselves from historical reflection so as to draw conclusions and make decisions on the options and limitations of our use of parliamentary democracy. My remarks on educational dictatorship were made in reference to this review of the period between 1918 and 1933.

I avoided a treating fascism as a mere expression of violence. Instead I tried to get closer to the factors of its social emergence. My critic writes: "Why suddenly reject democracy as a whole, simply because Hitler came to power by democratic means?" Hitler was able to benefit from democratic elections because the German working class, for a number of reasons, not least of which was its disunity, prematurely handed over the political power it had

won in November 1918 to a parliamentary democracy. From November 1918 on the economic basis for our power, meaning above all the socialization of key industries, the division of large estates, etc., could only be accomplished as long as a dictatorship of the people's representatives was in power. The moment we shared state power with the bourgeoisie by means of a parliamentary democracy we ourselves were on a path that inevitably led to the weakening of the economic power of the German proletariat instead of its strengthening. In this context I pointed out that July 20, 1932, destroyed the illusion that state administrative positions could compensate for our lack of economic power. Once again: a workers' party cannot assume more political responsibility in the State than it actually has the power to do.

My references to the outcome of the general strike against the Kapp Putsch in 1920 and the decline of the labor movement following the great election victory of May 1928 were also meant to serve as a lesson for the application of democracy or dictatorship after 1918.[26]

There is no disagreement whatsoever about the value of democracy, and to top it off, in Paris I once again characterized Social Democracy as the most noble form of human coexistence. Without a doubt, Democracy must be defended in democratic countries, but the Paris resolution agrees with me that "where the Bourgeoisie has abandoned the ground of democracy, thrown itself into the arms of fascism and snatched away the democratic weapons of

[26] Aufhäuser had helped direct the general strike that thwarted the right wing Kapp Putsch in 1920. He had opposed the electoral alliance of the Socialist Party with the right in 1928 [*Translator's note*].

struggle from the working class, there is no other path to liberation than revolutionary struggle." If in addition to that general deduction, some of us attempt to give substance to the concept of dictatorship, that is not merely "a shot at revolutionary posturing" or merely "chatter," for all the fierceness of Oda Olberg's language.

In the end the only point of the Paris Conference was to tell the heroic fighting workers in Germany:

1] By what means we will wage the struggle to overcome fascism and how we will assert our political power once we have won.

2] What we need to do in economic terms to replace the present system after seizing power.

This certainly includes an objective discussion of the problem of dictatorship: German workers want to know if the experience of dictatorship in Russia, Italy and now Germany will lead to a repetition of 1918, or if we have the will for a proletarian dictatorship. But if a proletarian dictatorship is presented as a "return to the Law of the Jungle, the fraying of the legal fabric, and lawlessness," then objective discussion is obviously more difficult.

To mechanically equate the fascist and Bolshevik dictatorships is unusual. For Socialists the meaningful question should always be, "Does the authority of the State issues from the agents of a capitalist economy or of the working class?" But it is also a plain misrepresentation of those who advocate for the revolutionary assertion of power, to assert that their concept of dictatorship

is "something ill-defined, only a fairground for letting off steam, at least in theory." Yes: Oda Olberg even explains to us that we are talking about the means "By which fascism won."

Not so. With fascism dictatorship is in generally minority rule, and therefore permanent, and violence is a necessary component whenever the bourgeoisie is in the minority. In Russia, whenever the Bolsheviks lean towards establishing a permanent dictatorship we should fight against it, but we should not raise the specter of Bolshevism against every vision of a socialist dictatorship.

If I use the concept of educational dictatorship it's from the outset with a time limit: in any case I refrain from predicting a definite duration. In a stage of intense conflict between socialism and capitalism the various forms of struggle can no longer be limited by the calendar.

It is also not true that an educational dictatorship means the "disciplining" of the working masses, that's what a fascist dictatorship means. Ultimately, a socialist dictatorship is the opposite of the repression of the workers; rather, it's purpose is to assert the power won by the working class. It will have an educational effect on the bourgeoisie, not the working class. It really sounds good when Oda Olberg says the meaning and content of education is self-determination.[27] Whenever, at a peak stage of the class struggle, we are will-

[27] "Self-determination:" in the original, *Selbstbestimmung*. The author is drawing a distinction between "Erziehung," the formation of a class consciousness and "Bildung," the formation of the innate, individual self into a rational individual fully integrated into the bourgeois state, a "Bürger" in the double sense of "citizen" and "bourgeois." [*Translator's note*].

ing to abandon the schools and the media to the "self-determination" of parliamentary democracy, we turn democracy into a weapon for our opponents out of sheer fear of dictatorship. And if one agrees that the "mental predisposition of the masses beyond our reach," (meaning of the middle class) is of decisive political significance, then it seems to me an educational dictatorship is almost a precondition for the practical socialist instruction we have failed to provide so far.

As a result of the premature introduction of parliamentary democracy in Germany the middle strata that until then had been politically indifferent came to know Social Democracy as an ally of the bourgeoisie and they have held it responsible for the sins of capitalism. The political education of these strata must aim to translate the material discontent that fills these rebellious masses into socialist willpower.

Oda Oldberg asks: "Should the workers and the downgraded have no ray of hope at all, nothing to uplift them beyond their everyday lives?"

Indeed, they must have hope, and the day-to-day success of parliamentary democratic politics is no longer enough, because capitalism is in a systemic crisis and its own remedies are failing. The struggle for Socialism has moved beyond the stage of theoretical discussion to the struggle for constructive realization.

Translated and annotated by Paul Werner.

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