

Appeal by the Communist Party (Berlin, 11 June 1945)

Caption: On 11 June 1945, the German Communist Party calls for the formation of a united democratic front against Nazism and for measures to overcome the consequences of the Second World War.

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Appeal by the Communist Party (Berlin, 11 June 1945)

‘Working People in the Cities and Countryside! Men and Women! German Youth!

Wherever we look are ruins, rubble and ash. Our towns and cities have been destroyed, wide areas that used to be fertile have been ravaged and abandoned. The economy is in disarray and completely paralysed. Millions upon millions of people have perished in the war for which the Hitler regime was to blame. Millions have suffered terrible distress and great misery.

A disaster of unimaginable proportions has struck Germany, and the spectre of homelessness, disease, unemployment and starvation looms above the ruins.

And who is to blame for this?

Guilt and responsibility are borne by the unscrupulous adventurers and criminals who are behind the war. Guilt is borne by Hitler and Goering, Himmler and Goebbels, and those who have actively supported and aided the Nazi Party. It is borne by the upholders of reactionary militarism, Keitel, Jodl and others of their ilk. It is borne by the imperialist backers of the Nazi Party, the men from the big banks and industrial groups, Krupp and Roehling, Poensgen and Siemens.

This guilt is clear. It was acknowledged by the Nazi leaders themselves, when hopes were high for a triumph that proved illusory, when victory and the spoils of war seemed to them to be guaranteed.

These words still reverberate in your ears, all you working men and women, soldiers and officers: “That is for us what the war is about: we are not fighting for ideals, we are fighting for the wheat fields of the Ukraine, for the oil of the Caucasus, for the wealth of the world. We want to grow fat!”

The national existence of our people was put at stake for that. Hitler’s Total War was the most unjust, most savage and most criminal war of pillage ever waged!

The Hitler regime has proved the ruination of Germany because, through his policy of aggression and brute force, pillage and war and the destruction of peoples, Hitler has plunged our own people into misfortune and saddled the German people with heavy guilt and responsibility in the face of all civilised humanity.

The forcible annexation of Austria and the fragmentation of Czechoslovakia were crimes. The conquest and suppression of Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland and France, Yugoslavia and Greece were crimes. The heavy bombing and annihilation of British cities, for which we ourselves paid a terrible penalty, was a crime. Hitler’s greatest and most fateful war crime, however, was to break his word and launch the malicious assault on the Soviet Union, which has never wanted a war with Germany, and since 1917 has on numerous occasions provided the German people with proof of honest friendship. German workers! Could there be a greater crime than this war against the Soviet Union? Horrific acts of cruelty were committed by Hitler’s bandits in foreign lands. The blood of many, many millions of murdered children, women and old people taints the hands of Hitler’s Germans. Destruction of human life went on day after day in the death camps with factory regularity in gas chambers and incinerators. Burnt alive, buried alive, hacked to pieces while still alive – that is how the victims of the Nazi bandits were treated! Millions of prisoners of war and foreign workers deported to Germany died from maltreatment, starvation, cold and disease.

The world is shaken and at the same time filled with the deepest revulsion of Germany in the face of these unprecedented crimes, this horrific mass murder systematically perpetrated by Hitler’s Germany. If there had been tit-for-tat retaliation, German people, what would have happened to you?

But on the side of the United Nations, headed by the Soviet Union, Britain and the United States, was the cause of justice, freedom and progress. The Red Army and the armies of its allies have saved humanity from Hitler’s barbarism through their sacrifices. They have smashed Hitler’s armies, reduced Hitler’s state to rubble and in so doing have also brought you, the workers of Germany, peace and liberation from the chains

of Hitler's slavery.

This is all the more reason why an awareness and sense of shame must burn in every German person that the German people bears a significant part of the guilt and responsibility for the war and its consequences. Hitler is not alone in being to blame for the crime committed against humanity! A share of the guilt is also borne by the tens of millions of Germans who, in free elections in 1932, voted for Hitler, even though we Communists warned that whoever voted for Hitler would be voting for war! Some of the guilt is borne by all those German men and women who, meekly and without offering any resistance, looked on as Hitler seized power, smashed all the democratic organisations, above all the workers' organisations, and had the best Germans incarcerated, tortured and executed. Guilt is borne by all those Germans who saw in rearmament the "greatness of Germany" and glimpsed in the savage militarism, marching and military exercises the true salvation of the German nation. It was our misfortune that millions upon millions of German were seduced by Nazi demagoguery, that the poison of the bestial racial doctrine, the "struggle for living space" was able to contaminate the body of the people. It was our misfortune that broad levels of the population lost their basic sense of decency and justice and followed Hitler when he promised to fill their larders at the expense of other peoples through war and pillage.

In that way, the German people became the tool of Hitler and his imperialist backers. Workers of Germany, men, women and youth! The working people of Germany!

Hitler would never have been able to seize power, consolidate it and wage his criminal war against the will of a people who were unified and ready to fight. We German Communists declare that we too feel guilt since, despite the sacrifice of the blood of our best fighters, due to a series of errors on our part we were not able to forge the anti-Fascist unity of workers, peasants and intelligentsia against all the adversaries, to gather together in the working population the forces needed to overthrow Hitler, to lead them into successful battle and prevent that situation in which the German population suffered a historic failure.

After all the suffering and misfortune, the humiliation and shame, after the darkest period in German history, today, at the end of the "Third Reich", the Social Democratic worker too will concede that the Fascist plague was only able to spread in Germany because in 1918 those who were to blame for the war and the war criminals went unpunished, because the battle for true democracy was not waged, because the Weimar Republic gave free rein to the forces of reaction, because the anti-Soviet smear campaign of some democratic leaders smoothed the way for Hitler and the rejection of the anti-Fascist united front paralysed the power of the people.

We therefore demand: No repetition of the mistakes of 1918! An end to the division of the working people! No looking back towards Nazism and the forces of reaction. Never again smear campaigns and animosity towards the Soviet Union; where these smear campaigns emerge, that is where the forces of imperialist reaction raises its head!

The Communist Party of Germany was and is the party of the decisive battle against militarism, imperialism and imperialist war. It has never strayed from this path. It has always kept the flag of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Thälmann and Johnny Schehr flying. We Communists look back with pride to this battle, in which our best and most faithful comrades fell. We warned insistently and in good time that the imperialistic path, the path of Hitler's Fascism, would inevitably lead Germany to disaster.

In January 1933, the Communist Party called for a unanimous general strike to prevent Hitler from assuming power. In June 1933, we warned: "War is imminent! Hitler is driving Germany to disaster!" In January 1939, the Berne Conference of the Communist Party of Germany issued an appeal to the German people: "In the East and in the West, the Hitler regime is creating a situation where the German people may be plunged into the disaster of war overnight – a war against the powerful front of all the peoples who are threatened and attacked by Hitler and the war axis." In October 1941, when Hitler boasted that Soviet Russia had finally been brought to its knees and would never raise itself up again, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany declared, in an appeal to the German people and the German Army: "This war is a hopeless war for the German people. Hitler's defeat is inevitable. The only way out for the German

people is to put an end to the war. But to put an end to the war, Hitler must be overthrown. And woe betide our people if it ties its fate to Hitler to the last!”

Now it is important to draw the lessons from the past, thoroughly and for ever. A totally new path must be taken! Let every German be aware that the path which our people has followed to date has been a wrong path, that a wrong turning has been taken, leading to guilt and shame, war and devastation. Not just the rubble of destroyed cities, the reactionary rubble of the past too must be thoroughly cleared away.

May the reconstruction of Germany take place on a solid foundation, so that a third repetition of the disastrous imperialist policy becomes impossible. At the same time as Hitlerism is destroyed, it is important to bring to a conclusion the democratic reformation begun in 1848, completely remove the remnants of feudalism and destroy the reactionary old Prussian militarism with all its economic and political offshoots. We hold the view that the path of foisting the Soviet system onto Germany was wrong, because this path is not appropriate to present-day development conditions in Germany. We instead hold the view that the decisive interests of the German people in the present situation prescribe a different path for Germany, the path of establishing an anti-Fascist, democratic regime, a parliamentary democratic republic with all democratic rights and freedoms for the people. At the present historic turning-point, we Communists call upon all working people, all democratic and progressive forces of the people to join this great battle for the democratic renewal of Germany, the rebirth of our country!

The immediate and most urgent tasks along this path at present are:

1. Complete liquidation of the remnants of the Hitler regime and Hitler's party. Assistance of all honest Germans in tracking down the Nazi leaders, Gestapo agents and SS bandits who are in hiding. Complete clearing-out of active Nazis from all official positions. As well as punishment of the major war criminals, who will be tried before the courts of the United Nations, maximum punishment by German courts of all those Nazis who have been guilty of criminal offences and taking part in Hitler's betrayal of the people. Very rapid and tough measures against all attempts to continue criminal Nazi activity illegally, against all attempts to disrupt the restoration of law and order and normal life for the population.
2. Battle against starvation, unemployment and homelessness. Active support on all sides for the self-governing bodies in their efforts quickly to ensure normal life and start up production again. Completely unobstructed development of free trade and private entrepreneurial initiative on the basis of private ownership. Effective measures for the reconstruction of schools, homes and places of work which have been destroyed. Strict economy in administration and in all public tasks. Reconstruction of the tax system according to the principle of progressive increases, ensuring that the whole harvest is brought in by providing broad assistance with labour for peasants, fair distribution of food and the most important items for consumption and energetically waged battle against speculation.
3. Provision of democratic rights and freedoms for the people. Restoration of the legality of free trade unions of manual and clerical workers and officials as well as the anti-Fascist democratic parties. Reconstruction of the judicial system according to the new democratic ways of life of the people. Equality of all citizens without distinction of race before the law and severe punishment of all expressions of racial hatred. Clearing of Fascist and reactionary filth from the entire education system. Cultivation of a truly democratic, progressive and liberal spirit in all schools and educational establishments. Systematic clarification of the barbaric nature of Nazi racial doctrine, of the mendacity of the "doctrine of living space", of the disastrous consequences of Hitler's policy for the German people. Freedom of scientific research and artistic creation.
4. Re-establishment of the self-governing bodies based on democratic principles in the municipalities, administrative districts and regions as well as the provincial and Land administrations and Land parliaments.
5. Protection of the working population against arbitrary treatment by employers and exploitation. Free and democratic elections of the works representatives of factory and office workers and civil servants in all factories, offices and all public authorities. Contractual regulation of conditions of pay and employment. Public measures to assist the victims of Fascist terror, orphans, invalids and those in poor health. Special

protection for mothers.

6. Confiscation of the entire assets of Nazi tycoons and war criminals. Transfer of these assets to the people for disposal by the municipal and provincial self-governing bodies.

7. Liquidation of large land holdings, the large estates of the Junkers, counts and princes and transfer of all their land as well their livestock and deadstock to the provincial and Land administrations for distribution to peasants who have been ruined and deprived of possessions by the war. It goes without saying that these measures will not in any way affect land ownership and the economic position of the large farmers.

8. Transfer of all businesses which provide for essential needs of the people (transport firms, water, gas and electricity works, etc.) and those businesses which were left by their owners to the self-governing bodies of the municipalities or provinces and Länder.

9. Peaceful coexistence as good neighbours with other peoples. Decisive break with the policy of aggression and brute force towards other peoples, the policy of conquest and pillage.

10. Recognition of the duty of reparation for the harm inflicted on other peoples by Hitler's aggression. Fair distribution of resultant burdens among the various levels of the population according to the principle that the richer also bear a larger burden.

Working people in the cities and the countryside! These are the first and most urgent tasks for the reconstruction of Germany, for the rebirth of our people. These tasks can only be accomplished through the solidarity of all anti-Fascist, democratic and progressive forces among the people.

Filled with a realisation of the extent of the disaster and the fateful consequences of the division which has existed to date among the people in relation to Nazism and the forces of reaction, an ever stronger urge for unity is being felt in the cities and the countryside. In accordance with the will of the people, saboteurs and those who would divide us must not be given the opportunity to carry out their treachery. It is necessary to create democratic solidarity for the final liquidation of Nazism and for the construction of a new democratic Germany!

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany holds the view that the imminent programme of action can serve as a basis for the creation of a bloc of anti-Fascist democratic parties (the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party and others). We hold the view that such a bloc can provide a solid foundation in the battle for the complete liquidation of the remnants of the Hitler regime and for the establishment of a democratic regime.

A new page is being opened in the history of the German people. A fresh awareness is developing among the people from the lessons of the collapse of Germany.

We declare: Solidarity, a resolute battle and steadfast work are the guarantees of success for our just cause! Take firmer steps! Raise your heads! Set to work with all the strength at your command! Because from distress and death, ruin and humiliation, the freedom of the people and a new life of dignity will arise.'