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The Communist Party of Switzerland*

The history of the Communist Party of Switzerland (*Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*; KPS) has so far attracted little attention from researchers into international Communism. Only Edward H. Carr devoted a short chapter to it in *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930-1935*.¹ It may have been numerically insignificant in the spectrum of Swiss parties, but in the early twenties its membership made it the eleventh largest section in the Communist International (CI). It even attained the ninth position² when the number of party supporters was considered in relation to the total population of Switzerland. Research into its history in a supra-national context will therefore undoubtedly be most informative. Also, on various levels, it fulfilled important supportive functions for the CI, especially after its activities began sliding more and more into illegality. Many German, Italian, Austrian and also Yugoslavian Communists found refuge in Switzerland (often illegally). In the thirties the Comintern periodical *Rundschau* (Review) moved to Basle and the *Rundschau* news agency was built up in Zurich. At the time of the Spanish Civil War many of the Volunteers' lines of communication passed through the Swiss Jura and went via Geneva and Basle. The KPS also played a certain part in international politics, if only because of the polarisation it caused inside the workers' movement and the reactions it provoked outside it. Its activities made it possible for a left-wing majority to rule the city state of Basle in the thirties.

So far Swiss research has concentrated mainly on the twenties. As far as the following decade is concerned, in this review the KPS history from its founding in 1921 to its dissolution and new foundation as the Party of Labour (*Partei der Arbeit*; PdA) in 1943/1944 I shall draw on my own work.³

1. The Sources for the History of the KPS

Until Peter Stettler's pioneering study appeared in 1981⁴ Swiss researchers not connected with the party had largely ignored the history of the KPS, though there had been some work in universities on the era in which the KPS came into being and was founded.⁵ The field of research was therefore free for uncritical historiography. An early attempt was a short version of the history of the KPS by Marino Bodenmann, for many years party

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¹ Edward H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930-1935* (London, 1982), pp. 282-288.

² Calculations presented at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, quoted by Annie Kriegel, "La IIIe Internationale", in Jacques Droz (ed.) *Histoire générale du socialisme*, Vol. 3 (Paris, 1977), pp. 108-109.

³ The author is working on a doctoral thesis about the relationship between the KPS and the CI in the thirties. She is also the scholarly editor of volume V of the *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz* (to be published soon).

⁴ Peter Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz, 1921-1931. Ein Beitrag zur schweizerischen Parteiforschung und zur Geschichte der schweizerischen Arbeiterbewegung im Rahmen der Kommunistischen Internationalen* (Berne, 1980).

⁵ Heinz Egger, *Die Entstehung der Kommunistischen Partei und des Kommunistischen Jugendverbandes der Schweiz* (Zurich, 1952); Hans Ulrich Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der deutschen Schweiz 1914-1918* (Berne, 1973), and *Die Altkommunisten. Linksradikalismus und Sozialismus in der Schweiz 1919 bis 1921* (Frauenfeld, etc., 1977).

secretary, which was published in the sixties by the publishing house of the PdA.⁶ This was followed in 1981 by a publication of the Historical Commission of the PdA, consisting of a collection of book reviews, memoirs, necrologies and historical essays of varying quality from the party's newspaper *Vorwärts* (Forwards).⁷ In 1977 the Geneva PdA published a brochure containing contributions to a colloquium it had organized on the history of the workers' movement in Geneva. During this event an interesting controversy had arisen concerning the supposed local independence of the Geneva CP.⁸ The researchers' reserve is partly explained by the fact that the relevant archives were not opened until the beginning of the eighties.⁹ Peter Stettler was the first to be given access. His detailed work, already mentioned, was based on the KPS archives of the Swiss Federal Archives (*Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv*). The KPS archives were also available to Willi Gerster, who concentrated on the Basle workers' movement between 1927 and 1932 in his thesis,¹⁰ and to Peter Huber, who dealt with the question of the co-operation between the Social Democrats and the Communists between 1921 and 1935.¹¹ Since then further monographs have been published. The more important ones will be mentioned in the course of this article.

The PdA does not possess official party archives. The long-serving KPS official Jules Humbert-Droz made one of the most comprehensive collections of source material. Most of it is kept in the library at La Chaux-de-Fonds and some of it is at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Apart from already published documents on Humbert-Droz's activities as secretary and agent of the Comintern - his own description - the collection also contains documents from the era when he headed the KPS.¹² It is the most complete collection of source material dealing with the history of the KPS in the thirties. For the period from 1921 to the middle of 1932 the Federal Archives in Berne have the most complete collection, founded on material con-

⁶ Marino Bodenmann, *Zum 40. Jahrestag der Gründung der Kommunistischen Partei der Schweiz* (Zurich, 1961).

⁷ Historische Kommission der Partei der Arbeit (ed.), *Zur Geschichte der kommunistischen Bewegung in der Schweiz. Ausgewählte Beiträge aus dem "Vorwärts" 1968-1980* (Zurich, 1981).

⁸ Karl Odermatt, et al., *Histoire et politique. Sur le mouvement ouvrier à Genève*, ed. by the PdA Geneva (Geneva, 1977). Particularly informative are the two contrasting contributions from, on the one hand, Neria Monetti, who argues that the change to popular front tactics and to co-operation with the Social-Democrats can be explained in the light of the context of Fascism and the prevailing circumstances in Geneva and, on the other hand, Marie-Madeleine Grounauer, who contradicts this and points out that in this case the "need for new political alliances" would have made itself felt several years earlier.

⁹ But perhaps also by a certain climate in which occupying oneself with the subject of "Communism" was considered suspicious. Thus, when the Philosophy Faculty at Zurich accepted the doctoral thesis of Heinz Egger, who admittedly sympathised with Communist thinking, this provoked political intervention in the Cantonal Council. Under these circumstances it is only slightly surprising that the subject has been dealt with mainly by historians interested in the history of Swiss Communism because of their own party or ideological links. However, for about a decade the climate has changed for scholars.

¹⁰ Willi Gerster, *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung zur Zeit der Totalkonfrontation zwischen Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten, 1927-1932. Von der Einheitsfrontpolitik zur Sozialfaschismustheorie* (Zurich, 1980).

¹¹ Peter Huber, *Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in der Schweiz 1918-1935. Der Streit um die Einheitsfront in der Zürcher und Basler Arbeiterbewegung* (Zurich 1986).

¹² Three volumes have already been published: Siegfried Bahne (ed.), *Origines et débuts des partis communistes des pays latins 1919-1923* (*Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, I) (Dordrecht, 1970); Siegfried Bahne, et al. (eds.), *Les partis communistes des pays latins et l'Internationale communistes dans les années 1923-1927* (*Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, II) (Dordrecht, 1983); Casto del Amo and Bernhard Bayerlein (eds.), *Les partis communistes et l'Internationale communiste dans les années 1928-1932* (*Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, III) (Dordrecht, etc., 1988). Two further volumes are currently being printed; they were edited by Bernhard Bayerlein and, as already mentioned, by the author.

fiscated by the police from the KPS Secretariat in Zurich in 1932.¹³ It is as freely accessible as the Humbert-Droz archives. However, anyone wanting access to another important source - the documents of the Swiss Federal Prosecutions Office (*Bundesanwaltschaft*) in the Federal Archives - has to put in an application. They contain dossiers on events and documents on people. In contrast to the KPS archives on the twenties, the material on the thirties is full of gaps. Recently access to documents in the former Central Party Archives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in Moscow became possible. These fill in some of the gaps in the Swiss archives.¹⁴ The PdA had the Moscow documents copied on to microfilm and entrusted the spools to Professor André Lasserre, who is in charge of the last two volumes of the edited papers of Humbert-Droz, and to the writer of this article. They have been deposited in the library of Lausanne University. There is very little material for the time after 1938 and even less for that after 1940.

Smaller collections can be found in the Swiss Economics Archives (*Schweizerisches Wirtschaftsarchiv*) in Basle and in the Swiss Social Archives (*Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv*) in Zurich. The Library for Studying the History of the Workers' Movement Foundation (*Stiftung Studienbibliothek zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*) in Zurich has several sets of partly unsorted papers (e.g. those of Alfred Hümbelin) plus small archives on the KPS and especially on the PdA. Mention should also be made of the papers of Jean Vincent in the Swiss Federal Archives¹⁵ and of André Muret in the Vaudois Cantonal Archives and also of a small collection of documents donated by Emile Depierraz to the *Association pour l'Etude de l'Histoire du mouvement ouvrier*.

When it comes to memoirs, again we find Humbert-Droz heading the list. Because of their contents and the breadth of their chronology his four volumes¹⁶ can claim to be a comprehensive report on the life of a Swiss workers' leader. Despite the author's obvious attempt to include everything and to be objective, various questions remain unanswered; such as, his attitude to the Comintern opposition or his relationship with the Soviet Secret Service at the beginning of the Second World War. The memoirs of Jean Vincent, the communist advocate from Geneva,¹⁷ which are thin and full of resentment against the "renegade" Humbert-Droz, contain more atmospheric material and anecdotes than useful matter for historiography. Thanks to his long years in a leading position, first as the head of his section and then in the thirties on a national level, Vincent really should have had more to say. Equally brief, but far more informative, are the memoirs of the former Social-Democrat from Basle, Max Wullschleger.¹⁸ During the thirties he was among the KPS leaders, working as an editor and Politburo member. Also informative, though mainly written in self-justification, is the work of Karl Hofmaier, the PdA Secretary who was dismissed after a financial scandal and, in 1947, excluded from the party.¹⁹ However, like Wullschleger he is silent on the subject of internal struggles within the party. The writings of Paul Thalmann²⁰ have more to offer, especially the chapters on his time at the Soviet University of the West and about the splitting off the group known as the right-wing Communist Party Opposition (*Kommunistische Partei-*

¹³ The material is indexed under J.II.94 and consists of four archive boxes.

¹⁴ The author had the opportunity of seeing the material relevant to the KPS in June 1990.

¹⁵ They are indexed under J.II.217, 1991/44.

¹⁶ Jules Humbert-Droz, *Mon évolution du tolstoïsme au communisme, 1891-1921* (Neuchâtel, 1969), *De Lénine à Staline. Dix ans au service de l'Internationale communiste, 1921-1931* (Neuchâtel, 1971), *Dix ans de lutte antifasciste, 1931-1941* (Neuchâtel, 1972), and *Le couronnement d'une vie de combat, 1941-1971* (Neuchâtel, 1973); the last volume was written by Jenny Humbert-Droz.

¹⁷ Jean Vincent, *Raisons de vivre* (Geneva, 1985).

¹⁸ Max Wullschleger, *Vom Revoluzzer zum Regierungsrat. Zeuge einer bewegten Zeit* (Basle, 1989).

¹⁹ Karl Hofmaier, *Memoiren eines Schweizer Kommunisten, 1917-1947* (Zurich, 1978).

²⁰ Paul Thalmann, *Wo die Freiheit stirbt. Stationen eines politischen Kampfes* (Olten/Freiburg i.Br., 1974). The expanded second edition appeared with Clara and Paul Thalmann as co-authors: *Revolution für die Freiheit. Stationen eines politischen Kampfes: Moskau, Madrid, Paris* (Hamburg, 1977).

Opposition; KPO) around Walther Bringolf in Schaffhausen. His memoirs complement - and sometimes contradict - those of Bringolf.²¹ Always critical were the comments of the Zurich paupers' and workers' doctor Fritz Brupbacher, who was excluded from the KPS at the beginning of 1933. Influenced as he was by anarcho-syndicalism, his memoirs²² and his unpublished diaries in the Swiss Social Archives are full of cutting remarks about the "typical CP functionaries".

Mention must also be made of the memoirs of two Communists working at the local level. Theo Rutschi, a Communist supporter in the demi-canton Basle-Country, writes mainly about the thirties and the war, when he was distributing illegal literature. Ernst Illi, one of the initiators of the Schaffhausen KPO, writes about what happened in that organization from the very beginning and, for the time after 1935, about what happened in the Social-Democratic Party.²³

Finally, there are also the two volumes by the Basle politician Friedrich (Fritz) Schneider.²⁴ His membership of the KPS lasted only a few months, but as he remained an active left-wing Social-Democrat his memoirs are worth reading for their remarks about the relationship between the two parties in Basle.

2. Periodization

Jean Vincent was the only one of the memoir writers to be uninterruptedly active as a leading party member from its foundation in 1921 till its re-founding as the PdA in 1943/1944. But he makes no mention either of the abrupt twists and turns in the political line and the internal conflicts or of the gradual alteration in the make-up of the membership or of the frequent radical changes of leadership. Karl Hofmaier also presents a history of the KPS without a trace of periodization. However, this is not surprising in the case of a Communist devoted strictly to the policies of the Comintern. Changes of course were hardly ever declared to be just that. However, the question of whether it is possible to periodize the history of the KPS is by no means unimportant to the researcher. The most obvious breaks are the Comintern's changes of course, which, like all other sections, the KPS followed. They thus provide a background pattern for the periodization of the history of the KPS. As with all the national parties within the CI, the internal life of the Swiss section was bolshevized from the middle of the twenties and its authority to make decisions continually more limited by the Russianized and Stalinized International.²⁵ However, for the purpose of this article it is assumed that this dimension is well known, and it will not be further explored.²⁶ What will be briefly inquired into are specific, perhaps deviating KPS patterns within the increasingly rigid whole; and here two levels are relevant - that of the relationship between the CI and the KPS and that of the KPS's position within the Swiss political system.

In regard to the first of these: of particular importance is the conflict between the CI and the KPS about

²¹ Walther Bringolf, *Mein Leben. Weg und Umweg eines Schweizer Sozialdemokraten* (Berne, 1965). The Moscow archives of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the documents kept in the Swiss Federal Archives both show that Bringolf hesitated longer about leaving the Comintern than he cared to admit retrospectively. Concerning the Schaffhausen CP section and its splitting off to form the KPO, see Eduard Joos, *Parteien und Presse im Kanton Schaffhausen* (Thayngen, 1975), pp. 339-456.

²² Fritz Brupbacher, *60 Jahre Ketzer. Selbstbiographie*, with an epilogue, "Ich log so wenig als möglich", by Karl Lang (Zurich, 1973; first edition 1935). See also his biography by Karl Lang, *Kritiker, Ketzer, Kämpfer. Das Leben des Arbeiterarztes Fritz Brupbacher* (Zurich, 1975). Incidentally, Brupbacher wrote the foreword to the memoirs of Willi Münzenberg, *Die dritte Front. Aufzeichnungen aus 15 Jahren proletarischer Jugendbewegung* (Berlin, 1930).

²³ Theo Rutschi, *Ich höre ein Lied. Autobiografie*, ed. by Karl Lang and Hans-Ulrich Stauffer (Zurich, 1983); Ernst Illi, *Skizze meines Lebens* (Schaffhausen, 1979).

²⁴ Friedrich Schneider, *Hieronymus Roggenbachs Erlebnisse*, 2 vols. (Basle, 1943 and 1959).

²⁵ In 1927 the KPS voted itself a "bolshevik" statute. See Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, pp. 61-92.

²⁶ Nor will there be references to works on the history of the Comintern.

the political line, which dragged on in several stages from 1928/1929 to 1932. The consequences of the Comintern's authoritarian intervention were the dismissal of the entire old guard of the party leadership and innumerable leadership changes, until the party had at last been steered on to a Stalinist course.²⁷ The chief sufferer from this was Humbert-Droz, identified as the main opponent, who was not able to return to the party leadership officially until after the CI's Seventh Congress. Because of a lack of authoritative sources it is not possible conclusively to decide whether - and if so, how - the Comintern further interfered in personnel questions of the KPS leadership after 1940. Since the Comintern insisted upon such strict centralization it seems unlikely that Hofmaier was solely responsible for removing his rival Humbert-Droz first from the secretariat in 1942 and then, in 1943, excluding him from party membership. Hofmaier had returned to Switzerland in 1935 and, as a former prisoner of Mussolini's and the Comintern's emissary to the KPS, was soon thrust into the upper echelons. The reasons behind this exclusion of his rival must also be examined.

Of course, the KPS's place within the Swiss political system was also influenced by the development and the instructions of the CI. A simplified description would be that the development was steadily in the direction of an alienation from the majority of the indigenous workers' movement. Occasionally this process was interrupted, as, for example, in the years 1935/1936, when, partly at a local level, signs of a developing co-operation between the Social Democrats and the Communists were seen. In Basle, thanks to the Communists' support for the Social Democrats, it was even possible to form a left-wing city government.²⁸ The canton of Geneva, on the other hand, is a special case. In 1937, after the party was banned in the canton, the Communists were allowed to join Geneva's Social-Democratic Party. However, this phenomenon did not last long. Also, because of the strongly marked local differences in the federalist state system of Switzerland, it applied only on the cantonal or local level. For the Centre parties the KPS had always been a foreign body; however, in the thirties attempts to have it banned increased. Conservative and extreme right-wing groups were particularly urgent in these, and by gradual stages - partial bannings - they finally attained their object at the end of 1940, in the second year of the war. The Swiss Federal Government (*Bundesrat*) promulgated the confederacy-wide ban in two stages. This was the most important break in the KPS's public activity since its foundation two decades earlier.²⁹

3. Antecedents: Joining the Third International

Neutral Switzerland was the site of important international socialist conferences during the First World War. There were, for instance, the Zimmerwald Conference in 1915 and the Kiental Conference in 1916. Among the organizers were members of the Social-Democratic Party of Switzerland (*Sozialdemokratische Partei der*

²⁷ The conflict between the Swiss section and the Comintern will be explored in more detail below.

²⁸ See Charles Stürnimann, *Die ersten Jahre des "Roten Basel" 1935-1938. Zielsetzungen und Handlungsspielräume sozialdemokratischer Regierungspolitik im Spannungsfeld von bürgerlicher Opposition und linker Kritik* (Basle, 1988).

²⁹ The first measure against Communists concerned the federal civil servants. As early as 1932 they were not allowed to be members of a Communist organization. Stronger state protection measures followed by means of Federal Council decrees and the Confederate Criminal Code. Finally, several cantons in western Switzerland, plus Uri and Schwyz, outlawed the party. This was less serious for the life of the party than might be thought, since it could withdraw to other cantons and particularly since its strongholds, Basle and Zurich, were not affected. For banning measures against the Communists during the war, see Christian Gruber, *Die politischen Parteien der Schweiz im 2. Weltkrieg* (Vienna, etc., 1966), pp. 199-221, and *Bericht des Bundesrats über die antidemokratische Tätigkeit von Schweizern und Ausländern*, Vol. 3. For a consideration of the banning from a legal point of view, see Erich Edwin Brunner, *Die Problematik der verfassungsrechtlichen Behandlung extremistischer Parteien in den westeuropäischen Verfassungsstaaten* (Zurich, 1965), and Ivo Zellweger, *Die strafrechtlichen Beschränkungen der politischen Meinungsäußerungsfreiheit (Propagandaverbote)* (Zurich, 1975).

Schweiz; SPS), which, considered internationally, was left-wing.³⁰

During the second half of the war social tensions grew, as the supply situation got worse and the workers' purchasing power decreased. Soon demonstrations, strikes and other protest actions were on the increase. The climax was the general strike of November 1918, which was lastingly to polarize Switzerland's political climate.³¹

The Olten Action Committee, the strike leadership, abruptly ordered the ending of the 1918 general strike after three days. This was criticized by many of the strikers. The Russian Revolution and the favourable post-war state of the market encouraged the growth of opposition in the work force. A left wing, inclining to the Bolsheviks, developed in the SPS. The founding of a new International lent organizational impulse to the left wing of the party, which was concentrated in Basle and Zurich. It formed bonds with western Switzerland, the area of influence of Humbert-Droz, with his newspaper *Le Phare* (The Light Beacon). Links to the "old CP", known as the Old Communists,³² which had started as Jakob Herzog's "Gruppe Forderung" (Challenge Group) and was strongly anarcho-syndicalistic, intensified. However, because of basic differences in their programmes they did not join forces at that point. Besides, the left wing of the SPS preferred to stay in the SPS, after a ballot of party members had failed to confirm the party's conference's recommendation for joining the Third International. Matters were finally hurried along by the Twenty-One Conditions of Admission formulated at the CI's Second Congress, made more stringent by, among others, Humbert-Droz, one of the two left-wing representatives of the Swiss party. Finally the groups with Bolshevik sympathies were given four months to decide whether or not they wanted to join the CI.

Actually it was only the left wing of the SPS which faced this choice. The other two possible groups, the Old Communists and the Socialist Youth Organization,³³ had joined a year earlier. In fact a decision to join - and thus to split the party - had already been made as far as the left wing of the SPS was concerned. This had happened at the meeting known as the Conference of the Fifty-Four at Olten in June 1920, at which delegates to the Second Comintern Congress were selected. Only the time of joining was undecided and, connected with this, how many party members could be persuaded to go along with the decision. Thus the Left could feel fairly happy with the result of the Berne party congress in December 1920. True, the majority of the delegates - 350

³⁰ See among others Yves Collart, *Le Parti socialiste suisse et l'Internationale 1914-1915. De l'Union nationale à Zimmerwald* (Geneva, 1969), which, as the title says, only covers the time up to the Zimmerwald Conference. However, it makes a basic contribution to the understanding of internal happenings within the SPS. Further, see Horst Lademacher (ed.), *Die Zimmerwalder Bewegung*, 2 vols. (The Hague, etc., 1967), and Alfred E. Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland 1914-1917* (Madison, etc., 1971).

³¹ See Willi Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918*, with an epilogue by Hans Ulrich Jost (3rd edition, Zurich, 1988) and also *Dokumente zum Landesstreik* (2nd edition, Zurich, 1988); Marc Vuilleumier, et al., *La grève générale de 1918 en Suisse* (Geneva, 1977). Markus Mattmüller, *Leonhard Ragaz und der religiöse Sozialismus. Eine Biographie*, 2 vols. (Zurich, 1957 and 1968). For the reaction of the Swiss authorities to the Soviet mission in Berne, see Alfred Erich Senn, *Diplomacy and Revolution. The Soviet mission in Switzerland 1918* (Notre Dame and London, 1974). And for the polarized political climate: Hans Beat Kunz, *Weltrevolution und Völkerbund. Die schweizerische Außenpolitik unter dem Eindruck der bolschewistischen Bedrohung 1918-1923* (Berne, 1981).

³² On this see Jost, *Die Altkommunisten*.

³³ The Youth Organization became radical very early, under the leadership of Willi Münzenberg. On this see Münzenberg's memoirs, *Die Dritte Front*. Very little work has been done on either the Young Socialists or the Young Communists, on this see Eggert, *Die Entstehung der Kommunistischen Partei und des Kommunistischen Jugendverbandes der Schweiz*, and Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der deutschen Schweiz*, esp. pp. 7-65, 173-184. Both authors deal only with wartime and the immediate postwar period, while no research at all exists for the twenties and thirties.

to 213 - had voted for Robert Grimm's motion³⁴ not to join the Third International but to work with other parties to effect an alteration of the Conditions of Admission; however, both the party's left wing and the Old Communists, eagerly awaiting the result outside, were pleasantly surprised at the size of the support for the new International. They were less content with the result of the ballot held in January 1921. Only 8,777 SPS members (about a quarter) and only two cantonal parties, Basle and Schaffhausen, were in favour of joining.

Humbert-Droz, who, as authorized agent of the CI's Executive Committee (ECCI), was in charge of the merger negotiations, put equal numbers of left-wing party members and Old Communists on the Union and Programme Commissions then set up, even though the latter had only upwards of 800 members. Statutes and party programme points also took both sides into account, though the Old Communists' anti-parliamentary and soviet-communist stipulations were dropped. At the party union congress called for 5 and 6 March 1921 there was a majority for the two commissions' suggestions. The only controversial question was the attitude to be adopted towards the trade unions. The newly elected committee consisted of nine leading officials. The Old Communists, who provided only a sixth of the members, were relatively well represented with three people on the committee.³⁵

4. The Relationship with the Internationals

Since some leading Bolsheviks had spent at least some of their time in exile in Switzerland, personal contacts existed even before the founding of the Third International. It suffices here to mention the friendly, but above all political connections between Fritz Platten and Lenin.³⁶ Platten, well-known in Zurich as the "General" of the strike,³⁷ whose picture in a black hat and fluttering cloak was said to decorate many a worker's front room, accompanied the returning Russians on their journey home in the "sealed" railcar in spring 1917. He was an important apologist of the party's left wing. At Kiental he had voted for the resolution presented by the Bolsheviks, and as a member of the SPS party executive continually pressed for this point of view. He had also participated in the founding congress of the CI as the only Swiss with voting rights and had there, at Lenin's suggestion, been voted on to the Presidium.³⁸ In 1923/1924 he emigrated to the Soviet Union with a fairly large group of Swiss. They founded an agricultural commune there.³⁹ Later Platten worked for the International

³⁴ On Robert Grimm see: Adolf McCarthy, *Robert Grimm. Der schweizerische Revolutionär* (Berne and Stuttgart, 1989), and Christian Voigt, *Robert Grimm. Kämpfer, Arbeiterführer, Parlamentarier. Eine politische Biografie* (Berne, 1980).

³⁵ Among the five members of the inner Central Committee was the Old Communist Willy Handschin; the other four, Franz Welti, voted party president, Rosa Grimm, Hermann Kündig and Fritz Sulzbachner, came from the left wing of the party. They were under orders to live in the Basle suburb. There were also four representatives of other regions, always two from each political direction: for the left wing Humbert-Droz from La Chaux-de-Fonds and Fritz Platten from Zurich and for the Old Communists Herzog from Zurich and Edwin Maag.

³⁶ On this see Willi Gautschi, *Lenin als Emigrant in der Schweiz* (Zurich and Cologne, 1973), esp. part 2; Leonhard Haas, "Lenin an Platten. Ein Briefwechsel aus dem Jahr 1918", *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 18 (1968), pp. 69-78; Alfred Erich Senn, "Die Schweiz als Asyl für russische Revolutionäre", *Schweizer Monatshefte*, 56 (1976), pp. 693-698.

³⁷ As Secretary of the Zurich Workers' Union he headed the 1912 local general strike.

³⁸ A second Swiss representative, Leonie Kascher, member of the Old Communists, had only an advisory function.

³⁹ See Barbara Schneider, *Schweizer Auswanderer in der Sowjetunion. Die Erlebnisse der Schweizer Kommunisten im revolutionären Rußland (1924-1930)* (Schaffhausen, 1985).

Workers' Aid (IWA), was arrested for the first time in 1937 and shot in a camp in 1942.⁴⁰

Considering the small size of the KPS, an amazing number of Swiss worked as Comintern officials. At the highest level, as head of the Latin American secretariat, the well-known Humbert-Droz, formerly a minister of the church in Neuchâtel, who spent more than ten years serving the Comintern. Up to the end of the twenties four Swiss were formally ECCI members: Emil Arnold (after the Third Congress), Fritz Wieser and Humbert-Droz (after the Sixth Congress) and also Edgar Woog, alias Alfred Stirner, who, however, had been elected to represent Mexico's Communist Party. He also had a seat on the International Control Commission for some time.⁴¹

Karl Hofmaier also worked at a high level in the Comintern apparatus. In 1927 he was arrested in Italy. In spring 1939 he was one of the last Swiss to travel again to the Soviet Union, where, by the way, his brother Emil then lived. Mention must also be made of Siegfried Bamatter, who, by way of the Communist Youth International (CYI), became a Comintern emissary - and that to his own party. In 1929 he was sent back to the KPS in Switzerland as political secretary. He was replaced at the beginning of 1932 by Humbert-Droz and returned to the Soviet Union, where he died in 1966. On the other hand his lover, Lydia Dübi of Basle, a Comintern clerk whose whole family belonged to the KPS in Switzerland, was killed in the 1938 purges.⁴² Altogether some one hundred and twenty Swiss Communists worked as Comintern officials in some way or other.⁴³

As the influence of the KPS in the International decreased, so did the number of Swiss in leading positions during the twenties. In 1922 the section lost its seat on the ECCI for the first time and when Fritz Wieser, after strong protest by the KPS, was finally elected in 1928, the Comintern forced his resignation and did not replace him. So it came about that, from the beginning of the thirties, the KPS was no longer represented in the ECCI.⁴⁴ How little attention the ECCI paid to the KPS is obvious from the numerous complaints the KPS leadership sent to CI leaders in Moscow months before the Sixth Congress, charging that Swiss letters were seldom or dilatorily answered. Bodenmann, who repeated these charges at the Congress, also made it clear that the KPS was not happy about the left turn that was developing.

All this seems to make particularly astonishing the violence of the Comintern's reaction shortly afterwards to the section's attitude, which up to then it had treated with indifference. There are, however, several reasons for this reaction: for one thing the intervention occurred at the moment when the KPS abandoned criticism in favour of resistance, and for another the Swiss section provided invaluable support for Humbert-Droz in his opposition to the Stalinist line. Apart from this it was probably a welcome opportunity to bring back to the prescribed course a section which, for rather too long, had been somewhat too independent.⁴⁵ It was all triggered off by two letters written to the ECCI Presidium in November 1928, in which the KPS supported Humbert-Droz's criticism of the Comintern's part in the Wittorf-Thälmann affair. It also severely criticized internal party procedures and decision-making mechanisms in Germany and in the Comintern as a whole. Initially receiving no answer, the party leadership wrote another letter in January 1929, stating its criticisms even more

⁴⁰ In the prosographic section of my dissertation devoted to the KPS's three hundred cadres in the thirties there will be a detailed biographical note.

⁴¹ Concerning the members of and candidates for the leadership structures of the Communist International, see: Vilém Kahan, "The Communist International, 1919-1943. The Personnel of its Highest Bodies", *International Review of Social History*, XXI (1976), pp. 151-185.

⁴² Despite repeated pressure from the KPS in 1931 the Comintern would not let her return to Switzerland.

⁴³ According to as yet unpublished figures arrived at by my colleague Bernhard Bayerlein and me.

⁴⁴ Humbert-Droz was an ECCI member not as a KPS representative but in his own right.

⁴⁵ The Comintern intervention against the KPS has been described by several authors. For a more detailed description, see: Gerster, *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung*, pp. 155-197; Huber, *Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 213-245; Joos, *Parteien und Presse im Kanton Schaffhausen*, pp. 398-439; Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, pp. 170-199, and Bernhard Bayerlein, "Einleitung", in *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, III, pp. LVIII-LVIII.

clearly and declaring itself to be "in an oppositional position to the leading organs of the Comintern".⁴⁶ The Presidium's reaction arrived in the middle of April 1929 in the form of a letter containing an ultimatum. The KPS was required immediately to change its attitude to the SPS and regard it as a centre, not a proletarian, party. Without waiting for an answer from the KPS, the International doubled its representation at the session of the extended Central Committee at Whitsun 1929 by sending several emissaries.⁴⁷ The old leadership was dismissed and the Swiss section made subject to the authority of the Comintern. In the internal party "discussion" which followed the Youth Organization was also required to withdraw its earlier criticism of conditions within the KPS. The party cells were also obliged to make similar declarations. But this was still not enough for the Comintern. At the beginning of 1930 the ECCI Politsecretariat sent the KPS an "open letter", with orders to publish it in the party press.⁴⁸ It complained that "right-wing elements" in the party - meaning Fritz Wiesner and Franz Welti - had not yet been "liquidated", that the conversion to works and street cells had not yet been carried out and that the theory developed by Hermann Bobst claiming "historical peculiarities" for Switzerland, but which was only a perverse sort of opportunism, was still in circulation.⁴⁹

The party congress which followed in June restructured the leadership yet again,⁵⁰ even replacing the editors, the party administrator and the workers in the printing office. Leadership crisis followed leadership crisis.⁵¹ After yet another of the many changes the Comintern finally sent Humbert-Droz to help out for a little while. He was allowed to stay on in Switzerland, thanks to the intervention of the emissary Richard Gypner, who was there at the time. At the turn of the year 1931/1932 he, together with Robert Müller and Robert Krebs, set up the new party secretariat. It had suffered no less than five restructurings between May 1929 and December 1931.

However, that was not the end. In June 1932 the fifth Central Committee plenum had unanimously accepted a resolution written by Humbert-Droz clearly distancing itself from designating the left-wing Social Democrats as its "main opponents". This provoked a second intervention from the ECCI. At its Twelfth Plenum an international campaign against Humbert-Droz as a "right-wing opportunist" was started.⁵² Once again the KPS was obliged to hold a "party discussion", the course of which saw not only the dismissal of Humbert-Droz

⁴⁶ The letter is to be found in the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne. It is reproduced in Gerster, *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung*, pp. 166-167, and in *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, III, pp. 425-427. In it the KPS also censures the setting aside of Bukharin as reported in the "bourgeois press". And on Stalin's speech against Humbert-Droz to the Presidium it remarks: "Politically this speech is certainly not brilliant. Its tone is such as must dismay. It is thus one speaks against people outside the Communist movement, and not against comrades still in a leading position in the Communist International."

⁴⁷ The Basle Police Inspectorate's Search Department identified one as Arthur Dombrowsky-Lewin (Gerster, *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 347, note 9). Stettler also mentions Julian Leński (Leszzyński) and thinks Richard Gypner may also have been among the "Turkestanis" - the somewhat disrespectful name for the emissaries.

⁴⁸ The letter was approved on 31 January 1930. Gerster in *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung* dates it 4 April, but this was only when it appeared in the party press.

⁴⁹ Bobst was expelled from the party in 1932 after he had started working with the left-wing opposition. See David Vogelsanger, *Trotzkismus in der Schweiz. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Schweizer Arbeiterbewegung bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Zurich, 1986), pp. 72-91. Documents on this are to be published in *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, V.

⁵⁰ From this point onwards the Political Secretariat of the party was supposed to be led by the worker Theo Dunkel together with Max Pfeiffer and Bamatter, who had been sent back from the Soviet Union.

⁵¹ Dunkel and Pfeiffer soon left the party leadership. Bodenmann re-entered it. There is a list of the KPS leadership in its first decennium in Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, between pp. 120 and 121. For the years 1927-1930 see also *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, III, p. ■ ■. For the thirties a list will be published *ibid.*, V.

⁵² Documents on this conflicts are published *ibid.*, III. More will be published in the volume on the KPS.

as political leader but also the forced self-criticism of the new member of the Swiss Parliament (*Nationalrat*) Emil Arnold. Leadership of the party was put into the hands of the electrician Robert Müller.

There were no major ECCI interventions in the following years. However, the CI's interference had negative effects for a long time to come; the party had lost almost all its public prestige.⁵³ Not until 1935/1936 did it regain some for a little while.

5. The Party's Structure and Organization

a) The members:

In 1921 the new party in the Swiss political landscape had 6,356 members and 104 sections, but by June 1922, according to the report presented at the second party congress, these figures had sunk to 4,837 members and 88 sections. The majority, 70%, came from German-speaking Switzerland, mainly from the industrial conurbations Zurich, Basle and Schaffhausen. French-speaking Switzerland had only 416 members and 9 sections and the Italian-speaking area just 210 members divided among 17 sections.⁵⁴ However, these figures should be regarded with caution. In its reports to the ECCI the party leadership had a tendency to correct them upwards. Other sources quote a membership of some 4,000 in 1921, including 300 women. There were also 300 members in the associated Women's Organization and 500 in the Communist Youth Organization.⁵⁵ In the August of 1922 Platten estimated the number of members as only 3,500.⁵⁶ Approximate statistics on the development of membership, drawn from various sources, show an almost continuous downward tendency during the interwar years. Only during 1935/1936 and, according to some contemporaries, during the Second World War after the party was outlawed, was there a certain recovery. Documentary proof is lacking because of the safety measures necessary while the party was illegal.

(Table 1)

b) The main regional centres:

The party's weak hold in western Switzerland, where the split had taken place further left, could not be bettered despite several organizational efforts. During the two interwar decades - and not just then - the Geneva section was led by the advocate Jean Vincent. Its size varied from 40 to 80 more or less active members and this in a city canton with some 170,000 inhabitants. The Social-Democratic Party around the charismatic Léon Nicole, on the other hand, had between 1,100 and 2,400 members in the thirties, was supported by more than 30% of the electorate and even governed Geneva for three years.⁵⁷ The party was even weaker in other French-speaking cantonal capitals, such as Lausanne and Neuchâtel, where its sections could not function constantly or appear continually in public. These local groups usually depended almost entirely on the engagement of a single person. A typical example of this is Lausanne, where a drowsy section awoke to new life and even had a few political successes when, at the beginning of the thirties, it was taken over by Emile Depierraz.

Contrary to the Communist organizational principle of democratic centralism, the relationship

⁵³ It had also lost the Schaffhausen section and several important Zurich members who had founded the CP Opposition (KPO). A left-wing opposition also came into being, but it was of less importance.

⁵⁴ Figures in Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, p. 54, and Federal Archives, Berne, J.II.94, vol. 1.

⁵⁵ Figures from: Archives deposited with the Central Committee of the CPSU, Moscow, 495, 91, No. 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 495, 91, No. 32.

⁵⁷ See Marie-Madeleine Grounauer, *La Genève Rouge de Léon Nicole, 1933-1936* (Geneva, 1975), and Alex Spielmann, *L'aventure socialiste genevoise 1930-1936. De l'opposition à l'émeute, de l'émeute au pouvoir, de pouvoir à l'opposition* (Lausanne, 1981).

between the German- and French-speaking Swiss sections was not free of tension. Originally the Central Committee, which was situated in Basle, tried to lessen this by making federalist concessions. But taking Switzerland's historical traditions into consideration was increasingly frowned on as a "bourgeois relic" and at the end of 1931 the Secretariat wrote rather severely to say that there was no Central Committee for the French-speaking cantons, but only a Regional Committee.⁵⁸ There were similar conflicts with the Ticino members. However, they numbered so few that these were less important.

c) *The press:*

The summoning to Moscow of Humbert-Droz in 1921 had a negative effect on western Switzerland. One result was that *Le Phare*, the paper he edited, had to cease publication in the summer of the same year.⁵⁹ The fortnightly *Drapeau Rouge* (Red Flag) did not appear until 1923. As the woman who then administered it remembers, it sold only a few hundred copies at the end of the twenties.⁶⁰ The aim of printing the French weekly was not attained, despite continual efforts, until March 1932.

For the press, too, the centre of activity lay in German-speaking Switzerland, where at times the party published three daily papers. They appeared in Basle, Zurich and Schaffhausen, that is in the main organizational and political KPS centres. The *Basler Vorwärts* (Basle Forwards), won from the Social-Democratic Party at the time of the split, looked back on a long tradition and had the biggest circulation. Next came the Zurich *Kämpfer* (Fighter) and last the *Schaffhauser Arbeiterzeitung* (Schaffhausen Workers' Paper), which the party lost to the KPO at the end of 1930.

The shrinking process ushered in by the loss of the paper from eastern Switzerland continued throughout the entire decade and at least into the first year of the war. Very little difference was noticeable when at last the *Drapeau Rouge* was published weekly in 1932. *La Lutte* (The Struggle), which had replaced the *Drapeau Rouge* in May 1934, even had to cease publication in October 1937. And after the sixth party Congress at Whitsun 1936 the two remaining Swiss daily papers printed in German, *Kämpfer* and *Vorwärts* (as the *Basler Vorwärts* had been called since September 1935), were amalgamated and then outlawed by the Swiss Government in December 1939. That robbed the KPS of its last organ, for *Il Popolo* (The People), successor to *Falce e Martello* (Sickle and Hammer), had ceased publication in July 1939.

The following table, drawn up partly by Stettler and partly by me, shows the circulation and subscription figures for the Communist press between 1921 and 1940.

(Table 2)

Apart from the large regional and supra-regional daily and weekly papers, the Communist cells, groups and sections sold and distributed an amazing number of small, mostly hectographed works and district "newspapers". These were generally short-lived A4 sheets with propaganda-style contents. Sometimes they were also enlivened with an unskilled drawing. Counting all the legal and illegal periodicals produced between 1930 and 1943/1944, which were so various in content, size and appearance, there was a respectable total of some 250 titles.⁶¹

There is no way of discovering the circulation figures of the works and district newspapers. It can be assumed that they varied according to the size of the group at which they were aimed. The upper limit would be set by the capacity of the hectograph machine. In any case it is not possible to draw conclusions about the strength of Communist influence from the number of papers sold. Just at the time when there was

⁵⁸ The document will be published in *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, V.

⁵⁹ Up to the end of 1922 it was replaced by the weekly *L'Avant-Garde*, but for almost all of 1923 subscribers received no newspaper at all.

⁶⁰ Conversation (30 April 1990) with the Geneva Communist Jacqueline Zurbrugg, who was married to Jean Vincent till the middle of the thirties. - Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, p. 98, cites a circulation of 800 for 1928.

⁶¹ They will be listed, with further details, in the appendix of vol. V of the *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*.

a drastic fall in the number of subscribers to the regularly appearing established party press - which means the two daily papers *Basler Vorwärts* and *Kämpfer*, the western Swiss *Le Drapeau Rouge* and the Italian-language *Falce e Martello* - there was a rise in the number of hectographed works and district sheets, most of which were not sold but distributed free of charge. Their readers would have probably had less close links to the party than regular subscribers.

From 1940 onwards Communist printed matter of any kind could be distributed only illegally. In spite of this the party refused to give up one of its few means of propaganda, for not only public but also private meetings were forbidden. Communist organizations published more than forty titles during the war years, some of which exceeded their pre-war circulation, though not until after the summer of 1941. Most of these illegal organs were hectographed, but some were printed, like the forbidden *Freiheit* (Freedom), which is said to have attained a circulation of 3,000 as an illegal publication.⁶²

d) *Participation in elections and the KPS electorate:*

During the twenties and thirties the KPS took part in six national election campaigns.⁶³ With the exception of 1939 its percentage of the electorate remained fairly stable, but the trend over the two decades is downwards. The two biggest inroads, on the occasions of the 1931 and 1939 *Nationalrat* elections - which will be briefly examined in the following - were on both occasions an expression of the critical situation confronting the party at those times.

(Table 3)

There were various reasons for the unfavourable circumstances attendant on the 1931 elections. There were unpleasantly clear memories of the CI's authoritarian interference in 1929, which had not remained hidden from the public. The abrupt exchange of the entire party leadership disturbed not only those electors who primarily registered party policy through the statements of particular leading personalities. The uneasiness, nay discontent, in the party's grass roots was only too plainly visible. On top of all this, the make-up of the Secretariat had not succeeded in becoming re-stabilized by the autumn of 1931. Not wishing to risk losing seats the new leadership was prepared to grant concessions. The respected advocate Franz Welti, an old campaigner with friends in all political circles, was persuaded to be a candidate. In Schaffhausen, on the other hand, where up till then the party had had a second *Nationalrat* seat, it lost it conclusively to the KPO - and the strong personality of Walther Bringolf. The two candidates of the KPS section, there re-named the CP-Line (*KP-Linie*), could attract only 263 votes, while he, as a candidate receiving cumulative votes, easily took the seat for his new party with 6,407 votes. He even beat the second Centre candidate, whose party had to relinquish the seat it had held till then.⁶⁴

If the KPS expected, or should have expected, the loss of the Schaffhausen seat - after all, it had lost almost the entire section - it was surprised at regaining the Zurich seat, even though it had put most of its effort into the campaigns in the cantons of Zurich and Basle. As the election success showed it had managed to cancel out the bad impression left by the sitting member, Fritz Beck, who had apparently found this position too much for him. Also, the electorate was positively impressed by the fact that the leadership in Zurich quarrelled less among itself than it had three years earlier. In the other eight cantons where the party put up candidates it did not actually hope to gain a seat. On the other hand it did intend to use the campaign to attack "left-wing social democracy", and plenty of propaganda speeches were held to that effect.

The party was similarly pugnacious towards the SPS in October 1939, although it had started the

⁶² According to the written charges against Theo Rutschi some 3,150 copies of *Freiheit* were printed. See Rutschi, *Ich hör ein Lied*, pp. 201-205.

⁶³ There is not enough room to go into local elections here. During the interwar period the KPS was a regular participator in cantonal elections in Basle-City, Basle-Country and Zurich and up to 1930 in Schaffhausen. On the other hand it only sporadically put up a list in the cantons of Geneva, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Berne, Lucerne, St. Gallen and Ticino.

⁶⁴ On this see Joos, *Parteien und Presse im Kanton Schaffhausen*, pp. 440-442.

previous legislative period with a combined list for the two left-wing parties for the first time since 1922.⁶⁵ In autumn 1939 the situation had changed radically. As early as September Léon Nicole, who welcomed the German-Soviet non-aggression pact, and with him the majority of the cantonal parties of Geneva and Vaud, had been expelled from the SPS. In the city of Basle the SP, which thanks to the support of the Communists had had a majority since 1935, cancelled the agreement to co-operate in parliament. Willingness to accept the KPS also disappeared on other sides and it found itself surrounded by enemies. In several cantons the authorities forbade public KPS appearances. There were arrests, the distribution of certain leaflets was forbidden and shortly before the election an edition of *Freiheit* was confiscated. In addition to this the party's finances were not on a good footing, as can be seen by the mounting calls after September for readers to recruit new subscribers, to favour the advertisers with their custom, to take out shares and - last but not least - to make voluntary contributions. But above all the party was made to feel public reaction to its support of the "Soviet peace policy", which it was claiming had "dealt the decisive blow" to the "war axis of the anti-Comintern powers". However, in commenting on the party's catastrophic electoral result - it had lost both seats - Marino Bodenmann, editor of *Freiheit*, who was not re-elected to the *Nationalrat*, did not mention this most obvious reason. Instead of admitting the KPS's own responsibility he depicted it as the victim of inimical circumstances. Another excuse was that many members were on active service⁶⁶ - which, however, was equally true of other parties. He also claimed that the KPS was the only party to be the victim of slander, chicanery and persecution and that it had received no financial support not even from the trade unions.

6. Communist Influence in the Trade Unions

The Swiss Trade-Union Council (*Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund*, SGB),⁶⁷ which had itself been shaken by fights between the various factions in the early interwar years and shortly after the split in the SPS, had quickly taken decisive action against the opposition within its own ranks. It reacted particularly sharply against the formation of Communist cells and by the end of the twenties it had drawn a decisive line between itself and the KPS.

It did this even though in 1920 the internal trade-unions opposition could count on a considerable number of supporters. This was very obvious at the last trade-union congress before the split in the KPS, where it managed to get 92 votes. The trade-unions leadership was supported by 136 of the delegates. The conflict was about questions of tactics. The opposition suggested two alternative concepts. One, the idea of workers' soviets, soon sank into insignificance. In this point the majority of the newly founded KPS had no sympathy with the Old Communists. The KPS was firmly behind the project of a united trade-union-political organization for all left-wing forces. Its main apologist, Friedrich Schneider of Basle, was for a short time a member of the KPS.

But as early as April 1921 the KPS opted for different tactics with the Open Letter "For the United Proletarian Front". The intention was to retain the existing organizations, such as parties and trade unions, but to work together for a certain time in some political campaigns "in the interests of the class struggle". Although reactions to the Communist initiative were quite positive - seven of the eighteen unions in the SGB accepted the invitation - the plan was finally defeated by the opposition of the workers in the metal and

⁶⁵ As in the *Nationalrat* elections of 1922, in 1935 the SPS only took up the Communist offer in cantons where the KPS had a considerable presence. On the 1922 elections see Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, pp. 324-329; on the 1935 elections: Huber, *Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in der Schweiz*, pp. 447-455.

⁶⁶ The military service made necessary by the 1939-1945 war years is called active service in Switzerland.

⁶⁷ As yet there is no satisfactory scholarly history of the SGB's organization for the whole time of its existence. For the decade succeeding the general strike, see Bernard Degen, *Abschied vom Klassenkampf. Die partielle Integration der schweizerischen Gewerkschaftsbewegung zwischen Landesstreik und Weltwirtschaftskrise (1918-1929)* (Basle and Frankfurt, 1991).

clock industries and the railwaymen, who together made up more than half of the SGB members.⁶⁸ Both the SGB and SPS had refused to take part.

The KPS initiative on the question of a united front brought it plenty of praise from the CI.⁶⁹ However, the accompanying requirement that Communist trade-union members should form cells was rejected by the Swiss workers' organizations and even by some party members. Several prominent trade unionists in Basle and Zurich left the party, but support at the basis also began to decrease. One of the reasons was certainly the depression which started in 1920 and the accompanying unemployment. Many of the trade unionists who had been carried into opposition in the wave of optimism in the years around the end of the war now retreated in disappointment. This feeling was reinforced by the fact that despite their combative slogans, the Communists had not had any concrete successes. The lessening of KPS influence was clearly visible at the extra-ordinary trade-union congress of 1922. The matter of a united front had been dropped. Even the motion of the Communist-dominated Basle Cartel, seeking to require the SGB to put up a central leadership for future combative measures, was supported by only 30 delegates, while 181 voted against it - and this although at the end of 1922 the KPS was supposed to have 43,000 supporters in the revolutionary trade-union opposition, though, it is true, this was scarcely structured. Just three years later the KPS had to admit that this number had decreased to 20,000 at most.⁷⁰

In 1927, despite strong opposition from the Communist congress delegates, the SGB removed the article concerning class struggle from its statutes. In the same year the KPS's trade-union work received a further blow. The party launched a referendum against the new confederate civil service law, to which the SGB had given its blessing. This led to the exclusion from the SGB of the Communist-dominated Basle Cartel, which had supported the referendum. This robbed the KPS of its most important area of influence within the trade unions. In addition to this the referendum was not carried out⁷¹ - a clear indication of the KPS's political weakness among the workers.

Nor was this the end of its failures and reverses: in February 1928 the SGB expelled the Schaffhausen Workers' Union (*Arbeiterunion*), the majority of whose members was Communist. Finally, at the trade-union congress in October 1930 the leadership of the SGB decreed the exclusion of the entire Union of Clothing and Leather Workers, who had elected the Communist Hermann Bobst as their secretary.⁷²

At the beginning of the thirties things could not have looked blacker for the Communists. This was most clearly seen in the SGB committee dealing with cartels and unions. Step by step the KPS had lost influence, as first well-known trade unionists left its ranks, and then unions and cartels where it had a majority were expelled. Originally it had been able to count on the votes of 70 of the committee delegates. By 1930 not one was left.

⁶⁸ For the political conflicts provoked within the SGB by the Communists, see Bernard Degen, *Richtungskämpfe im Schweizerischen Gewerkschaftsbund. Zur Organisationsdebatte zwischen Landesstreik und Lausanner Kongress, 1918-1924* (Zurich, 1980), and Clive Loertscher, *Le Parti communiste suisse et les syndicats 1920-1921*, Foreword by Marc Vuilleumier (Lausanne, 1977). The subject is also dealt with by Markus Bolliger, *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung im Zeitalter des Ersten Weltkrieges und der Spaltung der Sozialdemokratischen Partei. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Schweizerischen Arbeiterbewegung* (Basle, 1970), pp. 323-338, by Huber, *Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in der Schweiz 1918-1935*, pp. 27-101, and by Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, pp. 389-394.

⁶⁹ The CI did not publish the "Theses on the Tactics of a United Front" until 18 December 1921 (see *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 20).

⁷⁰ Figures in Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, p. 397. - The total number of people organized in the SGB in 1922 was 154,692.

⁷¹ Gerster, *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung*, gives the most detailed account of the conflict over the Basle Trade-Union Cartel. See also Huber, *Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 187-191, and Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, pp. 399-410.

⁷² *Protokoll Gewerkschaftskongreß in Luzern, 18./19.10.1930*; Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, p. 413.

Effort was now put into building up the Red Trade-Union Organization (*Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition*; RGO). This shifted the emphasis of Communist activity from the trade unions to the factory floor, but still without the desired result. Right up until the RGO broke up in 1936 complaints continued that workers feared to lose their job if they supported the RGO. Even though in 1931 the effects of the economic crisis had not effected Switzerland very much, the industrial workers' reserve was not completely without foundation. Switzerland's decentralized economic structure meant that activist could not fail to attract management's attention - a problem with which the trade unions were also familiar. The severe crisis which started in 1932 raised workers' fears of unemployment even more.⁷³

The constituent assembly of the RGO's national leadership was held on 9 August 1931 in Basle. The seat of the Secretariat stayed there until the beginning of 1932, when it moved with that of the KPS to Zurich. After the first chairman, the Old Communist Jakob Herzog, died of injuries received in an accident, leadership was taken over by the politically indestructible Marino Bodenmann from the Valais. The new secretary - who was also editor of *Der Rote Gewerkschafter* (The Red Trade Unionist) - set out the RGO's aims in a brochure published on Mayday 1932.⁷⁴

The RGO set itself a double organizational target which it planned to achieve by means of the complex organizational structure described in the brochure. However, it never came anywhere near to realizing this in the years that followed. On the one hand it wanted to gather in all the workers: organized and non-organized, Communists, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, unemployed and all the men and women of whatever age employed in a firm. On the other hand it also intended to build up opposition groups inside "hostile" trade unions. The second aim turned out to be completely unrealistic, since a large number of its members was no longer organized in the SGB. As an "Org Report" noted in 1932, only 351 members of the Zurich KPS section were trade-union members, while 117 men and 64 women did not belong to any organization. Apart from this there were more and more unemployed among the party members. In Zurich in 1932 they accounted for a tenth of the membership.⁷⁵ Many saw no reason to pay the "social fascist" subscriptions. In addition to this the RGO leadership constantly saw itself faced with "passivity in carrying out party work", except among the building and tram workers, where some attempt was made. According to RGO sources the organization had a maximum total of 6,500 members, while the KPO claimed that there were only somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000. They were, in any case, concentrated in Basle and Zurich and sometimes in Lausanne. Whatever the truth of the matter, RGO numbers could never seriously challenge the mighty SGB with its 200,000 wage earners.

Even so the organization felt it was obliged to carry out an "independent economic struggle". It even hoped, accepting the CI's inadequate economic and political prognostications, that there would be "mass strikes".⁷⁶ Caught up in its own radical rhetoric about an unavoidable approaching class struggle, the KPS found that when it came to the point it could persuade only a few workers to strike. One such occasion was the shoemakers' strike at Brüttisellen in the autumn of 1931. The party was particularly proud of this because it seemed to prove incontrovertibly the rightness of the "united front from below" tactics.⁷⁷ The

⁷³ One indication was the number of days lost in strikes, of which there were 73,975 in 1931, 159,154 in 1932, 69,065 in 1933, 33,309 in 1934 and still 15,153 at the lowest point in 1935. Figures in: Bundesamt für Industrie, Gewerbe und Arbeit (ed.), *Ergebnisse der schweizerischen Sozialstatistik* (Berne, 1932), p. 201, and Bundesamt für Industrie, Gewerbe und Arbeit (ed.), *Handbuch der schweizerischen Sozialstatistik* (Berne, 1973), p. 80.

⁷⁴ *Gegen Lohnraub, für Arbeit und Brot! Kämpft die RGO Schweiz. Was sie ist und sie will* (Basle, 1932).

⁷⁵ Membership in Zurich totalled 532. In 1929, when there were 624 members, 86 and 68 respectively were not organized in a trade union. Figures from the archives deposited with the Central Committee of the CPSU, Moscow, 595, 91, No. 180.

⁷⁶ Cf. among others *Basler Vorwärts*, 17.3.1932.

⁷⁷ On the four most important strikes led by the RGO between 1930 and 1933 see Josef Wandeler, *Die KPS und die Wirtschaftskämpfe 1930-1933 [...]* (Zurich, 1978). Even though his theses are very questionable, his work is a valuable examination of the events in an otherwise much neglected area of research.

strike was not carried out in opposition to the SGB, since almost the entire staff was organized in the red Clothing and Leather Workers' Union; the RGO line was not narrowly interpreted, however. After all, with the help of the IWA some small farmers had been persuaded to supply the strikers' canteens.

There was a second strike that should be mentioned: that of the Zurich heating engineers in 1932. Once again it was about a threatened cut in wages and it ended in partial success. This time the RGO could point the finger at the "traitorous" policy of the "Social Fascists", as the SGB failed to support the industrial action. The KPS saw an additional confirmation of its policy in the fact that the chief of Zurich's police, a Social Democrat, ordered his men to shoot an illegal demonstration of solidarity with live ammunition.⁷⁸

Even though the RGO did have a partial success in opposing wage cuts, this did not help it to break out of its isolation. As Gerster says, it remained nothing more than a party working-group made up of an assembly of KPS members and their closest sympathizers. When the KPS dissolved the RGO after its sixth congress in 1936 and the Communists tried to re-join the SGB, the two trade-union organizations had grown so far apart at some points that, on the one hand, many KPS members did not even apply for re-admission and, on the other hand, several unions refused admission to better-known Communists. The SGB even chose that moment to publish a brochure condemning the KPS's united front manoeuvre.⁷⁹

Even after the RGO interlude Communist influence in the trade-union movement was marginal. When in 1937 the Swiss Metal and Clock Workers' Union concluded the "peace agreement" with their employers' confederation,⁸⁰ the KPS strongly criticized this policy. However, it had to limit its reaction to protests in its own press and to a brochure it published.⁸¹ Nor was it able to make capital out of the dissatisfaction prevalent among many work forces⁸² at the time, as it had hardly any cadres in the firms.

7. The Subsidiary Organizations

Much of the KPS's influence was exercised through its numerous and - as the years went on - changing subsidiary organizations. Here are the names of a few: Red Aid (*Rote Hilfe Schweiz*; RHS), IWA, Workers' Defence (*Arbeiterschutzwehr*), Friends of the Soviet Union, the Swiss Anti-Fascist Alliance (*Schweizerische Antifaschistische Allianz*), the National Committee against War and Fascism (*Landeskomitee gegen Krieg und Faschismus*), the Marxist Student Groups (*Marxistische Studentengruppen*). Propagandistic and organizational means to enlarge Communist support were also the training courses known as MASCH and the organizations for independent social groups, such as those for young people and women.⁸³

⁷⁸ Cf. the Communist brochure *Die Blutnacht und der Monteurenstreik in Zürich Juni 1932*, ed. by the national leadership of the RGO (Zurich, 1932).

⁷⁹ Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund (ed.), *Die Wahrheit über die Taktik der Kommunisten. Dokumente über die "Einheitsfront"-Manöver* (Berne, 1936).

⁸⁰ See on this among others Geneviève Billeter, *Le pouvoir patronal. Les patrons des grandes entreprises suisses des métaux et des machines (1919-1939)* (Geneva, 1985), esp. pp. 89-106.

⁸¹ Commissioned by the party Karl Hofmaier wrote the brochure *Arbeitsfriede? Grundsätzliche Betrachtungen zum Abkommen in der schweizerischen Maschinen- und Metallindustrie und zur angestrebten "Neuorientierung" der schweizerischen Gewerkschaftsbewegung* (Basle, 1937).

⁸² Cf. Rudolf Jaun, *Management und Arbeiterschaft. Verwissenschaftlichung, Amerikanisierung und Rationalisierung der Arbeitsverhältnisse in der Schweiz 1873-1959* (Zurich, 1986), esp. pp. 272-284; and also Thomas Buomberger, *Kooperation statt Konfrontation. Die Winterthurer Arbeiterschaft während der Krisenzeit der 1930er Jahre* (Winterthur, 1985).

⁸³ An important role was also played by the publishing and printing industry, various party-owned bookshops and the press agency RUNA in Zurich.

a) Red Aid:

First let us consider the larger of the two humanitarian organizations which the party used to further its aims: the RHS. This was better known and worked with less interruption than the Swiss section of IWA. The latter was founded in 1922, but scarcely a year later its activities ground to a halt and could not get started again till 1930/1931. The RHS, founded in 1923, also had initial difficulties, but managed to consolidate its work after April 1926 when Willy Trostel was confirmed in his office. His salary as secretary was paid by the International Red Aid. He remained in office when war broke out. This gave the RHS amazing continuity of leadership when compared with the party itself or its other subsidiary organizations. The RHS tried to appear to be above party politics; so, incidentally, did the International Red Aid. As their first president they choose the "Independent" Dr Max Tobler, who, however, was married to the Communist medical practitioner Minna Tobler-Christinger and himself joined the KPS shortly before he died. Not exactly helpful to his aim was the requirement that every KPS member should join the RHS, though it is hardly likely that they all did. They did, however, guarantee the aid organization a minimum of activists and subscriptions. In 1927 75% of the members were Communists and 4% were Social Democrats. The rest did not belong to any party. It seems that three years later those without party loyalties accounted for somewhere between two thirds and one half of the membership - this varied from section to section - while the number of Social-Democrat members had become insignificant.

In 1927 an individual membership of 5,200 was claimed. On the other hand, counting only those who had paid their subscription reduced this number to 2,161.⁸⁴ In 1933 the Swiss section reported to Moscow that it had upwards of 4,100 individual members, leaving open whether or not they had all paid their subscription.⁸⁵ The weakness cited by the leadership were the "complete lack of a politically trained cadre" and the still unsatisfactory conditions in Italian- and French-speaking Switzerland, even though Edouard Scherrer and Jean Vincent had been responsible for efforts there since their appointments in 1931. Another reason for dissatisfaction was the small number of women members; 1930 figures claim only 7%, even though all the newspapers unanimously state that women were mainly responsible for all practical work.⁸⁶

From 1933 onwards one of the RHS's main tasks was supporting political refugees in every way. When the National Socialists took over power in the country on Switzerland's northern border, Switzerland became a refuge for numerous German Communists and other people the NS regime was persecuting for their politics. Since officialdom was very restrictive about accepting Communists, whom it regarded as troublemakers, many never registered but remained in hiding, looked after by sympathetic comrades.

According to its own accounts, confiscated in 1936 by the Federal Police,⁸⁷ in 1935 the RHS's income was some 45,000 francs and its expenditure about 48,500 francs. Individual and collective subscriptions accounted for 21,000 francs. 21,700 francs came from collections, selling badges, leaflets and periodicals, from donations and sponsorship. It claimed that it had to pay 3,700 francs to the International Aid Fund, 25,000 to support emigrants and the rest for legal aid, agitation and propaganda, office material and other administrative expenses.

"Emigrants" was the Comintern word for the political refugees. In contradiction to Red Aid's claim to stand above party politics, it supported only Communists.⁸⁸ Each received three francs a day, which had

⁸⁴ Federal Archives, Berne, J.II.94, vol. 3.

⁸⁵ Archives deposited with the Central Committee of the CPSU, Moscow, 495, 91, No. 190.

⁸⁶ Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, pp. 440-448.

⁸⁷ The accounts were confiscated together with other material in the possession of the International Red Aid instructor Gustav Gundelach, who was arrested during the police raid on 10 September 1936 (Federal Archives, Berne, E 4001 (B) 1970/187, vol. 3).

⁸⁸ An RHS report dated 10 April 1934 declared that it supported 86 people. Apart from two SAP members they are all listed as having been active in the KPD, Red Aid Germany, Red Front Combatants' Union or Communist Youth Organization (Archives deposited with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Moscow, 539, 3, No. 1314).

to pay for his food, accommodation, clothing and any doctor's fees. This was not much, considering the cost of living even then, but they also received some provisions, valued, according to RHS calculations in 1935, at 100,000 francs.

The task facing the RHS soon got to much for it. As early as July 1932 - at which time the RHS was dealing mainly with Italian Communists - Trostel wrote to the executive of International Red Aid asking if it would not be possible for a fairly large group of emigrants to go to the Soviet Union.⁸⁹ Up until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War when, it is said, several hundred Austrian, German and Italian Communists left Switzerland,⁹⁰ the secretary of the RHS continually put this request to Moscow. The answer was seldom positive for, contrary to its propaganda, the Soviet Union was not liberal about accepting refugees.⁹¹

The second reason why Communists living in Switzerland seldom registered with the police can be found in the orders of the Comintern: Swiss officialdom expected refugees to abstain from political activity, on pain of being expelled. The Comintern obliged them to engage in it. It gave them tasks and decided where they were to live. Only in cases of extreme danger were they allowed to go to the Soviet Union. Heinz Neumann was so favoured when he was about to be expelled by the Swiss authorities.

Starting in summer 1933, first in Basle and then in Zurich, the German emigrants built up a border base, which was swallowed up by the leadership section South as a result of the re-direction of the German Communist Party's party work after the "Brussels Conference" at the end of 1935. From Switzerland they kept South Germany supplied with Communist literature and maintained contact with Communist resistance groups in southern and south-western areas. They also had a great deal of say, because they had international money channels at their disposal.⁹²

b) The Youth Organization:

The Communist Youth Organization (*Kommunistischer Jugendverband*; KJV) was constituted before the KPS and had attracted 2,500 members. Membership decreased rapidly,⁹³ partly because of the 1921 economic crisis, partly because the organization was obviously losing its avant-garde position and developing into a receiver of party and Comintern orders and finally because on reaching the age of 25 members were required to take up full party membership instead. Four years after its foundation on 13 November 1920 it had only 369 members left, nor did it manage much to improve this figure up to the end of the thirties. In contrast to the Social Democrats' youth organization, which managed to overcome its status as a tiny group at the end of the twenties, the KJV remained a sect.

However, in the thirties the KJV did manage a little growth under the influence of political events at home and abroad. On 11 November 1932 a recruit school was sent into action against anti-fascist demonstra-

⁸⁹ The letter is in the Archives deposited with the Central Committee of the CPSU, Moscow, 539, 3, No. 1312.

⁹⁰ Hans Teubner's *Exilland Schweiz. Dokumentarischer Bericht über den Kampf emigrierter deutscher Kommunisten 1933-1945* (Frankfurt, 1975) is very informative on the facts about this, even though one has to make allowances for the way the author's party ideology colours his depiction.

⁹¹ See, e.g., *Rundschau*, 1936, No. 3. Nor were the few that it did accept safe from political persecution, as they had mistakenly thought. On the fate of the German Communists who emigrated to the Soviet Union, see Hermann Weber, "Weiße Flecken" in *der Geschichte. Die KPD-Opfer der Stalinschen Säuberungen und ihre Rehabilitierung* (2nd edition, Frankfurt, 1990). Some dozen Swiss Communists were also victims of the reign of terror in the Soviet Union.

⁹² See Teubner, *Exilland Schweiz*; Paul Meuter, "Ein Lebensbericht" (manuscript 1989 in the possession of Hermann Wichers, Basle, who is working on a dissertation entitled "Die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung im Exil 1933-1940").

⁹³ It was said to still have 1,750 members in 1921 (Bolliger, *Die Basler Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 275, note 57).

tors, an incident which ended in the death of thirteen people in the whole of Switzerland.⁹⁴ The KPS and the KJV seized this opportunity to introduce at last mobilization against "the danger of war", as demanded by the CI. As late as April 1932 the Swiss Communists were being reprimanded for their "passivity". They should not believe Switzerland was not participating in the international preparations for war, just because it was a small country. In the autumn of 1934, with the support of the few remaining Young Communists - the KPS launched a referendum against the new military decree extending the time to be spent at recruit school. The Young Socialists and some SPS sections helped collect signatures. As was only to be expected the electors rejected the Communist initiative, but only narrowly. The majority of the votes against the decree came from the rural, conservative areas, indicating that opposition to the innovation came mainly from the farmers, who did not want men to be missing from the farms for months, especially in the summer, when there was so much work to be done. The initiative had useful results for the party and its Youth Organization. Young Socialists and Communists had campaigned together in many places and this had brought the two groups closer together, bringing about signs of a developing co-operation.

Influenced by events in France, where Communists and Social Democrats co-operated in the popular front, the KJV made various representations to the Social-Democratic youth organization. During their sixth conference on 15 and 16 August 1936, a few months after the KPS party congress, they declared a merger to be their object. While the Young Catholics refused the invitation to co-operate, solidarity of action in favour of the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War strengthened the affinity between the two left-wing youth organizations.

Since Communist organizations had been outlawed in western Switzerland, under pressure from conservative circles in the cantons of Neuchâtel, Vaud and Geneva in 1937, Communists, especially in Geneva, had been joining the very left-wing Social-Democratic organizations under Léon Nicole. In addition to this, in 1938 and 1939 some leading members of the Social-Democratic youth organization quietly joined the KJV or declared their sympathy for it, after German Communist emigrants had given them training courses. At Zurich University the various left-wing student groups had come closer together. As a result, in November 1939 there was a merger between Zurich's Communist and Social-Democratic youth organizations and Socialist students. This led to a breach with the SPS some months later.⁹⁵

After the German defeat in Stalingrad, the turning point of the war, members of the new Socialist youth organization, which was de facto under Communist control, were to play an important role as a reservoir from which forces could be recruited to found a new Communist party, the PdA.

c) Women's groups:

Quite soon after the First World War a majority within the SPS women's groups was in favour of the new International, as was also the case in the Social-Democratic youth organization. Once again the wartime events had acted as a catalyst. Pacifism and anti-militarism were combined with protests against increasing food prices and low wages for women. The number of those joining a union shot up. At its lowest point in 1915 the SGB had only 5,519 women members (8.5%) whereas by 1919 this had increased to 43,903 (19.6%). The following years of crisis saw many women leaving their union again. Much the same thing happened to the KPS. In 1921, the year it was founded, there were one thousand women among the 6,500 members. Considered internationally this was a respectable percentage, but by 1927 it had sunk from 15.4% to 12.5%. Of the remaining 3,200 members only 350 were women. Admittedly there were considerable local differences. The Geneva section, said to consist initially of 300 members, numbered only five women. Although we do not have contemporary figures for other towns broken down according to sex, there can be no doubt that they had more women members than did the city on the Rhône.⁹⁶ In Basle party statistics for

⁹⁴ On this army action, which had long-lasting effects, see Spielmann, *L'aventure socialiste genevoise 1930-1936*, pp. 167-315, and the book based on a series of well-researched documentary films by the western Swiss television: Claude Torracinta and Bernard Mermod, *Genève 1930-1939. Le temps des passions* (Geneva, 1978).

⁹⁵ See Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Zurich, Ar. 27.80.1. See also Teubner, *Exilland Schweiz*, p. 61, and *Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, V.

⁹⁶ Stettler, *Die Kommunistische Partei der Schweiz*, pp. 489/490.

1934 show 113 women among the 685 members, ten times as many as in Geneva.⁹⁷ In 1935 the party was still registering 7% women members.⁹⁸

The most important women Communist leaders in the founding years⁹⁹ came from Zurich and Basle, where there had previously also been a strong Social-Democratic women's group. In Zurich mention must be made of the well-known Rosa Bloch, who died after an operation in 1922, of Mentona Moser, Swiss social work pioneer and rich heiress, who presented the Soviet Union with a children's home,¹⁰⁰ and of the medical practitioner Minna Tobler-Christinger, who worked for better health care for underprivileged women. In Basle, of Rosa Grimm, the former wife of the leader of Berne's Social-Democratic Party, Robert Grimm, and of Marie Dübi, the only one who did not come from a middle-class background and, significantly, was still in a leading position in KPS women's organizations in the thirties.

There were even fewer women in leading positions than there were at the basis. Up until 1927, when the party passed "bolshevist" statutes, the Women's Agitation Commission (*Frauenagitationskommission*) was officially represented on the Central Committee. For some time there was one other woman among the nine to twelve Committee members. Among the forty or so members of the Central Committee introduced in 1927 as the new leadership structure, it is possible to make out two to five women at most. On the other hand, both Politburo and Secretariat remained purely male preserves.

The KPS did not manage to publish a women's paper in western Switzerland until the second half of the thirties. Up till then the only publication for women was the German-language *Die Arbeitende Frau* (The Working Woman), which, in the twenties, appeared as a fortnightly supplement. It had less than a dozen pages and dealt with many subjects, mainly, of course, with questions of female employment, but also with problems concerning housewives and mothers. The paper also dealt with questions of internal and external politics, even though Swiss women did not have the vote at that time, a fact which drew constant adverse criticism from women Communists. The party started several initiatives at a local level, but like all those started by other political forces - meaning primarily the SPS and the women's organizations which the Communists called middle-class - they had little chance of success until the late fifties.¹⁰¹ Other concerns of the Communists women's groups expressed in *Die Arbeitende Frau* were better maternity protection and the provision of child care. The women reader was presented with much positive material about conditions for women and children in the Soviet Union, which the women editors compared favourably with those existing in capitalist countries. There was no criticism of the Soviet Union until 1936, when it decided to reintroduce legal sanctions against abortion. Swiss women Communists experienced the Soviet decision as doubly negative. For one thing it frustrated one of their principal aims, and one for which they had always held up the Soviet Union as an example. For another thing the timing could hardly have been worse: two years before the vote on the Swiss Criminal Code.¹⁰² In the parliamentary and public debate which had

⁹⁷ Federal Archives, Berne, E 4320 (B) 1, vol. 13.

⁹⁸ Figures on the Communist Party membership in Switzerland on 10.12.1936, in: Archives deposited with the Central Committee of the CPSU, Moscow, 495, 12, No. 75.

⁹⁹ On the difficulties peculiar to their sex faced then by politically active women, see Brigitte Studer, "Rosa Grimm (1875-1955): Als Frau in der Politik und Arbeiterbewegung. Die Grenzen des weiblichen Geschlechts", in Arbeitsgruppe Frauengeschichte Basel (ed.), *Auf den Spuren weiblicher Vergangenheit* (2). *Beiträge der 4. Schweizerischen Historikerinnentagung* (Zurich, 1988), pp. 163-182.

¹⁰⁰ Her memoirs appeared not only in a GDR publishing house, in which country she spent her old age, but also in a Swiss one: Mentona Moser, *Unter den Dächern von Morcote. Meine Lebensgeschichte*, with an epilogue by Ilse Schiel (Berlin, 1985), and *Ich habe gelebt*, with an epilogue by Roger N. Balsiger (Zurich, 1986).

¹⁰¹ The first canton to give women active and passive voting rights were Geneva, on 1 February 1959, and Neuchâtel, on 27 September 1959. Not until 7 February 1971 were all Swiss women given the suffrage.

¹⁰² This, the first Criminal Code for all of Switzerland, was passed by parliament in 1937 and accepted by a confederate ballot in the following year. It came into force in 1942. The KPS had also decreed acceptance.

been going on since 1921 the KPS had again and again opposed the introduction of Federal penalties in this matter.

Protests against the Soviet measure did not appear in *Die Arbeitende Frau*, as by then it had already folded. The two new periodicals which replaced it from the end of 1936 onwards, *Frauenwelt* (Women's World) and *Femmes en Suisse romande* (Women in Romanic Switzerland), looked very different. They had more illustrations, even introduced photographs, the general make-up was less stiff and modern typefaces were used. Style and content had also changed.

8. KPS Language and Outward Appearance

The year 1936 did not only mark a change in party policy. Far more remarkable to people living at that time were the party's different way of expressing itself and the new impression the KPS tried to make on the public. Not that this was the first break in continuity. Bolshevization and the change in course to the ultra-left line after the Sixth World Congress had gradually introduced new expressions borrowed from Russian or German and formerly unknown in Switzerland. No other party had the "cell principle", the "Politburo" or an "Org Department". Older expressions, drawn from the linguistic systems or reference of the various groups of the Swiss workers' movement, were heard less and less. However, it is clear that regional linguistic and cultural forms of expression, which have deep roots in Switzerland, were not fully replaced by verbal homogeneity, as a differentiating examination will surely confirm.

In contrast to the former semantic-organizational innovations, which always moved yet another step away from the country's usual expression, once the "popular front tactics" had been officially adopted there was an effort to be more integrative and to take account of usual Helvetic political formulation and national traditions. Efforts were made to avoid the vocabulary of class struggle and the words borrowed from Russo-Soviet party jargon. "Proletarian" was replaced by "Worker", the "People" entered the scene and there was even room for William Tell. When the KPS began to claim the Swiss National Day for itself and those it called true patriots, and when astonished readers were told that there was originally no cross on the Swiss flag, it was just red, the other political parties reacted with ridicule and scorn but also with fury and indignation.

Since everyone considered that the KPS was completely under Moscow's thumb, its late attempts to become integrated, at a time when tolerance could no longer be expected and the party was obviously about to be outlawed, were not very convincing. At best this was regarded as an additional tactical manoeuvre to ensure political survival. The KPS's system of relationships had two anchors - on one side the Soviet Union and the CI, on the other, Switzerland's federal political system, based on consensus. The party's loyalties appeared unevenly distributed between them. How right people were to believe this became obvious in 1939/1940, when the Swiss Communists did yet another smart about turn in order to support the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Even so, the KPS could not afford entirely to neglect the Swiss political system, since it sought to create and keep a place for itself there. Thus many of its actions were a compromise between the demands of the Comintern or of the Soviet exemplars it strove to copy, and the sensibilities of the Swiss workers, which had to be taken into account. The following example clearly demonstrates their dilemma; it concerns the personality cult. As Max Wullschleger writes in his memoirs: "The KPS only hesitantly and unwillingly supported the cult surrounding the person of Stalin, which grew stronger and stronger in the thirties. They realized it was unlikely to make a favourable impression on the sober, critical Swiss workers. The party leadership regarded this cult as a concession to the Byzantine customs still prevailing in Russia."¹⁰³

Whether the party wanted to or not it had to make the "concession" of celebrating Stalin's birthday with a full page in the party press every year. However, in November 1936 it attempted to congratulate its own chairman. The honour was intended for Jules Humbert-Droz, since the CI's Seventh Congress again a member of the international cadres and officially and publicly recalled to his position at the head of the Swiss section on the occasion of the sixth KPS party congress. A little brochure and a public event were intended to mark the "Silver Jubilee" of his political activity in the workers' movement. But the whole occasion, which in any case took place in remote La Chaux-de-Fonds, had a very low profile. Not even the other party officials seem to have taken much notice of it. writing to Humbert-Droz about this and that Willy

¹⁰³ Wullschleger, *Vom Revoluzzer zum Regierungsrat*, p. 75.

Trostel added laconically at the end of his letter, "Congratulations on your working quarter-century. I've already passed mine."

9. Conclusions

The Comintern had existed for over twenty years when it was dissolved in May 1943. Almost simultaneously the KPS, outlawed in the whole of Switzerland, merged with the extreme left-wing *Fédération socialiste suisse* under Léon Nicole, which the Communists in Western Switzerland had joined when war broke out. However, the further development of the PdA, which was newly founded in 1944, soon showed how slight was the influence of the former leading left-wing Socialists from Geneva. All too soon they were pushed out by the cadre schooled in the Comintern's Stalinist system.

Outside observers can clearly see that in the postwar period Communist patterns of behaviour dominated those of all other left-wing movements which had collected in the PdA. Nowadays this can be seen as the final result of a long process. The history of the KPS's twenty-two years of existence is one of progressive attempts to reconcile two systems of relationship, which from the beginning were unequally weighted. The national context cannot be ignored in researching the KPS, but to limit oneself to this would inevitably produce a one-sided, even crooked, perspective.

The second pole of the Communists' system of relationship was Lenin's version of Bolshevism. Swiss Communists, like other sections of the Third International, accepted it voluntarily. The ties affecting politics, organization and personnel which ensued¹⁰⁴ were so forceful that they progressively suffocated the Communist Party's initial independence. The power to take autonomous decisions was lost step by step, through the Comintern's Bolshevization, Russification and Stalinization. Even though the final "norming" of the KPS happened relatively late, the Swiss party in no way escaped the phenomenon.

Translated by Delia Grözinger

¹⁰⁴ The nature of these ties is described in my essay "Le Parti communiste suisse et l'Internationale, 1931-1943. Quelques remarques quant à la nature de leurs relations". It will be published soon in: *Actes du colloque pour le Centenaire de Jules Humbert-Droz, La Chaux-de-Fonds*.

Table 1: KPS Membership 1921-1940

1921: 6,356 members
1922: 5,400
1923: 4,500-4,800
1924: 6,300
1925: 4,000
1926: 4,000
1927: 3,500
1931: 2,200
1932: 1,900
1933: 1,700
1934: 1,650
1935: 1,900
1936: 1,800-2,300 ¹⁰⁵
1937: 2,200 or according to another, more likely source: 1,200
1938: a few hundred
1940: 350 (?)

Table 3: The KPS Electorate in the Interwar Period on the Occasion of the National Council Elections

Year	Percentage	No. of electors	No. of seats	
1922	1,8	13,441		2
1925	2,0	14,837		3
1928	1,8	14,818		2
1931	1,5	12,778		2
1935	1,4	12,569		2
1939	_.106	7,964		-

Source: *Statistische Jahrbücher der Schweiz* (Berne, 1923-1940).

¹⁰⁵ On the occasion of its Sixth Congress, end of May/beginning of June 1936, the party claimed it had 1,800 members. By the end of the year it was claiming 2,300.

¹⁰⁶ Less than one percent.

Table 2: Communist Press - Circulation

Year	Total circulation	Basler Vorwärts	Kämpfer ¹	Schaffhauser Arbztg.	Drapeau Rouge ³	Falce e Martello ⁴	Party members
1922	14,000	5,300	3,900	2,400	1,350	1,000	5,300
1925	12,200	5,000	3,000	2,200	1,000	1,000	4,000
1928	11,200	4,800	2,600	2,200	800	1,000	3,000
1931	7,850	3,600	2,450	2	800	632	2,200
1932	-	3,480	2,400	-	-	-	1,900
1933	10,100	3,180	2,700	-	-	1,700	1,700
1936	10,900	3,500	2,200	-	2,700	1,600	2,300
1937	-	6,500	-	-	2,800	-	2,200 ⁵
1940	-	-	-	-	-	-	350

1. As of 1936 the *Basler Vorwärts* and the *Kämpfer* merged to the *Freiheit*.

2. Starting on 15 October 1930 the *Schaffhauser Arbeiterzeitung* appeared as the official organ of the KPO. The actual constituent assembly of the KPO took place on 23 October.

3. As of 1934 *Le Drapeau Rouge* appeared under the title *La Lutte*.

4. As of 1936 the *Falce e Martello* was re-named *Il Popolo*.

5. Other sources cite a membership of 1,200 for 1937.