

Proclamation by the Central Committee of the German Communist Party (June 11, 1945)

Abstract

In the Soviet occupation zone, “anti-Fascist” parties and unions were permitted again as early as June 10, 1945. The revival of the German Communist Party [*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, or KPD] was shaped in crucial ways by a group of pro-Soviet politicians under the leadership of Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht. The members of this group had returned to Germany from their Moscow exile at the beginning of May. The appeal they issued on June 11, 1945, was deliberately moderate. It acknowledged the political mistakes it had made in the past, emphatically opposed a transfer of the Soviet system to Germany, and advocated the introduction of a Western-style parliamentary democracy. The future shape of the economic system was described in decisively moderate language in passages envisaging expropriations and nationalization on a very limited scale. This KPD appeal was noticeably different from the class warfare slogans of the 1920s and early 1930s. It tied in with the concept of the People’s Front [*Volksfront*], the broad anti-fascist coalition proclaimed by the Communist International in 1935, and it also reflected the experience of working together with military officers who were critical of the Nazis in the “National Committee Free Germany” during World War II.

Source

Working People in the City and Countryside!
Men and Women!
German Youth!

Wherever we look, we see ruins, rubble, and ashes. Our cities are destroyed; immense, once- fertile regions are desolate and deserted. The economy is in shambles and utterly paralyzed. Millions upon millions of people have been devoured by a war that was caused by the Hitler regime. Millions have been cast into extreme hardship and abject misery. A catastrophe of unimaginable proportions has befallen Germany, and the specter of homelessness, pestilence, unemployment, and hunger peers out at us from the ruins.

And who is to blame for this?

The blame and guilt rest with those unscrupulous exploiters and criminals who are responsible for the war. They are Hitler and Göring, Himmler and Goebbels, the active followers and supporters of the Nazi party. They are the champions of reactionary militarism, the likes of Keitel, Jodl, and associates. They are the imperialistic sponsors of the Nazi party, the gentlemen of the large banks and concerns, Krupp and Röchling, Poensgen, and Siemens.

Their guilt is clear. It was openly and publicly admitted by the Nazi leaders themselves when they stood at the height of their military triumphs, when victory and spoils seemed certain.

All of you, men and women of the working people, soldiers and officers, can still hear the words ringing in your ears: “This is the purpose of the war for us! We are not fighting for ideals. We are fighting for the Ukrainian wheat fields, for Caucasian crude oil, for the treasures of the world. We want to make a killing!”

For this they gambled away the national existence of our people. Hitler’s total war – this was the most unjust, the most savage, the most criminal war of plunder of all times!

The Hitler regime has proven the ruin of Germany, for with its policy of aggression and violence, plundering, war, and genocide, Hitler has brought destruction unto our people and has burdened it with heavy guilt and responsibility in the eyes of the civilized world.

The violent annexation of Austria was a crime, as was the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The conquest and oppression of Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France, Yugoslavia, and Greece was also a crime. The “Coventrization” and wiping out of English cities was one crime that came back home to haunt us with a vengeance. Hitler’s greatest and most fateful war crime, however, was the perfidious, surprise attack on the Soviet Union. This was a breach of our promise to the Soviet Union, which never wanted a war with Germany and which had actually demonstrated its honest feelings of friendship toward the German people many times since 1917. German workers! Could there have been a more heinous crime than this war against the Soviet Union? And monstrous are the atrocities committed by Hitler’s bandits in foreign countries. The blood of many million murdered children, women, and old people is on the hands of those Germans who followed Hitler. In the death camps, human beings were annihilated day after day, factory-like, in gas chambers and crematoria. Burned alive, buried alive, chopped into pieces alive – this was how the Nazi bandits raged! Millions of prisoners of war and foreign workers who were carted off to Germany were worked to death, died of hunger, cold, and epidemics.

These unprecedented crimes, this horrible, ghastly mass murder that was systematically carried out by Hitler’s Germany has left the world shocked and at the same time full of hatred toward Germany. If “an eye for an eye” had been the rule, then what would have happened to you, German people?

Fortunately, the cause of justice, freedom, and progress stood on the side of the United Nations, with the Soviet Union, England, and the United States at the head. Through their sacrifices, the Red Army and the armies of the Allies saved the cause of humanity from Hitler’s barbarism. They shattered Hitler’s armies, demolished Hitler’s state, and thereby also led you, the working German population, out of the chains of Hitler’s slavery and into peace and liberation.

Every German must burn with shame all the more in recognizing that the German people share a significant part of the guilt and responsibility for the war and its consequences. It is not only Hitler who is guilty of crimes against humanity! The guilt is shared by the ten million Germans who voted for him in free elections in 1932, although we Communists warned, “Voting for Hitler means voting for war!” It is further shared by all those German men and women who passively watched as Hitler usurped power, as he broke up all the democratic organizations – especially working-class organizations – and had the best Germans imprisoned, tortured, and beheaded. Guilt is borne by all those Germans who saw “Germany’s greatness” in the armaments program, who saw the nation’s only true salvation in savage militarism, in marching and military drills. It was our misfortune that millions upon millions of Germans were seduced by Nazi demagogy, that the toxins of that beastly racial doctrine, of the “fight for living space” [*Lebensraum*], could poison the organism of the people. It was our misfortune that broad segments of our population lost their most basic sense of decency and justice and followed Hitler when he promised them a well-laid lunch and dinner table at the expense of other peoples, through robbery and war.

Thus the German people became the tool of Hitler and his imperialistic sponsors. German workers! German working-class youth! German working people!

Hitler would never have been able to seize power, consolidate it, and wage his criminal war against the will of a unified people willing to fight. We German Communists declare that we, too, feel responsible. For despite the bloody sacrifices of our best fighters – and because of a series of failures – we were unable to forge an anti-fascist unity between the worker, the farmer, and the intelligentsia against all opposition, to gather the strength of the working population to overthrow Hitler, to successfully lead the working population into battle, and to avoid that very situation in which the German people failed historically.

Today, at the end of the “Third Reich,” after all the suffering and misfortune, all the shame and disgrace, after the darkest era in German history, the Social Democratic German worker will agree with us that the fascist plague was only able to spread through Germany because in 1918 those who were responsible (for the war), and those who had committed war crimes, went unpunished, because the struggle for a genuine democracy was not waged, because the Weimar Republic gave free rein to reactionary forces, because the anti-Soviet agitation of a few democratic leaders paved the way for Hitler, and because the rejection of a unified anti-fascist front paralyzed the people.

Therefore we demand: Let us not repeat the mistakes of 1918! No more driving a wedge into the working population! No leniency for Nazism and reactionary forces! Never again shall there be agitation and hostility toward the Soviet Union, for where such agitation appears, imperialistic reaction rears its head!

The German Communist Party was and is the party of the resolute struggle against militarism, imperialism, and imperialistic wars. The party has never deviated from this path. The party has always kept pure the banner of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Thälmann, and Jonny Schehr. We Communists look back with pride on these struggles, which claimed the lives of our best and most faithful comrades. We warned early on and insistently against the imperialistic path, warned that the path of Hitler Fascism would inevitably lead Germany into catastrophe.

In January 1933, the Communist Party called for a united general strike to prevent Hitler from taking power. In June 1933, we warned, “War is imminent! Hitler is leading Germany into catastrophe!” In January 1939, the Bern conference of the KPD issued a call to the German people: “In both east and west, the Hitler regime is creating a situation in which the German people could be pushed into the catastrophe of war overnight – a war against the mighty front consisting of all nations threatened and attacked by Hitler and the war axis.” In October 1941, when Hitler boastfully proclaimed that the Soviet Union had been decisively defeated and would never rise up again, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued an appeal to the German people and the German army: “The German people have no chance in this war. Hitler’s defeat is inevitable. The only salvation for the German people lies in putting an end to this war. But in order to put an end to this war, Hitler must be overthrown. And woe to our people if it ties its fate to Hitler to the very end!”

The task now is to learn the lessons of the past, thoroughly and forever. We must break completely new ground! Every German must become aware that the path our people took previously was a false path, the wrong track, one that led to guilt and shame, to war and ruin. Not only the rubble of destroyed cities, but also the reactionary rubble of the past must be thoroughly cleared away. May the rebuilding of Germany take place on a solid foundation, so that a third instance of the catastrophic policy of imperialism will become impossible. With the destruction of Hitlerism, it is also important to complete the democratization of Germany, that bourgeois-democratic transition that began in 1848, to completely remove the last vestiges of feudalism and of reactionary, old-Prussian militarism, with all its economic and political offshoots. We are of the opinion that forcing the Soviet system onto Germany would be the false path, for this path does not suit the present conditions of German development. Rather, we are of the opinion that the most compelling interests of the German people in the present situation call for Germany to take a different path, the path of establishing an anti-fascist, democratic regime, a parliamentary, democratic republic with all the democratic rights and liberties for the people. At this present historic transition, we Communists call for all working people, for all democratic and progressive forces to join together to fight for the democratic renewal of Germany, for the rebirth of our country!

Presently, the most pressing and immediate tasks on this path are:

1. The complete elimination of all vestiges of the Hitler regime and of Hitler’s party; securing the help of all honest Germans in tracking down Nazi leaders, Gestapo agents, and SS bandits in hiding. The complete purging of active Nazis from all public offices. In addition to the punishment of major war

criminals, who will stand trial before the courts of the United Nations, the harshest punishment by German courts of all those Nazis who are guilty of crimes and of participating in Hitler's betrayal of the German people. The swiftest and toughest measures against all attempts to continue pursuing criminal and Nazi activity illegally, against all attempts to interfere with the establishment of peace and order and a normal life for the population.

2. The fight against hunger, unemployment, and homelessness. All-around active support for the organs of self-government in their efforts to quickly secure normalcy in day-to-day life and to get manufacturing up and running again. The completely unhindered development of free trade and private enterprise on the basis of private property. Effective measures to rebuild destroyed schools, living quarters, and workplaces. Strict economy in (government) administration and in all public expenditures. The restructuring of the tax system in accordance with the basic principles of a progressive income tax. Guaranteeing the complete harvest of all crops by providing laborers to farmers. The fair and just allocation of food and key consumables; a vigorous fight against speculation.

3. The establishment of democratic rights and liberties for our people. The legalization of free trade unions for blue-collar workers [*Arbeiter*], white-collar workers [*Angestellte*], and civil servants, and of anti-fascist democratic parties. The reconstruction of the court system in accordance with our people's new democratic way of life. The equality of all citizens before the law regardless of race, and the harshest punishment for all expressions of racial hatred. The purging of all fascist and reactionary refuse from the entire educational system. The fostering of a genuinely democratic, progressive, and liberal spirit in all schools and educational institutions. Systematic education about the barbaric character of Nazi racial theory, the mendacity of the "doctrine of living space," and the catastrophic consequences of Hitler's policies for the German people. Freedom of scientific research and artistic expression.

4. The resurrection of democratic organs of self-government in communities and districts as well as in provincial and state administrations and in their corresponding parliaments [*Landtage*].

5. The protection of workers against arbitrary measures by employers and against excessive exploitation. The free democratic election of employee representatives for all blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, and civil servants in all factories, offices, and public administrations. Agreed regulation of wage and working conditions. Public assistance for the victims of fascist terror, for orphans, invalids, and the sick. Special protection for mothers.

6. The expropriation of all property belonging to Nazi bigwigs [*Nazibonzen*] and war criminals. The transfer of this property into the hands of the people for use by communal or provincial organs of self-government.

7. The liquidation of the large landholdings and large estates of the Junker, counts, and princes; the transfer of all land and property as well as all livestock and non-living inventory to the provincial or state administrations for allocation to farmers who were ruined by this war and left with nothing. These measures, of course, will in no way affect the property and the economic enterprise of big farmers.

8. The transfer of all enterprises that provide essential public needs (transportation, water, gas, electricity, etc.), as well as all enterprises abandoned by their owners, to the organs of self-government of the communities, provinces or states.

9. Peaceful and neighborly coexistence with other nations. A decisive break with the policy of aggression and violence toward other peoples, the politics of conquest and plunder.

10. Acknowledgement of the duty we have to repair the damage done to other nations as a result of Hitler's aggression. Fair allocation of the associated burdens among the various segments of the population in accordance with the principle that the wealthy must carry a heavier burden.

Workers in the city and countryside! These are the most important, the most pressing tasks for the rebuilding of Germany, for the rebirth of our people. These tasks can only be carried out through the firm unity of all anti-fascist, democratic, and progressive forces.

Having realized the magnitude of the catastrophe and the disastrous consequences of their former division in the face of Nazism and reaction, the people in cities and the countryside increasingly yearn for unity. In accordance with the will of the people, the dividers and saboteurs of unity must not be allowed to continue their treacherous work. In order to completely liquidate Nazism and construct a new democratic Germany, we must create a strong unity among democrats!

The Central Committee of the Communist Party believes that this action program can serve as the basis for the creation of a block of anti-fascist democratic parties (the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Center Party, and others). We believe that such a block can provide a solid foundation for efforts to completely eliminate the last vestiges of the Hitler regime and to build up a democratic regime.

A new page has been turned in the history of the German people. New insights are forcing their way forward from the lessons of Germany's collapse.

We declare: firm unity, a resolute struggle, and a determined effort guarantee that our just cause will be successful! Let us march forward, holding our heads high! Let us begin the task with all our strength! For then, out of destitution and death, out of ruins and disgrace, freedom for our people and a new life of dignity will arise!

Source: Aufruf des Zentralkomitees vom 11. June 1945, reprinted in Ossip Kurt Flechtheim, *Die Parteien der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Hamburg, 1973, pp. 292–99.

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