

## Poster: Social Democracy or Communist Party? (1921)

### Abstract

This 1921 poster called on workers to join the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) by explicitly contrasting it with the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), which was Germany's largest political party and, like the KPD, also drew most of its support from the working classes. The poster illustrates not only the political rivalry between the two parties, but also the bitterness that had grown between them during the early years of the Weimar Republic. This reflected tactical and policy differences—a reformist approach from the SPD, a revolutionary one from the KPD— and a sense of betrayal and mistrust on both sides that had already emerged in 1918/1919.

The left panel depicts a vote for the SPD as leading “to misery,” and it showed an SPD leader in the foreground shaking hands with representatives of the capitalist and authoritarian order. The left panel's background shows police and military suppressing a workers' protest by force, a scene designed to evoke recent memories of such clashes in the streets of Berlin, Munich, the Ruhr region, and elsewhere in 1919 and 1920. The right panel, by contrast, shows workers empowered by the KPD who had just struck down a capitalist plutocrat, under a sign that read, “Through Struggle to Victory!” The word “Kampf” appeared again at the bottom of the poster, in the militant imperative “Arm yourself for the fight!”

The Berlin-born artist, Karl Holtz (1899–1978), was only 22 years old at the time he made this poster. During the Weimar Republic, his work appeared not only in Communist publications, such as *Rote Fahne* and the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, but also in the USPD publication *Die Freiheit* and the satirical magazine *Der wahre Jacob*, which supported the SPD, as well as in a number of other venues.

### Source



Source: KPD Poster, 1921. Artist: Karl Holtz. Deutsches Historisches Museum Inv.-Nr.: P 90/10643.

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