

Wilhelm Pieck

1876 – 1960



www.MinisterieVanPropaganda.org



Pieck was a founding member of the Communist Party of Germany. After Hitler came to power Pieck went to the USSR and was active in the Comintern. After WWII he returned to Germany where he became president of the German Democratic Republic.

Works:

November 1921: Enter the Communist Party!

July 1936: Ernst Thaelmann: Fifty Years Old

1939: At Lenin's Funeral

Communist Recruiting Week. Enter the Communist Party! (1 November 1921)

The cleansing of its membership which the Russian Communist Party has undertaken makes it appear as if Levi and his followers were right when they charged that the Communist International laid more emphasis on the formation of a small but unblemished party, a sect, than on the building of mass parties. And an article by comrade Lenin in Pravda on the cleansing of the party, which was reprinted in the German party press, could easily be used to support this statement, when the difference between the Russian Communist Party and the communist parties of other countries is not pointed out.

The Russian Communist Party has become a government party and it is therefore only too natural that a large number of persons have contrived to enter its ranks who thought that they could thereby create "careers" or obtain other advantages as Soviet officials. The same experience befell the German Social Democracy, when, through the November revolution, it became a governing party. Of course it undertook no party-cleansing, and now its leaders rely in no small degree upon the support of this infiltration from the petty-bourgeois camp. If the Russian Communist Party is now undertaking a cleansing of its ranks, it does so conscious of the fact that, in spite of the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the class struggle in Russia has not yet been decided, and that therefore the advance-guard of the revolutionary struggle, united in the party, must be kept free of any influence hostile to this struggle. That is all the more necessary since in Russia the non-Bolshevik elements have forced their way into

the communist party and are attempting, by referring to the Russian economic crisis, to incite the workers against the party leadership and thereby against the Russian government. They are seeking to achieve this by apparently placing themselves upon the intellectual level of the communist worker and demanding complete democracy within the party, that is, in order to carry through their carefully deliberated plans. In Russia, under the Bolshevik government, membership in the communist party does not imply political persecution, but especial confidence, does not mean exclusion from all governmental functions, but appointment to positions of the greatest responsibility. Therefore the cleansing of the Russian party does not mean a weakening, but rather a strengthening of the worker's government, for the government's policy is decisively influenced by the party. If the petty-bourgeois and non-bolshevik elements should obtain the upper hand in the party, this would soon be noticed in the change in the policy of the government, and its fighting strength against all internal and foreign enemies of the Russian workers' and peasants' state would be seriously impaired.

The conditions in other countries where capitalism and the bourgeoisie rule unchecked are rather different. There the communist parties are the organizations in which the workers of town and country who desire the overthrow of this rule and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship are united. In these countries membership in the communist party implies persecution and oppression by the bourgeoisie, means the struggle for liberation from capitalist rule and exploitation and the readiness to make any and all sacrifices demanded by the fight. The greater the membership of the communist party, the stronger the revolutionary advance guard, which leads the working class in its battles, will be. Therefore the communist parties in the capitalist countries can and must include a much greater percentage of the working-class than the Russian Communist Party. They are protected against the attempts of career seekers or petty-bourgeois elements to crowd into their ranks. Only working men, conscious of their class interests, will enter the party. They will comparatively easily comprehend the ideas of Communism and revolutionary tactics and will in a short while become excellent fighters. It is therefore not correct to set up difficult requirements for workers' entrance into the communist party, in the sense that entrance is made dependent upon the possession of a certain amount of communist preparatory knowledge. It is the task of the party to impart political and scientific knowledge to the workers by enabling them to comprehend the communist conception and tactics. In order to do this the party must take the necessary steps therefor, and it will be able to carry on this education better and more quickly within its ranks than without. Of course the party must be kept clean of impure elements, but, in the majority of cases, these find their way into the party in spite of all preventative measures. It would be therefore unwise in create such difficult entrance conditions.

If the limits of the membership of the party are to be made so extensive, there follows therefrom of course the necessity of the education of a body of capable, trustworthy functionaries who are to have the leadership of the party in their hands, by influencing the resolutions of the party in a decisive manner. Only enlightened members are to be admitted to this corps. The greatest demands in the way of readiness for sacrifice and communist education are to be made of them and they must stand in the forefront of the conflicts of the working class. Furthermore, especial attention must be paid to the maintenance of the most rigid discipline within the party. According to experience, however, breaches of discipline occur less often among the workers than among the comrades who are no longer active as workers in the factories and have attained a position of leadership in the party. Even if it is not always necessary to proceed against such violators of discipline with exclusion from the party, nevertheless the especially strict observance of party discipline must be demanded from such comrades.

When the communist parties increase their membership, they will have members in every factory, in every workers' organization, in every village and city borough, who will have to ensure the spreading of our ideas there and thus strengthen the influence of the party in the masses. That is urgently necessary, because the intensification of the political and economic crisis is driving the working class to struggles in which the communist party must have the leadership.

Therefore the international Communist Recruiting Week must be made a great campaign for the winning of party-members and subscribers to the party press. The slogan, "Approach to the masses" also means "Into the Communist Party". It means the party's taking root in the great working masses. Only through the Communist Party will the proletariat be able to vanquish the bourgeoisie.

Ernst Thaelmann: Fifty Years Old

Ernst Thaelmann will be fifty years old on the sixteen of April. There is hardly a corner of the world where the name of the imprisoned leader of the Communist Party of Germany is not uttered with warmth and emotion by all workers and friends of peace and liberty and where his release is not insistently demanded. Ernst Thaelmann, whom the bloodthirsty hangmen of the German proletariat have already kept in prison for three years, whom they are torturing and ill-treating, has become the symbol of the struggle against war and Fascism, the struggle for Socialism, all over the world.

It was a long journey, rich in sacrifice and struggle, that the Hamburg docker, Ernst Thaelmann, had to make before he grew to be the great leader of the

producing masses of Germany and one of the most popular leaders of the Communist International.

As the son of a class-conscious worker organised in the Social-Democratic Party, Ernst Thaelmann came into the Socialist movement in his early youth. He was hardly sixteen years old when he joined the Social-Democratic Party. The indigent circumstances of a proletarian family drove him very early into the drudgery of capitalist exploitation. These circumstances prevented him from following the well-meant advice of his teachers that this talented working-class boy should continue his education.

Ernst Thaelmann began his independent proletarian existence as a porter in the Hamburg docks. He made a trip to America as a coal trimmer, and worked as a daily laborer on American farms. Thus the international character of capitalist exploitation was hammered into him in early youth – but at the same time it taught him militant life of the international working class. Arriving back in Hamburg, he devoted his whole energy and all his spare time to work in party and trade union. After a heavy day's work and an evening spent in the service of the organisation, he voraciously read and studied the Socialist literature. At first his activities were mainly in the trade union field. Very soon his work for the organisation, his personal courage, his self-sacrifice and the successful way in which he stood up for the workers' demands, won him the confidence of the workers. They elected him to the local executive of their trade union, they sent him four times as delegate to the congress of the Transport Workers' Union. And already in those days Ernst Thaelmann began his open and determined fight against opportunism.

In Hamburg, Germany's largest city serving international trade, all the shady sides of the capitalist system were in evidence in their most blatant forms. Besides the strata of labor aristocrats corrupted by colonial surplus profits, it was the circumstance that Hamburg was the seat of a number of central trade union and co-operative institutions with their large bureaucratic apparatus which, more than anything, supplied a firm foundation for opportunism. Among other things it is also noteworthy that after the Revolution of 1918 these opportunist elements in Hamburg became the representatives of the most reactionary and right-wing opinions in Social Democracy. In order to indicate their attitude, it is enough to mention that it was one of the leaders of reactionary Hamburg Social-Democracy (Sarendorff) who replied to the united front proposals of the Communists before Hitler's assumption to power with the provocative statement that he would ten times rather go with the bourgeoisie than once with the Communists.

In the struggle with these reactionary elements in the working-class movement Ernst Thaelmann became an uncompromising fighter for revolutionary Marxism.

When the slaughter of the nations began, and opportunism went over with banners flying to the camp of chauvinism and imperialism, the revolutionary worker, Ernst Thaelmann, did not waver one minute. From the very first days he fought resolutely against the war policy of Social-Democracy. In the first few weeks of the war he was ordered to the front. As an internationalist he set out to enlighten the troops, circulating illegal leaflets and newspapers and making a stand against the brutal treatment of the soldiers by Prussian militarism. For this he was deliberately victimised by the officers and given the most dangerous duties in the front line. Even from the trenches he kept in close touch with the illegally operating Hamburg opposition. Together with it he joined the Independent Social-Democratic Party. After the outbreak of the Revolution in November 1918, Ernst Thaelmann fought in the foremost ranks of the revolutionary workers against the counter-revolutionary troops which Ebert and Noske had sent to crush the workers of Hamburg and Bremen. The revolutionary workers of Hamburg, who recognised Thaelmann's personal courage and daring, elected him to represent them in the City government of the port. It was due to him that out of the 42,000 members of the Independent Social-Democratic Party's organisation in Hamburg, 40,000 declared their allegiance to the principles of the Communist International.

After the Party, following the defeat of the German proletariat in 1923, had devastatingly settled the opportunists, Ernst Thaelmann, as one of the most popular left-wing leaders, was summoned to the Central Committee of the Party, where he very soon rose to be leader of the Party. Under his leadership, the Party quickly and definitely rid itself of the ultra-left group of Ruth Fischer and Maslow, whose pseudo-radical, fatal policy had done immense harm to the mass-influence of the Party, threatening to isolate the Party from the masses.

With the help of the Communist International, he welded all the healthy and valuable forces of the Party in the leadership and in the organisation as a whole into an iron phalanx, which first flung the Trotskyist gang out of the ranks of the Party, only later to cleanse it with equal thoroughness of the Right opportunist and conciliators.

To all of us in the leadership, and to every single Party comrade, Thaelmann became a model revolutionary loyalty and devotion to the Communist International, the World Party of Lenin and Stalin. He taught us absolute devotion and passionate love for the Soviet Union and for our great leader

Stalin. Thaelmann never wavered on this question. At the October Congerence of the C.P.G. in 1932, he addressed the following words of warning to the Party:

“There were sometimes in our own ranks comrades who thought themselves cleverer and more capable of judging various questions than was done in the definite decisions of our World Party. Here I stress with the greatest emphasis: our relations with the Comintern, this close, indestructible, firm confidence between the C.P.G. and the C.I. and its Execitive – this is one of our Party, the inner-political struggles and disputes in the past and of the higher political maturity of our Party generally.”

The latest war-provocation by German Fascism recalls to our mind Thaelmann’s passionate struggle against war, against Fascism, for an international understanding among the nations, particularly between the working masses of Germany and France. Under Thaelmann’s leadership the Communist Party of Germany resolutely took over and resolutely continued the militant policy of the Spartakus-Bund against the Treaty of Versailles. In contrast to the criminal war-policy of the German-Fascists, however, the policy of the Communist Party is founded on international solidarity among the nations, on peaceful understanding between them, on the alliance of the working class of the whole world. This attitude was forcibly expressed by Thaelmann at that historic mass meeting of the French workers in Paris, at which he had to appear illegally because the French police tried to prevent him from attending. There Thaelmann said:

“Even more boldly and more courageously we shall hold out our hands over frontier barriers to our militant comrades in France, joining with them in fraternal solidarity in a fighting alliance against the war-criminals and their accomplices. We shall not allow the German and French workers to be goaded again into mutual fratricide.”

The Bolshevist policy of the Communist Party under Thaelmann’s leadership led to a steady, constant increase in its mass-influence. At the elections to the German Reichstag in November 1932, six million working people voted for the Communist Party of Germany. The Party numbered more than 300,000 members, and it was fulfilling with ever-increasing success its great historic task of preparing the working masses of Germany for the struggle for and winning Socialism.

The development of the Party to a mass-party with a vigorous Bolshevist character was largely due to Ernst Thaelmann. He was more than usually sensitive to the temper of the masses, especially the Social-Democratic workers. For this reason he was accused by the group Nuemann of “running behind the

S.P.G. workers.” But Ernst Thaelmann’s work was anything but this. Quite the reverse: he tried to make the Social-Democratic workers realise the necessity of the united front in view of the rising wave of Fascism. He tried also, however, to create the conditions for this in the Party itself. At the meeting of the Central Committee on February 19, 1932, he said:

“We say that the revolutionary united-front policy forms the main link in the proletarian policy in Germany. Comrades, a formulation like this is one of great moment; we have chosen it on mature reflection.”

And at the Berlin Anti-Fascist Unity Congress on July 10, 1932, Thaelmann said: “The question of the united front against Fascism ... that is the question vital to the German proletariat.” On the initiative of Ernst Thaelmann the “Anti-Fascist Action” was inaugurated by the Communist Party in May, 1932, bringing the Communist and Social-Democratic workers closer together. And yet there were still present in the Party very powerful sectarian inhibitions among Communist workers against the united front with the Social-Democratic workers, chiefly caused by the struggle conducted against the Communist Party by the Social-Democratic leaders, especially the Social-Democratic Prussian Government, with the use of terrorist methods.

In these circumstances a number of grave errors were made by the Party, to correct which, on the strength of experience gained in the meantime, Ernst Thaelmann would naturally have acted with the utmost vigour if he had not been prevented from doing so by his arrest. The most serious error was that the Fascist menace was under-estimated and the main blow was not aimed at the Fascist menace as it became more and more clearly manifested.

On the bold initiative of Comrade Dimitrov, the Seventh World Congress decided to divert our tactics to the creation of the united front and the People’s Front, and set the Communist Party of Germany, in view of the altered situation in Germany, the special task of revising its relations with Social-Democracy, so that the rapid creation of the united front should become possible.

The working masses in town and country are beginning to revolt against their Fascist oppressors, although under the severe terror this result takes at first the simplest forms. The tasks facing the Communist Party of Germany in such a situation are great and fraught with responsibility. Now is the time, in spite of Fascist rule to terror and the suppression of all free expression of opinion in Germany, to counteract the mass chauvinist infection and to rally all available forces for the overthrow of this mad rule of the war-mongers, the oppressors and murderers of the working people of Germany. It is necessary to unite quickly and boldly all the opponents of the Fascists rule of terror against all reactionary attempts at sabotage and against all sectarian inhibitions; but above all to heal

the split in the working class and to lead the Communist and Social-Democratic workers together into a united fighting front.

The C.P.G. lives on and is working despite the tremendous sacrifices it has to make under the Fascist terror. The heroic struggle, full of sacrifices, which tens of thousand of Communists and revolutionary workers are waging at the cost of the lives of thousands of their best, has shown that the Fascist terror and the reformist policy of capitulation were not able to demoralise the ranks of the proletariat. The fact that the Communist Party has been successful in this is due primarily to the heroic cadres raised by the Party under Thaelmann's leadership.

For more than three years Thaelmann has been lying in a Fascist gaol. During all this time it has only been possible once – through the workers' delegation from the Saar – for the proletariat to establish personal contact with Thaelmann. The Fascists allow the visit on that occasion in order to confuse the workers of the Saar, because they thought that the long period of terrorism in prison would have cowed Thaelmann and that he would not dare to speak openly to the workers. But Ernst Thaelmann bade farewell to the workers in these words: "I have been and I am being tortured! Greet the workers of the Saar from me as I would greet them!" With that he showed that the brutalities of Fascist imprisonment could not break his revolutionary fortitude.

The indictment against Thaelmann published the other day is no more than a miserable declaration of bankruptcy of the part of the Fascist prosecution. That explains why the Fascists for three whole years have been continually postponing the trial and now want to abandon it altogether. The latest report concerning Thaelmann's fate should arouse the international proletariat the utmost vigilance. Thaelmann has been transferred from the custody of the remand authorities to that of the terrorist Gestapo gangs. This increases the mortal danger in which he is. But, on the other hand, in view of the publication of the indictment against Thaelmann, the present moment is also favorable for the struggle for his release. If we succeeded in raising a tremendous storm of protest throughout the world, it will be possible to break down the prison walls and as in the case of Dimitrov, deliver Thaelmann from the clutches of the Fascist hangmen. The fact that Ernst Thaelmann has got to spend his fiftieth birthday in the gaols of Hitler-Fascism is an urgent reminder to all the anti-Fascists of the whole world that they must intensify to the utmost their campaign for the release of Thaelmann and the many thousands of imprisoned victims of the White Terror.

We greet Ernst Thaelmann on his fiftieth birthday! Freedom for him and for all anti-Fascists! Long live international solidarity! Long live the joint struggle of

the workers of the entire world under the leadership of our great Stalin for peace and liberty for World Communism!

At Lenin's Funeral

January 22, 1924. Moscow. A room in the Lux. 11 a.m. The telephone rings. A comrade is asking: Is it true that Lenin died? People say that he died last night.

No, it cannot be true! I heard only the day before that Lenin's health was improving. Rashly I call up Clara Zetkin in the Kremlin, to find out whether the report is true. Clara has heard nothing. They were afraid to break the news to her. A few minutes later Clara, sobbing, confirms that the report is true.

Lenin is dead. In a short while the streets are crowded with people. All are in the grip of a great sorrow. Workers – men and women – stream from the factories to the centre of the city, Here they stand silent, as if crushed beneath the weight of a heavy load.

* * *

January 23, 1924. The house in Gorki where Lenin died. An hour and a half's ride from Moscow.

The earth is covered with a thick layer of snow. It is a cold and bright winter day, Lenin lies in the room. His face is a pale yellow, but the skin is smooth – there is practically not a wrinkle left. How hard it is to become reconciled to the thought that he is no longer! Silent, with tears in their eyes, veterans of the Civil War carry him out of the room. The mournful cortège, carrying the dead leader, wend their way along a narrow path across an open snow-covered field to the railway station. Crowds of people – old and young – have assembled near the station. The heartrending strains of the funeral march float in the air.

Moscow. Hundreds of thousands of people line the streets. An endless procession is moving to the House of Trade Unions where Lenin lies in his bier. Old Bolsheviks – Lenin's closest friends and associates – stand in the first guard of honour. Comrade Stalin and other members of the Political Bureau are among them. Comrade Krupskaya stands by the side of her dead husband.

It is bitterly cold outside. Thirty degrees and more below zero. Day and night masses of people flock to the centre of the city. They stand in the street for hours on end. Bonfires are burning. And in endless lines the people march past the bier

holding the remains of the dead Lenin. For four days and four nights they never stop marching. It is something unsurpassed and awe-inspiring!

* * *

January 26, 1924. The Second Congress of Soviets. The Bolshoi Theatre with its immense parterre and five tiers of boxes and galleries is filled to overflowing. Here are the representatives of the Soviets. On the large stage sit the members of the Central Executive Committee of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Comrade Krupskaya speaks. Her few simple words produce a soul-stirring impression – tragic and at the same time elevating. Stalin delivers his historical speech – the oath. Kalinin speaks. Followed by representatives of the Soviets – workers, peasants, men, and women. Then the congress files past Lenin's bier, weighed down by heavy sorrow and the burthens of the morrow.

* * *

January 27, 1924. Red Square. In its centre, close to the Kremlin wall, stands Lenin's tomb. 4 p.m. The guns fire a salute. The bells in the Kremlin tower chime. Factory sirens whistle. The whole Land of Soviets holds its breath.

Lenin is carried to his final resting place. Workers, peasants, Red Army men from Moscow and environs stand in close ranks on the vast square. The strains of the mournful funeral march sung by a mighty chorus of voices hover over the square. It kept ringing in my ears when I was sitting in the train that night on the way to Germany.

* * *

Lenin's mausoleum on the Red Square in Moscow. There Lenin sleeps his eternal sleep. But his cause lives. Lenin's great Party lives and, led by the continuator of Lenin's cause – the brilliant and beloved Stalin – it carries on the victorious fight.