

# Response to Review of Wild Socialism

September 12, 2013

I would like to comment on the Leninist critique of my book *Wild Socialism: Workers Councils in Revolutionary Berlin, 1918-21* by Dan La Botz on your website. His review contains several errors and misinterpretations.

La Botz contends that I did not explain why the *Revolutionäre Obleute*, the workers councilists, refused to join the Spartacist League, predecessor to the German Communist party. But as my text makes clear, the *RO* was composed entirely of industrial workers, a purely proletarian organization. The Spartacists were a relatively small grouping of radical intellectuals and former Social Democratic activists, prone to incessant revolutionary pronouncements and demonstrations – inept “revolutionary gymnastics” according to the *Obleute*, which earned the workers' distrust, if not contempt.

Further, there is no evidence to indicate, as La Botz maintains, that the revolutionary shop stewards joined the Communist Party (KPD) in 1920. A case might be made for their support of the Communist Workers Party (KAPD) at that period – the latter an anti-Leninist group that defined itself as “not a party in the traditional sense. It is no leadership party .... The concept of a party with a revolutionary character in the proletarian sense is nonsense .... The council system is the organization of the proletariat.” (WS pp. 70,71). At that time the KAPD with some 12,000 members in Berlin was larger than the local KPD itself.

The reviewer doubts that the workers council movement exerted any influence over the Weimar government. In fact it was the seizure of workplaces and factories by the workers that so frightened the Social Democrats (SPD), the Weimar regime and the employers' associations that they all came to an accord on the installation of SPD-controlled unions and pseudo-workers councils throughout German industry, the latter institutions even being acknowledged in the Weimar constitution – thus containing and channeling the radical upsurge (of course, all these measures would be annulled or reversed at the first opportunity).

La Botz claims that the political positions and ideologies of the various groups were not fully explained in WS, despite the fact that the divisions and differences within German radicalism both before and after the fall of the Imperium are fully outlined for the reader.

Lastly, La Botz makes the fabulous assertion that the occupation of factories and workshops by the workers of Berlin was in fact a “frantic and failed attempt to build a party.” Say wha? Here we enter the realm of science fiction or perhaps the occult, evidently the Leninist imagination knows no bounds. The search for the revolutionary vanguard party, even in the most uncongenial and unlikely of places, is similar to that of the quest for the Holy Grail or the Fountain of Youth in the Middle Ages. Faith trumps Reason every time.

I go along with La Botz in recommending *The German Revolution, 1917-1923* by Pierre Broué, a work that I reviewed in the Winter 2007 issue of NP, and whose focus is on the origins and early development of the German Communist party. In his discussion of the latter, Broué notes that the KPD, the Leninist vanguard, by the mid-twenties was transformed into “nothing but an apparatus...intended to meet the needs of the foreign policy of the Soviet bureaucracy.” And so far as social revolution was concerned, the KPD was fearful that such an event would “threaten to overturn the precarious status quo upon which its survival was predicated” (pp. 910-911). Recall what the German Communists advised the German working class in 1933—don't worry they said,

*Nach Hitler, uns.*