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## A SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF KPD SUPPORTERS: THE HAMBURG INSURRECTION- ARIES OF OCTOBER 1923\*

Although much has been written about the history of the German Communist Party, little is known about who actually belonged to it or supported it. Yet knowledge of the social composition of German Communism is an important, in many ways crucial, factor in assessing the role of the KPD in the development of the German workers' movement during the Weimar Republic. Aside from a census of party members conducted by the national leadership in 1927, and voting returns in elections, there are no national sources on which to base an analysis of the social structure of the Communist movement in Germany. Local and regional sources, though sporadically preserved and until now little exploited, offer an alternative way to determine the social bases of German Communism. This article contributes to the history of the KPD by attempting to analyze one source about support for German Communism in a major industrial city. In October 1923 the KPD staged an insurrection in Hamburg, resulting in the arrest and conviction of over 800 persons. A social analysis of these known insurrectionaries can indicate some of the sources of support for the KPD and suggest some of the ways in which the KPD fit into the history of the German working class and workers' movement.

The Hamburg insurrection of October 1923 was itself a political misunderstanding. In early October, at the height of the inflation, the KPD entered coalition governments with the Social Democratic Party in Saxony and Thuringia. From these official positions, the KPD planned to prepare and arm its backers for the approaching revolution, the final crisis of post-war Germany. However, the national government under Stresemann acted first by ordering the army to occupy Saxony and Thuringia. The

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KPD advocated resistance to the occupations and expected left-wing Social Democrats to support a call for a general strike in the two provinces. A conference of works councilors in the Saxon city Chemnitz on October 21, at which the Social Democrats held a majority, was to declare such a strike and set off a movement against the German state. For the Communists this movement was to culminate in an insurrection throughout Germany. However, the left-wing Social Democrats refused to support the KPD. For reasons that are still not clear, a Communist courier nevertheless left Chemnitz for Northern Germany with instructions to carry out the planned insurrection on October 23. But even as he arrived in Hamburg, national Communist leaders had decided to call off any sort of insurrection. A second courier rushed north to cancel the Hamburg insurrection. He arrived too late. The uprising had already been set in motion. It began early on the morning of October 23 with the storming of police stations throughout the working-class neighborhoods and suburbs of the city, and continued into the next day until the party, in recognition of the isolation and futility of the Hamburg action, convinced its followers to retreat and disperse.<sup>1</sup>

The Communist uprising in Hamburg was a mistake, the result of contradictory decisions or of a confusion of signals during the KPD's and Comintern's attempt to force a German revolution while the crisis of 1923 lasted. Yet in spite of its tactical confusion and political failure, the Hamburg uprising reveals much about the nature of the German Communist movement. For the party's members in Hamburg responded to the insurrection by carrying out the party's orders with loyalty and discipline, in the face of death or arrest. Despite the isolation of the Hamburg action, they retreated only under pressure from the party's leadership. Other historians have analyzed the uprising in terms of what it tells about the party's leadership, organization and relations with the Comintern. But who actually fought in the uprising? Who were these Communists, and what do *they* tell about the social composition and organization of the KPD? How do they, and through them the KPD, relate to the German working class? That the Comintern arranged an insurrection says nothing about those persons who chose to join the KPD and who

<sup>1</sup> W. T. Angress, *Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921-1923* (Princeton, 1963), is the principal account about the background of the insurrection, but the reader should also consult earlier accounts by O. K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt/M., 1971); O. Wenzel, "Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands im Jahre 1923" (Ph.D. diss., Berlin, 1955); and (A. Neuberg), *Der bewaffnete Aufstand: Versuch einer theoretischen Darstellung* (Frankfurt/M., 1971), pp. vi-xii.

had the choice of implementing or disobeying decisions handed down from Berlin or Moscow. The Communist organization could only be effective when its membership and mass following communicated with national and international leaders. In Hamburg the followers of the KPD chose to support the uprising, and in so doing left records about who they were and from where they came. Were these Communists those “alienated” workers who, in the description of one historian of the Hamburg labor movement, were driven by hunger and unemployment to support the KPD’s “politics of despair”?<sup>2</sup> By analyzing the social origins of those insurrectionaries whose identity has been recorded and by comparing the results of this analysis with what is known about the socio-economic structure of Hamburg and about the composition of support for the KPD in other parts of Germany, I shall suggest some answers to these questions.

## I

### THE SOURCE

According to the chief of the *Ordnungspolizei* in Hamburg, 983 persons were arrested in the week after the insurrection. However, over 100 persons were quickly released and charges were brought against only 875 persons.<sup>3</sup> In 1925-26 the Hamburg police compiled a complete list of these 875 persons as part of a *Denkschrift über die Unruhen im Oktober 1923 im Gebiete Gross-Hamburg*, and sent printed copies of both the report and the list of participants to police officials in other parts of Germany.<sup>4</sup> This report served several purposes. First, it was intended for internal police use in Hamburg itself. The list of arrested persons also served police throughout Germany in keeping KPD members under surveillance. Finally, the Hamburg police chief thought that the report would help police to handle future Communist insurrections by learning from the mistakes made in Hamburg. Neither Habedank, in his study of the Hamburg uprising, nor Comfort, in his work on the Hamburg labor movement, uses or mentions this list of participants, although both

<sup>2</sup> R. A. Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg: Labor Politics in the Early Weimar Republic* (Stanford, 1966), p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> H. Habedank, *Zur Geschichte des Hamburger Aufstandes 1923* (Berlin, 1958), p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> I used copies of each in the files of the Oberpräsident of the Rhineland in the Staatsarchiv Koblenz, Abteilung 403, Nr 13403: Die Polizeibehörde Hamburg, *Denkschrift über die Unruhen im Oktober 1923 im Gebiete Gross-Hamburg*. Zum dienstlichen Gebrauch zusammengestellt von der Zentralpolizeistelle Hamburg, and Verzeichnis der wegen Teilnahme an den Umstürzbewegungen im Oktober 1923 verurteilten Personen. Anlage zur *Denkschrift über die Unruhen im Oktober 1923 im Gebiete Gross-Hamburg*.

made use of the *Denkschrift* in their accounts of the October uprising.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the list is a homogeneous source of information about a definite group of active participants in the events of October 1923.

The Hamburg police recorded the sex, age, place of birth, occupation, offense, and disposition of the charges of each of the 875 participants. This is at best rudimentary information on which to base a social analysis, but it suffices to make a social profile of support for the KPD in Hamburg in 1923. The tentative conclusions drawn from such information should not be exaggerated; their meaning when analyzing the history of the KPD and determining the social background of protest movements among workers can be elucidated only when compared to similar information from other sources. Moreover, a social analysis of the Hamburg insurrectionaries, even when the limits of the source material are admitted, can over-emphasize the "structure" of social support for the KPD. The uprising occurred at one point in time, and the list of those arrested marks that point only in the fluctuation of support for the KPD. The results of a social analysis of the Communist insurrectionaries need to be compared with trends in the history of Hamburg and of the workers' movement.<sup>6</sup> In the following, I shall analyze the composition of the insurrectionaries by offense, sex, occupation, age, and place of birth, in light of the composition of Hamburg's population as a whole, before comparing them to the social "structure" of support for the KPD in other parts of Germany and suggesting a hypothesis on how the KPD fit into the social history of the German workers' movement.

## II

### POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS

The party affiliations of the 875 arrested persons are unknown. However, it can be surmised that they were members either of the KPD itself or of its paramilitary auxiliary organizations, or that they were rank-and-file sup-

<sup>5</sup> Habedank mentions the *Denkschrift* along with other police reports in his introductory chapter on sources. Comfort lists the *Denkschrift*, but not the *Anlage*, in his bibliography. Habedank's work is the most detailed and reliable reconstruction of the insurrection itself and the conditions in Hamburg immediately preceding the insurrection. Comfort says surprisingly little about the October 1923 uprising or its background, and what he says is not reliable. He merely recites the events, without analyzing the social situation in Hamburg or relating local events to national developments.

<sup>6</sup> For the background of the Hamburg workers' movement and political events leading up to 1923 see Habedank, Comfort, and especially V. Ullrich, *Die Hamburger Arbeiterbewegung vom Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Revolution 1918/19* (Hamburg, 1976).

porters of the KPD who joined the insurrection after it started. The KPD's strategy in organizing the insurrection, the course of the insurrection, and police strategy in making arrests point to this conclusion.

In planning the October insurrection the KPD relied exclusively on its paramilitary organization, the *Ordnerdienst* (OD). The OD had originally been created in the early 1920's to protect KPD meetings and functionaries, but by 1923 it had evolved into a *de facto* paramilitary organization. In particular, the KPD used the OD as the "military core" of the more politically and organizationally diffuse proletarian hundreds; that is, the KPD used OD members as the organizers and leaders of larger paramilitary groupings in the factories where they worked.<sup>7</sup> The OD itself was made up of the most active and dedicated party members. It was organized hierarchically, and it was centralized nationally to parallel the organization of the *Reichswehr*. Locally, the OD was organized by residential neighborhood, rather than factory cell, although OD members were assigned to leadership positions in the factory-based proletarian hundreds. In 1923 the KPD had about 18,000 members in Hamburg, and the OD had 1,300 members. The OD appears to have been strongest in the neighborhoods around Barmbeck (the main center of the insurrection), where it had organized two *Züge*. At full strength, these two *Züge* would have had a maximum of 300 members, although they probably did not attain this goal and one third of the members mobilized in Barmbeck refused to participate in the insurrection for lack of arms.<sup>8</sup> Prior to October 1923, the OD in Hamburg spent its time drilling members, guarding party leaders and meetings, carrying out propaganda, and organizing the proletarian hundreds. However, it also participated actively in the general strike that overthrew the Cuno government in August 1923, and, although it returned to organizational and agitational work in September, it geared itself at this time to play a more active role in the German crisis. Thus, it was not unprepared when the KPD decided to rely upon the OD alone to start a military insurrection on October 23.<sup>9</sup>

The second Communist paramilitary organization was the proletarian hundreds. These nominally non-partisan units were organized in the factories, and in fact they recruited a number of non-party members. The hundreds were weak in Hamburg (their main centers of strength were in

<sup>7</sup> Habedank, *Zur Geschichte*, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

<sup>8</sup> K. G. P. Schuster, *Der Rote Frontkämpferbund 1924-1929: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Organisationsstruktur eines politischen Kampfbundes* (Düsseldorf, 1975), pp. 54-55; (Neuberg), *Der bewaffnete Aufstand*, op. cit., pp. 75, 82; Habedank, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> Schuster, *Der Rote Frontkämpferbund*, pp. 53ff.

Rhineland-Westphalia, Saxony and Thuringia) and comprised fifteen units with a total of 600 to 900 members. They were also less homogeneous than the OD, more loosely and sporadically organized, more decentralized, and in an insurrection less reliable. Nor did the party have a clear idea of what role the hundreds could play in an insurrection. Even though the OD formed the "military core" of the hundreds, the Communists could not be certain of them in a party-initiated action. Party leaders decided against mobilizing them for fear of leaking information about the planned insurrection to the SPD (and from there to the police), and for reasons of discipline and party control. In fact, only one proletarian hundred, comprising at most a couple dozen men, is reported to have participated in the insurrection, in response to a call of the OD leadership in Schiffbek (a secondary center of fighting) for reinforcements after the first day of fighting. Since the plans for insurrection relied on concentrated surprise attacks on police stations and key transportation points – to cut Hamburg off from Prussia, disarm the police, and arm the workers – as the prelude to a general uprising, the KPD's concern with secrecy, reliability and discipline was a crucial aspect of its military strategy.<sup>10</sup>

The insurrection itself began as simultaneous surprise attacks by the OD against police stations and transportation points in working-class neighborhoods throughout the greater Hamburg region. A leader and participant of the insurrection in Barmbeck estimated the total number of armed insurrectionaries at 250-300 persons, but, because this leader had detailed knowledge only of the neighborhoods under his direction, it is unclear whether this figure refers to Barmbeck alone or to all of Hamburg. The uprising was most successful in Barmbeck. Aside from a few isolated successes in other parts of the city and suburbs, the insurrectionaries elsewhere were defeated by the police or failed to carry out their orders because of weakness, confusion, or lack of organization and leadership. After the initial attacks on police stations, the insurrectionaries built street barricades to defend those positions they had won. It was at this point that additional participants joined the insurrection, although it never assumed "mass" proportions. The additional participants, drawn from outside the OD, fall into three categories. First, they were KPD members and leaders whom the party mobilized to organize public assemblies and demon-

<sup>10</sup> (Neuberg), *Der bewaffnete Aufstand*, p. 175; Habedank, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 98-101, 164-65. Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg*, op. cit., pp. 124-25ff., incorrectly says that the pro-Communist proletarian hundreds attacked the police stations, but he gives no evidence to back his assertion. Habedank provides ample proof that in fact the KPD relied exclusively on its own paramilitary organ, the *Ordnerdienst*, instead of the more heterogeneous hundreds.

strations in working-class neighborhoods and at factories in support of the insurrection. Here the KPD relied primarily on its most loyal and disciplined members and did not attempt a full-scale mobilization or involvement of its followers and supporters in working-class neighborhoods, factories, labor unions or united-front organs. Second, the additional participants included people drawn from the neighborhoods where the insurrection took place (primarily inhabitants of the area around Barmbeck but also the proletarian hundred in Schiffbek) who aided the insurrectionaries, especially in building barricades and providing logistical support, but who were unarmed. Some of these participants were no doubt KPD members, but in a larger sense it would not be going too far to say that they came from the KPD's mass following even if all did not formally belong to the party. It should be noted that there is no evidence that the KPD actively organized or encouraged their participation in the uprising. They supported the KPD largely on their own. Finally, the insurrection was accompanied by looting, particularly of food stores, in several neighborhoods outside of the main insurrection. Although looters were not political participants in the insurrection, they played a definite, if small, role in the events of October 23 and 24.<sup>11</sup>

In making arrests, the police were primarily interested in suppressing the military wing of the KPD, and only secondarily in punishing the political leadership of the party. However, police strategy was complicated by the fact that they were caught unprepared for the insurrection. Whereas in some neighborhoods the police successfully defended their precinct stations against the Communists and arrested their attackers immediately, in other parts of the city the Communists overran the police stations. Police were forced to regroup and counterattack from outside to recover the lost ground. Moreover, after two days of fighting, when the situation was clearly hopeless, the KPD called off the insurrection, and the Communist insurrectionaries disappeared overnight into their neighborhoods, leaving the police with no one to arrest. Most of the arrests came in the week from October 25 to October 31, that is, after the insurrection was over, and most of the arrests came as a result of investigations after the fact, police lists of KPD militants drawn up prior to October 23, and denunciations (KPD members complained bitterly of being betrayed to the police by Social Democratic neighbors). The police concentrated most of their energies on

<sup>11</sup> (Neuberg), *Der bewaffnete Aufstand*, pp. 83ff., 88-90. Cf. Habedank, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 92-101, 152-55, 187-200, for information on demonstrations, assemblies, and riots in parts of Hamburg outside the insurrection. Habedank does not provide a systematic account of these, but it seems clear that the KPD merely called on its militants to organize limited protest demonstrations in support of the insurrection, but did not try any large-scale mobilization of its working-class followers.



participants in the insurrection (over 88% of those arrested). In other parts of the city, the police tried to contain and suppress strikes, assemblies and demonstrations. But they made few arrests and directed the arrests at the leading agitators and speakers. Finally, the police tried to contain looting. The insurrection took place at the worst point of the German inflation. Large numbers of workers were laid off by their employers in anticipation of the introduction of a new currency; workers were literally penniless and starving; and hunger riots and looting of foodstores were daily occurrences throughout Germany. The insurrection overburdened and distracted the police so that looting could be carried out openly in the city's poorer neighborhoods. Thus, although the arrests for looting and theft were peripheral to the insurrection, they were necessary to prevent the complete breakdown of public order in an extremely volatile economic situation. If starving, unemployed or striking workers had rioted simultaneously with the Communist insurrection, the two in combination could rapidly have overwhelmed state and policy authority, despite the lack of political motives or Communist sympathies among the looters. Therefore police tried to suppress the looting, making arrests when necessary, just as they tried to contain strikes, assemblies and demonstrations.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the strategy of the police was aimed primarily at the leaders, organizers and direct participants of the insurrection. Only secondarily did the police move against KPD leaders and agitators in strikes and demonstrations in others parts of the city or against looters. There were no mass arrests in demonstrations, strikes or food riots nor, for that matter, in the working-class neighborhoods where the insurrection took place. Police moved to disperse demonstrations and assemblies throughout the city, to prevent disturbances in the harbor (where a major strike was underway) and to stop looting, but they arrested only selectively. On the other hand, the police devoted their full resources to tracking down and arresting known Communist militants and insurrectionaries in the week after the uprising. Working from police lists of party and OD members and with the help of informers, they singled out the most active supporters of the KPD and its military wing.

The evidence on the KPD's military strategy, on the insurrection itself, and on the manner in which the police arrested participants all point to several groups among the insurrectionaries, all but one of which stood clearly in some political relationship to the KPD. First, there were at least

<sup>12</sup> For police strategy see *Denkschrift über die Unruhen im Oktober 1923 im Gebiete Gross-Hamburg*. An analysis of the list of arrested persons and the charges brought against them, combined with the fact that police made no mass, indiscriminate, arrests, further underscores this conclusion.



250-300 armed or partially armed insurrectionaries from the OD (probably more if one considers OD members in neighborhoods where the initial insurrection was unsuccessful). Second, there were an unknown number of Communist party militants who assumed the political tasks of agitation among workers throughout the city and of the organization of public assemblies and demonstrations in support of the insurrection. Third, at least several hundred (and probably more) persons joined the main insurrection, taking over such auxiliary roles as the building of barricades and the provision of logistical support to the insurrectionaries. Whereas the first two groups definitely consisted of Communist party militants, this third group was probably more diverse in political affiliation and included non-party members as well as rank-and-file Communists who belonged to neither the OD nor the party's leading militants. Considering that the KPD did not actively mobilize their support and that they joined actively in an explicitly Communist, military action aimed at the overthrow of the capitalist state, one can assume that these participants were committed on their own to Communist goals and methods. Looters were the only group that did not act out of political motivations. They did not technically belong to the insurrectionaries, although they played a role in the insurrection. The arrested were drawn from all four groups, although the largest number came from the armed insurrectionaries of the OD and their unarmed supporters in the main areas of the insurrection. The following analysis of the arrested thus centers on both the most active party militants and on the KPD's rank-and-file supporters.

### III

#### CHARGES

Of the 875 persons arrested by the police, charges against 815 are known. These can be broken down into the following broad categories.

Table 1. *Charges brought against the arrested*

	Total	%
Charges related to the main insurrection	719	88.22
Political offenses outside the area of the main insurrection	38	4.66
Theft and looting	53	6.50
Location unsure	5	0.61
Total	815	

Most of those arrested in relation to the main insurrection were charged with varying degrees of high treason (507 persons), followed by disturbing the peace (*Landfriedensbruch*, 94 persons) and insurrection (*Aufbruch*, 90 persons). Additional charges in this category included possession of weapons (17 persons) and coercing public officials (8 persons). The remaining three offenders were charged with assault, usurping a public office, and illegally wearing an official uniform. Political offenses outside the area of the main insurrection involved the illegal assemblies and demonstrations called by the KPD in support of the insurrection. Most of those arrested under these circumstances were charged with violating presidential decrees against unauthorized public demonstrations, rioting, incitement to riot, and participation in an illegal assembly. An additional five persons were arrested for resistance (*Widerstand*), but the location of the five arrests, in or outside the main insurrection, is unclear.

The courts convicted 793 of the 875 arrested persons. 58 persons were acquitted, 18 were not prosecuted; two were amnestied; one died before being brought to trial; one person was still at large; and the disposition of two charges is unknown. The longest average sentences were meted out to those convicted of high treason. These sentences ranged from 12-18 months to 3-4 years or more in a penitentiary. Those convicted of *Landfriedensbruch* and *Aufbruch* received highly variable sentences, from several months in jail to 10-12 years in a penitentiary, with one death sentence. The most serious offenses were prosecuted under these statutes, but also many minor infractions. The lowest sentences (mostly fines) were given for violations of the presidential decrees prohibiting unauthorized public assemblies and demonstrations. Other less serious offenses, punished with several months in jail, were looting, receiving stolen goods, and illegal possession of weapons.

Thus the overwhelming majority of those arrested were charged with political offenses of a serious nature. Only a handful of persons was charged with political offenses peripheral to the main insurrection or with offenses that were politically unrelated to the insurrection.

#### IV

##### SEX

Of the 875 persons arrested, only 47 were women. The number of women is not only exceedingly small when compared to the female population of the city as a whole; it also bears no relation to the number of working women in Hamburg. At the time of the 1925 census, there were 108.99 women for every 100 men in the state of Hamburg, and of the 586,407 employed

persons 179,658 or 30.64% were female.<sup>13</sup>

The military nature of the uprising no doubt accounts in large part for the overwhelmingly male composition of the insurrectionaries. In socio-economic protest movements, the Communists could on occasion mobilize large numbers of women, especially during strikes in factories with large female workforces, during strikes in predominantly male industries like mining where wives could be mobilized to demonstrate or picket, and in protest demonstrations against the inflation of food prices. In preparing the Hamburg insurrection, on the other hand, the KPD relied on its military arm, which was even more heavily male than the membership of the party as a whole. There is only sporadic information about women supporting the insurrection, mainly in helping to build barricades, in supplying the men with food and munitions, and in leading protest demonstrations in other parts of the city.<sup>14</sup> In any case, whether by design or accident, the militarization of the party's action precluded the widespread mobilization of women, as would have been normal if the movement had been built around social and economic demands.

Of the 47 women, a disproportionate number were in fact arrested for looting rather than for participation in the insurrection. Thirteen of 43 looters (30.23%) were women, whereas women made up less than 6% of the entire sample. In addition, three of six persons arrested for receiving stolen goods were women. Housewives were particularly prominent among these sixteen women. Of a total of 21 housewives in the sample 10 were arrested for looting or receiving stolen goods, and nine of the ten were over 30 years of age. October 1923 was the worst month of the German inflation, when many workers had been laid off and when even those still employed could

<sup>13</sup> For the 1925 census, cf. Statistik des deutschen Reichs, CDII-CDVIII: Volks-, Berufs- und Betriebszählung vom 16. Juni 1925 (Berlin, 1929), and especially Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXII-XXXIII: Die Volks-, Berufs- und Betriebszählung vom 16. Juni 1925, ed. by the Statistischen Landesamt (Hamburg, 1927). The 1925 census was the closest one to the 1923 insurrection. While the 1925 figures are not exact comparisons, they are generally indicative of the social, economic and demographic composition of Hamburg's population in the early 1920's. Unless otherwise stated, all Hamburg figures given in the article will be from the 1925 census and will refer to the state of Hamburg as a whole (the city of Hamburg plus suburban and unincorporated areas under Hamburg's jurisdiction). The Hamburg figures do *not* include the suburbs of Hamburg that lay in Schleswig-Holstein or Hanover (provinces of Prussia), nor the cities of Altona and Harburg. The arrested, in contrast, may have lived in the Prussian suburbs of Hamburg. I am using the Hamburg figures only for purposes of comparison with the arrested. They are merely indicative, and conclusions drawn from them cannot be considered absolute. I am working under the assumption that the structure of the population of the greater metropolitan Hamburg area (including parts of Prussia) is accurately reflected in the population statistics for the state of Hamburg alone.

<sup>14</sup> Habedank, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 150-51, 189.

not earn enough to keep up with the devaluation of the mark. It is not surprising that many persons, especially housewives and mothers with the responsibility of feeding their families, should have seized on the turmoil of the uprising to take what was necessary to survive. However, this merely underscores the point that women in general played only a peripheral role in the insurrection itself.<sup>15</sup>

## V

## OCCUPATION

The 875 arrested persons gave no fewer than 189 different occupations. After those identified simply as *Arbeiter*, the most numerous were the metal trades (47 different occupations), construction (23 occupations), wood (9 occupations), and harbor, transport and warehouse (26 occupations).

In analyzing the occupations of the insurrectionaries, one should keep in mind how German workers viewed themselves, their jobs, and the organization of the labor movement. In the early 1920's German workers still defined their occupations according to the trades divisions of the craft unions. If they did not fit into the existing craft-union structures, they simply called themselves "workers" (*Arbeiter*). This was true even among militant Communist workers. Although the KPD was at this time the strongest advocate of industrial unionism and industrially based works councils, Communist workers still defined themselves according to possession or lack of a craft. Few workers identified themselves in terms of industry. Hence, few of those arrested described themselves by industry (*Metallarbeiter*, *Textilarbeiter*, etc.). Rather, most continued to see themselves according to the division of the labor movement into numerous categories of skilled craftsmen and the mass of unskilled workers.

Moreover, workers did not identify their occupations in the same language used by government statisticians in subdividing Hamburg's population into individual industries and industrial sectors. It would have been inconceivable for workers to describe themselves according to the specific industrial categories used by middle-class statisticians. The terminology used by the insurrectionaries in describing their occupations to the police suggests major class differences between the ways workers and the bourgeoisie perceived economic reality, and calls into question the "scientific" or "objective" basis of contemporary statistical categories.

In dividing the arrested into industrial and occupational categories, I have followed two criteria. First, I have used the industrial classification

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-55.

worked out by the German labor unions and by the SPD and KPD in their proposals for industrial unionism in the 1920's. Second, I have used the occupational sub-categories based on craft or lack of craft which unions and workers both used to identify and organize themselves. I have used this system of classification because workers tended to identify their occupations according to the nomenclature most commonly used in the German labor-union movement, but also because the nomenclature of the labor unions reflected the social experience and level of consciousness of workers.

Most of the arrested who gave a specific trade belonged to the most important occupations in Hamburg.<sup>16</sup> These, in turn, can be grouped into the following industrial categories.

Table 2. *Occupation of the arrested*

	Total	%
General	309	35.31
Rural and agricultural	10	1.14
Metal	150	17.14
Construction	132	15.09
Wood	28	3.20
Glass	5	0.57
<i>Transport</i>	93	10.63
Harbor	45	5.14
Warehouse/shipping	12	1.37
Transportation	36	4.11
Printing trades	6	0.69
Textile, clothing, leather	12	1.37
State and municipal workers	17	1.94
Food and entertainment	15	1.71
<i>White-collar workers</i>	45	5.14
Salaried employees	25	2.86
Tradesmen	12	1.37
Professional/independent	8	0.91
Services	8	0.91
Health care	2	0.23
Housewives, widows	22	2.51
Unknown or no occupation	21	2.40
Total	875	

<sup>16</sup> Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXIII, pp. 192-94, 364-71.

Hamburg's most important industries, those with the largest number of workers, were all prominent among the insurrectionaries.<sup>17</sup> Both the metal and construction industries were well represented. Whereas 8.79% of the employed population and 17.87% of all workers in Hamburg were employed in the metal industries, 17.14% of those arrested gave various metal trades as their occupations. In construction, the respective figures were 4.60% (of all employed), 8.97% (of all workers) and 15.09% (of those arrested).<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, there were very few white-collar workers, although almost half of the working population of Hamburg was employed in such jobs, and white-collar participants in the uprising tended to be KPD employees (newspaper editor, journalist, party secretary) or lower-level salaried employees rather than better-paid technicians or professionals. The small number of rural and agricultural workers is to be expected in a major metropolitan area. Those arrested probably came from the outlying suburbs where the KPD tried to block roads and stop rail traffic.<sup>19</sup>

The relatively small number of transport workers (especially in the harbor) is more surprising. Although some 13.59% of the working population and 21.35% of all workers in Hamburg fell into the sectors transportation and warehouse, only 10.63% of those arrested gave harbor, warehouse or transportation as their occupation. On first sight this agrees with what is known about the logistics of the main insurrection, which was located between Barmbeck and Bergedorf, that is, in those working-class neighborhoods furthest from the harbor, but this explanation merely begs the question. On closer examination, one can say that harbor workers (and workers living in the older Hamburg neighborhoods closest to the harbor) failed to respond to the Communist insurrection, and this failure, in turn, led to the isolation and the rapid suppression of the uprising. The inner city and the harbor neighborhoods nearest to it remained largely unscathed, leaving the government and police forces a secure base from which to mount a counter-offensive. Had the harbor risen, the inner city would have been surrounded and cut off. But the harbor workers failed to respond spontaneously; the KPD's *Ordnerdienst* was least effective in harbor neighborhoods; and the party did not try to expand the movement to the

<sup>17</sup> For a list of Hamburg's major occupations, see *ibid.*, p. 25. Those manufacturing or transportation industries with large numbers of working-class occupations (metal, construction, harbor and transportation, in addition to smaller ones) were all prominent among the arrested. The primarily white-collar and independent occupations (wholesale and retail trade, rentiers, banking and finance, government functionaries) were all weakly represented among the arrested.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Habedank, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 117ff.

harbor itself or to factories associated with the harbor.<sup>20</sup>

One should note, finally, that few insurrectionaries came from Hamburg's lesser trades. Alongside the large and highly concentrated shipbuilding and metal industries, Hamburg's industry was composed of many small factories dependent upon the import-export trade of the harbor (textiles, clothing, chemicals, wood, and food preserving among the more important). The former industries are well represented among the insurrectionaries, whereas the latter are largely absent. Only a handful of those arrested can be clearly identified with the small-factory export-trade sector. By the same token, few insurrectionaries were employed in the printing trades, despite the relative importance of Hamburg as a publishing center.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the unidentified general workers (*Arbeiter*) may have worked in the small-factory export-trade sector, but what is most remarkable about workers in this group is their lack of identification with any single trade or industry. In fact, unskilled workers formed the largest single group among the arrested. This can be seen even more clearly if the employed persons who were arrested are regrouped according to class rather than industry. The Hamburg insurrection was indeed a workers' movement, and primarily a movement of the unskilled.

Table 3. *Class and skill*

	Arrested	%	Hamburg 1925	%
<i>Workers</i>	766	92.18	250,861	42.78
Unskilled	451	54.27	108,463	18.50
Skilled	315	37.91	142,398	24.28
<i>White-collar and</i>				
supervisory	45	5.42	186,360	31.78
<i>Independent</i>	19	2.29	93,498	15.94
<i>Employed by one's</i>				
own family			16,422	2.80
<i>Servants</i>	1	0.12	39,266	6.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>831</b>		<b>586,407</b>	

Source for Hamburg: Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXIII, pp. 35-36.

<sup>20</sup> Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, op. cit., p. 187, noticed this long ago. Hadedank also points clearly to the geographic and industrial limits of the uprising.

<sup>21</sup> This is even more surprising when one considers that Hamburg was a publishing center for the workers' movement, with Communist as well as Social Democratic presses in operation.



The sizeable minority of skilled workers can be attributed to the prominence of metal and construction workers among the insurrectionaries. Of the 315 skilled workers 204 were metal or construction workers: 129 (of 150) metal workers and 75 (of 132) construction workers. This is what one would expect in Hamburg, since over 67% of all workers employed in construction and almost 81% of all workers in the metal industries were affiliated with a trade.<sup>22</sup> The importance of skilled workers from metals and construction is underscored by the number of skilled workers who identified themselves as masters, journeymen or apprentices.

Table 4. *Craft status*

	Total	Metal	Construction
Masters	129	55	53
Journeymen	25	9	6
Apprentices	16	4	5

Of the 47 arrested women, 22 were wives or widows and six gave no occupation. Thus considerably fewer than half of the women, only 19, can be associated with a specific form of paid employment, and 12 of these gave their occupation simply as worker (*Arbeiterin*). Of the remaining seven, all but one held jobs associated with women (textile workers, telephone operator, typist, salesgirl, and other low-level white-collar jobs), and all but two held white-collar jobs in trade, commerce or communications.

In sum, those arrested during the insurrection were in the first instance unskilled and associated with no single industry. Without possessing a trade or skill that would have tied them to a specific industry, they would have been employed interchangeably in Hamburg's factories, shipyards and harbor. Many may have experienced unemployment, although there is no evidence to prove this hypothesis, for in periods of economic crisis (as in 1923) workers without skills had much less job security. The women arrested during the insurrection formed a peripheral group, different in occupation (or in lack of paid employment) from the main body of insurrectionaries. On the other hand, a sufficiently large number of skilled workers also joined the uprising to make the skilled a significant, if secondary, contingent in the fighting. From these workers, it is clear that the KPD drew its active supporters primarily from the major industries of the city – metal and shipbuilding, construction, to a lesser extent the harbor.

<sup>22</sup> Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXIII, pp. 41-44.

The KPD drew from large pools of industrial workers in the dominant sectors of the local economy. Conversely, it failed to attract workers from the many lesser categories of craft workers, from the lesser industries, and from the small-scale factories dependent on the harbor trade.

## VI

## AGE

I have grouped the 875 persons into six age categories as follows.

Table 5. *Arrested by age category*

Age category	Arrested		Working population Hamburg 1925	
	Total	%	Total	%
I 20 and under	175	20.00	87,594	14.94
II 21-30	373	42.63	162,559	27.72
III 31-40	180	20.57	121,158	20.66
IV 41-50	94	10.74	105,795	18.04
V 51 and over	48	5.49	109,301	18.64
VI Unknown	5	0.57		
Total	875		586,407	

Source for Hamburg: Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXIII, pp. 17, 51.

The figures speak for themselves. The arrested insurrectionaries were overwhelmingly young. This is even more apparent when the arrested are divided by sex (Table 6). Over 80% of all insurrectionaries were under 40 years, 60% under 30. The relative youthfulness of those arrested is underscored if one computes separately those who were born since 1901, that is, those who would still have been under eighteen years of age at the end of the First World War. These were the children and adolescents who grew up during the bitter strikes of the period 1904-14 and the difficult war years. Few would have had military experience, but all would have known the home front only too well. A total of 284 arrested, almost a third, had been born since 1901.

Most of the industrial groups are too poorly represented among the arrested to provide statistically meaningful information about their age composition. However, the larger industries and a few of the more important trades can be subdivided by age (Table 7). The unskilled, metal

Table 6. *Age and sex*

Age category	Males			Females		
	Arrested Total	%	Employed in Hamburg 1925 %	Arrested Total	%	Employed in Hamburg 1925 %
I	172	20.77	11.59	3	6.38	22.52
II	349	42.15	23.96	24	51.06	36.23
III	167	20.17	21.92	13	27.66	17.80
IV	90	10.87	20.72	4	8.51	11.98
V	46	5.56	21.81	2	4.26	11.47
VI	4	0.48		1	2.13	
	828			47		

Source for Hamburg: *ibid.*, pp. 17, 51.

workers and transport workers tended to be somewhat younger than the sample as a whole. This is especially true of transport workers, over 40% of whom had been born since 1901. Of these, warehouse and transportation workers were the youngest, although harbor workers were also younger than the arrested as a whole. The large group of construction workers, on the other hand, tended to be older. Construction workers were mostly between 21 and 50 years of age, whereas the arrested as a whole fell mostly in the brackets 40 or younger. This is seen clearly among those born since 1901. Only 23.48% of the construction workers were this young, compared to 32.46% of the entire group.<sup>23</sup> Finally, white-collar workers, especially

<sup>23</sup> Figures for the age of males employed in the metal, construction and transport industries of Hamburg in 1925 are as follows (source: Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXIII, p. 53).

Age	Metal	Construction	Transport
To 16	6.09%	3.00%	0.73%
16-20	15.78	6.46	4.18
20-30	26.75	19.90	22.78
30-60	46.28	60.45	66.28
Over 60	5.10	10.19	6.03

These figures are not directly comparable with the arrested, since they include white-collar employees as well as workers in each industry, whereas the figures for those arrested refer almost exclusively to workers. About 70-75% of the males employed in each of these industries were *Arbeiter* (whether unskilled or skilled), the rest proprietors or white-collar employees. Still, the relative youthfulness of the arrested metal and transport workers is underscored by comparing them to the age structure of these industries. Arrested construction workers, on the other hand, tended to be older, as was true of all construction workers in Hamburg. Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg*, p. 157, notes that the "industrial" trades in Hamburg — such as those in metal production — had a higher

Table 7. Age and major industries

Industry	Total	Age category										Born s.1901	%
		I	%	II	%	III	%	IV	%	V	%		
General*	309	71	22.98	139	44.98	51	16.50	26	8.41	21	6.80	112	36.25
Metal	150	33	22.00	67	44.67	35	23.33	8	5.33	7	4.67	51	34.00
Construction	132	10	7.58	56	42.42	31	23.48	28	21.21	7	5.30	31	23.48
Transport	93	26	27.96	37	39.78	19	20.43	8	8.60	3	3.23	39	41.94
Harbor	45	11	24.44	17	37.78	10	22.22	5	11.11	2	4.44	16	35.56
Warehouse/shipping	12	4	33.33	6	50.00	2	16.67					7	58.33
Transportation	36	11	30.56	14	38.89	7	19.44	3	8.33	1	2.78	16	44.44
White collar	45	7	15.56	14	31.11	15	33.33	7	15.56	2	4.44	9	20.00
Salaries employees	25	3	12.00	10	40.00	9	36.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	4	16.00
Tradesmen	12	1	8.33	2	16.67	4	33.33	4	33.33	1	8.33	1	8.33
Professional/independent	8	3	37.50	2	25.00	2	25.00	1	12.50			4	50.00
All Arrested**	875	175	20.00	373	42.63	180	20.57	94	10.74	48	5.49	284	32.46

\* The age of one worker was unknown.

\*\* The age of five workers was unknown.

employees and tradesmen, were also older as a group. In fact, they form a distinctive lower-middle-class group of participants, different in age as well as in occupation from the workers.

The women fell into two broad age groups. Almost all of the 22 wives and widows fell into the middle age categories, precisely those in which women would be most likely to have small children. The large number of looters among these middle-aged married women should be recalled, for the age of the married women underscores their most common motivation for joining the insurrection – to provide for their families. On the other hand, there was a clear distinction between housewives and working women. 14 of 22 wives and widows were over 30, whereas 15 of 19 working women were under 30. While looting preoccupied more of the wives, the working women participated politically in the insurrection itself.

Similar tendencies can be seen when one compares the age groups by skill.<sup>24</sup>

Table 8. *Age by skill*

Age category	Unskilled		Skilled		White-collar & supervisory		Independent		Other		All arrested	
		%		%		%		%		%		%
I	95	21.06	69	21.90	6	13.04	3	15.79	2	4.55	175	20.00
II	205	45.45	127	40.32	21	45.65	4	21.05	16	36.36	373	42.63
III	81	17.96	67	21.27	12	26.09	5	26.32	15	34.09	180	20.57
IV	41	9.09	37	11.75	6	13.04	6	31.58	4	9.09	94	10.74
V	27	5.99	15	4.76	1	2.17	1	5.26	4	9.09	48	5.49
VI	2	0.44							3	6.82	5	0.57
Born s. 1901	158	35.03	107	33.97	11	23.91	4	21.05	4	9.09	284	32.46
Total	451		315		46		19		44		875	

proportion of young workers than the traditional crafts, partly due to a relatively high number of young apprentices in the industrial trades. While some tendency in this direction can be discerned, it was not very pronounced, and the Communist insurrectionaries were exceptionally young even when compared to the metal industry as a whole.

<sup>24</sup> The age structure of employed males (employees and workers) in Hamburg in 1925 was as follows (source: *ibid.*, pp. 33, 55).

Age	Employees ( <i>Angestellte</i> )	Workers ( <i>Arbeiter</i> )		
		All workers	Skilled	Unskilled
To 16	2.37%	3.93%	5.25%	1.85%
16-20	9.46	11.56	13.15	9.10
20-30	28.44	26.63	27.09	25.91
30-60	55.71	50.76	48.87	53.67
Over 60	4.02	7.12	5.62	9.47

The unskilled tended to be somewhat younger. White-collar and supervisory employees fall mostly into the middle categories. The group of independent professions, though too small to be meaningful, is substantially older, as one would expect from a group that contains many small property-owners, shopkeepers and professionals.

The group of skilled workers is the most interesting. If one divides this group into those below 30 and over 30, the age distribution is almost identical with those arrested as a whole.

	Below 30	31 and over
Skilled	62.22%	37.78%
All arrested	62.63%	37.37%

Unlike the others, there is a tendency neither toward the older nor the younger age categories. However, if one looks within these two broad groupings, it is equally apparent that there is no tendency toward the middle age categories either. Rather, there is a swelling of the youngest (those under 20) and of the workers between 41 and 50 years of age. Those born since 1901 are also larger than average, though this group is not so pronounced as among the unskilled. The reason for this divergence between the youngest and older skilled workers can be explained by the relatively large number of journeymen and apprentices among the arrested skilled workers. Without the journeymen and apprentices, the group of skilled workers would have shown a distinct tendency toward the middle and older age categories.

Table 9. *Age and craft status*

Age category	Masters		Journeymen		Apprentices		Skilled	
		%		%		%		%
I	17	13.18	9	36.00	15	93.75	69	21.90
II	59	45.74	7	28.00			127	40.32
III	32	24.81	6	24.00			67	21.27
IV	17	13.18			1	6.25	37	11.75
V	4	3.10	3	12.00			15	4.76
Born s. 1900	34	26.36	11	44.00	15	93.75	107	33.97
Total	129		25		16		315	

The largest group of masters was between 21 and 30 years of age, but there was also a greater number than average between 31 and 50 years of age.

The number of arrested workers in individual trades was for the most part too small to draw any conclusions as to their age. Most trades were represented by fewer than five workers. A few comments, however, might be ventured for the most common trades found among the insurrectionaries. (No percentage figures are given because of the small number of workers involved.)<sup>25</sup>

Table 10. *Age and trade*

Age cat.	Turners	Lock-smiths	Smiths	Joiners	Painters	Stone-masons	Carpenters
I	5	6	3	7	1	2	3
II	4	17	7	6	4	6	14
III	4	7	5	3	8	10	3
IV		3		5	3	5	3
V	1	2		1	1	3	
Total	14	35	15	22	17	26	23

Here, again, very few of the insurrectionaries were over 50, although there were many older workers in all of Hamburg's skilled trades. The youngest age brackets are consequently overrepresented, even among the skilled. In most cases, the younger masters, those between 21 and 30, formed the core of the insurrectionaries. Among the turners, smiths and joiners, these young masters were followed by an almost equal number of apprentice workers (those under 20). The locksmiths (*Schlosser*) formed the backbone of the metal industry. They were also the single largest group of skilled workers among those arrested. The insurrectionaries came from young master locksmiths, and secondarily from those between 30 and 40. As with the locksmiths, master carpenters were substantially overrepresented while younger apprentices were underrepresented. The other two groups of skilled construction workers offered a somewhat different picture. Stonemasons (the second largest group of skilled workers among the arrested) and painters fell more often between the ages 31 and 50 than any

<sup>25</sup> The age structure of these trades for Hamburg as a whole was as follows (source: *ibid.*, pp. 192-94, 364-71).

Age cat.	Turners	Lock-smiths	Smiths	Joiners	Painters	Stone-masons	Carpenters
I	16.81%	30.18%	12.93%	23.72%	17.34%	12.20%	16.72%
II	31.71	31.03	25.61	18.47	24.20	13.96	17.34
III	21.19	17.86	23.69	15.75	19.64	23.00	21.39
IV	17.35	12.67	19.63	19.01	18.58	21.85	20.32
V	12.93	8.26	18.12	23.05	20.24	29.00	24.23



other group. Although younger stonemasons and painters, 21-30 years, were also well represented, the youngest age group was virtually absent. It will be remembered that construction workers as a whole tended to be older than other workers, both among those arrested and in the working population as a whole. Few of the arrested stonemasons and painters were over 50, but these two trades tended, more than any others among the insurrectionaries, to reflect their general age composition in Hamburg.

The military nature of the insurrection accounts in part for the relative youthfulness of those arrested. The KPD's strategy required that it rely most heavily on those party members with military experience who were most physically fit for combat, that is, on younger male Communists. This fact restricts the representativeness of the arrested persons in analyzing the KPD as a whole. However, an explanation of the youthfulness of the insurrectionaries must go beyond the limiting effects of a narrowly military insurrection. Most interesting in assessing the youthfulness of the insurrectionaries was the fact that so many of them had been born after 1901. The KPD did not send these young men into battle because of their military experience, for they were too young to have been in the war. Moreover, the military draft had been eliminated after 1918 by the Treaty of Versailles. Whatever military knowledge they had, they had gained in the street fighting of the revolution of 1918-19 or in the drills of the OD. Nor were they potentially the most reliable, disciplined or tenacious fighters. More mature, but still physically fit workers in their middle or late twenties would have been better choices. Certainly in the history of revolutionary insurrections it is just as common (if not more common) to find men in their late twenties or thirties than teenagers and very young adults. Thus, if the military nature of the insurrection explains part of the youthfulness of the insurrectionaries, a disproportionate number of very young men nevertheless chose to join the KPD and to support a particularly activist party strategy.

All this points to one overriding conclusion: the insurrectionaries of October 1923 came from among the youngest workers. While this tendency was most pronounced among the unskilled and among transport workers, it can be seen among skilled workers as well. Secondarily, smaller, though not negligible, groups of older skilled workers, especially in the construction industry, supported the KPD in the fighting. Only housewives and white-collar employees and professionals — groups that were already atypical when compared with the main body of workers who supported the KPD — show different age patterns. They remained at best peripheral participants in an insurrection composed overwhelmingly of younger unskilled and skilled workers.

## VII

## PLACE OF BIRTH

Before 1914 Hamburg was a rapidly growing port city, and this fact is reflected in the origins of those arrested.

Table 11. *Place of birth\**

	Total	%
Hamburg city	218	24.91
Altona	32	3.66
Hamburg suburbs	265	30.29
North Germany	124	14.17
East Germany	91	10.40
Berlin	10	1.14
<i>Rest of Germany</i>	75	8.57
Middle Germany	35	4.00
South Germany	16	1.83
West Germany	24	2.74
Foreign	17	1.94
Uncertain	34	3.89
Unknown	9	1.03
Total	875	

\* The Hamburg suburbs include all suburban areas both in the state of Hamburg and in Prussia, but not Altona, which is listed separately. The other geographical designations comprise the following provinces. North Germany: Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony; East Germany: Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Posen, East and West Prussia, Silesia; Middle Germany: Saxony, Thuringia, Hesse; South Germany: Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg; West Germany: The Palatinate, Rhineland, Saar, Westphalia.

No comparable figures exist for Hamburg as a whole in the 1920's, but in 1910 the state of Hamburg compiled statistics on the birthplaces of its inhabitants. In addition 162,726 persons migrated to Hamburg between 1914 and 1925 (comprising 14.12% of the 1925 residential population of the state of Hamburg), and these most recent immigrants followed the same general patterns of migration as those who moved to Hamburg before 1910.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXII, pp. 38, 43.

Table 12. *Birthplace of residential population state of Hamburg, 1910*

	Total	%
Hamburg and Altona	554,531	55.03
North Germany (including Prussian suburbs)	209,401	20.78
East Germany	83,905	8.33
Berlin	17,305	1.72
Rest of Germany	112,320	11.15
Foreign	30,248	3.00
Total immigrants	453,179	44.97
Total Hamburg population	1,007,710	

Source: Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXVIII (1919), pp. 74-78.

The figures for Hamburg are not directly comparable with those computed for the arrested insurrectionaries. The former refer only to those persons living in the state of Hamburg, whereas the arrested lived both in the state of Hamburg and in suburbs of the city under Prussian jurisdiction. For the arrested, I have included the Prussian suburbs of Hamburg in the figures for those born in Hamburg suburbs. The high percentage of persons born in North Germany in the 1910 Hamburg figures no doubt reflects the many residents who were in fact born in Hamburg's Prussian suburbs, but later moved to the city of Hamburg itself.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the 1910 figures are a rough indicator of the magnitude of migration into the metropolitan area from the different parts of Germany and can be used for comparative purposes. In general, the origins of the arrested parallel the birthplaces of the population as a whole. The Communists do not seem to have been any more "uprooted" than the general population.

The most interesting aspect of the arrested is that they came disproportionately from the suburbs rather than from the city. This is seen if the arrested are divided according to whether they were born in the state of Hamburg or its Prussian suburbs.

State of Hamburg with Altona	294	33.60%
Prussian suburbs	221	25.26%
Other	360	41.14%

<sup>27</sup> In 1910, 122,524 inhabitants of Hamburg, 27.04% of the immigrant population, came from Schleswig-Holstein alone, not including those born in Altona. Most of Hamburg's Prussian suburbs were in fact located in Schleswig-Holstein, and immigrants to the city from them are reflected in the figures for Schleswig-Holstein.

Even more striking is the number who were born in the main neighborhoods of the insurrection itself. These neighborhoods included suburban areas, stretching from Barmbeck to Bergedorf, along both sides of the border that separated the suburbs under Hamburg's jurisdiction from those in Prussia. 225 persons, over 25% of those arrested, were born where the main insurrection took place. Since the turn of the century, the fastest growing neighborhoods of Hamburg had been Barmbeck, Eimsbüttel, Winterhude, Eppendorf and Hamm, most of them tripling in population from 1900 to 1925.<sup>28</sup> The greatest number of those arrested came from these neighborhoods or from the fast-growing areas of Prussia immediately joining them.

Thus a large number of the insurrectionaries was born in Hamburg and its suburbs, and a significant portion was born in or near the neighborhoods of the insurrection itself, despite the fact that these neighborhoods had largely grown up since the turn of the century. Indeed, anyone over 35 years of age in the early 1920's was unlikely to have been born in these recently urbanized areas. One would not be going too far to suggest that the insurrectionaries were the *children* of the immigrants, not the immigrants themselves who first settled Hamburg's newest working-class neighborhoods. There is no proof here for those who see support for the KPD among the uprooted or alienated. On the contrary, if anything there was a tendency towards participation among the younger native population, if not among *Alt-Hamburger*. Beyond this, there were no striking tendencies among the arrested who were born outside Hamburg. As with Hamburg's general population, the non-native-born among the arrested came in greatest number from Northern Germany, secondarily from Eastern Germany and Berlin, then from the rest of Germany and from foreign countries.

I have correlated the birthplaces of the arrested with their occupation, age, skill, and age and occupation. I have done the same for the 225 arrested who were born in the neighborhoods of the main insurrection. For

<sup>28</sup> The growth of the residential population in Hamburg's North-Eastern neighborhoods is seen clearly in the following index (1900 = 100; source: Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXII, p. 16).

	Eimsbüttel	Barmbeck	Eppendorf	Winterhude	Hamm
1900	100	100	100	100	100
1905	130	137	166	150	132
1910	182	192	244	226	224
1919	192	270	281	307	345
1925	200	310	294	331	370

Bergedorf, another center of fighting, had a population gain of 22.5% from 1910 to 1925.

reasons of space I shall only summarize the conclusions and forego a detailed presentation in tabular form.

Workers in different industries showed different patterns in their places of origin. The unskilled, more than any other group, came from Hamburg's suburbs. Whereas 33.94% of all arrested came from the suburbs, 41.42% of the unskilled were born in these outlying working-class neighborhoods. Indeed, almost half (47.11%) of all those born in the neighborhoods of the main insurrection were unskilled or general workers.<sup>29</sup> They were also younger: almost 91% of the unskilled who were born in the suburbs were under 40 years of age. Of the unskilled born in the neighborhoods of the insurrection, over 77% were under 30 years. No matter how one approaches the problem, lack of skill or trade affiliation, youthfulness, and birth in the working-class suburbs, especially in those of the insurrection itself, combine to define the largest single group of insurrectionaries.

Although there were only 10 persons employed in rural occupations, all were born in or near the state of Hamburg. There is nothing surprising in this, since all were employed on farms or in forests near Hamburg. Metal workers, on the other hand, tended to come from the city of Hamburg itself or to migrate to Hamburg from other parts of Germany. They came less often from Hamburg's working-class suburbs. The value of skill was paramount. Skilled metal workers were born and trained in Hamburg's older, more established neighborhoods (those closer to the harbor industries and shipbuilding), or else they were drawn to Hamburg from the rest of Germany because of their skills.<sup>30</sup> The newer working-class suburbs had not existed long enough to produce their own, native-born stratum of skilled metal workers. In fact, not one metal worker over 40 years of age came from the suburbs, a clear sign of the recent transformation of Hamburg's suburbs from rural to urban neighborhoods.<sup>31</sup>

Construction workers followed a third, distinct pattern. They came primarily from the suburbs or from Northern Germany. Again, the nature of the industry seems to have determined the composition of the workforce.

<sup>29</sup> The unskilled did *not* come in exceptionally large numbers from the Eastern provinces. Whereas 10.51% of all arrested came from Germany's East, only 8.74% of the unskilled came from there.

<sup>30</sup> Metal workers even came in large numbers from the East. 12% of metal workers came from the East, which included the metal industries of Upper Silesia and the shipbuilding industry of the Baltic seaports, as well as the rural hinterland. Thus, a skilled metal worker was more likely to come from the "backward" East than unskilled workers with no stable industrial occupation.

<sup>31</sup> Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg*, pp. 164-66, has noted the residential differences between skilled and unskilled workers in Hamburg and used these differences for an analysis of which workers voted for the USPD (and later the KPD).

In contrast to workers in the metal industry, construction workers would have been able to learn their trades or gain initial experience wherever they were born. They may have migrated to Hamburg in search of permanent employment, but the construction trades existed everywhere, including the countryside. Moreover, the rapid growth of Hamburg's suburbs since the late nineteenth century spurred residential construction, and at least some of the jobs fell to workers in the newer neighborhoods or to their children. In fact, most of the construction workers born in the suburbs were under 30. Communist construction workers seem to have come from two labor markets: one in Hamburg, especially its suburbs, for younger workers, and a regional one in Northern Germany, which traditionally kept Hamburg supplied with additional construction workers and through which many of the older workers had been recruited.

Transport workers came overwhelmingly from the city of Hamburg. Whereas only 24.91% of all arrested were born in the city, over 50% of transport workers were native inhabitants, almost 58% of the harbor workers alone. Transport workers formed the only occupational group to favor the city so clearly, and the overriding importance of the harbor in providing transport jobs is undoubtedly the explanation. Harbor and transport workers had their own culture; they were born, lived and worked in the older neighborhoods nearest the harbor. Very few came from the suburban areas where the main insurrection took place. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the arrested transport workers were disproportionately young. They were the youngest of an already young group of workers. Thus the arrested transport workers tended to come from the younger generation of the indigenous working-class population of Hamburg's harbor neighborhoods.

There were too few arrested in the lesser industries upon which to base firm conclusions. If one takes workers in printing, textiles/clothing/leather, state/municipal, and food/entertainment together, they come mainly from Hamburg's suburbs, but, interestingly, more often than not from those suburbs *outside* of the insurrection. Workers in these industries seem to have been drawn into the insurrection as individual party members or members of the OD. They were generally charged with the same offenses as the other insurrectionaries (insurrection, high treason, disturbing the peace, etc.), but there is no clear link between their specific occupations and their political activity. In any case, probable membership in the KPD or OD is the only apparent link between them and the rest of the insurrectionaries.

White-collar employees and professionals came less often from either Hamburg or its suburbs. More than any other group, they came from other

parts of Germany or from foreign countries. And, among the other regions of Germany, they tended *not* to come from the rural Eastern provinces, but rather from Northern Germany, Berlin, and Middle and Western Germany. In short, they followed the lines of trade and commerce between Hamburg and the more advanced parts of Germany. They belonged to a different labor market and did not migrate from the same areas as workers. Only the youngest white-collar employees came in significant numbers from Hamburg's suburbs. Otherwise, they tended to come from outside the immediate Hamburg area.

The 47 women arrested during the insurrection also tended to come from outside Hamburg and its suburbs. Only 11 women were born in the city, and another 9 in the suburbs. On the other hand, 7 came from Northern Germany, 6 from the Eastern provinces, and another 6 from Western Germany. Only 7 were born in the neighborhoods of the insurrection (14.89% of all women, compared to 25.71% of all arrested). All the white-collar employees came from outside Hamburg, whereas 10 of 14 women workers were born in Hamburg or its suburbs. Wives came evenly from in and outside the Hamburg area. None of the seven women born in the neighborhoods of the insurrection was arrested for looting; rather, all were charged with political offenses. This accords with what is known about the geography of the Hamburg disturbances. The fighting (in which disproportionately fewer women participated) was concentrated in the North-Eastern and Eastern suburbs of Hamburg, whereas the looting (in which many more women took part) occurred in neighborhoods not directly related to the uprising.<sup>32</sup> These additional facts confirm the hypothesis that few women took part in the insurrection, but that those who were politically involved came from the area of the uprising, fought rather than looted, and were above all younger workers between the ages of 21 and 40.

Before concluding this discussion of birthplaces, I would like to emphasize that the younger insurrectionaries tended to come from the city of Hamburg and especially its suburbs (Table 13). This is underscored when one considers the age of the 225 born in the neighborhoods of the insurrection (Table 14). These younger workers, the largest group of insurrectionaries, were not newcomers to Hamburg. Rather, they fought in their home neighborhoods. The older workers, who had migrated in larger numbers to Hamburg, may have been "uprooted". But it is just as possible, and more likely, that they had first come to Hamburg in the period of expansion and industrialization before 1914 and that by 1923 they, too, had long become accustomed to their new life in the Hansa city.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Habedank, *Zur Geschichte*, esp. pp. 142-43 and 152-55.



Table 13. *Place of birth by age*

Birthplace	Age category											
	I		II		III		IV		V		Total	
	T.	%	T.	%	T.	%	T.	%	T.	%	T.	%
Hamburg	56	32.00	100	26.81	35	19.44	21	22.34	6	12.50	218	24.91
Suburbs*	72	41.14	149	39.95	51	28.33	17	18.09	7	14.58	297	33.94
North Gmy*	28	16.00	52	13.94	24	13.33	13	13.83	6	12.50	124	14.17
East Gmy	5	2.86	27	7.24	29	16.11	16	17.02	14	29.17	91	10.40
Rest of Gmy	8	4.57	23	6.17	26	13.89	19	20.21	10	20.83	85	9.71
Foreign	2	1.14	10	2.68	3	1.67	2	2.13			17	1.94
Uncertain unknown*	4	2.29	12	3.22	13	7.22	6	6.38	5	10.42	43	4.91
Total	175		373		180		94		48		875	

\* The age of five of the arrested (one born in the suburbs, one in North Germany, and three of uncertain or unknown birthplace) was unknown.

Table 14. *Age of those born in neighborhoods of insurrection*

Age cat.	All arrested		Born in neighborhood of insurrection		% of age group
I	175	20.00	59	26.22	33.71
II	373	42.63	111	49.33	29.76
III	180	20.57	38	16.89	21.11
IV	94	10.74	12	5.33	12.77
V	48	5.49	5	2.22	10.42
VI	5	0.57			
Total	875		225		25.71

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the arrested did not differ significantly in place of birth from Hamburg's population as a whole, except that more of the native-born came from the suburbs and relatively fewer from the city. Each major industry of Hamburg had its peculiarities, based upon the social and cultural differences of workers in Hamburg's major industries and especially upon the labor market of each industry. The origins of the arrested correspond to what one might reasonably expect

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Statistik des Hamburgischen Staates, XXXII, p. 15, for statistics on the growth of Hamburg and immigration. Immigration was exceptionally large before 1890 and again after 1900. The large number of immigrants among the older arrested workers is reflected in the immigration statistics for before 1890. The 1890's was a decade of economic depression, slow recovery and, consequently, low immigration to Hamburg, and, in the city's growth, the greater importance of births than immigration. This is reflected among the arrested in age category II, many of whom were born in Hamburg.

in each of Hamburg's industries, whether in metal, construction, or transport, or among unskilled workers and white-collar employees. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of those arrested was that the youngest groups, the largest number of insurrectionaries, tended to come from Hamburg and its working-class suburbs, indeed from the very neighborhoods in which the main insurrection took place. These young workers may not have felt content with German or Hamburg society, but not because they were not at home, for they fought where they had been born, where they had always lived and worked.

## VIII

### CONCLUSION

Several historians have analyzed the social composition of the KPD in different parts of Germany, and their findings can be compared with the composition of the arrested in October 1923.<sup>34</sup> All who have analyzed the KPD during the Weimar Republic agree that it recruited a very small number of women. The disparity between male and female support for socialist politics, even among workers, was traditional in Germany, although the predominance of males was even more pronounced in the KPD than in the SPD. In the later 1920's, only 16.5% of all KPD members were women, compared to 21% of SPD members.<sup>35</sup> The military nature of the October 1923 insurrection partly obscures the role of women in the Hamburg KPD, but the small number of women among the arrested and

<sup>34</sup> For a general analysis of the early 1920's, see R. Wheeler, "Zur sozialen Struktur der Arbeiterbewegung am Anfang der Weimarer Republik: Einige methodologischen Bemerkungen," in: *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik: Verhandlungen des Internationalen Symposiums in Bochum von 12.-17. Juni 1973*, ed. by H. Mommsen, D. Petzina and B. Weisbrod (Düsseldorf, 1974), pp. 179-89; Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg*, chs 7-8, for Hamburg; and L. Peterson, "The Policies and Work of the KPD in the Free Labor Unions of Rhineland-Westphalia 1920-1924" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, 1978), especially ch. 9, for Rhineland-Westphalia. An analysis of the KPD in the late 1920's is provided by H. Wunderer, "Materialien zur Soziologie der Mitgliedschaft und Wählerschaft der KPD zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik," in: *Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Marxschen Theorie*, V (Frankfurt/M., 1975), pp. 257-77, and by H. Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus: Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M., 1969), I, pp. 281-87. For an analysis of the KPD in the 1928 and 1930 Reichstag elections, cf. Jerzy Holzer, *Parteien und Massen: Die politische Krise in Deutschland 1928-1930* [Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz, Abteilung Universalgeschichte, I] (Wiesbaden, 1975).

<sup>35</sup> Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus*, I, p. 282.

the large number of looters among the women both reflect the relative lack of political involvement of Hamburg women.

Like supporters of the KPD in other parts of Germany, the arrested insurrectionaries were overwhelmingly workers. White-collar employees were woefully underrepresented.<sup>36</sup> The largest group of arrested called themselves simply *Arbeiter*, general and unskilled workers without any firm industrial or trade affiliation. However, the KPD also attracted a large group of skilled workers who worked in Hamburg's major local industries (metal, construction, harbor and transport). It would be wrong to identify the KPD with the unskilled. Although this was the single largest group of Communist supporters, the KPD also attracted large numbers of skilled workers in the major urban and industrial centers of Germany, in Hamburg no less than in Rhineland-Westphalia, Berlin or Saxony. The SPD was in general more successful in holding the loyalty of craft workers, especially in older, lesser, more stable and less industrial trades, and craft workers tended to support a conservative form of trade unionism in the German free unions. But, if the KPD was relatively less successful among this group of workers, it nevertheless made real breakthroughs among the skilled in the largest and most modern industries, and (particularly in Hamburg) in construction and metals.<sup>37</sup>

It is unfortunately not possible on the basis of the evidence about the arrested insurrectionaries to say more about the conditions in which they worked. The police were more interested in their occupations than in where they worked. Hermann Weber, using Communist party statistics, has pointed out that in 1927 party members tended to work in small- and medium-size factories rather than in the largest ones. Moreover, skilled workers outnumbered the unskilled in the KPD of 1927.<sup>38</sup> In Hamburg this would have meant that relatively fewer Communists worked in the large-scale shipbuilding industry, and relatively more in the many smaller factories associated with the harbor and foreign trade. The sample used in this

<sup>36</sup> In the mid 1920's some 80% of the KPD's members were workers or craftsmen (*ibid.*), whereas over 90% of the Hamburg insurrectionaries identified themselves with manual work. The exceptionally heavy participation of workers in the insurrection corresponds to what is known of the history of the socialist movement in Hamburg. Even before 1914, the SPD in Hamburg was disproportionately working-class in composition and never attracted significant numbers from the middle classes. Over 90% of the pre-war SPD in Hamburg was composed of workers or their wives. Cf. Ullrich, *Die Hamburger Arbeiterbewegung*, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78, 83.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Wheeler, who draws similar conclusions, and Peterson, for an analysis of support for the KPD in the labor unions and industries of Rhineland-Westphalia.

<sup>38</sup> Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus*, I, pp. 282ff. According to national party-membership figures for 1927, 40% of party members were skilled workers, 10% handicraftsmen, 2% agricultural laborers, and only 28% unskilled.

article cannot confirm or refute this conclusion for Hamburg or for the early 1920's. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that the work situations of KPD members changed considerably between 1923 and 1927, so that Weber's conclusion does not apply to the early period of KPD history.

In particular, up until the beginning of 1924 the KPD throughout Germany won widespread support both in large factories (in works-councils elections, unions and strikes) and in the working-class neighborhoods where the unskilled workers lived. Between 1918 and 1924 unskilled workers in heavy industry also joined the labor unions and political parties, and became active in the workers' movement to an extent unheard of before 1914. In Hamburg the KPD was relatively stronger, at least in elections, in the large-scale shipbuilding enterprises and in the newer working-class suburbs to the North-East of the city (where the insurrection took place).<sup>39</sup> It is most likely that many of the metal workers and general workers among the insurrectionaries worked and lived in such settings. Only after 1924 did the balance in the KPD shift toward workers (often skilled rather than unskilled) in smaller or medium-size factories, and this change occurred, not because the KPD no longer appealed to or tried to organize unskilled workers in large-scale industry, but because of forces beyond the KPD's control. For the KPD suffered a series of major political defeats from October 1923 to June 1924, and these defeats were compounded by the equally serious defeats and crises in the labor unions. Starting in mid 1924 employers in large-scale industry seized upon the weakness of the workers' movement to launch an aggressive campaign to cleanse their factories of Communists and militant workers. At the same time, German industry underwent a wave of rationalization that greatly reduced the workforce in large-scale industry, and rationalization was followed in 1925-26 by an economic recession that resulted in massive unemployment. Employers used the opportunities afforded by rationalization and recession to fire the most militant and outspoken workers, mostly Communists, but also Social Democratic labor unionists and works councilors. By 1927 many Communists were still unemployed or blacklisted, and when they could find work it tended to be in smaller firms where employers were less well organized, more competitive (especially in

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg*, p. 116, for works-councils elections in Hamburg, and p. 185 for a break-down of voting returns by neighborhood in the 1921 and 1924 elections. In general, see Peterson, "Policies and Work", *op. cit.*, for the role of the unskilled in the KPD in the heavy industrial region of Rhineland-Westphalia in the early 1920's, and E. C. Schöck, *Arbeitslosigkeit und Rationalisierung: Die Lage der Arbeiter und die kommunistische Gewerkschaftspolitik 1920-28* (Frankfurt/M., 1977), for an analysis that covers the entire period from 1920 to 1928.

attracting workers on the labor market) and less repressive. The KPD also seems to have lost many of its unskilled members out of political disillusionment or the effects of defeat, repression, and economic recession in 1924-26. These unskilled workers would have been more likely to work in large-scale industry. Skilled workers exhibited greater endurance both in the KPD and in the workers' movement as a whole, but they were also more likely to work in smaller factories that did not rely so heavily on unskilled labor. One can at least build a strong hypothesis that KPD membership underwent a major change in 1924-26. Before then the party attracted more workers in large-scale industry and more unskilled workers. Afterwards, the party retained more workers in smaller factories and more skilled workers, and many KPD members who previously worked in large-scale industry were either blacklisted, unemployed, or forced to take jobs in smaller, less repressive firms. After 1924 the KPD continued to win the passive, electoral support of workers in heavy industry, but lost to it was the active role such workers had played in the movement in the early 1920's.

Finally, the KPD was an exceptionally young party. Here, too, the arrested insurrectionaries correspond to what is known generally about the German Communist movement. There were, of course, divergences between workers in different industries, some (as in the harbor) being younger than others (as in construction). Despite such industrial peculiarities, the striking point is the general youthfulness of the arrested as a whole. The largest single group of young workers was unskilled, but at the same time large numbers of apprentices, journeymen and young master craftsmen also joined the insurrection. With rare exceptions (mainly in certain construction trades) youth was a more general factor uniting workers in the KPD than level of skill. Young male workers in the major local industries, whether skilled or unskilled, formed the backbone of the party's cadres and supporters.

It is one thing to isolate specific age groups and industries as the most common links among the arrested. It is another thing to explain what these factors mean. Richard Comfort, in his study of the labor movement in Hamburg after the First World War, has argued that the KPD won its greatest support from unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the mass production industries. In his view, these workers were new to politics, uncommitted, "alienated", and therefore disproportionately young. They lent their support to Communist leaders who were, themselves, unskilled workers from the mass-production industries, with relatively short histories of affiliation to and leadership in the organized workers' movement; they, too, were uprooted by war, revolution and unemployment, alienated and

embittered. These Communists, both supporters and leaders, turned their resentment and grievances against capitalist society into a “politics of despair”, which culminated in the Hamburg uprising of October 1923.<sup>40</sup> Aside from the validity of the evidence upon which Comfort bases his conclusions,<sup>41</sup> does the information known about the background of the insurrectionaries of October 1923 justify Comfort’s assertion that the

<sup>40</sup> Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg*, pp. 134ff., 164-66, 170.

<sup>41</sup> Comfort’s evidence on both the leaders and the supporters of the Hamburg KPD is open to many criticisms. His characterizations of the KPD’s leadership is based largely on the statements of 14 leaders who were brought to trial after the October 1923 insurrection. Comfort does not identify these 14 leaders, nor does he justify his assumption that they were representative of the party. Indeed, at one point he flatly contradicts himself by saying that only “several were among the leading figures in the Hamburg KPD” (p. 138), not all 14 as he previously asserted. More serious, Comfort makes the elementary error of mistaking the distortions of the KPD’s agitprop machine for factual and reliable biographical information about the arrested. In their trials, the fourteen consistently followed the KPD’s ultraleftist agitprop guidelines of 1924-25, playing up their grievances against society for political purposes in a particularly extreme fashion. The fourteen were not directing their statements “at least in part with an eye toward winning the sympathy of the court”, as Comfort naively thinks, but rather in order to appeal above the heads of the court to workers in Germany. The KPD leadership under Fischer, Maslow and Thälmann believed, rightly or wrongly, that such extremely pathetic statements would “expose” the capitalist state and rally workers to the KPD. In any case, the trial statements used by Comfort, when stripped of their ultraleftist rhetoric, boil down to such typical features of a worker’s life as unemployment, poor working conditions, degradation of work, job insecurity, wartime experience, or deprivation at home during the war. Virtually all workers in Hamburg would have experienced at least several of these in the course of a normal proletarian life. Comfort’s analysis of the KPD’s supporters is just as weak. Although he subjects the electoral support of both the SPD and USPD to a detailed social analysis, he does not do the same for the KPD. Nor does he make any attempt to analyze the KPD’s support in the free unions, in works councils elections, or in major factories and industries. Having overlooked the most basic and informative sources about the KPD’s supporters, Comfort can make only a very superficial social analysis of the party. Even when describing the occupations of known Communists, he displays a very weak grasp of social and economic life in Germany. To give one example, he uses the term “semiskilled trades” to describe the occupations of KPD leaders (p. 137), but he neither defines this term (which seems to be his own invention and which I have not seen used by other German social historians or statisticians) nor explains its usefulness in analyzing the KPD. “Semiskilled trade” is a contradiction in terms: either a worker held a quickly-learned job operating a machine (semi-skilled work rarely taking longer than a week or two to master), or he learned a trade (knowledge of which he could later claim when looking for work). There is a statistical category called “semiskilled worker” (*angelernte Arbeiter*), opposed to unskilled (*ungelehrte*) and skilled (*gelernte*). However, the designation “semiskilled” was still poorly defined and rarely used in Germany or Hamburg in the early 1920’s, and there was no category of “semiskilled trades”. It is no wonder that Comfort belabors such abstractions as “alienation” when he pays so little attention to the reality of the work processes this abstraction is supposed to describe.

leading Communists “performed an anonymous kind of labor under very anonymous circumstances”?

Three facts stand out about the Hamburg insurrectionaries. First, they came from the major local industries, from the heart of Hamburg’s working class. For an outsider looking in, such workers may appear faceless and nameless, but in the organized workers’ movement these workers formed the strongest and largest base for working-class politics. And they were anything but nameless or faceless when it came to organizing a union, recruiting for a political party, mobilizing voters in a working-class neighborhood – or staging an insurrection. (Certainly the Communists were neither nameless nor faceless for the police, who arrested most of them within a week.) In particular, these workers gave a revolutionary party like the KPD its specific identity as representative of a major segment of the industrial working class.

Second, a significant group of insurrectionaries was composed of skilled workers. Traditionally, these workers were the most active participants in the German labor unions, and they served as a reservoir for the recruitment of the leaders of the workers’ movement in factories, unions and party politics. There is no place in Comfort’s analysis of the KPD for these skilled workers, yet they undoubtedly played a very important role in the development of the KPD. The Communist movement, in fact, became a formidable power in Germany, both in politics and in the labor unions and factories, once these skilled workers combined forces with the unskilled in the major urban centers and biggest industries.

Most important, however, and most directly related to the youthfulness of the KPD’s followers, the insurrectionaries of October 1923 did not differ significantly in terms of birthplace from the Hamburg population as a whole. There were no more migrants, no more “uprooted” workers, than one would normally have expected in a random sample of Hamburg’s population, and the immigrants among the arrested came from the same parts of Germany in approximately the same proportions as the general population. There were differences in the origins of the arrested between industries, of course, but these differences reflected the separate labor markets, the different recruiting practices, and the distinctive cultural backgrounds of workers in the metal, construction, harbor and transport industries. The birthplaces of the arrested reflect the general composition of Hamburg’s population and suggest that the KPD drew its support from the heart of the working class, not from fringe groups, casual laborers, or workers laboring under “anonymous circumstances”. By far the largest number of insurrectionaries were young, male, unskilled workers who were born in Hamburg itself, indeed in the very neighborhoods in which the



main insurrection took place. There is every reason to believe that they had firm roots in Hamburg.

The geography of the insurrection indirectly reinforces this picture of the insurrectionaries. The KPD in Hamburg is often associated with the city's harbor workers. Along with workers in the Northern and Eastern suburbs, harbor workers were unquestionably one of the KPD's main centers of support.<sup>42</sup> These casual laborers, a part of which comprised a floating population, lived within a distinct subculture in the older, inner-city neighborhoods nearest to the harbor, and they depended upon the fluctuating harbor trade to make a living. However, the main insurrection took place in the city's North-Eastern suburbs, not in the harbor, and drew primarily upon regularly employed factory workers, not casual laborers. To a certain extent, the geographic center of the insurrection can be explained by incidental or strategic factors. The Communists failed in their initial attempts to win control of police stations near the harbor, after which party leaders called off the insurrection in these neighborhoods. Moreover, as a result of the KPD's strictly military strategy it failed to link up with the strike of harbor workers that was already underway when the insurrection broke out, so that the KPD remained completely isolated from the main struggle in the harbor area. Nevertheless, the KPD was more successful in the North-Eastern suburbs around Barmbeck in large part because both the KPD and the OD were larger and better organized in these neighborhoods. And, once the insurrection began, the Communists received more sympathetic and active support from workers in these neighborhoods. Although many harbor workers participated in the insurrection, they were proportionately less prominent than their overall weight in Hamburg's working class, and the most active and best organized sections of the party came from young industrial workers in the North-Eastern suburbs. Factory workers, not casual laborers, formed the backbone of the insurrection, and they came from neighborhoods that had been built up in the decade and half prior to 1914. These neighborhoods were just old enough to have created a first generation of a relatively cohesive, yet still new and young working class, but not so old as to have given rise to a more thoroughly established, distinctive subculture, as in the harbor. In terms of age, occupation, living conditions, neighborhood life and work experience, Communist workers in these suburbs had much in common, but only after 1918 did they have their first opportunity to transform their shared experiences into a common consciousness of their condition as workers and into an organized defense of their interests as a class. They were a new –

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.



and in many ways a first – generation, and they exhibited the peculiar combination of cohesiveness and instability that is found among workers in such situations and that often gives rise to economic and political radicalism.<sup>43</sup>

Thus a social profile of the Communist insurrectionaries arrested in October 1923 suggests that they were part of a new generation of workers employed in the industries that had been newly built up or expanded in the two decades prior to 1914. They united a distinct group of skilled workers who drew upon long traditions of organization and struggle in the German workers' movement, the younger generation of transport workers in the city's old harbor neighborhoods, and a newly active mass of unskilled workers who had been only marginally touched by the SPD and labor unions before 1914. Viewed in this light, the revolution of 1918-19 and the political conflicts leading up to October 1923 formed a watershed in the history of the German workers' movement. These struggles were both the expression and the formative political experience of a new working class, one first thrown together by the economic expansion and rapid urbanization of Wilhelmine Germany, but eventually united by the shared experiences of both daily life and struggle. In particular, the unskilled workers of Hamburg stepped onto the stage of history after 1918 for the first time as an active, conscious and organized force. They sought recognition in a political party where they would be treated as equals, and they found a home in the new workers' party of the Communists.

It would be wrong to dismiss the Communist insurrectionaries of 1923 as alienated, uncommitted or anonymous workers, irrationally driven to support a politics of despair. No doubt they had experienced the negative and oppressive effects of wage labor under industrial capitalism. Until

<sup>43</sup> This combination of cohesiveness and instability can be found behind the radicalism of many groups of industrial workers in the early twentieth century. See my article "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, 1900-1925", in: *Work, Community, and Power: The Experience of Labor in Europe and America, 1900-1925*, ed. by J. E. Cronin and C. Sirianni (Philadelphia, 1983). The Communists themselves identified the party in Hamburg with *both* transport workers from the city's older harbor neighborhoods *and* the new working class from the suburbs. In KPD mythology as created in the later 1920's, Ernst Thälmann, the party's national leader after 1925 and a teamster in Hamburg before entering party and union politics, became the model of the revolutionary Communist proletarian. In the early 1930's Willi Bredel, a young Communist worker-writer-revolutionary from Hamburg, wrote two novels which epitomized the Hamburg KPD's self-image. *Maschinenfabrik N & K* told the story of a Communist-led strike at a metal factory in the industrial belt near the harbor, while *Rosenhofstrasse* recounted the lives of young Communist workers in one of the tenement complexes of Eimsbüttel, a working-class neighborhood and center of Communist strength in Northern Hamburg.

1918 they had been subjected to authoritarian discipline and had been excluded as workers from German society and politics. They were totally dependent upon wages for a living and had few resources to defend themselves economically. They had been forced into the unskilled or semi-skilled jobs of the new industries with few opportunities for advancement, for here was where work was to be found. They had experienced the alienating effects of wage labor in the mass production industries. They had been crowded into new working-class neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. But they had also learned from these experiences and chose, in the favorable political conditions after 1918, to do something about them.

Moreover, the radicalism of this segment of Hamburg's working class had been fed by a series of political and economic struggles that decisively conditioned their political consciousness. The young workers who fought in October 1923 grew up during the suffrage struggles and economic movements of 1905-14, which in Hamburg had culminated in mass political and wildcat economic strikes. They had lived through the war, either as young soldiers at the front or more often as adolescents in Hamburg, but in any case in an atmosphere of growing struggle for peace and of resistance against economic oppression and deprivation. They had entered the adult workforce just as military defeat and revolution drastically undermined social and economic stability in Germany, and they had often fought their first open political battles during the revolution of 1918-19. Finally, they carried on the struggle begun in 1918-19 in an atmosphere of political and economic crisis brought on by the inflation of 1921-23.

The insurrectionaries of October 1923 were no longer passive victims of their fate, but rather responded to their situation in terms of a specific economic context, social experience, and tradition of political struggle. If they had once been atomized and alienated, they now developed a class-consciousness to define their common goals and inform their common actions. If they had once been uncommitted, they now dedicated themselves to specific forms of economic and political struggle and to a political organization that could translate them into action. If they had once been anonymous faces in a crowd of workers, they now joined with other workers like themselves, in their industries and neighborhoods, and consciously challenged their bosses and rulers. They were not uprooted by war, revolution and inflationary crisis. Rather, they became politically conscious of shared social experiences and class interests in the course of a long series of political and economic struggles. These social experiences and class interests were rooted in the economic changes of 1890-1914. The

origins of their political and economic struggles predated 1914 as well. The war, revolution and inflationary crisis reacted upon this base by sharpening workers' identity and raising their struggles to a new level of consciousness.

The generation of workers, born *in Hamburg* from 1890 to 1914, rethought its parents' Social Democratic commitments, and a specific segment of it broke with past political conceptions that did not correspond to its needs or experiences. This new segment of the working class consciously sought the most convincing available alternative. Its support for the KPD, which culminated in the Hamburg insurrection of October 1923, was no "politics of despair". It was, rather, the reasonable and necessary response of an identifiable group of workers who first came to political consciousness during the social, economic, and political crises of post-war Germany.