

In the Freest State in the World

Ret Marut

December 3, 1919

It is not only the freest state in the world but it also has the freest voting system in the world. A voting system that enables the man who owns one or twenty large newspapers, or who takes the trouble to have several million cleverly gotten-up leaflets printed and distributed, to gain as much influence on the election as he desires. A voting system which permits the church confessional and the pulpit, the marital bed and the death bed, to be used for purposes of political propaganda, is indeed the freest voting system on earth.

It has been demonstrated that those who vote for the Social Democratic Party are composed approximately one-third of women and two-thirds of men. The voters for the official Christ-desecrators,¹ on the other hand, are two-thirds women and one-third men. And such a voting system passes for the will of the people.

The freest state in the world indeed: profiteers, usurers, and racketeers, killer-robbers and murderers of revolutionaries, all are living a life of luxury and debauchery. Workers and revolutionaries, on the other hand, are being slaughtered and martyred in jails and penitentiaries.

That all this would happen if ever the Social Democrats came to power, I told Social Democratic workers as long ago as the year 1905.² That the Social Democrats, once in power, would be a hundred times more brutal than the fathers of the Anti-Socialist Laws,³ I told Social Democratic workers in 1907. I told them this not out of political understanding (which I did not have then and do not have today, that being the reason I have been able to retain my feeling for human beings); rather I told it to them out of the feeling that Social Democracy was breeding a popery worse than that of the Catholic Church. And so today it has, in fact, come to pass: Social Democracy, which asserts that it is based on the materialist conception of history, is totally blind with regard to the

¹ "the official Christ-desecrators," in Marut's arsenal of epithets, refers to the leaders of the Catholic Party of Bavaria, once known as the Center (German: *Zentrum*), later calling itself the Bavarian People's Party (BVP).

² "year 1905" may seem an improbably early date for the man who became Ret Marut and then B. Traven to have been active and politically informed in Germany. Yet it is possible. Shreds of evidence, which cannot be detailed here, suggest that by 1905 he was in his early twenties, and actively involved in working class politics.

³ The Anti-Socialist laws were pushed through the Reichstag by Bismarck in 1878, after the Socialist Party (SPD) had won 500,000 votes and elected twelve delegates to that body. The laws, draconically framed and rigorously applied, broke up the Socialists' organizations, trade unions, newspapers, and publishing centers. Nevertheless the movement resisted and ultimately staged a comeback, gaining 35 Reichstag delegates by 1890, and 89 by 1903. In the Germany of 1919, of course, the Anti-Socialist laws were only a memory, but of a nightmare kind, to the readers Marut hoped he would reach with this piece.

inevitable and logical course of historical developments. Social Democracy believed that it alone was the revolutionary party; it believed that it alone represented the interests of the workers; it believed that it was the be-all and end-all of all political development. And yet, apparent to all who were willing to see there came into being even many years before World War I the successor to Social Democracy: the Communist Party.⁴

So, now, as a result, the Social Democratic Party has become the conservative party in this country, because with astonishment and fright it realizes that it is constantly being driven from positions on the left, ever further toward positions on the right. And we must surely keep our eyes wide open, because the Communist Party has at its left its extremely strong successor; and it may be that the Communist Party, once in power, will perhaps persecute the supporters of its successor party just as today the Communists are persecuted by the Social Democrats.

I stand to continue using a political concept – so far to the left that my breath does not even stir that successor to the Communist Party.⁵

The only person who could smile at this is one who forgets that humanity unceasingly evolves onward, and that human history, like nature shows no static moments.

But to what a state of degeneracy this Social Democratic Party has sunk, which hunts down like wild animals in the forest revolutionaries and workers who ask nothing but the fulfillment of what was promised to them a thousand times by the rulers of today promised in the days before they began to rule. Indeed, it is worse, for the animals of the forest are granted periods of closed seasons, and skilled hunting is required at other times.

How depraved this Party has become which offers bounties of 10,000 and 30,000 marks for the capture of fleeing revolutionaries, the purpose being not to protect the population from them, but rather to wreak vengeance on them and murder them. What more can you expect from this Party whose members perpetrate murders on revolutionaries legal murders, which they call death sentences. And this in a country where, since 1848, and despite the Anti-Socialist Laws, no death sentence has been carried out against revolutionaries.

How must honest workers regard this Party whose leaders in Bavaria alone throw five thousand revolutionaries into prison, and hand down penitentiary sentences as long as fifteen years and eight years this Party whose founders and leaders themselves once received asylum in Switzerland and England, but whose present leaders, in the most brutal and vicious manner, demand the extradition of fugitive revolutionaries who have sought and found protection in foreign countries. The purpose of these demands is vengeance base vengeance.

The Party which despite the monstrous misery of the German people, can produce untold tens of millions of marks in order to wreak cruel vengeance on revolutionaries, has thereby proclaimed its decay and disintegration.

⁴ “Communist Party” here cannot mean the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), which did not come into being under that name until the start of 1919, when it arose out of the militant Spartacist Bund. Marut here means rather the Majority Socialists of Russia, known since 1903 as the Bolsheviki or Bolsheviks. They, however, adopted the Communist Party name during 1918, only a year prior to the one in which Marut wrote this piece for the *Ziegelbrenner*.

⁵ “successor to the Communist Party” seems typically cryptic and obscure. Very likely Marut meant that all things change, particularly in political struggles. He had flaunted his independence of all parties in a fiery proclamation issued nearly a year earlier, declaring: “I do not belong to the Social Democratic Party, nor am I an Independent Socialist. I do not belong to the Spartacus group, nor am I a Bolshevik. I belong to no party, to no political association of any description... I cannot belong to any party, because I see in any party membership a limitation of my personal freedom; because the pledge to a party program takes from me .. that which I regard as the highest and noblest goal on earth: to be allowed to be a human being.”

In addition to the many old lies of the Party bosses,⁶ thousands of new lies are added: “We are not the government; the government is a coalition.”

Good. But if the Party bigwigs, in consequence of this brutal vengeance (which with their silent approval is being wreaked against revolutionaries) were to quit the coalition which, in any case, is a mockery of socialist ideas then the unprecedented crimes against the revolutionaries would no longer be possible. And Social Democrats, whose program calls for abolition of the death penalty, are voting for death penalties to be carried out. But they lie again, saying that they did not vote for this. Had they voted against it, the murders of revolutionaries could not be carried out. And now again, as during the war, they abstained from voting, and in this way did not openly violate their Party’s platform. Up to now, actions of this kind were attributed only to the Jesuits.

Such a Party is being guided in a way that abandons revolutionaries to the lust for vengeance and the bloodthirstiness of a degenerate and bestial bourgeoisie. Thus, the Party has done more damage to the concept of the nation than ever could have been done by a revolutionary. And only as a result of this was it possible that in Munich seven revolutionaries (not to mention more respectable men and women) received neither pardon nor amnesty, but rather were legally murdered a few hours after their trials whereas in the same city, four days later, a hold-up man who had slain a tavern-keeper and his wife while committing a theft, was pardoned; and people who had tortured their own children in the most brutal and gruesome way were sentenced to only a few days in jail.

And you think that the German Revolution is not coming?

Spartacists⁷ are not the ones who are making the Revolution in Germany, but rather those here who utter the lie that they must protect the German people from the Revolution — it is they who are making the Revolution.

But woe to you, officers, soldiers, Party bosses, judges, state’s attorneys, informers, and newspaper-scribblers,⁸ who have murdered and martyred revolutionaries! You have handed down your own sentences. Your deaths are decided, and I believe that even I am no longer able to rescue you. If I can, however — if I have even a trace of opportunity to save you I shall do it, because to me human blood is precious above all else.

How many people were there who hoped that the bourgeoisie would be better, nobler, more just and more conciliatory than the Spartacists? I, too, cherished this hope — I, even more than others, because I believe there is goodness in a person as long as he still retains a breath of life. But how disappointed we were! The unleashed bourgeoisie, whom we believed had attained a

⁶ “Party bosses” here and “Party bigwigs” below translate Marut’s term *Partei-Pfaffen*, literally “Party priests” meaning the officials of the German Social Democratic Party who — in his view — misled and swindled their followers as priests mislead and swindle the faithful.

⁷ “Spartacists” entered German political history when, after January, 1916, a small but gifted group of militant Socialists began publishing a series called *Spartacus Letters*, designed to free the enslaved minds of German workers as the original Spartacus had sought to free Roman slaves in 72 B.C. The Spartacist leaders and agitators after the spring of 1917 were reinforced by the Independent Socialists, but the former retained their organizational autonomy, and by the end of 1918 metamorphosed into the new German Communist Party. During 1919, “Spartacist” became a scareword to the German bourgeoisie and even to the orthodox Majority Socialists (SPD), who largely controlled the new government. It was the domestic equivalent of “Bolshevik” during the same era in western Europe and the U.S.A.

⁸ “newspaper-scribblers” is a justified translation of Marut’s phrase, *Zeitungs-schreiber*, for here and in many other key writings he vented burning contempt on “the press” and those who served it.

loftier level of culture, was, in fact, more bestial, more avid for vengeance, and more bloodthirsty than Spartacus ever had been even for an instant.

How much you would have won, citizens, had you but shown only a trace of magnanimity and conciliation! You would have, perhaps, gained a lifelong reprieve. But as it is, you have yourselves determined your own decline and fall, perhaps your total annihilation. And that is a pity; because among you are many who are capable of salvaging great and undying values.

But among the newspaper-scribblers, there is no one who could preserve or create intellectual values or cultural treasures among the people of the future.

Since order has been restored on the corpses of about six hundred honest revolutionaries⁹ (I greet you all again in death! All of you, without a single exception, not even excepting the so-called “murderers of hostages.” All of you died for the sacred cause of human progress; and all of us make mistakes) – insecurity in the city of Munich has reached its peak. And this has happened in spite of the fact that international Social Democracy expelled more than twenty thousand aliens (among whom they included also Prussians, Saxons, and Wurttembergers), and placed “unreliable elements” under protective arrest or simply tossed them into jail. Nevertheless, since the restoration of order in Munich, more robbery-murders and sex-murders have been committed than in the five years preceding the temporary end of the Bavarian Council Republic.¹⁰

Among these killings, six remain unsolved out of those committed during the few months of the bayonet-based “order.” This is quite natural, for robbery-murderers and rapists are having happy days in Munich, ever since the entire force of law-enforcement officials, policemen, police informers, and minions of the law of the Hoffmann-Noske-Epp¹¹ dictatorship is busy searching for escaped revolutionaries; and a whole horde of them are roaming around in Switzerland, in Austria, and in Prussia, so that to the many tens of millions of marks of past police expenses, several additional tens of millions must be added.

In the bright light of noonday in the busiest streets of Munich, stores are robbed bare, because the police and their informers have eyes only for Spartacus people. This time, the murderers and the plunderers can’t be Spartacus people, because the latter are lying dead, buried in cemeteries or in some sandpit they were hurriedly thrown into. Those that remain alive are serving time in

⁹ “six hundred” is not far beyond the official figures of deaths resulting from the violent crushing of the Bavarian Council Republic at the beginning of May, 1919. Known deaths totaled 599 in and around Munich, of which less than ten percent were those of the invading troops and vigilante groups. Of the remainder deaths among the defeated defenders great numbers did not fall while fighting but were killed after capture: either beaten to death or shot without trial, or after the most summary drumhead court-martial, later acknowledged to have been illegal.

“Hostages,” in the following sentence, refers to an event that turned many against the defenders of the Council Republic in Bavaria. Its so-called Red Army, during April, arrested and imprisoned a number of leading royalists and reactionaries, including some of the “Thule Society,” implicated in the incitement that resulted in the assassination of Kurt Eisner. As the invading anti-Red troops ringed Munich, Commandant Rudolf Egelhofer, military head of the defending Red guards, ordered these prisoners killed. Some twenty were slain before Ernst Toller, the then political head, managed to stop the slaughter. These killings were widely reported as an atrocity. R. M. Watt, an authority on the period, has concluded that “The Munich revolutionaries had talked about terror a great deal more than they had practiced it. Not so the Freikorps.” And he notes also that “The white terror which followed was vastly more savage than anything the Communists had undertaken.”

¹⁰ “Council Republic” the German phrase is *Räte-Republic*. Many of the histories translate this as “Soviet Republic” or even simply “Soviet” of Bavaria. This is not downright wrong but is misleading. *Rat* (singular) and *Räte* (plural) are ancient words, deeply rooted in Germany’s past, and antedating (in this sense) the example of the Russian Soviets from 1917 onward, or even from 1905. *Rat* has the double sense of an assembly or council, and of counsel or advice.

¹¹ See Introduction, p. 15 5.

jails and prisons. Nor can they be aliens from outside Bavaria, because these without exception have been expelled.

Nor, this time, can it be Jews who once again “are upsetting order,” because the Jews — as their leaders have proclaimed to the Aryans in shameful public statements — have “stoutly cooperated in the liberation of the dear city of Munich from the red terror of Russian Bolshevists, and have contributed their property and their blood in order to help the legitimate Hoffmann government regain its ascendancy.”

While Bavaria is now the freest state in the freest country in the world, Prussia merely lays claim to being the freest state in the world with the freest voting system in the world. For this reason it was possible that, in Prussia, in the city of Lyck in East Prussia (which is subject to the authority of the Social Democrat August Winnig),¹² a friend of the *Ziegelbrenner*¹³ periodical was sentenced to two years fortress-imprisonment¹⁴ because, with the permission of the *Ziegelbrenner*’s editor, he had duplicated and distributed as a reprint several hundred copies of the first article in volume 16/ 17. An article which carries the title “The New World War” an article whose sole content is justice and humanity.

I learned of this shameful action only a few days ago; for the time being I feel it is my duty to work for the downfall of the government that perpetrated so shameful an act. But I greet that revolutionary comrade: his imprisonment will not last a day longer than that of the “dishonorable” Dr. Wadler,¹⁵ who by rights ought to serve eight years in the penitentiary; and than that

¹² August Winnig was a Social Democratic officeholder of no special importance. To Marut, he was just one more example of the despised Party bosses or “party-priests.”

¹³ See Introduction, p. 155.

¹⁴ “fortress-imprisonment” is the German *Festungshaft*, or detention in a fortress — a distinctly less dishonorable and uncomfortable kind of incarceration than *Zuchthaus*, which corresponds roughly to “penitentiary,” or even than *Gefängnis*, which is like ordinary jail. Sentences passed on persons convicted for acts they had done during the days of the Bavarian Council Republic (November, 1918 through April, 1919), included 905 condemnations to such fortress-imprisonment; 65 to *Zuchthaus*; and 1,737 to *Gefängnis*. The *Festungshaft* sentences averaged about one and a half years; the *Zuchthaus* sentences, however, more than five times that long.

¹⁵ Dr. Wadler, an Independent Socialist and a former German Army officer, had been Minister of Housing in the Eisner cabinet in Bavaria after November 7, 1918. He is one of the few government officials known to have met Ret Marut face to face during the period between then and the terrible finale, in the first days of May, 1919. The ironic term “dishonorable” as used here seems to show that, so far as Marut knew when he wrote these lines, Wadler had not been granted the benefit of a fortress-confinement type of sentence, reserved for those whose acts the court considered to have been “honorable” in origin. However, the complete meaning of this paragraph remains cryptic and probably was intended to be so.

of the “honorable” Erich Mühsam,¹⁶ who could spend fifteen years in fortress confinement if it came to that, and if Scheidemann¹⁷ were not a liar, and if Noske were not a German.¹⁸

Among all of those who became known to me through M¹⁹ (and the “dishonorable” Dr. Leviné,²⁰ T. Axelrod,²¹ and Dr. Wadler are among them), there is also only one who could really be called dishonorable if I were to apply the standards of bourgeois morality. But about this matter I shall speak later on, so fully that all the peoples of the earth will hear.

¹⁶ Erich Mühsam (1878–1934), an anarchist agitator and writer of fascinating talent — and enormous courage. He took part in the original November overthrow of the royal regime in Munich, had a prominent role in the Council Republic and, after it was crushed, was sentenced to fortress confinement for five years. Early in this time during 1922 — a noteworthy postcard arrived, addressed to Mühsam. It was a greeting from his former fellow-fighter Ret Marut, at that time still somewhere in Germany, and evading arrest in most extraordinary ways. Not long after his release, Mühsam published in a 1926 issue of his magazine *Fanal*, a poignant appeal, begging the vanished Ret Marut, wherever he might be, to get in touch:

“Ret Marut, comrade, friend, fellow-fighter, man speak up, report, stir yourself, give a sign that you still live, that you are still the *Ziegelbrenner*...”

Above all, Mühsam wanted to be assured that Marut had not abandoned his old convictions and loyalties. We cannot say whether the mysterious B. Traven of Mexico ever communicated in any way with Mühsam. Probably he did not. Yet Mühsam came to suspect from stylistic analyses of the B. Traven novels and stories published in Germany beginning in 1926, that this “unknown” writer, was probably identical with the *Ziegelbrenner* of those revolutionary days in Bavaria. Mühsam did not survive to learn that he had been right. He was jailed again, and subsequently murdered in horrible fashion by the Nazis, the year after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany.

¹⁷ Philipp Scheidemann (1865–1939), prominent member of the Majority Socialists (SPD) and the first Chancellor of the new Weimar Republic, between February and June, 1919. See Introduction, p. 155.

¹⁸ “If Scheidemann were not a liar, and if Noske were not a German” are puzzling phrases and probably beyond clarification at this late date. See Introduction, p. 155.

¹⁹ M — without a period! This is no typographical slip; it was deliberately printed this way by the *Ziegelbrenner*. If that letter represents Marut, or Maurhut as he sometimes chose to call himself, who, then, is the “I” of this same sentence? The “I” of the following sentence is indubitably Marut himself. Its apocalyptic and grandiose finale is assuredly in his style. Two possible answers, or guesses, can be considered. (1) The “I” here is still Marut, pretending to be someone else, because he was then wanted on a police warrant for high treason. Or, less likely, (2) it is Irene Mermet (1893–1956), Marut’s longtime collaborator and companion. The manifold confusions and contradictions in *In the Freest State in the World* need not be regarded as entirely deliberate. Marut’s distraught and even desperate state of mind can be sensed throughout.

²⁰ Eugen Leviné (1883 — 1919), a co-founder of the German Communist Party, and a doctor of philosophy, not medicine. He was one of two similarly named but unrelated leaders of the Communist groups in Munich during April, the final month of the Council Republic. The other, also a doctor, was Max Levien, slightly younger than Leviné. Both had mingled Russian and German backgrounds, linguistically, educationally, and residentially. Both had been drafted into the Imperial German Army but had become Spartacists and then Communists. Leviné, after working with the brilliant Rosa Luxemburg, had come to Bavaria, reaching Munich early in March, 1919. He reorganized the local Communist Party and its executive committee; became editor of the Munich edition of the Communist newspaper, *Rote Fahne*; and devoted himself more to theory than to the rough-and-tumble of armed uprisings. He, as well as Levien, resigned from the Munich “Commune” at the end of April, as it became clear that overwhelming forces of Freikorps and regular troops were closing in on the city. Arrested not long after the actual penetration of Munich, Leviné was tried by a hasty court-martial, condemned to death, and shot down, his final defiant cry being “Long live the world revolution!” Levien escaped by fleeing into Austria.

²¹ Tobia Axelrod was another leader or at any rate a “consultant” of the Communists during the agitated April days of the Munich “Commune.” He had been with Lenin in what was then St. Petersburg, during 1917, and had reached Germany with the staff of the first Soviet ambassador to the Imperial government in Berlin. When that ambassador was expelled from Germany, Axelrod moved to Munich where the Eisner regime was by that time installed. Late in April, as things became desperate, Axelrod was sent by airplane to seek help. His destination was either Hungary or Russia, but mechanical trouble forced down his plane still within Bavaria. After the Council Republic was smashed, Axelrod was discovered and arrested. However, his diplomatic connection saved him: from Russia came warning that if he were harmed, similar action would be taken against German diplomats there.

I am a little hampered in my work. Several hundred letters are on hand awaiting answers to the question, “How goes it with Ret Marut?” From friends of the *Ziegelbrenner*? I have received so many splendid letters asking about my colleague M, and about aid and support for M some of our supporters, unsolicited, sent sums of money for M that I lack any words with which to express thanks. I would hurt those people, if I were to tell what I felt on reading most of their letters.

I am hampered in all my activities: The *Ziegelbrenner* publishing house has been as good as destroyed by the officers of the dictatorship-democracy of Noske-Hoffmann-Epp-Möhl. Its remnants are scattered in five different rooms, far removed from each other. Orders cannot be filled. My most trusted collaborator,²² without whose tireless activity I am almost helpless is being hunted on a warrant for high treason issued by the Bavarian government, and is in flight from the bloodthirsty royal Wittelsbach Social Democrats,²³ somewhere in a decent foreign country²⁴ which does not claim for itself the title of the freest state in the world.

As a result of all this, the *Ziegelbrenner* is written by an editorial staff on the run and published by a press in flight. More than four hundred impatient subscribers have in the meantime cancelled their subscriptions. I am not depressed because of this; the ranks of the *Ziegelbrenner* supporters in consequence will only become that much more pure as the superfluous ones withdraw and go back to where they came from — to the prostitute press.

It was May 1, 1919,²⁵ labor’s first worldwide May Day since the November 1918 farce,²⁶ which the Social Democrats claim was a revolution, and about which they lie and bamboozle all the peoples of the earth. On that afternoon of May 1, a meeting of revolutionary and freedom-loving writers from all over Germany was to be held.

²² “trusted collaborator” certainly this seems to refer to Marut himself, then “being hunted on a warrant for high treason.” That suggests the “I” of these lines either was, or was meant to be understood as, Irene Mermet, who had collaborated with Marut on the *Ziegelbrenner*. (See also fn. 19.) Conceivably the aim here was to confuse the authorities who might get hold of this issue, for M could mean Mermet as well as Marut... These typical Marut/Traven riddles, layered almost endlessly like an onion, do not seem to be finally soluble, nor did Marut/Traven intend that they should be.

²³ “royal Wittelsbach Social Democrats” is aimed at the leading Majority Socialists in Bavaria, such as Johannes Hoffmann, the premier who had been designated by the Landtag after Eisner’s assassination. The phrase brands them as basically royalist and reactionary in their actions despite their socialistic and democratic pretensions. (See Introduction, p. 155.)

²⁴ “a decent foreign country” was probably included in order to mislead the police and their informers, who were actively searching for Ret Marut in Germany. It is virtually certain that when these words were written, printed, and posted to subscribers, Marut was still within the German boundaries, living a hunted and harassed life.

²⁵ “It was May 1, 1919,” — here begins the narrative proper, a narrative obviously written by Marut himself but referring repeatedly to “my co-worker M,” as if someone else were the writer.

²⁶ “the November 1918 farce” refers to the events and declarations that began in Berlin on November 9 and 10, 1918 notably, the proclamation of the German Republic, the launching of the provisional government headed by Ebert and other Majority Socialist leaders, etc. The meeting of writers mentioned in the following paragraph was, of course, to be held in Munich, not Berlin. Marut’s particular role as “member of the Propaganda Commission” can be specified more precisely here. On April 7, barely more than three weeks before the seizure of Marut on May 1, he had been appointed Press Director (*Leiter*) by the revolutionary Central Council in Munich. However, in line with his repudiation of official position and formal authority, he declined, and that post went to another. Nevertheless Marut did take on the task of serving as government censor of one of the bourgeois dailies: the *Munich-Augsburg Abend-Zeitung*. The next day (April 8) the new “press representatives” (or censors) revealed a plan for the eventual socialization of the newspapers of Bavaria. Marut was the author of that plan.

My co-worker M was also invited to this writers' meeting, partly because of his position as the editorial head of *Der Ziegelbrenner*, but principally because of his role as a member of the Propaganda Commission of the Council Republic of Bavaria.

According to the contents of the warrants for his arrest, the high treason that M committed and which led to the issuance of those warrants, consisted in the fact that M belonged to the Preparatory Commission for the formation of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and to the Propaganda Commission. For this reason he was made the object of arrest warrants issued by the Bavarian government which sought to throw him into jail for about fifteen years, or if dishonorable intentions could be proved against him (which the shameful judges of Bavaria can manage by a mere twist of the wrist, as the trials have publicly shown even to the most obstinate reactionaries) to murder him legally.

I declare here and now: Until this hour there has never been anywhere on earth a court in which all judgments were handed down with such deep human understanding of every human act, as in this Revolutionary Tribunal of the Council Republic, which is described as a horror-court by the Bavarian government and its press pimps. The fact that this so-called "horror-court" was guided by so lofty a concept of the role of a court is due, not least, to the accomplishments of M, who and this I am imparting to the state's attorneys of Bavaria, because until now they have not known it was unanimously elected by the Preparatory Commission of the court as its presiding officer and speaker.

The Provisional Revolutionary Central Council Of the Council Republic of Bavaria had unanimously assigned M to this Commission. In the Convention of Factory Councils, which exercised the highest governmental authority of the Council Republic of Bavaria, M was unanimously elected to the Propaganda Commission in fact, he was nominated by a printer who works for a bourgeois newspaper.

M still declares today, and he always will, that this election by revolutionary factory councils represented for him the highest honor, and for his labors the highest recognition, which has come to him between the time of the masquerade of November 1918 and the present.

In all his tasks for he held no offices which were entrusted to him by the revolutionary workers, he stood for those same ideas that can be found expressed in the *Ziegelbrenner*. The fact that, because of these tasks — which he, as a revolutionary, felt bound to take on, and which it would have been indecent and counterrevolutionary to refuse — M is now pursued for high treason like a wild animal, and is robbed of food and shelter, gives a clearer picture of the freest state in the world than do all the articles in the newspapers.

As M was sitting in the Maria Theresia Coffee House on the Augusten Strasse, where he hoped to meet several participants in a writers' meeting, the autos carrying the white-guardists²⁷ began to dash through the streets, bent on "liberating" Munich from the red terror. The white-guardists did not begin by making statements; they fired mercilessly with machine guns directly into crowds of people who were walking the streets dressed in their Sunday best.

At once, seven innocent citizens lay wallowing in their blood on Augusten Strasse. Two of them died then and there. A seriously wounded well-dressed man lay on the street a few steps from the coffee house. While the machine-gun fire of the white-guardists continued to rage, M, together with a few helpful people, carried the unconscious wounded man into the coffee house.

²⁷ "white-guardists" (*Weiss-Gardisten*) is what Marut called them. As during the same period in Russia, white here carries the sense of violently counter-revolutionary and reactionary.

A woman doctor who was in the coffee house managed to locate the wound only after a lengthy examination. It turned out to be an uncommonly severe injury to the main artery of the left thigh. After an emergency bandage had been applied, an ambulance arrived which picked up the wounded and dead from the street and also took the injured man from the coffee house.

Then the coffee house was closed and M left the building. He had walked scarcely a few hundred steps the streets were still under fire from the white-guardist when an auto dashed madly up. It was loaded with about sixty infantry weapons and rifles on which about ten clerks and students were sitting all wearing white armbands and handkerchiefs wrapped around their sleeves,

When they saw and recognized M they stopped their car. Five of them rushed from the car at M. They had rifles slung around their shoulders and a revolver in each hand plus four to six hand grenades at their belts. They pointed their revolvers at M and bellowed at him "Hands up!"

M asked what these gentlemen wanted of him. They said to him that he was a member of the Central Committee the most dangerous agitator in the Council Republic, the scourge of the citizenry and the destroyer of the press. Hence they said, they had to take him along and if he did not admit that he bore the primary guilt for the bloodbath now being carried out then they'd have to make quick work of him.

M was then searched for weapons by each and every one of these bloodthirsty ruffians. The editorial head of *Der Ziegelbrenner* was searched for weapons! Naturally you can also search for truffles on bare paving stones, if you have nothing else to do.

On M was found an ordinary housekey which however, to the astonishment of these half-baked clowns was not usable as a weapon!

When M now asked where these noble liberators and defenders-of-law-and-order carried the legal warrant for his arrest, the rest of the fellows who still sat in the auto pointed their pistols at him.

M then asked these brave liberators to allow him to go to his house once more, in order to take care of his most urgent affairs before his arrest and possible death. Thereupon he was searched once again for weapons and machine guns, and then thrown violently into the auto on top of the rifles.

In the meantime, a number of pedestrians had gathered around to watch the incident. The white-guardists became aware of them and began to denounce M loudly, saying that he was the one principally responsible for the human blood that had been shed and was still to be shed; but that he was now about to get what was coming to him.

These incitements had no effect at all on the crowd. Only one of those present said quite loudly, "That is M." And the bystanders asked, in turn, "So? That is M?"

As a result of this public declaration of neutrality, it was not possible for the white-guardists to stand M against a wall then and there and shoot him down. Hence, the noble "freedom-fighters" and saviors of the bourgeoisie dashed away in their auto, shouting, carrying with them M, surrounded by ten pistols and rifles pointed straight at him.

Wherever they spied people on the streets, these brave boys yelled, "Now we've really nabbed one of them the most dangerous one of all!"

Even though these bold liberators were liberators, and, as such, surely had a feeble notion of human pride and freedom, they nevertheless felt they had to get official approval before they could proceed. For, as they passed one of the more imposing houses, they spied a man standing in an upper window. In spite of the menace of M and the danger that he might perhaps escape from them, they stopped their car, stood up as erect as they could, drew themselves to attention,

removed their hats, and resoundingly bellowed, “Long live der Herr General: Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!!!”

Their joy and gratification at being once again underlings for a moment, and able to roar out praise to an oppressor of humanity, seemed to make them forget completely their usual subservience, for after their hurrahs at stiff attention were over, they called up to him: “Herr General, now we’ve got one of them here — the most dangerous one of all!”

The Herr General whose presence and placid appearance in his house served as sufficient indication of the extent of Bolshevik terror waved a benevolent greeting from on high. Deeply gratified, as if each one had been promoted to the rank of Prussian top sergeant, the honest battlers for Munich’s liberation dashed off, bearing with them their valuable prey.

They stopped in front of the War Ministry²⁸ building. Under heavy guard, M was dragged from the car, searched again for weapons, and then was led through a hundred- yard-long corridor lined by heavily armed war profiteers, bourgeois sonny-boys, elegant pimps, and such hangers-on of the hodgepodge collection that calls itself the middle class and respectable officialdom. All of them wanted to play at revolution, now that it was safe to do so — now that the infamous army troops had set up their field camp in front of the Residenz²⁹ and had begun to occupy public buildings.

M was placed in confinement in one of the rear rooms of the War Ministry building. A kind of attorney’s clerk, or something similar, had the job of guarding this room. He was asked by the heroes who delivered M there, “Do you have weapons too?”

“Here, see for yourself!” — and with that the guard pulled a Browning out of each of his pants pockets, showed them to the prisoner, showed him further that each was loaded, and held them close under his nose while releasing their safety catches.

“I’d just like to see him try to escape,” said this guard, while M’s captors looked at M as if he were a well-fattened calf whose slaughter they awaited with almost unbearable impatience.

Now began the judicial examination or questioning of M. For a while, the gentlemen bickered back and forth as to which one of them was best qualified to conduct such a hearing. And when the examination then began, first one, then another, would break in with shouts of “Aw, you don’t know how to question! Let me do it a while!”

So it went for a good long time, until finally all of them at once were questioning M.

The examination consisted of accusing M of about twenty serious crimes of high treason: incitement of soldiers against their officers, insulting the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, use of force and violence against the legitimate Hoffmann government of Bavaria, and various other infamous acts, for which — according to the wishes of the Social Democrat Hoffmann — the death penalty was to be carried out forthwith.

M explained that he had nothing to say here, and that, in particular, he could not recognize as judges or magistrates these gentlemen who with violence had simply dragged him, a peaceful pedestrian, off the street.

²⁸ Bavaria’s “War Ministry building” stood at number 24 Ludwig Strasse, about half a mile north of the royal palace, or Residenz, mentioned later. During the heavy bombings of World War II, the War Ministry building was burned out.

²⁹ The Residenz, at the site where Bavaria’s dukes, electors, and kings had their official residences, was the show-place of old Munich. The structure to which Marut was taken was reduced to ruins by the bombings of World War II, and reconstruction began after 1945.

As nothing could be forced out of M, one of the gentlemen suddenly screamed, “Make a voluntary confession! We’re now going to fetch the witnesses, and then so much the worse for you! — then we’ll really finish you off, once and for all!”

And soon witnesses arrived who testified to everything desired of them. These witnesses, who were always at hand, especially when they were permitted to witness a worker being stood against a fence and shot, also played important roles in the trials conducted by the infamous Bavarian courts,³⁰ whose operations will provide better and more valuable evidence in days to come of the bestiality, the brutality, the hypocrisy, and the degeneracy of the German bourgeoisie than do the War and the Lie of November 1918.³¹

Witnesses for his defense were named by M, who sought to have them called; but his requests were disregarded here, just as similar requests were later disregarded by those infamous Bavarian courts.

After his captors had get nowhere, they went in search of further adventures. M was left under the strict surveillance of the Browning-pistol-wielder. After half an hour, the same company of heroes trooped in again. In spite of their repeated threats, M continued to have nothing to say to them, and they declared they would now force him to confess.

M, now flanked by two heavily armed guards, and Followed by two more, was led back again through the corridor of armed men outside the War Ministry building, and taken to the Residenz.

The situation in the streets had now changed completely. From the windows waved blue-white flags;³² on public buildings, where formerly had fluttered socialist banners — long since betrayed and besmirched by Social Democracy — black-white-red³³ flags of Imperial Germany were now displayed.

Although Herr Hoffmann’s jailers (whose feeding trough was now beginning to grow full) called out to the lanes of bystanders around the War Ministry and also around the Residenz that they were bringing in an arrested Spartacist, M was neither struck nor reviled by any of the vigilantes. But in other parts of the city at this time, things were proceeding in a more bestial manner.³⁴

Once in the Residenz, M was turned over to soldiers of the infamous army,³⁵ while his captors and the witnesses against him sought permission to remain with M, to prevent him from escaping, and so that they would be right on hand when M was placed before the court-martial.

After half an hour, the order was given that M was to be taken to Police Headquarters where one court-martial was at work. But downstairs, as M was about to be taken away, he and his escort were not allowed out of the door of the Residenz because, in the meantime, a counter-order had come: to place him directly before the court-martial at work in the Residenz itself.

³⁰ “infamous... courts” (*Schandgerichte*) . Marut also used *Schand* as a prefix (signifying disgraceful, shameful, or outrageous) to describe the armed forces, regular or irregular, sent to crush the Bavarian Council Republic, as in *Schandwehr*, or “army of infamy.”

³¹ “Lie of November 1918” refers again to the fraud — as Marut saw it — launched in Berlin on November 9. See fn. 26.

³² The colors of Bavaria itself were blue and white, so too was the royal flag of the ancient house of Wittelsbach. The replacement of the red socialist banners by these flags meant reversion to royalist and reactionary principles.

³³ Return to Imperial and pro-Hohenzollern sentiment was indicated by the black-white-red flags. The flag of the Weimar Republic in contrast was black-gold-red.

³⁴ Regarding “bestial manner” see earlier notes, especially fn. 10. Also see Introduction, p. 155.

³⁵ For Marut’s use of *Schandwehr*, here translated as “infamous army,” see fn. 30.

M was led back again into the anteroom of a large hall in which the court-martial was in session. The court-martial in this freest state of the world consisted of one dashing lieutenant. He disposed of every case in about three minutes, On the basis of denunciations by informers he decided whether the arrestee was to be summarily shot at once, or set free. In cases of doubt, the arrestee was shot because that was safer. No time was allowed to let defense witnesses be brought, or even to summon people who could confirm that the arrestee was no Spartacist, let alone a leader of Spartacists.

The hall in which M now found himself became increasingly full of captured workers, red-guards, sailors, girls, and boys. Among the other denounced people there, M saw a sixteen-year-old boy who was charged with having attacked soldiers of the infamous army and with having spread Spartacist propaganda.

At every moment, workers and sailors with deadly white faces were led out of the Large hall in which the cigarette-smoking lieutenant decided on Life or death for the prisoners. Their horror-struck and tragic eyes revealed to the others who waited that they had received death sentences.

Probably when this is written it will no longer be possible to determine whether the lieutenant who decided the fate of the Spartacists and the denounced members of the Council Republic was assigned to the office by the Hoffmann government, or whether he had simply installed himself in it on his own.

So passed an hour of excruciating waiting. M asked his guards whether he might still write a note to his friends to inform them where he was. This was refused him. At that point, the man who was to be tried by the lieutenant just before M, was summoned and led in. This man was seized so violently by the mercenaries that he resisted loudly and vigorously. In the confusion that resulted, M succeeded in escaping. Not unconnected with M's escape were two soldiers, in whom for an instant a spark of humanity arose as they saw what was being done here to the most precious of human possessions — human life. Let them be thanked at this point for preserving a man's life.

In the army of infamy, according to my estimates, there are about ten thousand misled soldiers and officers of the Reichswehr. Soldiers and officers of the Reichswehr are recognizable by the fact that they are human beings and not subject to Noske's orders. But the Reichswehr, too, is unnecessary and superfluous for the German people; and Germany will have the right to say that Goethe is a German only when in all Germany no firearms, no hand grenades, and no gas bombs can be found, excepting in a museum.

It was, in fact, a Reichswehr officer who, in a public bar in Munich, said to a gentleman who until then was not acquainted with *Der Ziegelbrenner*, "To me Munich is the best-loved city among all cities that I know, because the *Ziegelbrenner* is published in it."

(During the war, the *Ziegelbrenner* had among its subscribers about three hundred army officers, many of whom were in active correspondence with its editor.)

Since that hour in which M managed to escape, he has been in flight. We have many times considered whether it would not be better for M to place himself voluntarily in the power of the courts, for in the long run it is no particular pleasure to spend many nights in forests, barns and haylofts, and empty houses, in order not to be interned, and finally be turned over after all to the authorities.

However, it would simply mean increasing this public German infamy if an honest revolutionary were to place himself voluntarily in the hands of these courts, which now as if to fill the measure of outrage to overflowing call themselves "people's courts." For it has been revealed ever

more clearly and crassly — especially since the reactionary forces think they again have power in their hands for a long time (the workers having become smarter in not believing a suitable time for them is as yet at hand) that the courts of Germany are no genuine courts, but rather are institutions of cruelest vengeance and bloodthirstiness; that the judges are no judges, but rather are venal executioners and puppets of capitalism and the bourgeoisie; that the judges are not just and judicious men, but members of monarchist parties and members of the Catholic Center Party³⁶ and of the “democratic” cliques;³⁷ that the judicial procedures are only spectacles for the prostitute press, so that even some ordinary journalists have become disgusted; and that these judicial procedures are only supposed to provide clever state’s attorneys with opportunities to set off brilliant fireworks, and be praised for it by the prostitute press because, according to that press, in their accusations the state’s attorneys allow no place for feelings of humanity, but rather bring down just punishment upon common criminals.

The Revolution is following its unalterable course; it is proceeding onward inevitably and irresistibly; and such a reactionary power, so bestial an army of infamy, such unjust and inhuman judges must first appear, in order to prepare the soil for the future German Revolution. The state of blindness that today afflicts the bourgeoisie and the bloodthirstiness and vengeance-seeking with which it attempts to stabilize its shaky position, is a necessary prerequisite for that which is to come.

The bourgeoisie has not abolished capital punishment; rather it has extended it even further to include political offenders. I wish honestly from my heart and out of pure humanity that the rejection of the proposal to abolish capital punishment does not boomerang and have more far-reaching results for the bourgeoisie than hitherto for the proletariat. The German bourgeoisie has forfeited every moral right to be cast aside without the use of violence and murder. If the proletariat nevertheless does manage without bloodshed to administer the *coup de grâce* to the degenerate bourgeoisie — and the proletariat has the strength to do this, because it possesses greater morality and humanity in its soul — then the victory of the coming Revolution will be made that much more certain and permanent.

It will soon be reported (here in *Der Ziegelbrenner*) what happened to the *Ziegelbrenner* publishing office and to its friends, after the events perpetrated in the name of the freest state in the world and in the name of its “democratic” dictators. This delay in reporting is necessary because the records are not yet complete, and every day brings down upon us additional “freedom” and additional “order.”

The Council Republic is not the culmination of everything, and even less does it stand for the most perfect form in which humans can live together. However, the Council Republic is a prerequisite for the reconstruction of culture, because it makes possible the liquidation of the state. It must be the task of the revolutionary of today to work for the Council system and with it also for the Council Republic.

³⁶ Catholic Centre Party see Introduction, p. 155.

³⁷ Marut called them *Demokratischen Sippen* in German. This was not a denigration of principles of democracy, however. He referred here rather to the conservative, even reactionary, bourgeois groups or cliques whose chosen party names included the word “Democratic,” or who claimed to espouse democratic ideals while bitterly opposing socialism, pacifism, etc.

He may well have had in mind here the German Democratic Party (DDP), and also possibly the National People’s Party (NVP) and the German People’s Party (DVP), as well as other and smaller conservative or right wing groups.

Consequently you will understand that M, immediately after his escape, and as long as he still had the slightest freedom of action, took with him into the Bavarian countryside the principles of the Council Republic and the idea of the Council system.

In about sixty cities, villages, and localities of Bavaria, he talked with citizens, peasants, and workers. He elected to use a different method from that which has become usual today — a method that is more successful: he used a form of persuasion which is the only one that produces worthwhile results, a form that is very old and that was also used by Christ — namely, talking person to person, talking to the smallest gatherings or groups of people. His listeners rarely numbered more than twelve persons at a time.

But from these intimate conversations, which were in every way informal and unstructured, and which gave every listener opportunities through counter-questioning to become completely clear about what M had said, no citizen, no worker, no peasant went away who had not recognized the big lie called “democracy” for what it is — namely, a big lie.

It was by no means M’s intention that every listener should leave a convinced, enthusiastic Council republican. Such speedy enthusiasms and speedily acquired convictions are seldom the salt to be used as seasoning in cases like these.

Often M traveled for three days in succession to the same place in order to fulfill his task there. Never has he been denounced to the authorities, either by a citizen or by a peasant, although his listeners can hardly have been in doubt as to his identity.

By means solely of large political meetings, probably no one has been so completely won over to so novel a thing as the Council system that he could say he learned exactly what the Council system is, what it aims at, and how it operates. That is the reason such terrible confusion exists among workers because, as a result of insufficient knowledge, every worker has a different conception of the meaning of the Council system, the Council Republic, and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The real need is not to persuade the great masses, to whip them up to flaming enthusiasm, to move them to adopt a resolution. Rather the great need is to convince individual human beings. The people of the future, and the people who are preparing for that which is to come, should not be argued into this without thinking things out; they should not believe unconditionally; rather they should be filled with the consciousness that this Revolution is right and feasible, whereas that other bourgeois order is wrong and not feasible. The people who today carry within them the will to future development, should not work for the coming society by relying on the mind of a clever leader,³⁸ but rather with their own minds, with their own hearts, and with their own souls.

But this they can do only when they know what it is all about, and when they also know and understand exactly what they themselves want.

When workers and peasants — and not greedy bourgeois — first truly come to understand the council system and its values and its way of working, then any other form of human living-together and working-together during the period of transition to a higher form of society will seem nonsensical to them.

³⁸ Editors note: The translators left this word, *Führer*, untranslated. This was problematic, as this word is inexorably associated with Adolf Hitler to non-German-speaking people, and therefore rather anachronistic and obscures the author’s meaning.

Among his listeners M met a citizen active in the academic world, who said he was a decided opponent of the Council system, and who, with a weapon in his hand, had taken part enthusiastically in overthrowing the Council Republic. After the conclusion of a conversation with M, this gentleman said that M had not persuaded him, but that he wanted to reflect further on what he had heard. Two months later, M again met the man. The first thing he said to M was, "You are right, and for several weeks now I have been a fully convinced supporter of the Council Republic."

M mentions this case because it is, to date, the only instance in which M had the opportunity to speak again with an opponent, not immediately after a conversation, but several weeks later.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Ret Marut
In the Freest State in the World
December 3, 1919

Retrieved on January 10, 2013 from
<http://libcom.org/library/in-freest-state-in-world-b-traven-ret-marut>
First published in Marut's journal *Der Ziegelbrenner* Nr. 18/19, December 3, 1919
Published in *The Kidnapped Saint and other stories*; by B. Traven, Lawrence Hill & Co., NY, 1975.
Translated from the German by Mina C. and H. Arthur Klein.
Footnotes by Mina C. and H. Arthur Klein

theanarchistlibrary.org