

**Frédéric Cyr, Université de Montréal (Canada):  
Paul Levi and the Politics of the German Left 1918-1930. From Revolutionary to  
Defender of the Republic. PhD Project.**

As leader of the KPD, Paul Levi positioned himself against Moscow's "putschism" in March 1921, with his famous brochure *Unser Weg: Wider den Putschismus*. Levi was subsequently expelled from the party in April 1921. He went on joining the SPD when it merged with the Independent Social Democratic Party at the end of 1922. In the SPD, Levi consolidated a left-wing fraction, which he led until his death in 1930.

Above all, the image of Levi comes from his years as KPD leader. Historiography traditionally depicts him as "Luxemburg's political heir"<sup>1</sup>, whose political conceptions can be situated halfway between Spartacus communism and Western social democracy<sup>2</sup>. Levi epitomizes the more democratic German approach to communism, in comparison to Moscow's dictatorial *avant-gardist* method. Unfortunately, only few studies have examined Levi's career in the SPD after 1922<sup>3</sup>.

My project wishes to retrace the evolution of Levi's political ideas, paying particular attention to his conception of an ideal German socialist state. Specifically, I will examine Levi's conception of political agencies such as the parliament and the councils, as well as his definition of socialist concepts. How did he envision the "revolution" and a "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the German context? For the period following his dismissal from the KPD, special emphasis will be put on assessing how the reduced potential for a revolution in Germany and the subsequent rise of a nationalist right might have influenced Levi's idea of the socialist state. Like many other Weimar leftist thinkers, Levi progressively positioned himself in defence of the Republic, especially after Hitler's failed coup in November 1923. Central to my research will be to understand how Levi went on adapting his political conceptions to suit his strengthened goal of protecting Weimar.

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<sup>1</sup> David Fernbach, "Rosa Luxemburg's Political Heir: an Appreciation of Paul Levi", *New Left Review*, 238 (1999), p. 3-25.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Beradt, *Paul Levi : Ein demokratischer Sozialist in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main : Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Ulrich Ludewig, "Die sozialistische Politik und Wirtschaft: ein Beitrag zur Linksopposition in der SPD 1923 bis 1928", *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 17, 1 (1981), p. 14-41; Dietmar Klenke, *Die SPD-Linke in der Weimarer Republik: eine Untersuchung zu den regionalen organisatorischen Grundlagen und zur politischen Praxis und Theoriebildung des linken Flügels der SPD in den Jahren 1922-1932* (Münster: Lit, 1983); Bernd Dieter Fritz, *Die Kommunistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (KAG) im Vergleich mit der KPO und SAP. Eine Studie zur politischen Ideologie des deutschen "Rechts-Kommunismus" in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1966).