

THE THEORY OF FACTIONS IN MONOPOLY CAPITAL

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Abstract: Kurt Gossweiler has become known as one of the most important German researchers on fascism. Particularly his books *The Röhm Affair*, *Big Banks, Industrial Monopolies, State: Economy and Policy of the State Monopolistic Capitalism in Germany 1914–1932* and *Capital, Reichswehr and NSDAP: To the Early History of German Fascism 1919–1924* are found as reference books also in Western German university libraries, despite Gossweiler's main merit: having irrefutably hammered out the class character of fascism analyzing the factions in German monopoly capitalism. After 1989, after the incorporation of the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR), he devoted himself to researching the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its impact with focus on revisionism.

Key words: Kurt Gossweiler; factions of German monopoly capital; fascism; German imperialism

Introduction

One of Kurt Gossweiler's greatest contributions to the study of fascism is the thorough investigation of the capital factions in German monopoly capital.¹ This runs like a leitmotiv through his books *Großbanken, Industriemonopole, Staat: Ökonomie und Politik des staatsmonopolistischen Kapitalismus in Deutschland 1914–1932* (*Big Banks, Industrial Monopolies, State: Economy and Policy of the State Monopolistic Capitalism in Germany 1914–1932*) (Gossweiler 1971) and *Der Putsch, der keiner war: Die Röhm-Affäre 1934 und der Richtungskampf im deutschen Faschismus* (*The Putsch, Which Was Not*

One At All: The Röhm Affair 1934 and the Factional Struggle within German Fascism) (Gossweiler [1983] 2009).² And it speaks for the high significance of Gossweiler's analysis as well as, of course, for the expertise and courage of the PapyRossa Publishing House to have recently reprinted these writings. The statements of these books are rounded off and summarized by the *Essays on Fascism* (Gossweiler 1988), which furthermore present further evidence showing the responsibility of capital for fascism.

The Question

Kurt Gossweiler had derived the meaning of the question about the capital factions from Dimitroff's famous definition of fascism: "Fascism in power, comrades, is ... the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital" (Dimitroff [1935] 1991).

Who are these elements then and now? What special interests did they have over the other "elements of finance capital"? How could they assert themselves against these elements? And connected with this: when does the ruling class go on the adventurous course towards fascism and war and who prevails against whom? Behind this is the even more general question: how does political will and political action arise in capitalism? How do the divergent economic interests of individual capitalists give rise to political ideas of the total capitalist class and the state? How does politics become the concentrated expression of economics (to take up Lenin's formulation)?

Gossweiler emphasizes Jürgen Kuczynski as the father of the theory of monopoly groups. He therefore dedicates his book *Großbanken* (Big Banks) (Gossweiler 1971) to a critical examination of Kuczynski's results (see Gossweiler 1971, 11). This theory has been developed in serious and thorough research, and sharp but heated debates among historians from the GDR and other socialist countries (see, for example, the minutes of a conference of the German Historical Society, published under the title: *Deutsche Historiker-Gesellschaft, Monopole und Staat in Deutschland 1917–1945*). However, it was also developed and defended in partly violent polemics with blatant, but also shameful (e.g., Tim Mason) bourgeois darkeners and whitewashers from the Western historical guild.

Gossweiler's analysis is a sharp weapon against today's dominant fascism theories of the types: "mad sole offender Hitler"; irrational-fascist leadership elites; petty bourgeois and masses of the people who have gone mad: in essence always postulating the primacy of politics over economics and thus in the end, converting the powerful rulers of banking and industrial capital into poor

victims driven by the fascists instead of agents of the monopoly capitalist compulsion to accumulate and to expand.

The Results of Gossweiler's Analysis

Gossweiler comes to the conclusion that the most reactionary, chauvinist, imperialist elements of finance capital were to be found in the "old" industries (see the graph in Gossweiler [1971, 344]): the heavy industry around the Vereinigte Stahlwerke (vestag, steel and coal trust); Haniel-Group (transport, coal, steel trust combined with German Shipyard and Howaldswerke Deutsche Werft shipyard); GHH (Gutehoffnungshütte, coal and steel trust); MAN (Maschinenfabrik Augsburg Nürnberg, business group specialized in machinery, engines, trucks; nowadays Volkswagen owned by Piech/Porsche holds 75% of the shares of MAN); and Hoesch-Group (steel and coal group) all beside others, under the leadership of Deutsche Bank with such infamous representatives as von Stauss, Kirdorf and Vögler. They originally formed the "all-German" faction in German monopoly capital. This group urged in particular the destruction of the workers movement and its trade unions, suppressing not only the communists, but also the social democrats. They were also the ones who particularly pushed for a warlike redistribution of the world. The decisive factor in the transfer of power to Hitler, however, was made by the industrial monopolies from the "new" industries, from Chemie/Elektro (the new upcoming chemical and electrical industries), which were also led by Deutsche Bank such as Daimler and BMW, Siemens and IG Farben (after the war BASF, Bayer, Hoechst and others). They turned the balance when, in the negotiations under mediation of the banking houses, Schröder and Stein, between the November elections of 1932 and Hitler's assumption, reached an agreement with the heavy industry (and the Prussian nobility closely associated with it, the so-called Junker); in the first place, with a Reich Chancellor Hitler, who was to be "framed" by the DNVP (Deutsch Nationale Volks Partei, German National People's Party 1920–1933) and the Zentrum (conservative-catholic party) with the clique around the Junker Papen (since June 1932 non-party). As a reminder, this government did not have a majority in parliament.

Thus, Chemie/Elektro, the so-called reform wing of the financial capital, set aside its "maximum program." Among other things, this program included broadening the mass base of the fascist dictatorship by making minor concessions and by involving right-wing socialist and Christian trade union leaders in the fascist state, as well as Franco-German alliance (under German leadership, of course), on the basis of the cooperation of the German and French chemical and potash companies, and a minority participation of the French heavy industry in the nationalized German armaments industry, with the aim of dominating

Europe and overthrowing and dividing up the Soviet Union, as preliminary stages for the establishment of German world domination (Gossweiler 1973).

With the transfer of power to the Hitler fascists, the faction in German financial capital that had envisaged an understanding with France, i.e., with French monopoly capital and the use of right-wing social democracy, had failed. Its main protagonists, Schleicher and Röhm, were murdered by the SS (Schutzstaffel, a major paramilitary organization under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party NSDAP in Nazi Germany), on June 30, 1934.

But the heavy industrial wing (without Thyssen and others) around the Deutsche Bank, now with the support of IG Farben and Siemens, was in sharp conflict with the so-called “America” wing around the Dresdner and Danat Banks (weakened by the near bankruptcy in July 1931); with the AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft, general electricity company—one of the big multinational companies in this field); and with Thyssen and others, who were closely linked to US financial capital, especially the Morgan Trust, through the mediation of Hjalmar Schacht (then also president of the Reichsbank).

The differences between the political-strategic and economic conception of the Schacht-Thyssen grouping and that of the Göring/IG Farben can be reduced to the following extremely rough, model-like formula:

- Schacht/Thyssen: The goals that have been set can only be achieved if we assure ourselves of the support of the United States, at least in economic terms. Without this support, our potential is not sufficient to wage a war against the Soviet Union, and later also against the West. This war cannot be waged until we have armed ourselves to the teeth, built up the necessary stocks and made reserves available at the optimum speed of armament, that is to say, if possible avoiding inflationary and other crises.
- Göring/IG Farben: Our goals will inevitably bring us in contrast to all major powers interested in the status quo. The war cannot be limited to the continent (including the Soviet Union), but Britain and probably also the United States will be on the opposite side of the war from the beginning. Their first goal is to let Germany and the Soviet Union mutually exhaust each other in battle. The enemy camp will soon catch up with the German armament advantage. Our potential is not sufficient for a long, Great War. The only way out lies in a maximum of forced armament for a series of Blitzkriegs with which one cannot wait much longer, and economically in an at least temporarily sustained autarky as a means against blockade (Eichholtz and Gossweiler 1968, 221).

The Schacht/Thyssen line, i.e., subordination to US imperialism, was pushed back in 1936 with the four-year plan under the leadership of IG Farben. In 1937 Schacht resigned as Minister of Economic Affairs. As president of the Reichsbank, who had secured at least the funding of the armament built-up financially and monetarily (and in terms of monetary policy), he was replaced in January 1939. Thyssen leaves Nazi Germany in September 1939 (but Vichy delivers him to the Gestapo; he is held as a “special prisoner” in “Ehrenhaft,” among others in Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald).

What comes next is known: The attack on Poland prepares the blow against the West, which should free the back against the real enemy of imperialism, against the Soviet Union. The all-German heavy industry line had prevailed, and the other factions of finance capital had won over through the giant profits at first brought by the rearmament, then by the war.

So at first the faction that sought agreement with France in order to achieve world dominance (Röhm Affair) was eliminated, then the faction pursuing the same goal advocating temporary subordination to US imperialism (America wing around Thyssen/Schacht) was eliminated; only the faction remaining was now preparing for war with the “West.”

Scientific Achievements

Kurt Gossweiler traces the development of the factions back to the early years of German imperialism, when the capitalists of the Ruhr coal and steel industries agreed with the Prussian Junkers in 1878 on a protective tariff policy for iron (against English capitalists) on the one hand and grain (against imports from Russia and America) on the other. In the same year, the Socialist Law (Sozialistengesetze) banned the then revolutionary Social Democracy (then SAP—Sozialistische Arbeiter Partei or Socialist Workers Party; since 1890 SPD—Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland or Social Democratic Party of Germany). By this the profile is outlined also very concise: Threatened by competition in existence and therefore aggressive to the outside and inside the state was used without allowing it to govern itself into business.

On the other hand, new industries such as chemicals and electrical engineering have conquered a leading role on the world markets with their superior technology and achievement of high extra profits through their rapid technical developments and patents. They are in favor of free trade and are trying to expand their social base by bribing an upper stratum of workers and by enacting reforms to move across leaders from trade unions and the party.

With both groups they are sticking to their monopolistic and all-imperialist goals of Germany; the new industries, however, come in with the flair of the modern, liberal and progressive.

Against Schematism

What distinguishes the scientist in the best sense of the word is that he does not provide schemata, but rather responds to possible objections:

The opposing lines of heavy industry and new industries objectively exist, but on both sides, there are a multitude of deviations and often a reversal of the fronts and an overflow into the enemy camp. Capitalism is not only tantamount to a thousand conflicts of interest, but also to a thousand interweaving of interests, resulting in a confusing web through which the lines of the different group interests—clear in one place, barely discernible in another—run as basic patterns. (Gossweiler 1971, 28)

Also, this opens the view to a way of thinking about the theory of state monopolistic capitalism which is free of schematism. Yes, the monopolies have largely subordinated the state to themselves, but there is competition for the enforcement of the interests of the individual monopolies and their alliances, sometimes fiercely, to such an extent that some allow them to be blinded and regard as progressive or liberal, what in reality is only another disguise of the dictatorship of finance capital.

It is important to find out the dominant interest that ultimately determines the line of action. Only then will we gain a key for “understanding the concrete impact of monopolies on politics, for the transformation of economy into politics through monopoly capital” (Gossweiler 1971, 36).

By Acknowledging Weaknesses

Great researchers are also aware of the open questions and deficits of their own analysis, here are just a few examples: In his writings, Kurt Gossweiler repeatedly points out that those factions in the monopoly capital of the other imperialist great powers and the contradictions between these imperialists, e.g., between Great Britain and the United States, had to be strongly disregarded, i.e., the struggle for the division of oil wells and spheres of influence in the Arab states and Iran, in the so-called Near and Middle East in the 1920s.

This also applies to the role of certain intermediate states such as the Netherlands with important monopolies such as Philips or Shell, or Sweden and Switzerland, which as hubs and mediators could influence crucial decisions to some extent.

This also applies to the access to the files: Kurt Gossweiler once complained to the authors that after the Second World War on the one hand many files had fallen into the hands of the GDR concerning Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank, but on the other hand the development in Bavaria remained a difficult terrain for the GDR historians, at least as far as it is linked to August von Finck and thus to such

important parts of German financial capital as Allianz and Munich Re, which are particularly important today.

By Revealing the Laws

But through all these difficulties, Kurt Gossweiler reveals the law behind the formation of groupings in monopoly capital:

The example of Bethmann Hollweg and Ludendorff can help us better understand the dialectical mode of action of imperialist policy, the spontaneous combination of opposing imperialist interests in the overall imperialist interest. On the ground of capitalist competition, competition between different lines of imperialist politics inevitably arises.

Which of the competing lines of imperialist politics can be realized at the given time depends much less on the economic strength of the monopolies behind it than on the overall domestic and foreign political situation of the respective imperialism, on the internal balance of power, and on the relative strength in comparison to the imperialist competitor or on the balance of power between imperialism and socialism. The result of this interaction of the most diverse forces is that the struggle of the currents and groups within the capitalist class is not always won by the strongest group, but usually by those groups whose specific group interests are most congruent with the overall interests of the respective imperialism at a given point in time and whose individual situation corresponds most closely with those of the respective imperialism.

It follows from this that the composition of a government does not allow conclusions to be drawn simply about the strength of the monopoly groups wrestling with each other for supremacy. If one wants to uncover the causes for the concrete policy of an imperialist government—with knowledge of its general objective—then the analysis of the affiliation of its members to certain groups of the monopoly bourgeoisie must not be at the beginning of the examination, but it must be the examination of the overall situation of the imperialism.

From what has been said follows a characteristic of imperialist politics that the representatives of a certain imperialist line, usually, and not even wrongly, regard and fight the representatives of another imperialist line as opponents, who put obstacles in the way of the successful enforcement of their own line, and that nevertheless they all complement each other, they are dependent on each other and only together they make possible the continuity of imperialist politics beyond the most opposing situations. Yes, only the simultaneous existence of different lines of imperialist politics gives them the elasticity to adapt to new situations and to exchange a compromised and deadlocked policy for a “new” one that

seeks to achieve the same goal in a more skillful way, while at the same time only this diversity offers the possibility of preparing a mass basis for each variant of imperialist politics at any time. (Gossweiler 1971, 56)

This “Gossweiler Law” brilliantly confirms the dialectic of unity and contradiction in its analysis of the political development in German imperialism.

The Importance for Today

We can pick up Kurt Gossweiler’s ball. The strategic goal of total imperialism since 1918 has been the elimination of the Soviet Union. The inter-imperialist contradictions were subordinated to this goal, but even if partly concealed these contradictions still existed and were highly effective. Fascism in Germany was promoted by the Western Allies from the point of view of anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. Within the German monopoly capital, the line of a settlement with France was liquidated in 1934 in the June massacre, the so-called Röhm-Affair. The line of submission to the United States was eliminated in 1936 with Hitler’s speech about the four-year plan. The attack on the Soviet Union was not intended to take place as a tool of the financial powers in New York, London or Paris, but on one’s own initiative and account by prior subordination of France and the rest of Europe, including Great Britain (or neutralizing it until victory over the Soviet Union).

As a result of the Second World War, the Soviet Union and the anti-colonial liberation movements and the workers movement in the capitalist and imperialist countries were strengthened, but so were the United States. The strategic goal of the entire imperialism was now the rollback of the socialist camp including the GDR. The United States had become the dominant power in imperialism. It’s two main objectives, first, to maintain dominance in imperialism and, second, to break the resistance of the working class and oppressed peoples under the leadership of the Soviet Union, did not seem to be contradictory at first. The contradiction between the two main goals of US imperialism unfolded inside and outside the United States only during the post-war years.

German imperialism, reduced to West Germany, could not think of resurgence without the support of US imperialism. “Bulwark against the East,” an aggressive front against the Soviet Union and the GDR, and sharp suppression of communist influence in West Germany itself—these were the ways in which the dollars were raised. But even through the 1951 founded European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) together with France, the old heavy-industrial Pan-German wing of German monopoly capital created a base for rivalry with the United States by strengthening its influence in Europe. The incorrigible separatist and national traitor Adenauer, through his many connections to France and the United States

(Cologne coterie, McCloy, etc.), was the right man as Chancellor to play this double game between French and US imperialism in the overall interests of German imperialism and to crown it with the division of Germany.

In this context, it would go too far to go into the further development of the capital factions. Just this much: After the complete restoration of Deutsche Bank in 1957, we find in its supervisory board the names of such well-known Nazi war criminals as Hermann Schmitz of the former IG Farben, Helmut Zangen von Mannesmann and Hermann von Siemens—yes, from which company?

The Dresdner, who also rose from the dead, totally till 1957, can adorn their supervisory board with Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach and Friedrich Flick. So much for the continuity of the structures in Germany that brought about war and fascism!

Conclusion

With the theory of the capital factions we get a seismograph at hand that shows the vibrations in the ruling class. And for revolutionaries such shocks are indeed a precondition of revolution: When the rulers are no longer in agreement with each other, when they can no longer do as they please.³

And it is a microscope under which we can see more clearly what interests lie behind some positions that at first glance look like peace and democracy but being only a variant of the politics of the monopoly bourgeoisie.

Kurt Gossweiler explained this in detail in the foreword to *Großbanken* (Gossweiler 1971, 9, note iii) dealing with the new “Ostpolitik (politics to the east)” of the time that ended in the counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union:

For years, social democratism has endeavored to offer the flexible variant of imperialist politics, as practiced, for example, in the “new Ostpolitik” of the Brandt-Scheel government, as a genuine alternative to the openly aggressive political line of Franz-Josef Strauß. Modern revisionism supports such efforts by spreading the thesis that flexible, more refined imperialist politics is a line of “rational,” “realistic” politicians who have converted to peaceful coexistence and by this to the rejection of the elimination of socialism. Ultra-left-wing adventurers, on the other hand, argue that the differences between the two tactical lines of imperialist politics are totally of no concern to the working class and should not be taken into account at all. (Gossweiler 1971, 9)

Perhaps the 1989 counterrevolution could not have won so easily if the communist and workers parties had listened to Kurt Gossweiler. Instead of being

permeated by revisionism, raving about imperialism's capacity for peace in general and underestimating the aggressiveness of German imperialism in particular, possibly the left-wingers in West Germany would have better resisted the triumphant march of German imperialism if they had resisted more strongly the aggressive course of monopoly capital in their own country, instead of being absorbed in the peace movement with its main thrust against US imperialism.

Kurt Gossweiler didn't really want to write anything more about fascism, but only wanted to clarify the question of the causes of the victory of counterrevolution and the role of revisionism. Thanks to his desire to take part in the discussions on the left, he did not really keep to this resolution. In the tradition of his research, he published in 2005, at the tender age of 87, "German Imperialism and the Place of Fascism in Its Ruling System Today":

German imperialism has learnt from the two defeats it suffered when it believed to be able to bring down the whole rest of the world by going it alone, with only such weak allies as Austria and Turkey in the First World War, and with Italy and the satellite states of the "axis" Berlin–Rome in Europe in the Second World War, and from this it drew the conclusion: it can make the third attempt to reach for world domination no longer with a Europe as hinterland subjected by force of arms, but only with a Europe which is prepared to recognize Germany as the strongest economic and political power of the continent as leader of a European Union.

Indeed, as the strongest economic power in Europe and the third or even second strongest economic power in the world, the FRG has attained supremacy in the European Union and strives to develop the European Union under German leadership into a power that is at first economically, politically and militarily in par with the United States, but becoming then a power overtaking it. (Gossweiler 2005)

It makes sense and is worthwhile to build on this Gossweiler foundation in order to regain sight of the monopolies and thus of the profit system. Without the overthrow of this system by the working class and its allies, war, misery, insecurity of existence, fascist danger will be inevitable companions of our lives.

Kurt Gossweiler, the analyst of the greatest defeats of the workers movement, fascism in 1933 and counterrevolution in 1989, nevertheless always remained a revolutionary optimist. He occasionally quoted the Vietnamese: First, we are against it; second, we are not afraid!

Notes

1. Kurt Gossweiler was born in Stuttgart in 1917, and died on May 12, 2017. His parents were members of the Communist Party of Germany. As a student, he was in organized illegal resistance

against the Nazi-dictatorship. In 1939 he was drafted by the Wehrmacht. In March 1943, he succeeded in defecting to the Red Army. He became a student and eventually assistant professor at the Antifa-School of Taliza in the Soviet Union.

Back in Berlin, Kurt Gossweiler finds his place in the ranks of the Party of Socialist Unity of Germany, the SED. He researches and teaches at the Humboldt-University and in the Central Institute for History at the Academy of Sciences of the GDR. His main research becomes besides fascism also revisionism in the communist movement. His book *Against Revisionism* collects militant contributions, among others, on the role of Khrushchev, on revisionism of history, on Gorbachev, and on the causes of the temporary victory of counterrevolution in Middle and Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.

At a convention of the Parti du Travail of Belgium on May 1, 1993, Kurt Gossweiler gave new impulses to the communist movement in our part of the world with his speech on “Strengths and Failings in the Struggle of the SED against Revisionism.” However, his *Chronicle of the Pigeon Feet* became an indispensable essential for the research on the collapse of the Soviet Union. The book owes its title to a remark of a member of the Politbureau of the SED Karl Schirdewan on a meeting of the Central Committee in November 1956 that revisionism comes in “on pigeon feet.” With the *Chronicle of the Pigeon Feet*, Gossweiler traces the years of the “Thaw” after Stalin’s death and uncovers their positions which will lead decennials later to the liquidation of the first socialist state of the world. Few are able like Kurt Gossweiler to combine deep political passion and the cool distance of the scientist, as he did also in the *Chronicle of the Pigeon Feet*.

The first volume of the *Chronicle of the Pigeon Feet* sheds light on the period between Stalin’s death and the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) with the perfidious denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev. Its impact was, amongst other, that counterrevolution soared and rehearsed in Hungary and Poland that finally led to the surrender to imperialism in 1989.

The second volume of the *Chronicle of the Pigeon Feet* spans the time from 1957 to 1976. 1957 is the year in which resistance forms against the revisionist course of Khrushchev, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Albanian Party of Labor, on the Moscow Meeting of the Communist and Workers’ Parties. The following years until the dismissal of Khrushchev in 1964, scrutinize Khrushchev’s mind games recalling his line of courting US-imperialism with slogans like “peaceful transition to socialism” and “peaceful competition,” as well as the dividing up of the socialist camp under the catchphrase of “national communism.” The second volume ends with the death of Mao Zedong. Kurt Gossweiler was convinced that the red banner had gone from the CPSU to the CPC—against all the massive disinformation of the revisionist press.

2. The book was first published in 1983 entitled *Die Röhm-Affäre, Hintergründe-Zusammenhänge, Auswirkungen* (The Röhm Affair—Backgrounds, Coherences, Implications) in Cologne by Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag. This edition is out of print. A reprint was published in 2009, entitled *Der Putsch, der keiner war. Die Röhm-Affäre 1934 und der Richtungskampf im deutschen Faschismus* (The Putsch, Which Was Not One At All: The Röhm Affair 1934 and the Factional Struggle within German Fascism) in Cologne by PapyRossa Verlags GmbH & Co. KG.
3. “Only then, when the lower classes no longer want the old and the upper classes cannot rule anymore in the old way, only then the revolution can win” (Lenin 1983, 71).

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