CHAPTER 4
Between Berlin and Cologne

Bouts of Unemployment

Just as little as the bourgeoisie and its Social Democratic allies were able to assess their chances for survival during the first weeks of the revolution..., so the revolutionary minority could not assess the probability of success or failure within a situation still in flux and capable of going beyond its initial, limited, political goals.¹

Until he exited Siemens, Mattick had not consistently worked full time. During his apprenticeship, mornings were spent on the shop floor, but afternoons were devoted to classroom learning. And except for a few part-time jobs after school or during the summer when he still attended middle school, Siemens defined his employment history. Mattick's relationship to work shifted considerably over the next years, and at each juncture his engagement in radical politics altered accordingly.

Mattick began to travel, leaving almost immediately for Hannover and then for the seaport and industrial centre of Bremen on the northwest coast of Germany. Bremen was a natural destination, given its history of radical activity—the Bremen Left-Radicals broke with the Social Democrats before the Spartacists were willing to do so, formed the left wing of the KPD by opposing electioneering and the socialist unions, and helped forge the KAPD. Mattick found some work as an electrician, one of several auxiliary trades that were familiar to anyone skilled in the mechanical arts. His talents included construction, masonry, and plumbing. For whatever reasons, though, he soon returned to Berlin, which remained his base until 1924 despite many trips and sojourns to various parts of Germany. Only then was he fully independent of his parents' household.

In Berlin, Mattick was hired as a low-level clerk for the trade association that represented the sugar industry. These manufacturing associations played key roles in price-setting agreements among firms. Through their publications, through meetings and conferences, and through less formal social gatherings, industry executives exchanged information about business strategies, import and production quotas, and marketing plans. The executives of an association

¹ Mattick 1983, p. 270.
also functioned as lobbyists for the industry by monitoring the legislative and political processes.

The trade association, located on Kleiststrasse in the centre of the city, used Mattick for all sorts of odd jobs, most of them quite petty—sharpening pencils, fetching food for the white-collar employees, and other menial chores. Each day, he was tasked with finding newspaper articles that mentioned sugar. These were dutifully pasted into files in the association’s archive room—alongside other materials that dated to the 1880s. Mattick found it curious that no one ever requested any material, but he kept adding to it. Later he made arrangements to sell the entire collection to a paper-recycling dealer, confident—at least at first—that this deed would not be soon discovered. The recycler drove to the rear entrance one day, and in a flash, the entire archive disappeared.

Housed in the same building was an association of German military officers that received significant quantities of mail. Left on their doorsill, Mattick began to take this as well. In the meantime, Mattick had grown nervous about the thefts, and he abandoned the sugar industry office not long afterwards. The