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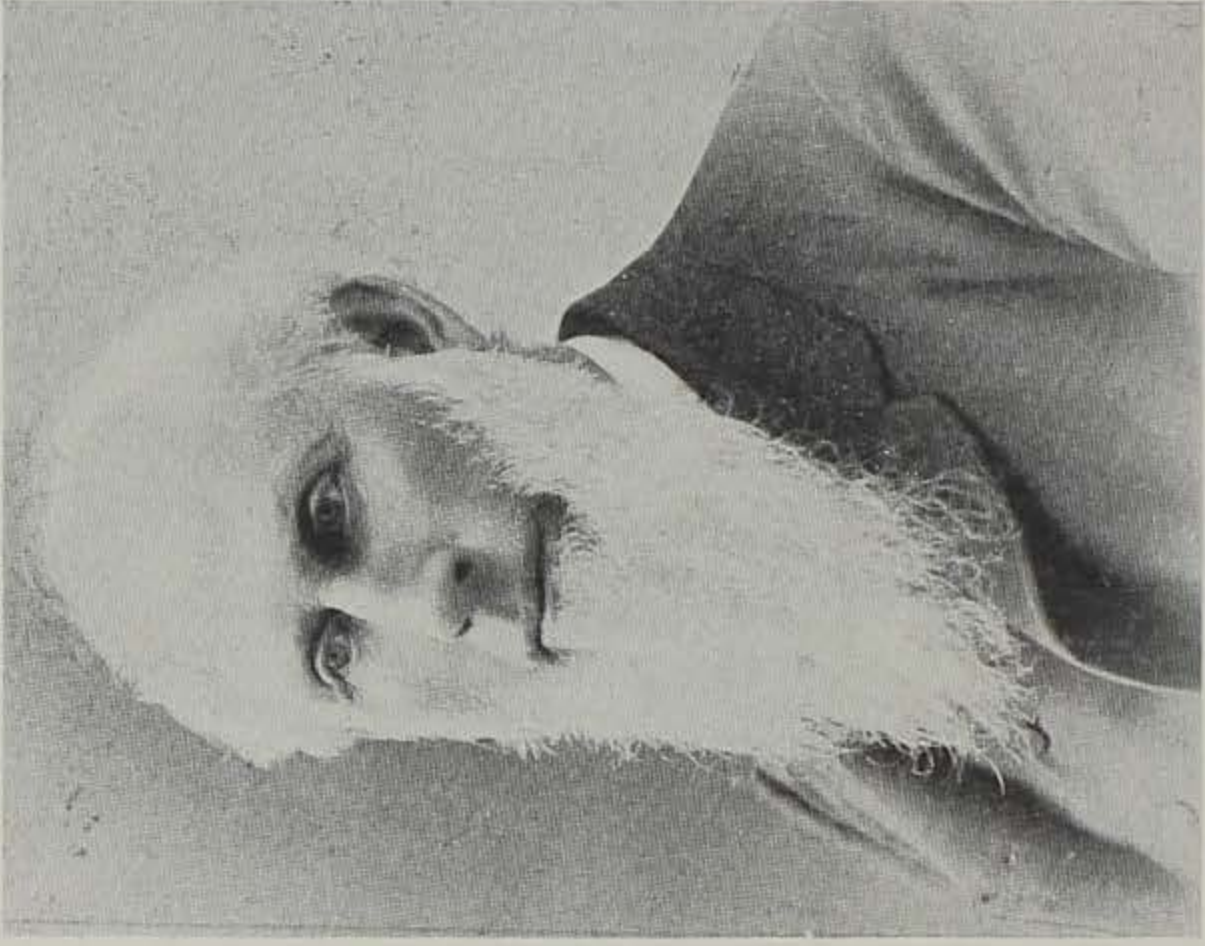


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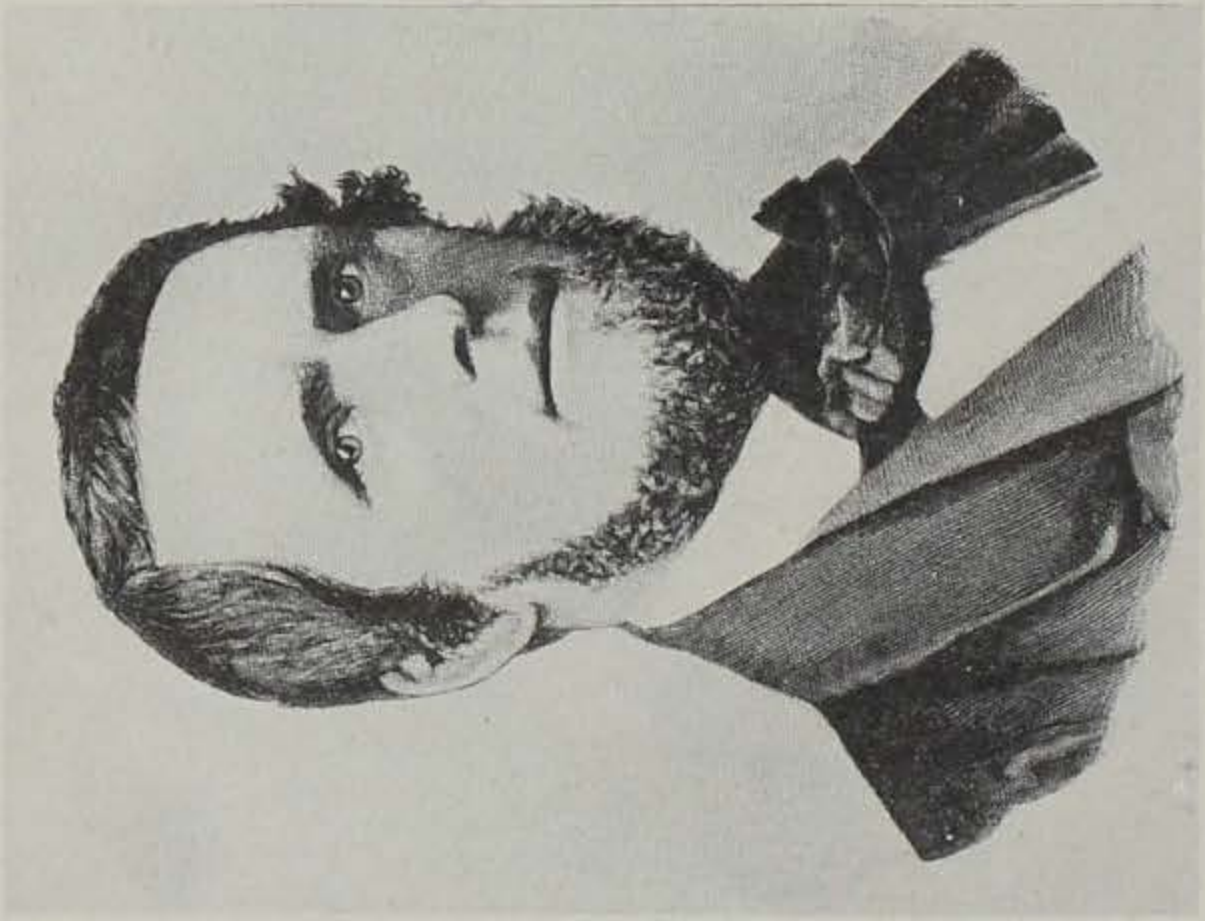


ANTOINE LE CLAIRE





ROMANZO KINGMAN



WILHELM WEITLING



COMMUNIA, IOWA,  
A NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN-AMERICAN UTOPIA  
By George Schulz-Behrend

The social and economic inequalities growing out of the industrial revolution of the early decades of the nineteenth century in Europe brought unrest and revolutions. The socialist theories of this period were an outgrowth of this unrest, and were particularly strong in France and Germany. Many of the German socialists were forced to leave their homeland and find refuge either in Switzerland or France. Some European socialists emigrated to the United States during these years and were instrumental in founding certain experimental communal colonies. The "phalanxes" of the followers of Fourier; the experiments of Robert Owen in New Harmony, Indiana; the Amana colonies in Iowa — all these are examples of socialist, or "communist," Utopias set up in the America of the early nineteenth century. Wilhelm Weitling, a German communist, early became active in forwarding German socialist thought in the United States among the industrial workers of the East. His connection with an Iowa Utopian colony at Communia in Clayton County is of interest as an example of one such experiment in communal living.

Although not prominently mentioned in the literature on Utopian colonies in the United States, Communia, Iowa, is not unknown. In many respects Communia was the successor of a Swiss-American communistic colony, New Helvetia, in Osage County, Missouri.<sup>1</sup> That colony had been the brief and imperfect realization of Andreas Dietsch's idea of a perfect place to live, but with the founder's death the members of the colony had scattered, most of them turning to St. Louis for work and wages in capital-

<sup>1</sup> Information on Communia can be found in the two histories of Clayton County: Realto E. Price (ed.), *History of Clayton County, Iowa . . .* (2 vols., Chicago, 1916), 1:322; *History of Clayton County, Iowa . . .* (Chicago, 1882), 1116-18; in a number of newspaper stories; and chiefly in Joseph Eiboek, *Die Deutschen von Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1900), 96-101. None of these accounts is complete. On New Helvetia and its founder, see G. Schulz-Behrend, "Andreas Dietsch and New Helvetia, Missouri," in Volume II of *The Swiss Record, Yearbook of the Swiss-American Historical Society*, which will be published in March of 1950. A biography of Wilhelm Weitling by Carl Wittke will be published in 1950 by the Louisiana University Press.



ist society. Here they came under the influence of the German revolutionary refugee, Heinrich Koch — watchmaker, journalist, poet, and politician of communist persuasion.

Some of the New Helvetians, communists since before their departure from Switzerland, were willing to try another Utopian venture. Meanwhile, the Mexican War afforded them an outlet for their energies and at the same time, through the land warrants awarded veterans, brought them nearer to the founding of their second colony. When Major-General Gaines called for volunteers, Koch, who had had some military experience in Germany, produced from the membership of his communist club one of the first volunteer companies to be accepted into the United States Army. His "Texas Freischar" (Texas Free Corps) became Company H of the St. Louis Legion, Missouri Volunteers, and was mustered into service on May 19, 1846, with a full complement of men. Koch, who had contributed so heavily to the equipping of his company that he had to mortgage his house, was elected captain.<sup>2</sup> Because of the incomplete lists of the members of New Helvetia, only two men — Benjamin Friedrich Weis, saddle maker, and Cornelius Kopp, tailor — can definitely be identified as New Helvetians and veterans of the Mexican War — however, there may have been others.<sup>3</sup>

Receipt of land warrants by Mexican War veterans was a most powerful incentive toward the founding of the new Utopia at Communia, Iowa. Koch, time and again characterized as a forceful man, was certainly behind the plan. While all the details cannot be ascertained now, several different sources agree that Communia was founded in 1847.<sup>4</sup>

According to one account, Koch and a man named Hochstetter, together with others, bought some Iowa land near the Mississippi River; this location,

<sup>2</sup> Information on the life of Koch can be found in Eiboek, *Die Deutschen von Iowa* . . . , 198-205 (portrait on p. 199), and in an obituary in the *Dubuque Daily Herald*, Feb. 19, 1879. See J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Saint Louis City and County* . . . (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1883), 1:365, 939, for some information on Koch's military and publishing activities before his removal to Dubuque.

<sup>3</sup> The muster roll of the company, signed by Colonel Davenport and Captain Koch at the time of mustering out (Jefferson Barracks, August 31, 1846) lists 86 men. The roll was photostated through the cooperation of the War Records Office, National Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm Weitling in *Die Republik der Arbeiter* (hereafter abbreviated *RdA*), Oct. 18, 1851, May 8, 1852; F. Weis in *ibid.*, Dec. 25, 1852; the obituary of Joseph Venus, in a clipping from the *Elkader Nord-Iowa Herald*, Feb. [?], 1880, which gives September 13, 1847, as the founding date.



however, did not suit them and they subsequently acquired some of the land that is known as Communia today. Although these transactions could not be verified, there is no reason to doubt them. According to the deed records of Clayton County, the first land later to become part of Communia was entered in the name of Adam Koch, Captain Heinrich Koch's son and an ex-private of Company H, on April 11, 1848. Two other ex-privates of Company H, August Obert and Anton Lubbing, followed on October 11, 1848, each with a 40-acre tract. Henry Koch himself entered 40 acres on one warrant on May 31, 1849, and another 40 acres on another warrant on July 26, 1849. Lewis Weinel, another of Koch's men, followed with 40 acres on his own warrant and 40 more acres on a warrant assigned to him; both entries are dated July 4, 1850. All other original entries are in the name of Joseph Venus and Lewis Weinel, in whose hands the land was concentrated and from whom it was transferred to the Communia Colony proper on August 19, 1850, and on November 16, 1850.<sup>5</sup>

Hardly had the settlement been started when trouble arose between Koch and the other members. The colony had as yet no charter, and Koch, in order to protect his investment, had rushed to the land office to transfer the land to himself and then had forced the colonists to buy it back from him.<sup>6</sup> The colonists objected to this and Koch left the incipient colony in a

<sup>5</sup>F. Weis in *RdA*, Dec. 25, 1852. The following land was conveyed by Joseph Venus to the Communia Colony on Aug. 19, 1850:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , sec. 18, 92-4 | NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , sec. 18, 92-4 |
| NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4      | SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4       |
| S $\frac{1}{2}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4        | NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 13, 92-5      |
| SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 12, 92-4      | NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4      |

The price paid for this total of about 360 acres was \$970. On this same date Lewis Weinel conveyed to the Communia Colony:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , sec. 8, 92-4 | SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , sec. 14, 92-4 |
|---|--|

The price paid for these 80 acres was \$100.

On Nov. 16, 1850, Venus conveyed to the Communia Colony:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 18, 92-4 | E $\frac{1}{2}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 12, 92-5 |
| SE $\frac{1}{2}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4     | W $\frac{1}{2}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4    |
| SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4     | NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4    |
| NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4    | NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 12, 92-5   |
| N $\frac{1}{2}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4      |   |

The price paid for these 480 acres, more or less, was \$500. Clayton County Deed Records (Elkader, Iowa), Vol. F, 171, 173, 174, 489; dates of original entries, warrant numbers, etc., are also given there.

<sup>6</sup>F. Weis in *RdA*, Dec. 25, 1852. An entry in Clayton County Deed Records, Vol. E, 364, records a trust deed given by Joseph Venus and Mathew Grieshaber to Henry Koch, in the amount of \$920, dated August 14, 1849. This deed is in effect a mortgage on 320 acres of land which Koch sold that same day to the colony.



huff and turned to other fields of activity in Dubuque. Joseph Venus then became president of the colony.

Venus had been one of the early associates of Andreas Dietsch. In Europe he had been destined for the priesthood, but to the disappointment of his parents he had turned to communism and his family had severed all connections with him. He later became a blacksmith and emigrated to America.<sup>7</sup>

During Venus' presidency a constitution and charter were drawn up so that the colony now became a legal person capable of holding title to its possessions. From the "Articles of Association" we can get an idea of what the colonists wanted Communia to be. The purpose of the association was given as "Agriculture, Mechanical Arts and Trades, and such other industrial pursuits and business as said association may deem proper and desirable." The capital, consisting of farms and lands and their improvements, was valued at \$3,000.

All members, regardless of original contributions, were to have equal interests and rights in the property and effects of the association, and there was to be no division of the property of the association except by unanimous consent. Members and their families were assured of maintenance and support during their lives; orphaned children of members would be maintained and educated by the association. New members were to be admitted after a trial period of three months and a favorable vote by two-thirds of the members. If a member should want to withdraw, his original investment in the association was to be repaid without interest, one-third at the time of separation, the next third at the end of one year, and the last third at the end of two years after withdrawing. Expulsion was authorized for failure to observe the rules of the association and for immoral conduct, but it required a two-thirds vote; payment of claims was to be the same as for members voluntarily leaving.

An administrative committee consisting of president, vice-president, and secretary was created and given the duty of supervising the carrying out of the constitution, conducting business, and making reports every three months. Regular meetings were to be held every Saturday.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Information on the life of Joseph Venus comes from a clipping from the *Elkader Nord-Iowa Herald*, Feb. [?], 1880, and from letters to the author from Miss Louise Liers, Clayton, Iowa, the granddaughter of Joseph Venus.

<sup>8</sup> The Articles of Association of the Communia Colony are recorded in the Clayton



In 1850 a far-reaching connection began between the colony and Dietsch's old friend, Wilhelm Weitling. A tailor by trade, Weitling knew well the troubles of the skilled workers who were being depressed and displaced to an ever-increasing extent by improved machinery. To escape Prussian military service, he had left his home and for years had followed his trade in various parts of Europe. As a member of a German socialist organization in Paris he had published his first political treatise in 1839. This was followed in 1842 by his chief work, *Garantien der Harmonie und Freiheit*, issued in Vevey, Switzerland. Through this book Weitling gained a prominent place among socialist thinkers and planners.

The *Garantien* proposes a communist Utopia which, however — in distinction from previous Utopias, including the one of Andreas Dietsch — does not depend for its realization on the good will of capitalists. In the *Garantien* a worker speaks for the workers. To be sure, Weitling was better at pointing out the faults of the existing system than at reconstructing a better one or at suggesting remedies, chief of which he considered a somewhat hazy revolution and the coming of a messiah, "greater than the first."

Having been expelled from Switzerland, Weitling had come to the United States where he had organized the German skilled workers in the larger cities of the East into an "Arbeiterbund" or Workingmen's League. The publication of the League was *Die Republik der Arbeiter*, which Weitling and a small staff edited, first as a monthly, then as a weekly, and toward the end of the League again as a monthly.

For the purpose of extending the influence of the Workingmen's League, Weitling had called a Workers' Congress that met in Philadelphia, October 22-28, 1850. One of the resolutions adopted at this meeting was that the League would foster colonies in conjunction with the already existing exchange associations operated by the League in the larger eastern cities. (These exchange associations were shops and stores run by the League

County Deed Records, Vol. F, 137-9. Although the constitution was dated July 4, 1850, it was not given to the recorder of Clayton County until July 31, 1850. The signers were: Joseph Venus, Johan Enderes, Frederick Weis, H. Pape, F. Nagel, K. Kopp, Jacob Ponsar, Lewis Weinel, Johann Taffy, Henry Koenig, Michael Brumme, Joseph Gremfer, W. Krisinger. The schedule of property belonging to the "association of the Community [sic] Colony" (in the deed records the terms *Communia* and *Community* are used interchangeably) lists the land given in footnote 5 as already in possession of the colony when the actual transfers were not made until August 19 and November 16, 1850.



members and mainly patronized by them.) At the height of its development the League had some twenty branches throughout the country and Weitling claimed for it a membership of close to 2,000 in New York alone.<sup>9</sup> Each member had to pay an initiation fee of \$10.00 and monthly dues of \$1.00. The fund of money built up by these payments was to be used for sickness insurance, old age pensions, the publication of the *RdA*, and for propaganda.<sup>10</sup>

The November, 1850, issue of the *RdA* reported on the colonization resolution; the December issue contained a lengthy and favorable account of life in Communia, written by F. Weis, and the German version of the constitution. It seems probable that the Communia colonists had appealed to Weitling for support before the meeting of the Workers' Congress. Other Utopian settlements were mentioned, often in great detail, in the pages of *RdA*, and possible union of Communia with some of them (the Liberty colony near Communia, Cabet's Icaria, and Keil's Bethel) were considered.

Early in October, 1851, Weitling finally saw Communia. "For the first time," he wrote, "I am standing on the holy soil of a fraternal community whose inhabitants have undertaken to live, not half and one-sidedly, but wholly for the sacred cause for which you, tried and true communists, together with me and Father Cabet have fought in Europe for years."<sup>11</sup> The colonists now officially joined the Workingmen's League. Weitling reported that he had drawn up the contract of union on the spur of the moment, but no one objected; again he praised the splendid spirit of the Swiss communists and those trained by them.

In the same issue of the *RdA* there follows a description of the colony, the first of many that were to come. Communia was located about fifty miles northwest of Dubuque and five miles south of Elkader; it lay between the Turkey and the Volga rivers in a healthful hilly region that knew neither cholera nor malaria, and where there were no snakes. It could

<sup>9</sup> *RdA*, Dec. 11, 1852. Weitling's figures are always apt to be rather optimistic. Heinrich Richter, also writing in the *RdA*, Jan. 17, 1852, gives only "close to 1000"; Weitling, *RdA*, Oct. 22, 1853, gives 300 members and a financial strength of \$10,000 as of May, 1852, and 500 members and \$17,000 as of November, 1853.

<sup>10</sup> Details concerning the League are to be found throughout the pages of *RdA*, cf. also Hermann Schluter, *Die Anfänge der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung in Amerika* (Stuttgart, 1907); and Wittke's biography of Weitling.

<sup>11</sup> *RdA*, Oct. 18, 1851. Unless stated, material from *RdA* is by Weitling.



easily be reached by steamboat from Dubuque or any other Mississippi River town; the closest landing was at Clayton.

The colony was said to own, at that time, about 1,240 acres of paid land which was located in such a way that about 3,000 acres more would be available if they should be needed later. There was a two-story frame house, 60 by 35 feet large and worth \$1,000, which contained five large apartments for families. The communal dining hall was connected with the basement kitchen through a dumbwaiter. Galleries or porches surrounded the outside of the house, while the attic contained the dormitory for the unmarried men. Other improvements and possessions, especially livestock, reportedly brought the value of the colony to \$6,500. Debts, amounting to only \$500, would be paid from the deposits of new members. Of the eighteen male members in the colony at that time, twelve had paid in \$2,300.

Though the future of the colony seemed assured, Weitling found no opulence. A visit to nearby Liberty colony gave him an idea of the difficulties which all settlers had to overcome at the outset. Toward the end of the account Weitling made optimistic plans for Communia: cattle, hog, and sheep raising was to be started; a gristmill was to be built on the Volga River; more land was to be cleared and vineyards planted.<sup>12</sup>

Close contact thus having been established between the League and Communia, Weitling continued his "Bundesreise" — trip in behalf of the League — but he now also busied himself in the interest of Communia. When he stopped off at Nauvoo, Illinois, Cabet happened to be away, but from what he saw Weitling considered union with the Icarians "neither possible nor useful" — the Icarians were too poor. After a visit to Economy, Pennsylvania, Weitling exclaimed: "Ah, if the League had this town, the workers from Pittsburgh would join us in six months and the majority of all workers in one year!"<sup>13</sup> From various branches of the League in the cities he visited, Weitling sent enthusiastic accounts of the willingness of local groups to support the colony at Communia with money and manpower.

Weitling's concern with Communia is quite accurately reflected in the space given to the discussion of its needs and problems in the pages of the

<sup>12</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>13</sup> *RdA*, Nov. 8, Dec. 6, 1851; Feb. 26, 1853.



*RdA*. The issue of December 6, 1851, contained two poems by Weitling on Communia; both are modeled on poems by Goethe.<sup>14</sup> The same issue also contains an article by Weitling on successful colonization. As the cardinal virtues of good colonists he stressed hard work, frugality, satisfactory habits, and joyous cooperation. In the society of the future — and he took a Utopian colony to be the beginning of that — vocal and instrumental music and a greatly improved theater were to be utilized for educational and conciliatory purposes so that church and university would no longer dominate these fields. The education of the children, however, should follow the principles laid down by Fourier. Penal institutions would become unnecessary in time. From these echoes of his *Garantien*, Weitling made a quick transition to the specific needs of Communia: more brick houses, \$3,000 in cash, and a good leader with a plan. The inference was, of course, that Weitling thought of himself as the right leader.

It was Weitling's plan now to make League funds available to Communia so that the colony (once it had grown into a sizeable town to be called Communia City or Munzerstadt) could become the home and headquarters of the League, a haven for its aged, and the place of publication of the *RdA*. By advertising in the *RdA* Weitling hoped to attract the right kind of new colonists to Communia, namely able-bodied, unmarried young craftsmen. These were invited to stay a few months in the colony, contribute their labor as a gift to the League, and if they liked life there their initiation fee — \$100 per adult, \$50 for each child — would be reduced.<sup>15</sup>

In July of 1852 Weitling came back to Communia for the purpose of adjusting the charter of the Communia Association to conform with the constitution of the Workingmen's League, but several untoward things happened. One of the new colonists from Cincinnati, Adam Freund, who had taken sick on the trip west, died in the colony;<sup>16</sup> then a man named Thompson, the owner of a number of enterprises in and around Elkader, had bought a mill site on the Turkey River.<sup>17</sup> Although Weitling does not mention it, this would mean serious competition for the gristmill projected

<sup>14</sup> One of these poems is printed, along with other material by Weitling, in William Frederick Kamman, *Socialism in German-American Literature* (Americana-Germanica, No. 24, Philadelphia, 1917), 71-3; cf. also Kamman's note "Communia" in *Monatshefte*, 40:423-4 (1948).

<sup>15</sup> *RdA*, May 15, Feb. 14, 1852; the names are mentioned in *RdA*, Sept. 3, 1853.

<sup>16</sup> *RdA*, July 10, 1852. Freund was buried "in our vineyard that did not prosper."

<sup>17</sup> *RdA*, July 17, 1852; the Thompson mill was built and is standing today (1948).



for Communia. But worst of all, the seven women in the colony — three wives of founders and four newcomers — were constantly quarreling, and thereby in turn causing trouble among the men.<sup>18</sup> All the dissatisfaction and trouble came to a head when Weitling asked the president, Griesinger (identical with W. Krisinger who signed the Articles of Association) for a deed of trust in the amount of \$5,000 for one year at 10 per cent interest. This deed of trust, a mortgage on the colony, was meant to secure the investment of the League and its members. Griesinger refused to give the deed of trust.

At about the same time Joseph Venus had to go to Dubuque to make some purchases and to pay a debt which had to be paid before a deed of trust could be validly given. The nature of the debt is not revealed, but the colony still owed Koch.<sup>19</sup> When Venus and Weitling, who accompanied him, returned on the following day, Griesinger had changed his mind to the extent that he was willing to sign a simple note for the amount; but that was not satisfactory to Weitling. We are not told whether it was the regular time of elections in Communia or whether Griesinger resigned in protest; but an election was held in which eight members voted for the man willing to give the deed of trust, five for Griesinger. Thereupon Griesinger and three other members declared they were willing to leave the colony within twenty-four hours if their investments were returned to them. Although the Articles of Association specified that this money need not be paid at once, \$750 was immediately refunded and the disgruntled men left, together with their cantankerous wives. Griesinger had threatened to travel up and down the country, but he seems to have spoken only to the League branch at Cincinnati.<sup>20</sup>

Weitling's demand for the deed of trust in the amount of \$5,000 appears only partially justified in view of the fact that the League so far, on Weitling's own admission, had invested collectively only \$1,950. Even if the total indebtedness of Communia at the time was \$4,080, these debts were — aside from the \$1,950 — individually owed to members of the League, not to the League itself.<sup>21</sup> One of the defects of Weitling's character be-

<sup>18</sup> *RdA*, Aug. 21, 1852; written in retrospect.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Clayton County Deed Records, Vol. E, 364; schedule of payments.

<sup>20</sup> *RdA*, July 24, Oct. 16, 30, Dec. 18, 1852.

<sup>21</sup> *RdA*, July 24, 1852; but in *RdA*, Aug. 14, 1852, the indebtedness to the League is given as \$1,700 and the total indebtedness as \$5,666, both as of July 30, 1852.



came apparent in the unbusinesslike handling of the demand for the deed of trust: obstinate insistence on what he had come to see as the right way. In this insistence he was not only willing but at times eager to disregard not only the amenities but even parliamentary or legal restrictions at first acknowledged by him.<sup>22</sup> By his intransigence he usually gained no more than a temporary advantage while he lost the long-range benefits of the esteem and trust of his fellow men.

The break between parties had been temporarily repaired by the removal of Griesinger and his followers. Weitling stayed for about a month in Communia, working on the new constitution which was to safeguard the investments of the League and of individual members, and to put the administration of the colony beyond the vagaries of officeholders. The deed of trust was given "by unanimous consent" on July 22, 1852, and from various letters we learn that the colony was prospering in a modest way; but at the same time Weitling noted that not all departments were doing equally well and that all might do better. The corn, for example, would have yielded a larger return if the colonists had planted it in time. A farmer in the "corrupt and religious outside world" would have plowed his fields on Sunday — but not the colonists. He concluded that the "stimulus of egotistic self-interest" that governs society at large ought to some extent be reinstated in the colony, but that, as in the exchange associations of the League, this principle must be made to operate in favor of the workers instead of against them as in the outside world. The colony, then, according to Weitling's latest plan, was to be run like a combine of exchange associations, in which non-members could also enjoy the benefits of a planned society. The influence of Communia would thus extend over several counties, and the customers would join the colony when they saw how well its economic system worked.<sup>23</sup>

After an illness, during which he stayed at the home of a neighbor of the colony, the German farmer Michael Baumann at Fork Landing,<sup>24</sup> Weitling left without having achieved complete union between the Communia Association and the Workingmen's League of America. His New Year's message to the colony was largely evasive of the underlying troubles; in it he

<sup>22</sup> *RdA*, Aug. 14, 1852. Weitling calls Griesinger a "parliamentarian monkey." *RdA*, Dec. 11, 1852, contains the phrase "democratic parliamentary humbug."

<sup>23</sup> *RdA*, July 31, Aug. 14, 1852.

<sup>24</sup> *RdA*, March 5, 1853.



was looking forward hopefully toward a better future. The women were lectured on harmony and industry, the children on education. (They would soon get a man teacher, a remark that may indicate that a woman teacher had kept school at Communia.) The basis for religious instruction was to be the love of Christ and of neighbor as Weitling had expressed the idea in a poem entitled "Der kleine Kommunist."<sup>25</sup>

In February of 1853, in answer to a letter from Philadelphia which was indicative of anxiety and perhaps mistrust, Weitling expressed dissatisfaction with the colonists in Communia. He had written to Communia on January 21 concerning three problems: (1) Would the colonists keep their promises and commitments? (2) Would they give up their claims to \$2,000 (recently reduced to \$1,600 by the renunciations of three old members)? and (3) Would they give a deed of trust to him, Wilhelm Weitling, for a mill recently purchased? As yet he had received no answer from the colony. Meanwhile he would be glad to hear of a suitable site in the East or Middle West on which to start a model colony. By March his chagrin with these seven or eight colonists at Communia who were preventing the complete union with the League had gone so far that he threatened an end to further financial support, to have the colony sold at forced sale for the recovery of the \$5,000 secured by the deed of trust, and to found another colony with the now experienced League members in Communia who had advanced beyond the position of the former New Helvetians and their friends in St. Louis. Weitling even went so far as to accuse the old settlers of corrupting the new ones; he called them "stupid as hogs and unfeeling as stones" in social affairs and censured them for their indifference to music and the theater.<sup>26</sup> Letters from the colony published in the *RdA* remained cheerful, but they were written by newcomers.<sup>27</sup>

Some twenty-five of these newcomers had come to Communia in the fall of 1852 and all apartments were filled. In an inventory made by Simon

<sup>25</sup> This poem is reprinted by Kamman, *Socialism in German-American Literature*. Weitling wrote, *RdA*, Jan. 8, 1853: "The teachings of Jesus form the nucleus of our morals; these morals find their practical application in the relationship of work to pleasure as well as of the rights and duties of the colonists."

<sup>26</sup> *RdA*, Feb. 26, Mar. 5, 1853.

<sup>27</sup> An exception is the critically quite objective letter by Sigmund Heuberger, *RdA*, Mar. 5, 1853. In notes to this letter Weitling explains that legally the League did not yet own the colony, that illness had prevented him from completing the merger, and that the present arrangement was provisional only.



Schmidt, a tanner by trade and an old-time Swiss friend of Weitling's, the resources of Communia were given as \$10,958.95, while the liabilities were recorded as \$7,881.62, both as of December 20, 1852. The surplus was thus \$3,077.33, but for some reason Schmidt had forgotten to include among the liabilities \$640 owed to outsiders. A later correction does not entirely clear up this point. The League as such had invested \$3,990 in Communia. (This money was transferred from the New York headquarters of the League by drafts on a bank in Dubuque; considerable amounts of cash must have been on hand in the colony at times.) Individual investments by League members amounted to \$6,891.62. The inventory lists a library of 75 volumes, valued at \$10.<sup>28</sup>

A sawmill together with forty acres of land had been bought in December, 1852, from one Stephen Bartle for the amount of \$1,000.<sup>29</sup> This mill was located on Bear Creek in Volga Township, six miles from the main colony, and the road to it was execrable. The colonists wanted to use the sawmill in the building of the gristmill and hoped to make some money by sawing and curing lumber for neighboring farmers. But the supply of timber gave out sooner than expected, the machinery needed repairs and finally broke down, and as early as December, 1853, Weitling called the sawmill the worst investment that could possibly have been made.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most joyful days in the short history of Communia was the Fourth of July celebration in 1853. Forty guests from Elkader together with some musicians had come and the members that had left in a huff the year before had sent a barrel of beer "to drown the old hatred in." Square dance music was all the small band was able to furnish, and when the Germans requested some waltzes, the musicians reluctantly and repetitiously produced "Ach, du lieber Augustin." Most of the guests celebrated until five in the morning, at which time some of the Communia lads sent them on their way with "Katzenmusik." The following day was a holiday too, but the afternoon was used for reading and discussing the new constitution composed by Weitling.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *RdA*, Jan. 8, Feb. 5, 1853.

<sup>29</sup> The location of the sawmill was NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , sec. 8, 92-4, and the price is given as the above amount in Clayton County Deed Records, Vol. H, 366. In the Dec., 1853, inventory, *RdA*, Jan. 14, 1854, the sawmill and with it at that time 80 acres of land was valued at \$1,228.75.

<sup>30</sup> *RdA*, July 16, Dec. 10, 1853.

<sup>31</sup> *RdA*, July 16, 1853.



Weitling, who had been in the colony since March, 1853, had obtained the consent of all the old settlers for a change in the Articles of Association to combine them with the charter of the League. He had worked out the new charter and the judge at the county seat, Garnavillo at that time, had found it in harmony with state law. The new constitution reflected, Weitling believed: (1) the views current in Communia; (2) the constitution of the League proper; and (3) the requirements of good administration. The new system was to be put into effect gradually, on the farms certainly not until after the harvest; but it was already working in the sawmill.<sup>32</sup>

The constitution that was adopted — it was recorded in Garnavillo on July 23, 1853 as "Constitution of the Association called the Communia Workingmen's League"<sup>33</sup> — had sixty articles. The Articles of Association of the Colony were revoked and the purpose of the new association was given as "every kind of agricultural, industrial, commercial and other business and to distribute [the proceeds thereof] among the members and shareholders according to their proportional and equal interest for the comfort and well-being in sickness, infirmity and old age and to secure a common homestead so long as everyone complies to laws, bylaws and rules of the association."

All work and business of the association was to be let in contract except such work as had to be paid on an hourly basis. Administrative work was not to be paid at a higher rate than manual labor. Minimum rents of 10 per cent of the value of the property rented plus an additional percentage for depreciation were required, and such rent could be paid in scrip, in kind, or in improvements. In time of need all colonists were to help those in the colony who needed help. Pay for work or produce, in so far as bookkeeping did not take care of it, was to be in "store bills" (colony scrip). Goods for sale at the store were to be priced at 10 per cent above cost; goods not available at the store could be had only on special order from the administrator. Individual households could be established, but their cost had to be borne individually. At least one day's earnings each month was to be paid into the sick fund, from which the sick were to be supported unless the fund was exhausted. In that case the sick could draw on their own credits, but contributions for the sick fund would be doubled

<sup>32</sup> *RdA*, Apr. 16, July 2, 16, 1853.

<sup>33</sup> Clayton County Deed Records, Vol. I, 39ff. The constitution appeared also in the pages of the *RdA*.



for a fixed time. Children were required to attend school, where the educational program included the performance of some useful work. The members of the Board of Instruction were placed in charge of devising the curriculum.

Members of the Workingmen's League of six months' standing could, after a probation of three months and no protests, become shareholders of the Association. Those shareholders who had lent the Association at least \$100 for ten years without interest were (if accepted by their equals) called trustees. A committee of these was to be elected annually to help with the administration of the colony. Trustees could also be called upon to make good financial deficits. The following administrative officers were to be elected annually by the committee of trustees: an administrator (who could appoint an agent to act in his behalf), a secretary, and a treasurer. The foremen in each branch were to be elected by the workers. The foremen, together with the administrator, the secretary, and the treasurer, formed the Central Group. Special divisions of this group were called Board of Arbitration, Board of Labor, and (with the addition of the teacher and the physician) the Board of Instruction. Specific duties were assigned and weekly meetings made mandatory.

Inventory was to be taken annually and a 10 per cent appreciation of the capital invested was to be declared from the improvements made, increase in livestock, etc. Ten per cent of this appreciation was to go into the pension fund, additional increase in value was to be divided between the loans of the trustees and the investments of the shareholders; but no money was to be returned until the expiration of the trusteeship, i. e., ten years. In case of dissolution, no one was to claim more than his original investment.

The document is dated July 23, 1853, and is signed by eight trustees: M. Baumann, administrator, who was interested with \$1,300; Geo. Nehser, treasurer and foreman of the farm branch, \$240; B. F. Weis, \$228; J. M. Weick, \$100; John Taffy, \$100; Philip Arnold, \$310; K. Kopp, \$200; and J. Klopfer, \$100. The signatures of fourteen shareholders follow: H. Pape; G. Forst; C. Schoch; J. Venus; Anton Weis; John Detzer, foreman of the industrial branch; John G. Smith; H. Krieg; G. Ponsar; G. Marxer; Ludwig Nehser; George Theodor Weick; W. Weitling, agent; L. Arnold, foreman of the building branch. An appended schedule of property lists 1,440



acres of land<sup>34</sup> which was valued at \$6,725; stock and teams were given as worth \$2,443; mechanical tools and farming equipment, \$1,057; merchandise and goods on hand, \$920; materials for building, \$630; furniture, etc., \$246. The total value was estimated as \$11,021.

In spite of its length, the new constitution left many things vague and open to doubt; but even when one assumes that these matters might have been clarified through bylaws, Weitling cannot be absolved from the charge that Mehring has made, namely that he was unnecessarily theorizing and impractical in this document.<sup>35</sup> Of the rather simple agrarian communism of the Swiss Utopians, not much was left. The essentially new feature of the constitution was the admission of capitalistic remuneration into a scheme that wanted to retain socialistic aspects throughout. The complicated system of trusteeship with interestless ten-year loans but with financial and managerial responsibility through elections, the interlocking sick and pension funds, and the overlapping boards with extensive responsibilities — all these (and many more not mentioned in this brief summary) were arrangements imposed on a group of people who did not have the same fervent desire to reform the world according to the ideas of Weitling.

Although debates took place before the adoption of the constitution — Simon Schmidt is mentioned as speaking against some phase of it — few changes seem to have been made. Since the members of the Communia Association had to vote unanimously for dissolution of the old order, the opposition was overcome mostly by financial threats.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Weitling

<sup>34</sup> The following tracts of land were listed:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 8, 91-4 | 14. NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , sec. 18, 92-4 |
| 2. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 8, 91-4     | 15. NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4       |
| 3. N $\frac{1}{2}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4      | 16. W $\frac{1}{2}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4        |
| 4. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4     | 17. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4       |
| 5. S $\frac{1}{2}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4      | 18. N $\frac{1}{2}$ " NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 19, 92-4        |
| 6. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4     | 19. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 4, 92-5        |
| 7. NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4     | 20. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " — " 12, 92-5                      |
| 8. SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 7, 92-4     | (E $\frac{1}{2}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 12, 92-5)          |
| 9. SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 8, 92-4     | (NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 12, 92-5)         |
| 10. NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 17, 92-4   | No. 20 comprises these.                                  |
| 11. NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4   | 21. NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 13, 92-5       |
| 12. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4   | 22. NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " — " 25, 92-5                      |
| 13. NW $\frac{1}{4}$ " NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 18, 92-4   | 23. W $\frac{1}{2}$ " SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 25, 92-5        |
|  | 24. NE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SW $\frac{1}{4}$ " 25, 92-5       |
|  | 25. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SE $\frac{1}{4}$ " 26, 92-5       |

(The list has been rearranged here.)

<sup>35</sup> Wilhelm Weitling, *Garantien der Harmonie und Freiheit* (Berlin, Germany, 1908), xlv.

<sup>36</sup> *RdA*, Mar. 5, 1853.



seems to have thought, at least for a while, that the new constitution of Communia was also a charter for the entire Workingmen's League of America, since there appeared, in the *RdA*, advertisements of the League as "a mutual exchange-, colonization-, association-and-aid society chartered in Iowa."<sup>37</sup> The extended purpose which the constitution was thus to serve did not contribute to its usefulness as the basic law of Communia.

The work of writing the constitution and having it adopted over, Weitling left the colony about September, 1853, and went on another "Bundesreise." In Detroit, Philadelphia, and other places, he was once again active in the interest of Communia. Aside from securing money from trustees for the gristmill and other projects, such as a brewery and a distillery, he promoted building associations with lottery features.<sup>38</sup> City lots were to be given free by the League and the work of building the houses was to be done by the craftsmen already in Communia. The lottery, in which eventually everyone would win in consecutive years, was an important part of the building association. Rather characteristically, a projected constitution of twenty-four articles was about the only thing that came of the scheme. In all his letters to the *RdA* an enthusiastic tone prevailed.

From the Louisville, Baltimore, Newark, Cincinnati, and Detroit groups of the League letters had come to Weitling which urged him to become the administrator of Communia because he was regarded as the ablest man in the League. But in New York, R. Kreter, the treasurer of the entire League, disagreed and resigned in protest. Immediately thereafter there appeared a declaration by Kreter that he had opposed Weitling as a candidate for the position of administrator solely because he thought Weitling could be of greater use to the League by traveling and getting new members.<sup>39</sup> An unpleasant controversy arose, not all of which comes to light in the pages of *RdA*. Nevertheless, at the first election under the new constitution, in November, 1853, Weitling was elected administrator with only one dissenting vote.<sup>40</sup>

Having been summoned to his new position by telegraph, Weitling was none too happy to assume the responsibility, for considerable trouble had already developed. The sawmill and the bakery had been operating at a

<sup>37</sup> *RdA*, Oct. 22, 1853.

<sup>38</sup> *RdA*, Aug. 8, Oct. 1, 1853.

<sup>39</sup> *RdA*, Oct. 1, 8, 1853.

<sup>40</sup> *RdA*, Dec. 10, 1853.



loss, seven-year contracts had been let on certain farms at unfavorable rents, and wages a third higher than those prevailing in the outside world had been charged the colony by some of its members. A reckless disregard for communal welfare had been shown and egotism had asserted itself. Goods for the store had been bought at too high a price and were being sold too cheaply; exorbitant prices were being charged for small jobs; the mill dam that was under construction was progressing too slowly and cost too much; machinery for the gristmill was lying out in the open untended; confusion reigned in the setting of prices for goods, rents, and services; and, to top all complaints, the storekeeper had put whiskey in a vinegar barrel. Weitling had to do his work in a room crowded by three other men and with a new baby next door. Dissatisfaction with things in general made him paint a gloomy picture for the future of the colony. The disorder would surely find its concrete expression in the inventory, he predicted.<sup>41</sup>

But suddenly Weitling forgot his troubles. Some of the workers excavating for the gristmill dam found what appeared to be silver ore. Unfortunately this discovery proved to be something less than expected, for not much more is heard about it. At that time there were 79 persons living at Communia; 35 members of League and colony with a total of 16 wives and 23 children; the rest were outside help that was temporarily employed.<sup>42</sup>

Instead of trying to create order out of near chaos by parliamentary methods, with himself as a trusted leader, Weitling apparently wanted to establish order autocratically. Although he was aware that his popularity would not be enhanced by this procedure, he let it be known that he "despised victories of the majority in matters which common sense and a man's honor should determine automatically in every man." Discussion and debate he regarded as sacrifices on his part which he had to make "since we live in a democracy, and who knows what it may be good for?"<sup>43</sup> Harmony of purpose was hard to achieve under an administrator so suspicious of the intentions and motives of his fellow Utopians and so cynical of dem-

<sup>41</sup> *RdA*, Dec. 10, 1853. This letter is especially gloomy. The one published in *RdA*, Dec. 17, 1853, is much more cheerful and was intended to counteract to some extent the letter of Dec. 10.

<sup>42</sup> *RdA*, Dec. 17, 24, 1853.

<sup>43</sup> *RdA*, Dec. 24, 1853.



ocratic procedure. Weitling, full of the best plans, and confident of his superior insight into every kind of business, soon considered himself the martyr of stupidity, pettiness, and rancor. Apparently he never realized how many of his disappointments were to a large extent of his own making.

Occasionally Weitling escaped from his chagrin into physical work. He helped in the earth moving on the mill dam, for the construction of which a new site had been chosen and acquired. In buying this land, Weitling had encountered a difficulty that was later to trouble him. When he entered the land at the Land Office in Dubuque he gave as the name of the purchaser the Communia Workingmen's League, but was told that mere legal persons could not become grantees under the law; so the mill land was entered (as the early Communia Association land had also been) in the name of one individual, in this case, Wilhelm Weitling. If he had known it, he could have entered the land in his name as trustee of the Workingmen's League and spared himself much trouble; but at the time he did not know it.<sup>44</sup>

On December 17, 1853, water flowed for the first time over the mill dam for whose completion even outside labor had been hired.<sup>45</sup> Other improvements in the neighborhood of the mill were to be a store and dwelling, stables for horses and oxen, a school building, lime kiln, and carpentry shop — in short, the beginning of a little town.

The inventory taken in November of 1853 and itemized for the different farms and enterprises showed a credit of \$19,942.49 and a debit of \$17,160.84 — a surplus of \$2,781.65. Weitling's pessimism regarding the financial condition of the colony had been almost entirely borne out, for the surplus consisted chiefly of the previous year's gain (\$2,219), while only \$562.65 could be credited to 1852-1853. Until July of 1853 every member had received a monthly wage of \$6.00, but since adoption of the new constitution wages had risen to \$1.00 for eight to ten hours of unskilled work and \$1.25 for skilled labor. The near deficit was, according to Weitling, due primarily to overcharging and inefficiency in the actual performance of the work.<sup>46</sup>

On January 6, 1854, Weitling resigned as administrator of the colony.

<sup>44</sup> *RdA*, Feb. 11, May 13, 1854.

<sup>45</sup> *RdA*, Jan. 1, 1854.

<sup>46</sup> The inventory was published together with Weitling's remarks in *RdA*, Jan. 14, 1854.



His election to that office, he complained, had not been occasioned by trust in his ability, but rather by the rumor that the colony would be cut off from further financial support by the Workingmen's League of America unless he were elected. In such an atmosphere of distrust and ill will he could no longer benefit the colony and had therefore resigned. The colonists, Weitling maintained, were acting as if they were the center of the entire League (a point of view which not long ago Weitling himself seems to have held, although his "center-of-the-League" concept was organizational rather than financial). Moreover Weitling resented the attempts to force him to transfer title of the mill land to the colony. In connection with these attempts, accusations of fraud and misuse of League funds were made against him, and threats of physical violence were joined with threats of criminal prosecution in court.<sup>47</sup>

Weitling had also encountered difficulties in renewing the expired deed of trust in the amount of \$10,000. (This deed of trust had been given at the time of reorganization and is not identical with the one that caused the trouble at the time Griesinger left.) Weitling had given the instrument to Heinrich Richter in Communia who was to hold it until the entire League had been chartered in the East. Then a new deed of trust was to have been given in exchange for the old one, but made out to the newly-chartered League. While Weitling was away, Richter had had the deed of trust recorded as paid, an act invalidated by the fact that the instrument had not been signed by Weitling, but one which showed bad faith.<sup>48</sup> This had taken place in the summer and fall of 1853.

In New York things were not going well either. Treasurer Kreter had continued his agitation against Weitling, who now announced that he would gladly leave all matters affecting the welfare of the League to majority decisions, provided the League could benefit by them. He did not think it could and insisted on a clause printed in every membership booklet: "In case of danger to the unity of the League, all members shall trust in the founder, the Central Commission appointed by him, and the measures instituted by him." On the basis of this proviso and his own judgment, Weitling hoped to settle all difficulties in two months. He offered reconciliation to Kreter, called for renewed confidence in the League, and suggested a mora-

<sup>47</sup> *RdA*, Jan. 21, Feb. 4, 11, 1854.

<sup>48</sup> *RdA*, Feb. 4, 1854.



torium on all disbursements. All holdings of the League and of the colony were to be transferred to a new organization, to be called the "Workingmen's League, an Association for the Purpose of Colonization," and a new start was to be made.<sup>49</sup>

The editor of the *RdA*, Leopold Alberti, resigned, charging that Weitling was interfering with the freedom of the press by suppressing certain news from Communia. At the same time a number of League members in New York formed a group whose aim it was to found another colony, to be called Communia II, in upstate New York. This group, highly critical of Weitling, seceded and weakened the League treasury considerably.<sup>50</sup>

A questionnaire to the various branches of the League resulted in a decision that Weitling was to hold the mill land in his own name, to charter the League in its entirety, to obtain a satisfactory deed of trust from the colony, and to transfer the mill land to the entire League, but nothing was said about how these decisions were to be implemented.<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile at Communia a certain Brandenberger had been elected administrator. As such he wrote a number of letters to Weitling which Weitling printed verbatim with all their mistakes in spelling and grammar.<sup>52</sup> As Mehring has pointed out, this action of Weitling's was unbecoming and malicious, for he wanted to show by it that Brandenberger was unintelligent and hence unfit for the job of administrator.<sup>53</sup> In his first letters, Brandenberger ignored the existing troubles: the mill building was to be finished, new members were asked to apply for admission to Communia, and life at the colony was reported as being rather pleasant. Weitling, deploring Brandenberger's ignorance of the English language, was sure a man who knew English could, if he wanted to, stop the suit which the executive committee at Communia had started against Weitling because he had retained title to the mill land which he had supposedly bought with funds belonging to the colony. An executive committee had not been authorized by the constitution and was therefore illegal; the administrator could arrange to have the suit dropped.<sup>54</sup> Brandenberger got even with

<sup>49</sup> *RdA*, Jan. 21, 28, 1854.

<sup>50</sup> *RdA*, Jan. 28, Feb. 4, 1854; Jan. 13, 1855.

<sup>51</sup> *RdA*, Feb. 4, 11, Mar. 25, 1854.

<sup>52</sup> *RdA*, Feb. 11, 25, 1854.

<sup>53</sup> Weitling, *Garantien* . . . , xlv.

<sup>54</sup> This suit is *C. W. M. L. v. W. Weitling*, Clayton County District Court, Judg-



Weitling for his malicious treatment by making the equally malicious accusation that Weitling had always wanted to steal the workingman's hard-earned money.<sup>55</sup>

Reaction to the Communia trouble was violent in all branches of the League. Resolutions, circulars, and letters of varying degrees of acrimony made the rounds — Weitling mentions his collection of several thousand — or were printed in the pages of the *RdA* which, as its publication grew less frequent, became more and more filled with matters concerning the colony dispute. Weitling went into great detail in chronicling the history of the colony and that of its feuds and factions. He went back to Dietsch's diary to prove that the New Helvetians had always been unable to get along with one another. The oldest settlers had always been a contentious lot and the League had merely inherited their quarrels. The League would have been better off if it had bought the colony outright instead of taking over inveterate disagreements.<sup>56</sup> The tenor of some of these writings degenerates into billingsgate at times, and name-calling, imputation of evil motives, rumor mongering and vilification are frequent.

In April, 1854, Weitling, who had been given power of attorney to act for the League, and a party of delegates from most of the larger League branches, went to Communia to try to bring about a peaceful settlement of the difficulties, for by this time many colonists wanted to leave Communia and to get their investments paid back. The instructions of the delegates were: (1) To get an itemized statement of the claims of each colonist. (2) All colonists were to furnish a deed of trust to the Workingmen's League of America in the amount the colony owed the League; the colonists were not to insist on special privileges as against the other members of the Workingmen's League of America. (3) Until the second provision was complied with, no one could receive payment. (4) Those whose claims had been paid were, if asked, to leave the colony. (5) Those not paid entirely would receive deeds of trust from the League and might stay in the colony as long as the other colonists did not object. (6) Only those

ment Docket, Vol. A, 8. The judgment was for the defendant, but the papers were removed from the vertical file in 1863 by attorneys Noble and Bechmeister and apparently never returned. These are not the only papers lost in this connection.

<sup>55</sup> *RdA*, June 17, 1854.

<sup>56</sup> *RdA*, Oct. 7, 1854. Weitling's summary of this date is in many ways the clearest statement of developments until then.



having permission from a special commission might live on the mill land. (7) Deeds of trust would be given by and to Weitling as attorney and trustee of the Workingmen's League of America. (8) At the time only \$1,000 to \$2,000 would be paid out; later, \$200 a month if demanded.

The delegates found that the colonists had diverse ideas. Most of them wanted to get their money and withdraw from the colony, where conditions had further deteriorated, if they were paid by July first of that year. Only one was willing to leave part of his claim against a deed of trust. No itemized claims were given, and all colonists set the date of payment after the mill land suit was expected to have been decided; this Weitling took as evidence of bad faith. Only two wanted to continue living in Communia. On their return to Dubuque, the delegates decided to let their attorney, James Burt, represent their interests in the lawsuits that were sure to follow.

Weitling now thought it best to let the law take its course, to recover what could be recovered if a sale was the decision of the court. "Forget that we once had brothers in Communia. What the courts give us [of our possessions there], let us regard as a gift which is worth less to us than one single zealous new member of League."<sup>57</sup> He asserted that the Workingmen's League of America had been set back by two years through the colony trouble, but he set great store by the second Worker's Congress which was to meet in 1855. Since the mill land was now assured (it had been correctly entered at the time Weitling and the delegates were in Dubuque), he called for new loans, so that millwrights and carpenters could complete the mill.

But as if internal strife occasioned by Communia had not been enough to bring the entire League to the brink of chaos, Nature now also did her share: a flood, caused by torrential rains, inundated the valley of the Volga River and washed out the foundation of the mill so that the wall collapsed. The dam itself had come through without serious damage, but unless it was reinforced soon it too would "go down the river."<sup>58</sup> Unless he were well paid, no colonist was willing to undertake the repair.

Since no more money was forthcoming from the Workingmen's League of America, the colonists sold livestock and other goods so that those leaving would have travel money. Also they inquired at the county seat

<sup>57</sup> *RdA*, May 13, 1854.

<sup>58</sup> *RdA*, June 17, 1854, Brandenberger's report.



about the probable success of a petition for dissolution of the colony. Weitling's reply was neither reassuring nor hopeful: as for paying the colonists now, he would rather "go with a sackful of meat among ravenous wolves than with money among the colonists." The salient point seems, however, to have been that there was not enough money left. The mill construction had cost until then \$6,000 and there had been many other large expenses. Out of the chaos that was Communia, Weitling only hoped to save enough to take care of those old and faithful members who would be entitled to a pension. The mill land was to become the site of homes for the old people of the League. Money might again become available to the present colonists if the deed of trust, fraudulently recorded as paid, was retracted and new, valid acknowledgements of indebtedness substituted.<sup>59</sup>

B. F. Weis charged that Weitling had corrupted the communistic ideal by introducing evil features of the system of capitalistic enterprise — contracts, wages, and rents. Weitling repudiated this by saying that, far from wanting to introduce these features, the colonists had been the ones who had insisted on them; he had at best but acquiesced in them. Communism, Weitling had previously said, had existed in Communia only on paper, but never in reality.<sup>60</sup>

Among all his prolix fulminations, Weitling made the suggestion that the colonists regain their honest name with the rest of the League by giving a good deed of trust. The colonists might also enter their debt to the League (presumably in the form of a lien), transfer the entire colony to the League, and come to terms with it. The colony would then be administered by a committee of League members who would be responsible to the eastern Central Committee. The administrative committee would enforce strict order and the communistic principle would be carried out fully. Order, Weitling had insisted but a little while ago, was of primary importance in Utopian colonies and only when it had become second nature to people would they be ready for freedom.<sup>61</sup>

The League, Weitling emphasized, wanted peace and if the colonists were inclined to buy the colony they were welcome to it. The money needed to satisfy the immediate claims in October, 1854, amounted to

<sup>59</sup> *RdA*, June 17, July 15, 1854.

<sup>60</sup> *RdA*, June 24, Sept. 23, 1854.

<sup>61</sup> *RdA*, June 24, Oct. 28, Dec. 16, 1854.



\$3,582, but because of claims arising from ten-year loans (which constitutionally would not fall due until 1862 but which would undoubtedly be called for sooner), the total amount needed would more likely be \$6,363.<sup>62</sup> None of Weitling's suggestions were taken up by the colonists, who had now petitioned for dissolution.

In November of 1854, when three doughty souls had come from Cincinnati and New York in order to live in the colony, there was a sudden blaze of hope of satisfactory settlement. Brandenberger and several others were reported to have made up for their past mistakes by endeavoring to save the colony for the League. Money for use and distribution in the colony would be sent to Thomas Bayer, one of the three latest settlers.<sup>63</sup> But nothing beneficial resulted.

Inasmuch as almost all the source material on Communia comes from the *RdA*, of which Weitling was editor or publisher or both, the colonists' point of view is not directly ascertainable and therefore incompletely represented in this paper. The colonists did not want to lose their investments or see the fruits of years of their life's work in jeopardy. Their love of the communistic ideal may in many instances have been stronger when they were in Europe or in the cities of the East. Greater competition in the struggle for existence and technological unemployment for the skilled workers who composed the membership of the Workingmen's League of America lent a desirable aspect to theoretical communism. But things were different in the small towns of Iowa where the frontier had been not very long ago. Their communist beliefs slowly gave way when they saw that people no richer than they to start with were prospering on farms of their own all around them. On the other hand, craftsmen among them did not care to make the adjustment to farming and were unhappy in a predominantly agricultural colony. These soon left Communia. The reason that others did not leave was that they did not have the money to move. Inertia also did its share, while others wanted to stay in the neighborhood in case the colony was divided up. To others like Venus and Enderes, two New Helvetians, and Weis, the veteran of Company H, Communia had long ago become home in America. Weis stocked a small grocery store with \$90 he had left from the sale of some livestock and carried on as

<sup>62</sup> *RdA*, Oct. 14, 1854.

<sup>63</sup> *RdA*, Nov. 4, Dec. 16, 1854.



best he could. He had been sickly for some time and died, at the age of thirty-eight, in 1860, before some semblance of order had reappeared in Communia.<sup>64</sup>

The colonists, in addition to being at odds with the League, were now divided into two factions. The one, consisting of the old-timers Venus, Ponsar, Weis, Enderes, Pape, the two Nehsers, Kopp, Marxer, and Schmitz, was suing for dissolution of the colony. The other faction, consisting of all others except the three most recent arrivals, wanted to get their money in the division or dissolution of the colony. The three new arrivals were still neutral.<sup>65</sup>

In November, 1854, Communia had two administrators: Venus for the dissolutionists, Brandenberger for the anti-dissolutionists. The latter had sworn out a warrant to stop Venus from selling colony property, but Weitling discredited the motives of the anti-dissolutionists as basically selfish.<sup>66</sup> Both administrators were subpoenaed to appear in court in the case of Lewis Weinel, a member who had left Communia in October, 1852, and who had an unpaid claim of \$122.26 or more against the colony.<sup>67</sup> No more reference is made to the case and it may be assumed that it was settled out of court.

The *RdA* suspended publication about the middle of 1855 (the last issue available to the writer being that of April, 1855); but about that time no more events of consequence are reported, though dilations of what might have been or what Communia could have become continued to take up considerable space until the end of the publication. The chief source of information after 1855 is the material in the court archives of Clayton County in Elkader. Much of this material has been lost so that it becomes difficult to piece out a connected history.

From an inventory dated April 4 and filed May 20, 1856, it becomes clear that John Garber and Dennis Quigley had been appointed receivers of "the corporation known as the Communia Workingmen's League." The original order of appointment could not be found. Garber's inventory lists six farms and then goes into great detail in enumerating the personal property on the farms, the sawmill, and in the store. Garber sold some goods

<sup>64</sup> *RdA*, Mar. 17, 1855; date of Weis' death from tombstone in Communia Cemetery.

<sup>65</sup> *RdA*, Feb. 17, 1855; alignment of factions as stated by Weitling.

<sup>66</sup> *RdA*, Feb. 17, 1855.

<sup>67</sup> Clayton County Archives, vertical file, 1854.



to members and paid out some cash. He left the household and kitchen furniture in the possession of the colonists; he rented rooms and farms and shops and allowed himself and committee \$100 for thirty-five days of work and for mileage.<sup>68</sup>

In the May term of 1857, the District Court took notice of a suggestion that the real property of the Communia Workingmen's League was in danger of waste and damage. The two previously appointed "trustees," Garber and Quigley, were therefore ordered to take immediate possession of all real estate, to "keep" it by renting it, and "in general to do all and singular whatever is necessary to preserve and protect the same till our further order."<sup>69</sup> This direction of the court seems to be hardly more than a reassertion of the first court order. But in September, 1857, James Burt, counsel for the Communia Workingmen's League, requested that Eliphalet Price be appointed additional trustee. He was so appointed and required to furnish bond. James O. Crosby was requested for referee; Crosby was appointed and ordered to report what parties were interested and to what extent.<sup>70</sup>

Suits brought by Jacob Ponsar, B. F. Weis, and Henry Barnhart against the Workingmen's League (also called Communia Workingmen's League) were still pending when, on May 16, 1859, Reuben Noble, attorney for the state of Iowa, requested and was granted a change of venue to Dubuque County in the case of *Iowa v. Workingmen's League*.<sup>71</sup> Actually the case remained in Clayton County.

Nothing at all appears in the court records until January 23, 1864, when the Honorable Elias H. Williams, "sole presiding judge in the cause of Michael Bowman v. Communia Workingmen's League" (since the death of Weis, Baumann had probably become the plaintiff in place of Weis and Ponsar), made a number of important decisions. Quigley reported that he had recovered \$317.18 and claimed \$250 of this as his fee; he then requested and was granted his discharge as trustee and the fee was allowed.

John Garber reported that since his appointment as co-trustee he had kept the property together as well as possible. There is no mention of Price's or Crosby's activities in this connection. Beyond the taxes and

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 1856.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1857.

<sup>70</sup> Clayton County District Court Records, Vol. V, 113.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 299, 410.



expenses, the rent had not yielded anything. In order to satisfy other claims, the real estate would have to be sold, for which purpose Garber requested the appointment of a referee with authority to "settle and close up the business of the defendants and dissolve the association." The court then authorized Garber to sell the real estate of the defendants at either public or private sales, specified the methods of announcing the sales, and appointed Silas T. Woodward referee.

The referee's duty was to determine the validity of all claims made against the defendants and to report on them to the court. Jacob Nicklaus, William Bente, and Charles Mentzel were appointed appraisers and ordered to take an oath of faithfulness. They were to appraise the real estate by forty-acre tracts and deposit their appraisals in writing with the clerk of the district court. Private sales were to be made only above the appraised values. Garber was then directed to pay, settle, or compromise debts or claims against the defendants after they had been validated by Woodward and approved by the court, provided money was available.

In these payments first consideration was to be given to outside claimants; League members and members of the colony were to be considered secondly. Garber was also to collect all debts for the defendants and to pay all expenses arising from the closing up of their business. Woodward's report on claims was to be made on the first day of the September term of court. There follows a schedule of the real estate in the possession of the corporation "now or at the time of dissolution."<sup>72</sup> A final report of the referee or the trustee cannot be found and is presumably lost.

As a matter of record, all the real estate was eventually sold, much of it to colonists. Whether any money was left after the claims had been satisfied is a matter of conjecture. The Workingmen's League of America had disappeared and could hardly have benefitted.

Three colonists, Lewis Arnold, Frederick Peick, and Adolf Peick, had, in 1858, obtained judgments against W. Weitling amounting to \$917.42. These were partially satisfied by the sheriff's sale of tract NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> sec. 25, 92-5, which brought \$470.90 (court and execution costs not considered).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Clayton County District Court Records, Vol. D, 495; dated Jan. 23, 1864. The schedule of real estate is fairly close to that given in footnote 34.

<sup>73</sup> Clayton County District Court, Execution Docket, Vol. A, 185-7; also Judgment Docket, 153.



One of the colonists, Louis Reuther, is reported to have represented Clayton County in the state legislature for a term. Descendants of Venus, Enderes, Meder, Ponsar, Kopp, and others are among the inhabitants of Clayton County today, while gravestones in Communia cemetery bear witness to the resting place of many of the original settlers of the colony.<sup>74</sup>

The sociologist or political scientist inquiring into the reasons for the failure of almost all Utopian colonies may be interested in a list of the reasons for failure given by Weitling and some other League members. The list comes from the whole range of the *RdA* and includes utterances made in anger as well as others that may be considered more objective. (1) City dwellers make poor farmers and pioneers. (2) There was not enough money to get it off to a good start, nor to continue the experiment long enough. (3) Most of the settlers were not sufficiently imbued with the ideals of communism to make the necessary sacrifices. (4) Many settlers were not skilled enough in their respective trades. (5) There was not enough education and intelligence in the colony, and consequently a hatred of educated leaders. (6) Ancient grudges poisoned the minds of some colonists. (7) Argumentativeness and contentiousness, especially among the women, ruined the colony. (8) Existing capitalistic law was inimical to the colony. (9) The trustees did not take orders from the Central Committee of the League and from divided authority came chaos. (10) The new constitution opened the door to egotism and greed. (11) Weitling was incapable of administering the colony; he was mainly responsible for the waste of money on the mill construction. (12) The administrator never had enough authority.

Many of these reasons can be summed up in the observation that the verbal or written profession of communism or socialism does not make for communism or socialism or even altruism. Secondly, no immigrant socialist or communist enterprise has long endured in the United States; a strong and hopeful capitalism has invariably undermined the foundations of such enterprises before they were well established.

<sup>74</sup> Eiboek, *Die Deutschen von Iowa . . .*, 100. Mrs. Amalie Hofer Jerome, author of *My Century, the Story of Andreas Franz Hofer*, is a granddaughter of one of the latest arrivals at Communia.