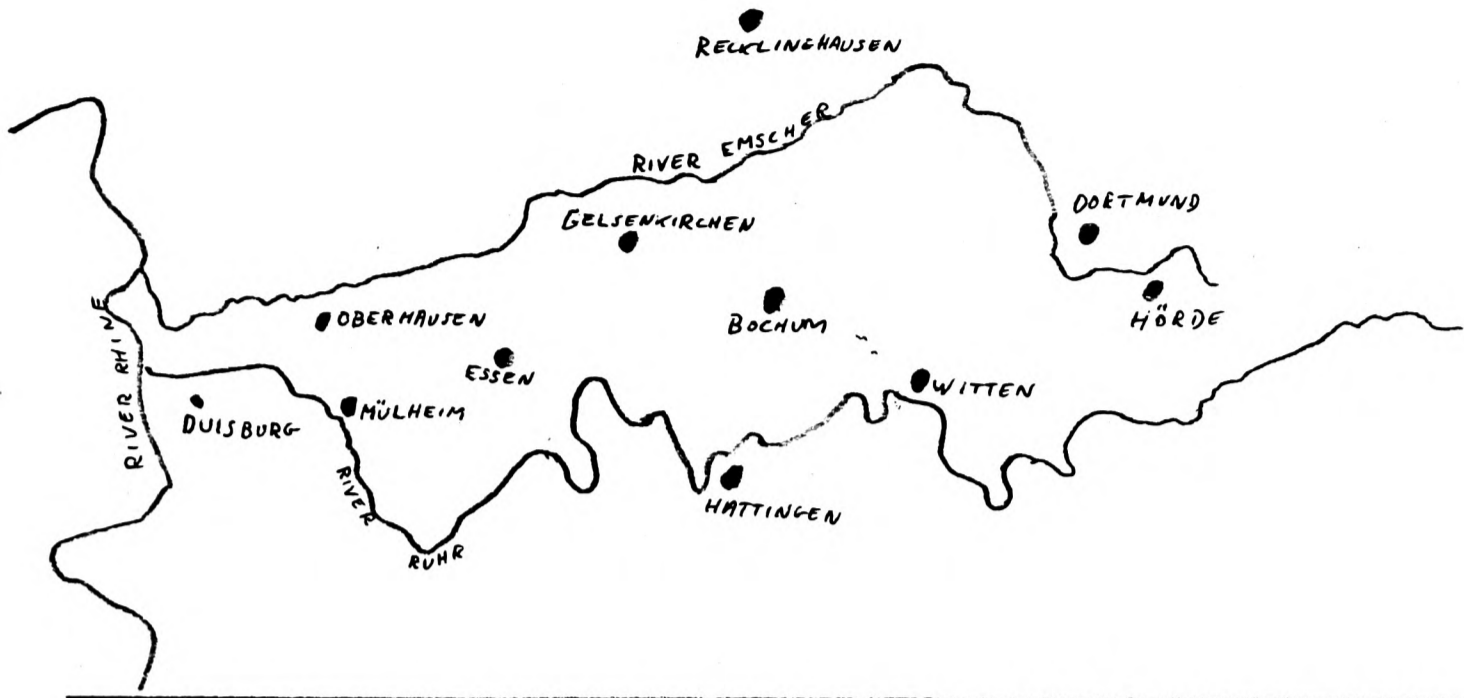
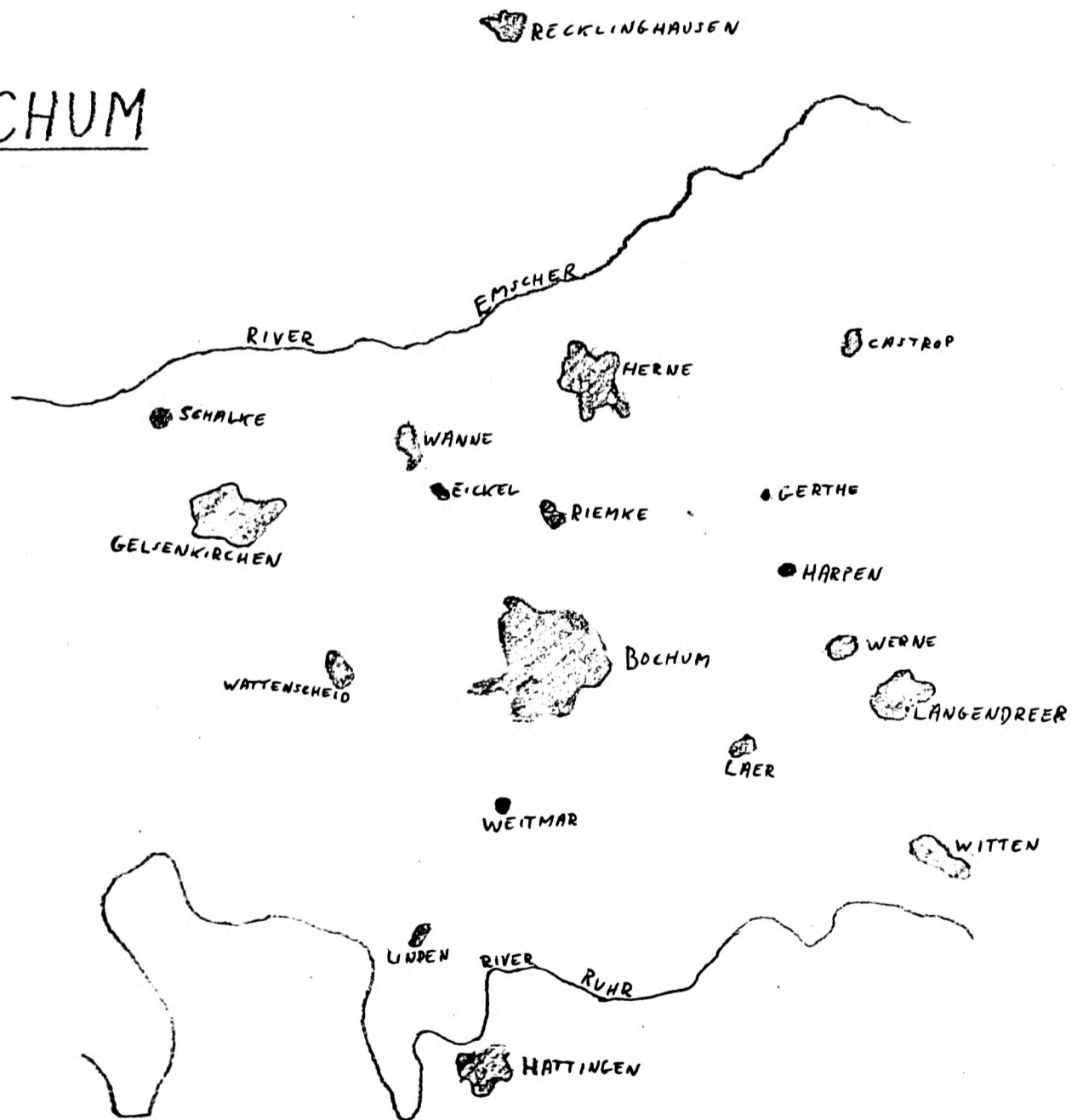


RUHR DISTRICT



BOCHUM



The Ruhr was an overwhelmingly working-class society, and the SPD stood openly as the workers' party. As Gustav Lehmann, the party's Bochum candidate in most elections before 1903, declared at an election meeting in 1898: "Only the social democrats strive for an improvement in the position of the workers; it is therefore also the duty of every worker to give his vote to social democrat candidates".¹ Yet very many workers failed to heed his call. On the eve of war the SPD leaders for the eastern Ruhr summed up their failure:

"It is deeply sad that our powerful industrial district, where one pit lies right by the next, where one foundry and one factory borders on the next, where the land is covered with thousands of chimneys and where a working class numbering hundreds of thousands slaves and wears itself down for miserly wages in these enormous work places, sends to Parliament men who are either the direct representatives of Capital, or are 'workers' representatives' like Giesbarts and Brust [Centre] and not true representatives of the workers, social democrats. The mass of the people here are still very unenlightened and politically backward. They stand aside from the struggles for justice and freedom fought by the class-conscious proletariat".²

The reasons for the social democrats' failure to win wider support are not hard to see. One problem which affected the party in common with other organisations was simply the high mobility of the area. Max König, the party's organiser for the eastern Ruhr, saw the "enormous fluctuation" in the district as one of the main problems for the party's recruiting efforts.³ Local branches suffered when the main personalities or officers left to work elsewhere. The high turnover of local leaders is illustrated by the regular reports of local government officials on

1. Wittener Tageblatt 6.6.1898, quoted in Nettmann Witten in den Reichstagswahlen p.134.
2. IZF, Arbeiter Zeitung 11.7.1914.
3. IZF, Arbeiter Zeitung 13.12.1909.

