

Anton Pannekoek  
**TEXTS / 2**  
(1930-1950)



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## *Workers Councils*

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# Individual acts

1933

Many divergent positions have been taken up on the burning of the Reichstag by Van Der Lubbe. In the organs of the communist left (Spartacus, Radencommunist) it was approved as the act of a revolutionary communist. To approve and applaud such an act means calling for it to be repeated. That's why it's important to understand what use it had.

Its only meaning could be to hit, to weaken, the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. There can be no question of this here. The bourgeoisie hasn't been at all hurt by the burning of the Reichstag. Its rule hasn't in any way been weakened. On the contrary, the government has seized the opportunity to strengthen considerably its terror against the workers movement. The ultimate consequences of this have yet to be appreciated.

But even if such an act really did hit or weaken the bourgeoisie, the only consequence of this would be to encourage the workers to believe that such individual acts could liberate them. The great truth that they have to learn, that only the mass action of the entire working class can defeat the bourgeoisie, this basic truth of revolutionary communism, would be obscured from them. It would lead them away from autonomous class action. Instead of concentrating all their forces on propaganda within the working masses revolutionary minorities would exhaust their energies in individual acts which, even when carried out by a large and dedicated group, would in no way shake the domination of the ruling class. With its considerable auxiliary forces, the bourgeoisie could easily master such a group. There has rarely been a minority group which carried out such actions with the devotion, sacrifice and energy of the Russian nihilists half-a-century ago. At certain moments it even seemed that, through a series of well-organized individual assassinations, they would succeed in overthrowing Tsarism. But a French policeman, called in to take over the anti-terrorist struggle in place of the incompetent Russian police, succeeded with his Western energy and organization to annihilate nihilism in a few years. It was only afterwards, with the development of the mass movement, that Tsarism was overthrown.

But doesn't such an act have a value as a demonstration against the abject electoralism which serves to derail the workers' struggles? A demonstration has value if it convinces people by giving an impression of strength, or if it develops consciousness. But are we really to believe that a worker who thinks he's defending his interests by voting social democrat or Communist is going to start doubting this because the Reichstag is burned down? All this is completely derisory compared to what the bourgeoisie itself does to undermine the workers' illusions—rendering the Reichstag completely impotent, dissolving it or removing it from the decision-making process.

Some German comrades have said that the act could only be positive because it would strike a blow at the workers' confidence in parliamentarism. Doubtless. But we can still ask whether this is looking at things in a rather simplistic way. Democratic illusions would only be introduced from another source. Where there's no right to vote, where parliament is impotent, the conquest of "real democracy" is put forward and the workers imagine that this is the only thing to fight for. In fact, systematic propaganda which uses each event to develop an understanding of the real meaning of parliament and the class struggle can never be side-stepped and is always the essential thing.

Can't individual acts be the signal which sets in motion a mass struggle by giving a radical example? It's a wellknown fact in history that the action of an individual in moments of tension can act as a spark to a powder keg. But the proletarian revolution has nothing in common with the explosion of a powder keg. Even if the Communist Party is trying to convince itself and everyone else that the revolution can break out at any moment, we know that the proletariat still has to form itself for new mass combats. These sorts of ideas reveal a certain bourgeois romanticism. In past bourgeois revolutions, the

rising bourgeoisie, and behind it the people, were confronted with the personalities of sovereigns and their arbitrary oppression. An assassination of a king or a minister could be a signal for a revolt. The idea that in the present period an individual act could set the masses in movement is based on the bourgeois concept of the “chief”, not an elected party leader, but a self-appointed chief, whose action mobilizes the passive masses. The proletarian revolution has nothing to do with this out-dated romanticism of the chief. All initiative has to come from the class, pushed forward by massive social forces.

But, after all, the masses are made up of individuals and mass actions contain a whole number of individual actions. Of course, and here we come to the real value of individual acts. Separated from mass action, the act of an individual who thinks he can accomplish great things on his own is useless. But as part of a mass movement, it's of the greatest importance. The class in struggle isn't a regiment of identical puppets marching in step and accomplishing great things through the blind force of its own movement. It is on the contrary a mass of multiple personalities, pushed forward by the same will, supporting itself, exhorting itself, giving itself courage. The irresistible strength of such a movement is based on many different strengths all converging towards the same goal. In this context, the most audacious bravery can express itself in individual acts of courage, since it is the clear understanding of all the others which directs these acts towards a real goal, so that the fruits of such acts aren't lost. In an ascending movement, this inter-action of strengths and acts is of the greatest value, when it's directed by a clear understanding by the workers about what needs to be done and about how to develop their combativity. But in these cases, it takes a lot more tenacity, audaciousness and courage than it takes to burn a parliament!

## The Personal Act

From: Persmaterial van de Groep van Internationale Communisten, No.7, March 1933;

The burning of the Reichstag by Van Der Lubbe, reveals the most divergent positions. In the organs of the communist left such as (Spartacus, De Radencommunist), the burning is approved as an act of a communist revolutionary. To approve and applaud such an act means advocating its repetition. Hence it is necessarily good to fully appreciate its usefulness.

Perhaps the fire's meaning could only be to affect or to weaken the dominant class: the bourgeoisie. Here, there can be no question. The bourgeoisie is not in the least affected by the burning of the Reichstag; its domination is in no manner weakened. On the contrary, for the government, it was the occasion to considerably reinforce its terror against the worker's movement. The indirect consequences must still be emphasized.

But even if such an act affects and weakens the bourgeoisie, the only consequence is to develop for the workers the conviction that only such individual acts can liberate them. The full truth that they must acquire is that only mass action by the working class as a whole can defeat the bourgeoisie. This basic truth of revolutionary communism will, in such a case, be hidden from them. Their independent action as a class will be lost. Instead of concentrating all their forces on propaganda among the working masses, the revolutionary minorities will squander their forces in personal acts which, even when such acts are carried out by a dedicated group with many members, are not capable making the domination of the ruling class falter. With their considerable forces of repression, the bourgeoisie could easily come after such a group. Rarely has there been a revolutionary minority group carrying out actions with more devotion, sacrifice, and energy than the Russian nihilists a half-century ago. At certain moments, it even appeared that by a series of well organized attentats, the nihilists would overthrow Tsarism. But a French detective, engaged to take over the anti-terrorist struggle in place of the incompetent Russian police, succeeded by his personal energy and his entirely western organization in destroy-

ing nihilism in only a few years. It was only afterwards that a mass movement developed and finally overthrew Tsarism.

Can such personal acts nevertheless have value as a protest against the abject electoralism, that turns aside the workers from their true fight?

A protest only has value if it arises from conviction, leaves a forceful impression, or develops consciousness. But who believes that a worker defending his interests by voting social democrat or communist, will express doubts about electoralism because someone has burned the Reichstag? This is a completely derisory argument, similar to what the bourgeoisie itself does to rid the workers of their illusions, making the Reichstag completely powerless, deciding to dissolve it, setting aside the decision process. German comrades said that this can only be positive since the confidence of the workers in parliamentarianism will receive a first-rate blow. Without doubt, but doesn't this depict matters in a far too simplistic way? In such a case, democratic illusions will be shed by another route. Then, where there is no right to a generalized vote or where Parliament is weak, the conquest of true democracy is advanced and workers can only then imagine themselves arriving there by their collective action. In fact, systematic propaganda seeking to explain from the start of each event an understanding of the real significance of parliament and class struggle, always remains the main point.

Can the personal act be a signal, giving the final push that sets in motion, by radical example, this immense struggle?

There is a certain current running in history where individual actions, in moments of tension, are like sparks on a powder keg. But the proletarian revolution is nothing like the explosion of a powder keg. Even if the Communist Party strives to convince itself and convince the world that the revolution can break out at any moment, we know that the proletariat must still form itself in a new manner to fight as a mass. A certain bourgeois romanticism can still be perceived in these visions. In past bourgeois revolutions, the bourgeoisie rose up with the people behind them and found themselves in confrontation against the sovereigns and their arbitrary oppression. An attentat on the person of a king or a minister could be the signal to revolt. The vision today in which a personal act could set the masses in motion reveals itself to be a bourgeois conception of a chief; not the leader of an elected party, but a chief who designates himself and, who by his actions leads the passive masses. The proletarian revolution finds nothing in this outdated romanticism of the leader: a class, impelled by massive social forces, must be the source of all initiative.

But the mass, after all, is composed of individuals, and the actions of the mass contain a certain number of personal actions. Certainly, it is here that we touch on the true value of the personal act. Separated from mass action, the act of an individual who thinks he can realize alone something great is useless. But as part of a mass movement, the personal act has the highest importance. Workers in struggle are not a regiment of marionettes identical in courage but composed of forces of different natures concentrated toward the same goal, their movement irresistible. In this body, the audacity of the bravest finds the time and place to express itself in personal acts of courage, when the clear comprehension of others leads them towards a suitable goal in order not to lose the gains. Likewise, in a rising movement, this interaction of forces and acts is of great value when it is guided by a clear comprehension that animates, at this moment, the workers which is necessary to develop their combativity. But in this case, so much tenacity, audacity, and courage will be called for that it will not be necessary to burn a Parliament.

## **Destruction as A Mean of Struggle**

(1933)

The assessment of the burning of the Reichstag in the left communist press once again leads us to raise other questions. Can destruction be a means of struggle for workers ?

First of all, it must be said that no one will cry over the disappearance of the Reichstag. It was one of the ugliest buildings in modern Germany, a pompous image of the Empire of 1871. But there are other more beautiful buildings, and museums filled with artistic treasures. When a desperate proletarian destroys something precious in order to take vengeance for capitalist domination, how should we assess this ?

From a revolutionary point of view, his gesture appears valueless and from different points of view one could speak of a negative gesture. The bourgeoisie is not the least bit touched by it since it has already continually destroyed so many things where it was a matter of its profits, and it places money-value above all else. Such a gesture especially touches the more limited social strata of artists, amateurs of beautiful things, the best of whom often have anti-capitalist feelings, and some of whom ( like William Morris and Herman Gorter ) fought at the side of the workers. But in any case, is there any reason to take vengeance on the bourgeoisie ? Does the bourgeoisie have the task of bringing socialism instead of capitalism ?

It is its role to maintain all the forces of capitalism in place; the destruction of all that is the task of proletarians. It follows that if anybody can be held responsible for the maintenance of capitalism, it is as much the working class itself which has neglected the struggle too much. Lastly, from whom does one remove something by its destruction ? From the victorious proletarians who one day will be masters of all of it.

Of course, all revolutionary class struggle, when it takes the form of civil war, will always provoke destruction. In any war it is necessary to destroy the points of support of the enemy. Even if the winner tries to avoid too much destruction, the loser will be tempted to cause useless destruction through pure spite. It is to be expected that towards the end of the fight the decadent bourgeoisie destroys a great deal. On the other hand, for the working class, the class which will slowly take over, destruction will no longer be a means of struggle. On the contrary it will try to pass on a world as rich and intact as possible to its descendents, to future humanity. This is not only the case for the technical means which it can improve and perfect, but especially for the monuments and memories of past generations which cannot be rebuilt.

One might object that a new humanity, the bearers of an unequalled liberty and fraternity, will create things much more beautiful and imposing than those of past centuries. And moreover that newly liberated humanity will wish to cause the remainders of the past, which represented its former state of slavery, to disappear. This is also what the revolutionary bourgeoisie did—or tried to do. For them, all of past history was nothing but the darkness of ignorance and slavery, whereas the revolution was dedicated to reason, knowledge, virtue and freedom. The proletariat, by contrast, considers the history of its forebears quite differently. On the basis of marxism which sees the development of society as a succession of forms of production, it sees a long and hard annexation of humanity on the basis of the development of labour, of tools and of forms of labour towards an ever increasing productivity, first through simple primitive society, then through class societies with their class struggle, until the moment when through communism man becomes the master of his own fate. And in each period of development, the proletariat finds characteristics which are related to its own nature.

In barbarian prehistory : the sentiments of fraternity and the morality of solidarity of primitive communism. In petty-bourgeois manual work : the love of work which was expressed in the beauty of the buildings and the utensils for everyday use which their descendents regard as incomparable masterworks. In the ascendant bourgeoisie : the proud feeling of liberty which proclaimed the rights of man and was expressed in the greatest works of world literature. In capitalism : the knowledge of nature, the priceless development of natural science which allowed man, through technology, to dominate nature and its own fate.



In the work of all of these periods, these imposing character traits were more or less closely allied to cruelty, superstition and selfishness. It is exactly these vices which we fight, which are an obstacle to us and which we therefore hate. Our conception of history teaches us that these imperfections must be understood as natural stages of growth, as the expression of a struggle for life by men not yet fully human, in an all powerful nature and in a society of which the understanding escaped them.

For liberated humanity the imposing things which they created in spite of everything will remain a symbol of their weakness, but also a memorial of their strength, and worthy of being carefully preserved. Today, it is the bourgeoisie which possesses all of it, but for us it is the property of the collectivity which we will set free to hand on to future generations as intact as possible.

## Die Zusammenbruchstheorie des Kapitalismus

1934

In den ersten Jahren nach der russischen Revolution herrschte die Ansicht, daß der Kapitalismus sich in einer Endkrise, in seiner Todeskrise befinde. Als die revolutionäre Bewegung der Arbeiter in Westeuropa abflaute, gab die 3. Internationale diese Theorie auf. Sie wurde dann aber festgehalten von der Oppositionsbewegung der K.A.P., die die Anerkennung der Todeskrise zu einem Unterscheidungsmerkmal zwischen dem revolutionären und dem reformistischen Standpunkt machte. Die Frage der Notwendigkeit und Unabwendbarkeit des kapitalistischen Zusammenbruchs, und in welcher Weise dieser zu verstehen sei, ist für die Arbeiterklasse, für ihre Erkenntnis und Taktik, die wichtigste aller Fragen. Rosa Luxemburg hatte sie schon 1912 in ihrem Buch **Die Akkumulation des Kapitals** behandelt, und sie kam dort zu dem Ergebnis, daß in einem reinen, geschlossenen kapitalistischen System der für Akkumulation dienende Mehrwert nicht realisiert werden kann, daß Jäher stetige Ausdehnung des Kapitalismus durch Handel mit nicht- kapitalistischen Ländern nötig ist. Das bedeutet: wenn diese Ausbreitung nicht mehr möglich ist, bricht der Kapitalismus zusammen; er kann als wirtschaftliches System nicht mehr weiter bestehen. Auf diese Theorie, die sofort nach ihrem Erscheinen von verschiedenen Seiten bestritten wurde, hat sich die K.A.P. oft berufen. Eine ganz andere Theorie wurde 1929 von Henryk Grossmann entwickelt in seinem Werk **Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems**. Darin leitet er ab, daß der Kapitalismus reinökonomisch zusammenbrechen muß, in dem Sinne, daß er, unabhängig von menschlichem Eingreifen, Revolutionen, als ökonomisches System unmöglich weiter bestehen kann. Die schwere und andauernde Krise, die 1930 einsetzte, hat zweifellos die Geister für eine solche Theorie der Todeskrise empfänglicher gemacht. In dem kürzlich erschienen Manifest der United Workers of America wird Grossmann's Theorie zu der theoretischen Basis einer Neuorientierung der Arbeiterbewegung gemacht. Daher ist es nötig, sie kritisch zu untersuchen. Dazu ist es unvermeidlich, zuerst die Fragestellung bei Marx und die damit verbundenen vorherigen Diskussionen darzulegen.

### **Marx und Rosa Luxemburg**

In dem 2. Teil des *Kapital* hat Man die allgemeinen Bedingungen des Gesamtprozesses der kapitalistischen Produktion behandelt. In dem abstrakten Fall der reinen kapitalistischen Produktion findet alle Produktion für den Markt statt: alle Produkte sind als Waren zu kaufen und zu verkaufen. Der Wert der Produktionsmittel geht auf das Produkt über und neuer Wert wird durch die Arbeit hinzugefügt. Dieser neue Wert zerfällt in zwei Teile dem Wert der Arbeitskraft, der als Lohn bezahlt und von den Arbeitern zum Kaufen von Lebensmitteln benutzt wird, und dem Rest, dem Mehrwert, der dem Kapitalisten zufällt. Wird letzterer für Lebens- und Genußmittel verwendet, so

findet einfache Reproduktion statt; wird ein Teil akkumuliert zu neuem Kapital, dann hat man eine Reproduktion auf erweiterter Stufenleiter.

Damit die Kapitalisten die Produktionsmittel, die sie brauchen, auf dem Markt finden, und die Arbeiter gleichfalls die Lebensmittel, die sie brauchen, muß ein bestimmtes Verhältnis zwischen allen Produktionsgebieten vorhanden sein. Ein Mathematiker würde dies leicht in algebraischen Formeln zum Ausdruck bringen: Marx hat statt dessen Zahlenbeispiele gegeben, phantasierte Fälle mit dazu gewählten Zahlen, die als Illustration dienen, um diese Verhältnisse zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Er unterscheidet zwei Sphären oder Hauptgebiete der Produktion, dasjenige der Produktionsmittel (I) und dasjenige der Konsumtionsmittel (II). In jedem wird ein bestimmter Wert der gebrauchten Produktionsmittel auf das Produkt ungeändert übertragen (konstantes Kapital  $c$ ). Von dem neu hinzugefügten Wert wird ein bestimmter Teil für die Arbeitskraft bezahlt (variables Kapital  $v$ ), und der andere Teil ist Mehrwert ( $m$ ). Setzt man für das Zahlenbeispiel die Annahme, daß das konstante Kapital 4 mal das variable ist (mit der Entwicklung der Technik steigt diese Zahl), und daß der Mehrwert gleich dem variablen Kapital ist (das wird bestimmt durch die Ausbeutungsrate), so genügen im Fall der einfachen Reproduktion die folgenden Zahlen diesen Bedingungen:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 \text{I} \quad 4400c \text{ plus } 1100v \text{ plus } 1100m \\
 \quad \quad \quad (= 550 \text{ k plus } 550 \text{ akk } (= 440c \text{ plus } 110v) ) = 66 \\
 \quad \quad \quad 00 \\
 \\
 \text{I} \quad 1600c \text{ plus } 400v \text{ plus } 400m \\
 \quad \quad \quad (= 200 \text{ k plus } 200 \text{ akk } (= 160c \text{ plus } 40v) ) = 24 \\
 \quad \quad \quad 00
 \end{array}$$

Jede Zeile genügt den Bedingungen. Weil  $v$  plus  $m$ , die für Konsumtionsmittel verwendet werden, zusammen die Hälfte sind von  $c$ , dem Wert der Produktionsmittel, muß in der 2. Sphäre halb soviel an Wert produziert werden als in der 1. Sphäre. Dann ist das richtige Verhältnis getroffen: die 6000 produzierten Produktionsmittel sind gerade nötig, um für die folgende Umschlagsperiode 4000c für die erste und 2000c für die 2. Sphäre zu liefern; und die 3000 in II produzierten Lebensmittel reichen genau, um 1000 plus 500 für die Arbeiter und 1000 plus 500 für die Kapitalisten bereitzustellen.

Um den Fall der Kapitalakkumulation in ähnlicher Weise zu illustrieren, muß man angeben, welcher Teil des Mehrwerts für Akkumulation dient; dieser Teil wird im nächsten Jahr (der Einfachheit wegen nimmt man eine Produktionsperiode von jedesmal einem Jahre) zum Kapital geschlagen, so daß dann ein größeres Kapital in jeder Produktionssphäre angewandt wird. Wir nehmen in unserem Beispiel an, daß die Hälfte des Mehrwerts akkumuliert (also für neue  $c$  und  $v$  verwandt) und die andere Hälfte verzehrt wird (Konsum  $k$ ). Die Berechnung des Verhältnisses von I zu II wird nun etwas verwickelter, aber es läßt sich natürlich finden. Es stellt sich heraus, daß bei den gegebenen Annahmen das Verhältnis 11 zu 4, wird, wie sich in den folgenden Zahlen zeigt:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 4400c \text{ plus } 1100v \text{ plus } 1100m \\
 \quad \quad \quad (= 550 \text{ k plus } 550 \text{ akk } (= 440c \text{ plus } 110v) ) = 66 \\
 \quad \quad \quad 00 \\
 \\
 \text{I} \quad 1600c \text{ plus } 400v \text{ plus } 400m \\
 \quad \quad \quad (= 200 \text{ k plus } 200 \text{ akk } (= 160c \text{ plus } 40v) ) = \\
 \quad \quad \quad 2400
 \end{array}$$

Die Kapitalisten brauchen 4400 plus 1600 zur Erneuerung, 440 plus 160 zur Erweiterung ihrer Produktionsmittel, und sie finden in der Tat 6600 an Produktionsmitteln auf dem Markt. Die Kapitalisten brauchen 550 plus 200 für ihren Konsum, die alten Arbeiter 1100 plus 400, die neu eingestellten 110 plus 40 für Lebensmittel; was zusammen die tatsächlich an Lebensmittel produzierten 2400 gleich ist. Im nächsten Jahre findet dann alles in um 10 % größerer Stufenleiter statt:

$$4840c \text{ plus } 1210v \text{ plus } 1210m \\ (= 605 k \text{ plus } 484c \text{ plus } 121v) = 7260$$

$$\text{I} \quad 1760c \text{ plus } 440v \text{ plus } 440m \\ (= 220 k \text{ plus } 176c \text{ plus } 44v) = 2640$$

So kann dann, jedes Jahr in derselben Proportion steigend, weiterproduziert werden.

Natürlich bildet dies ein ungeheuer vereinfachter Fall. Man kann es verwickelter und damit der Wirklichkeit ähnlicher machen, wenn man für die Gebiete I und II eine verschiedene organische Zusammensetzung (Verhältnis c zu v) annimmt, oder auch eine verschiedene Akkumulationsrate oder wenn man das Verhältnis c zu v allmählich zunehmen läßt, wobei auch das Verhältnis von I zu II jedes Jahr anders wird. In allen diesen Fällen wird die Rechnung komplizierter, aber sie läßt sich immer durchführen, da immer eine unbekannt Zahl, das Verhältnis von I zu II aus der Bedingung berechnet wird, daß Nachfrage und Angebot sich decken müssen.

Solche Beispiele sind in der Literatur zu finden. In der Wirklichkeit findet natürlich nie ein völliger Ausgleich in einer Periode statt; Waren werden für Geld verkauft, und erst nachher wird das Geld zum Kaufen verwendet, wobei Schatzbildung als Puffer und Reservoir dient. Auch bleiben Waren unverkauft liegen; außerdem wird mit nicht kapitalistischen Gebieten Handel getrieben. Aber das Wesentliche, worauf es ankommt, ist in diesen Reproduktionsschemas klar zu sehen: damit die Produktion, sich erweiternd, ihren stetigen Fortgang nimmt, sind bestimmte Verhältnisse zwischen den Produktionsgebieten nötig, die in der Praxis dann annähernd erfüllt sind; und diese Verhältnisse hängen von den vorhandenen Daten: organischer Zusammensetzung des Kapitals, Ausbeutungsrate, akkumulierter Fraktion des Mehrwerts ab.

Marx hatte keine Gelegenheit, diese Beispiele alle fein sauber auszuarbeiten (vgl. Engels Einleitung zu Bd.II des **Kapitals**). Das war wohl die Ursache, daß Rosa Luxemburg glaubte, hier eine Lücke zu finden, ein Problem, das Marx nicht gesehen und daher ungelöst gelassen hat, und zu dessen Lösung sie dann ihr Werk **Die Akkumulation des Kapitals** (1912) abgefaßt hat. Das Problem, wer die Produkte kaufen muß, in denen der Mehrwert enthalten sei. Wenn die Abteilungen I und II sich gegenseitig immer mehr Produktionsmittel und Lebensmittel verkaufen, so wäre das ein zweckloses Sich-im-Kreise-drehen, wobei nichts herauskommt. Die Lösung liege darin, daß außerhalb des Kapitalismus stehende Käufer auftreten, fremde überseeische Märkte, deren Eroberung daher eine Lebensfrage für den Kapitalismus sei. Dies sei die wirtschaftliche Grundlage des Imperialismus.

Nach dem Obenstehenden ist wohl klar, daß Rosa Luxemburg sich darin geirrt hat. In dem Schema als Beispiel ist unzweideutig die Tatsache zu erkennen, daß alle Produkte innerhalb des Kapitalismus selbst verkauft werden; nicht nur die Übertragenen Wertteile 4400 plus 1600, sondern auch die 440 plus 160, in denen der akkumulierte Mehrwert enthalten ist, werden als körperliche Produktionsmittel von den Kapitalisten gekauft, die im nächsten Jahr mit im Ganzen 6600 an Produktionsmitteln anfangen wollen. Und ähnlich werden die 110 plus 40 aus dem Mehrwert tatsächlich von den hinzukommenden Arbeitern gekauft. Zwecklos ist auch nichts daran: produzieren, einander verkaufen,

konsumieren, akkumulieren, mehr produzieren ist der ganze Inhalt des Kapitalismus, also des Lebens der Menschen in dieser Produktionsweise. Ein ungelöstes Problem, das Marx nicht gesehen haben sollte, ist hier nicht vorhanden.

#### Rosa Luxemburg und Otto Bauer

Bald nach dem Erscheinen des Buches von Rosa Luxemburg ist daher von verschiedener Seite die Kritik gekommen. So hat auch in einem Artikel in der **Neuen Zeit** (7.-14. März 1913) Otto Bauer eine Kritik gegeben. Natürlich wird darin, wie bei jeder anderen Kritik, gezeigt, daß Produktion und Abnahme zueinander stimmen. Aber hier hat die Kritik diese besondere Form, daß die Akkumulation mit dem Bevölkerungswachstum in Zusammenhang gebracht wird. Otto Bauer setzt zuerst sozialistische Gesellschaft voraus, wo die Bevölkerung jährlich um 5 % wächst; daher muß auch die Produktion von Lebensmitteln in demselben Verhältnis wachsen, wobei, durch den Fortschritt der Technik, die Produktionsmittel stärker zunehmen müssen. Ähnlich muß im Kapitalismus, aber hier nicht durch planmäßige Regelung, sondern durch Akkumulation von Kapital, diese Erweiterung stattfinden. Deshalb wird als Zahlenbeispiel ein Schema aufgestellt, das diesen Bedingungen in einfachster Weise genügt: eine jährliche Zunahme des variablen Kapitals um 5 % des konstanten Kapitals um 10 % und eine Ausbeutungsrate von 100 % ( $m = v$ ). Durch diese Bedingungen ist dann zugleich festgelegt, welcher Teil des Mehrwerts akkumuliert wird, um gerade die angenommene Zunahme des Kapitals zu ergeben, und welcher Teil verzehrt wird. Es erfordert keine schwere Berechnung, ein Schema aufzustellen, das von Jahr zu Jahr die richtige Zunahme aufweist.

|        |       |          |          |
|--------|-------|----------|----------|
| 1      | 200   | plus 100 | plus 100 |
| . Jahr | 000c  | 000v     | 000m     |
|        | (= 20 | plus 5   | plus 75  |
|        | 000c  | 000v     | 000k)    |
|        |       |          |          |
| 2      | 220   | plus 105 | plus 105 |
| . Jahr | 000c  | 000v     | 000m     |
|        | (= 26 | plus 5   | plus 77  |
|        | 000c  | 250v     | 750k)    |
|        |       |          |          |
| 3      | 242   | plus 110 | plus 110 |
| . Jahr | 000c  | 250v     | 250m     |
|        | (= 24 | plus 5   | plus 80  |
|        | 200c  | 512v     | 538k)    |

Bauer führt es für 4 Jahre durch und berechnet auch die Zahlen für die Produktionsgebiete I und II gesondert. Für den Zweck, daß kein Problem im Sinne Rosa Luxemburgs vorlag, war das ausreichend.

Aber der Charakter dieser Kritik mußte selbst Kritik hervorrufen. Sein Grundgedanke erhellt schon aus der Einführung mittels des Bevölkerungszuwachses in einer sozialistischen Gesellschaft. Der Kapitalismus erscheint hier als ein noch nicht geregelter Sozialismus, als ein noch nicht gebändigtes, noch wild um sich schlagendes Füllen, das nur der zähmenden Hand des sozialistischen Dompteurs bedarf. Die Akkumulation dient hier nur der durch den Bevölkerungszuwachs nötigen Erweiterung der Produktion, sowie der Kapitalismus überhaupt der Versorgung der Menschheit mit Lebensmitteln dient; beides findet aber, durch den Mangel an Planmäßigkeit, schlecht, unregelmäßig, bald zu viel, bald zu wenig, in Katastrophen statt. Nun mag auch die zahme Zunahme von 5 % jährlich passen für eine sozialistische Gesellschaft, wo alles Menschtum sauber einrangiert ist. Aber als Beispiel für den Kapitalismus, wie er war und ist, paßt sie schlecht. Seine ganze Geschichte ist ein Vorwärtsstürmen, eine gewaltige Ausbreitung, weit über die Grenzen des Bevölkerungszuwachses hinaus. Die treibende Kraft war der Akkumulationstrieb; möglichst viel von dem Mehrwert wurde als neues Kapital angelegt, und zu seiner Verwertung wurden stets größere Kreise der Bevölkerung

in den Prozeß hineingezogen. Es war ja, und es ist noch, ein großer Überschuß an Menschen vorhanden, die noch außerhalb oder halbwegs stehen als Reserve und, je nach dem Bedürfnis aufgesogen oder abgestoßen, für das Verwertungsbedürfnis des akkumulierten Kapitals bereit stehen. Dieser wesentliche Grundcharakter des Kapitalismus würde in der Bauerschen Darstellung völlig verkannt.

Es war selbstverständlich, daß Rosa Luxemburg dies zum Zielpunkt ihrer Gegenkritik nahm. Gegen den Nachweis, daß in den Marxschen Schemas kein Problem des Nichtstimmens lag, konnte sie nicht viel anderes vorbringen, als höhnende Ausrufe, daß in künstlichen Zahlenbeispielen alles schön zum Klappen gebracht werden konnte. Aber die Verbindung mit dem Wachstum der Bevölkerung als das regulierende Prinzip der Akkumulation war dem Geiste der Marxschen Lehren so völlig zuwider, daß hier der Nebentitel ihrer **Antikritik** paßte: was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben. Es handelt sich hier nicht einfach um einen wissenschaftlichen Irrtum (wie bei Rosa Luxemburg selbst); es spiegelt sich darin der praktisch-politische Standpunkt der damaligen Sozialdemokraten, Sie fühlten sich als die künftigen Staatsmänner, die an die Stelle der herrschenden Politiker tretend, die Organisation der Produktion durchführen sollen, und die daher in dem Kapitalismus nicht den völligen Gegensatz zu einer durch Revolution zu verwirklichenden proletarischen Diktatur sehen, sondern vielmehr eine noch ungergelte, verbesserungsfähige Form der Lebensmittelbeschaffung.

#### **Das Grossmannsche Reproduktionsschema**

An das von Otto Bauer aufgestellte Reproduktionsschema knüpft Henryk Grossmann an. Er hat bemerkt, daß es sich nicht unbeschränkt fortsetzen läßt, sondern bei längerer Fortsetzung auf Widersprüche stößt. Das ist sehr leicht einzusehen. Otto Bauer setzt ein konstantes Kapital 200 000 voraus, das jedes Jahr um 10 % zunimmt, und ein variables Kapital 100 000, das jedes Jahr um 5 % zunimmt; die Mehrwertrate wird 100 % gesetzt, d.h. der Mehrwert ist in jedem Jahre gleich dem variablen Kapital. Eine Größe, die jedes Jahr um 10 % zunimmt, hat sich den Regeln der Mathematik gemäß nach 7 Jahren verdoppelt, nach 14 Jahren vervierfacht, nach 23 Jahren verzehnfacht, nach 46 Jahren ver Hundertfacht. Eine Größe, die jedes Jahr um 5 % zunimmt, hat sich nach 46 Jahren nur verzehnfacht. Das variable Kapital und der Mehrwert, die im ersten Jahr halb so groß als das konstante Kapital waren, sind nach 46 Jahren nur noch der zwanzigste Teil des viel kolossaler gewachsenen konstanten Kapitals. Der Mehrwert reicht also gar nicht für den 10 prozentigen Zuwachs des konstanten Kapitals.

Das liegt nicht einfach an den von Bauer gewählten Zuwachsraten von 10 und 5 %. Denn tatsächlich nimmt der Mehrwert im Kapitalismus weniger rasch zu als das Kapital. Daß dadurch die Profitrate in der Entwicklung des Kapitalismus fortwährend abnehmen muß, ist eine bekannte Tatsache, und Marx widmet diesem Fallen der Profitrate mehrere Kapitel. Wenn die Profitrate auf 5 % fällt, kann nicht mehr das Kapital um 10 % vergrößert werden, denn die Vergrößerung des Kapitals aus akkumuliertem Mehrwert ist notwendig kleiner als dieser Mehrwert selbst. Die Akkumulationsrate hat selbstverständlich die Profitrate als obere Grenze (vgl. Marx, **Das Kapital**, III, S.251, wo er sagt, daß „mit der Profitrate die Rate der Akkumulation fällt“). Die Benutzung einer festen Zahl 10 % die für ein paar Jahre, wie bei Bauer zulässig war, Wird unzulässig, wenn man das Reproduktionsschema auf längere Zeit fortsetzt.

Grossmann führt jedoch das Bauersche Schema unbekümmert von Jahr zu Jahr weiter, und glaubt damit den wirklichen Kapitalismus wiederzugeben. Er findet dann die folgenden Werte für konstantes und variables Kapital, Mehrwert, Akkumulation nötigen und den für Konsum der Kapitalisten übrig bleibenden Betrag (alles in Tausende abgerundet).

|                | <b>Konst. Kap.</b> | <b>Var. Kap.</b> | <b>Mehrw.</b> | <b>Akkumulation</b> | <b>Konsum</b> |
|----------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Anfangs        | 200                | 100              | 100           | 20 plus 5 = 25      | 75            |
| nach 20 Jahren | 1222               | 253              | 253           | 122 plus 13 = 135   | 118           |
| “ 30 “         | 3170               | 412              | 412           | 317 plus 21 = 338   | 74            |
| “ 34 “         | 4641               | 500              | 500           | 464 plus 25 = 489   | 11            |

“ 35 “ 5106 525 525 510 plus 26 = 536 -11

Nach dem 21. Jahr nimmt der für den Konsum übrig bleibende Teil des Mehrwerts ab; im 34. Jahr verschwindet er nahezu, und im 35. Jahr ist sogar ein Defizit; der Shylock des konstanten Kapitals fordert unerbittlich sein Pfund Fleisch, es will um 10 % zunehmen, während die armen Kapitalisten hungernd daneben stehen und nichts zum eigenen Konsum behalten.

Vom 35. Jahre an könnte somit die Akkumulation nicht mit dem Bevölkerungszuwachs—auf Basis des jeweiligen technischen Fortschritts—Schritt halten. Die Akkumulation wäre zu klein, es würde notwendig eine Reservearmee entstehen, die mit jedem Jahr anwachsen müßte. (Grossmann, **Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchs gesetz des kapitalistischen Systems**, S.126)

Unter solchen Umständen werden die Kapitalisten nicht an Fortführung der Produktion denken. Und sollten sie, sie können es nicht; denn wegen des Fehlbetrags von 11 an Akkumulation müssen sie die Produktion einschränken. (Tatsächlich hätten sie das schon früher tun müssen, wegen ihrer Konsumausgaben.) Damit wird ein Teil der Arbeiter arbeitslos; dann wird ein Teil des Kapitals unbeschäftigt und der produzierte Mehrwert weniger, die Masse des Mehrwerts sinkt und ein noch größeres Defizit für die Akkumulation tritt auf, mit noch mehr zunehmender Arbeitslosigkeit. Das ist dann der ökonomische Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus. Er ist wirtschaftlich unmöglich geworden. Damit ist die Aufgabe gelöst, die Grossmann S.79 stellt:

Wie, auf welche Weise kann die Akkumulation die kapitalistische Produktion zum Zusammenbruch bringen?

Hier findet also statt, was in der älteren marxistischen Literatur immer als ein blödes Mißverständnis der Gegner behandelt wurde, für das der Name „der große Kladeradatsch“ gebräuchlich war. Ohne daß eine revolutionäre Klasse da ist, die Bourgeoisie zu besiegen und zu enteignen, tritt rein wirtschaftlich ein Ende des Kapitalismus ein; die Maschine will nicht mehr drehen, sie stockt, die Produktion ist unmöglich geworden. Mit den Worten Grossmanns:

... trotz der periodischen Unterbrechungen geht der Gesamtmechanismus mit dem Fortschreiten der Kapitalakkumulation immer mehr seinem Ende notwendig entgegen ... Dann gewinnt die Zusammenbruchstendenz die Oberhand und setzt sich in ihrer absoluten Geltung als „letzte Krise“ durch. (S.140)

Und an einer späteren Stelle:

... aus unserer Darstellung (ist) zu ersehen, daß der Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus, obwohl unter gegebenen Voraussetzungen objektiv notwendig und in bezug auf den Zeitpunkt seines Eintretens exakt berechenbar, dennoch nicht „von selbst“ automatisch zu dem erwarteten Zeitpunkt zu erfolgen braucht und deshalb bloß passiv abzuwarten sei. (S.601)

In diesem Satz, wo man einen Augenblick glauben möchte, daß von der aktiven Rolle des Proletariats als Akteur der Revolution die Rede ist, wird nur über Änderungen des Lohns und der Arbeitszeit gehandelt, die die zahlenmäßigen Grundlagen und Resultate der Rechnung etwas verschieben. Und in diesem Sinne führt er weiter aus:

So zeigt es sich, daß der Gedanke eines aus objektiven Gründen notwendigen Zusammenbruchs durchaus nicht im Widerspruch zum Klassenkampf steht, daß vielmehr der Zusammenbruch trotz seiner objektiv gegebenen Notwendigkeit durch die lebendigen Kräfte der kämpfenden Klassen im starken Maße beeinflussbar ist und für das aktive Eingreifen der Klassen einen gewissen Spielraum läßt. Eben deshalb mündet bei Marx die ganze Analyse des Reproduktionsprozesses in den Klassenkampf aus. (S.602)

Das „deshalb“ ist köstlich; als ob Klassenkampf bei Marx nur Kampf um Lohnforderungen und Arbeitszeit bedeutet.

Sehen wir uns die Grundlage dieses Zusammenbruchs etwas näher an. Worauf beruht die notwendige Zunahme des konstanten Kapitals mit jedesmal 10 %? In dem oben gegebenen Zitat wird gesagt, daß der technische Fortschritt (bei gegebenem Bevölkerungszuwachs) einen bestimmten jährlichen Zuwachs des konstanten Kapitals vorschreibt. Man könnte dann, ohne den Umweg des Reproduktionsschemas sagen: wenn

die Profitrate kleiner wird als diese vom technischen Fortschritt geforderte Zuwachsrage, muß der Kapitalismus zugrunde gehen. Abgesehen davon, daß dies nichts mit Marx zu tun hat: was ist der von der Technik geforderte Kapitalzuwachs? Verbesserungen in der Technik werden eingeführt in gegenseitiger Konkurrenz, um den Extraprofit (relativen Mehrwert) zu ergattern; aber das geht nicht weiter als die finanziellen Mittel vorhanden sind. Jedermann weiß auch, daß Dutzende von neuen Erfindungen, von technischen Verbesserungen, nicht eingeführt werden und oft absichtlich von den Unternehmern unterdrückt, damit nicht der vorhandene technische Apparat entwertet wird. Die Notwendigkeit des technischen Fortschritts wirkt nicht als äußerer Zwang; sie wirkt mittels der Menschen und für diese gilt das Müssen nicht weiter als ihr Können.

Aber nehmen wir an, daß es richtig ist, und daß infolge des technischen Fortschritts das konstante Kapital sich nach dem Schema zum veränderlichen verhalten muß: im 30. Jahre wie 3170 zu 412, im 34. wie 4641 zu 500, im 35. wie 5106 zu 525, im 36. wie 5616 zu 551. Der Mehrwert im 35. Jahr ist nur 525 Tausend und reicht nicht aus, 510 Tausend zum konstanten und 26 Tausend zum variablen Kapital hinzuzufügen. Grossmann läßt das konstante Kapital um 510 Tausend wachsen und behält dann bloß 15 Tausend als Zuwachs des variablen Kapitals! 11 Tausend zu wenig. Er sagt dazu:

11.509 Arbeiter (auf 551 Tausend) bleiben arbeitslos, es bildet sich die Reservarmee Und weil nicht die ganze Arbeiterbevölkerung in den Produktionsprozeß eintritt, so wird nicht die ganze Summe des zusätzlichen konstanten Kapitals (510.563) zum Ankauf von Produktionsmitteln erforderlich sein. Sollte bei einer Bevölkerung von 551.584 ein konstantes Kapital von 561.6200 angewendet werden, so muß bei einer Bevölkerung von 540.075 ein konstantes Kapital von nur 5.499.015 angewendet werden. Somit verbleibt ein Kapitalüberschuß von 117.185 ohne Anlagemöglichkeit. So zeigt uns das Schema ein Schulbeispiel für den Tatbestand, an den Marx dachte, als er den entsprechenden Abschnitt des 3. Bandes des **Kapital**“ mit der Überschrift versah: *Überfluß von Kapital bei Überfluß an Bevölkerung.* (S.126)

Grossmann hat offenbar nicht bemerkt, daß diese 11.000 nur deshalb arbeitslos werden, weil er, ganz willkürlich, ohne einen Grund anzugeben, das Defizit ganz auf das variable Kapital abwälzt und das konstante Kapital ruhig 10 % zunehmen läßt, als ob nichts los ist; als er dann aber gewahr wird, daß für all diese Maschinen keine Arbeiter da sind, oder richtiger, kein Geld da ist, ihnen Löhne zu zahlen, läßt er auch diese Maschinen lieber nicht bauen und muß nun Kapital unbenutzt liegen lassen. Nur durch diesen Schnitzer gerät er in das „Schulbeispiel“ für eine Erscheinung, die bei den gewöhnlichen kapitalistischen Krisen auftritt. In Wirklichkeit werden die Unternehmer ihre Produktion nur soviel erweitern können, als ihr Kapital, für Maschinen und Lohn zusammen reicht. Ist im Ganzen zu wenig Mehrwert da, so wird er (bei dem angenommenen technischen Zwang) proportional auf die Bestandteile des Kapitals verteilt werden; die Rechnung zeigt, daß von dem 525.319 betragenden Mehrwert 500.409 zu dem konstanten, 24.910 zu dem variablen Kapital geschlagen werden müssen, um das richtige, dem technischen Fortschritt entsprechende Verhältnis zu haben; nicht 11.000 sondern 1.356 Arbeiter werden freigesetzt und von überschüssigem Kapital ist keine Rede. Führt man das Schema in dieser richtigen Weise weiter, so findet statt einer katastrophalen eine sehr langsam zunehmende Freisetzung von Arbeitern statt.

Wie ist es nun möglich, diesen angeblichen Zusammenbruch auf das Konto von Marx zu schieben und durch viele Kapitel hindurch Dutzende von Zitaten von Marx zu bringen? Diese Zitate beziehen sich alle auf die wirtschaftlichen Krisen, auf den Konjunkturwechsel von Aufschwung und Niedergang. Während das Schema dazu dienen sollte, einen nach 35 Jahren einsetzenden endgültigen ökonomischen Zusammenbruch zu zeigen, heißt es 2 Seiten weiter:

Die hier zur Darstellung gelangte Marx'sche Theorie des Wirtschaftszyklus. (S.123)

Nur dadurch, daß er fortwährend Sätze von Marx, die über die periodischen Krisen handeln, durch seine Ausführungen streut, kann Grossmann den Schein erwecken, er stelle eine Theorie von Marx dar. Bei Marx findet sich aber nichts von einem endgültigen

Zusammenbruch nach dem Grossmannschen Schema. Allerdings: ein paar Zitate führt Grossmann an, die nicht über die Krisen handeln. So schreibt er S.263:

Es zeigt sich, daß die kapitalistische Produktionsweise an der Entwicklung der Produktivkräfte eine Schranke findet ... (Marx, **Kapital**, III, S.252)

Schlägt man aber das **Kapital**, III, S. 292, auf, so liest man dort:

Das wichtige aber in ihrem (d.h. Ricardo s und der anderen Okonomen) Horror vor der fallenden Profitrate ist das Gefühl, daß die kapitalistische Produktionsweise an der Entwicklung der Produktivkräfte eine Schranke findet ...

Das ist wohl etwas anderes. Und S.79 zitiert er, um nachzuweisen, daß sogar das Wort Zusammenbruch von Marx stammt:

Dieser Prozeß würde bald die kapitalistische Produktion zum Zusammenbruch bringen, wenn nicht widerstrebende Tendenzen beständig wie der dezentralisierend neben der zentripetalen Kraft wirken. (**a.a.O.**, S.256)

Diese widerstrebenden Tendenzen, das betont Grossmann mit Recht, beziehen sich auf das „bald“, so daß der Prozeß mit ihnen bloß langsamer stattfindet. Spricht Marx hier nun von einem reinwirtschaftlichen Zusammenbruch? Lesen wir den vorhergehenden Satz bei Marx:

Es ist diese Scheidung zwischen Arbeitsbedingungen hier und Produzenten dort, die den Begriff des Kapitals bildet, die mit der ursprünglichen Akkumulation sich eröffnet, dann als beständiger Prozeß in der Akkumulation und Konzentration des Kapitals erscheint, und hier endlich sich dz Zentralisation schon vorhandener Kapitale in wenigen Händen und Entkapitalisierung (dahin verändert sich nun die Expropriation) vieler ausdrückt.

Es ist hiernach wohl klar, daß der dann folgende Zusammenbruch, wie so oft bei Marx, einfach für das Ende des Kapitalismus durch den Sozialismus steht.

Mit den Marx-Zitaten ist es also nichts: aus ihnen ist eine wirtschaftliche Endkatastrophe ebensowenig zu lesen, wie sie aus dem Reproduktionsschema abzuleiten ist. Kann es dann aber zur Darstellung und Erklärung der periodischen Krisen dienen? Grossmann sucht beides zu einer festen Einheit zu vereinigen:

*Die Marx'sch Zusammenbruchstheorie ist zugleich eine Krisentheorie*

lautet die Überschrift des 8. Kapitels (S.137). Aber als Nachweis gibt er nichts als eine Figur S.141, wo eine schief emporlaufende „Akkumulationslinie“ in kleinere Stücke zerschnitten wird. Nach dem Schema soll aber erst nach 35 Jahren der Zusammenbruch beginnen, während nach 5 oder 7 Jahren als jedesmal die Krise einsetzt, in dem Schema alles noch in schönster Ordnung ist.

Will man einen rascheren Zusammenbruch bekommen, so geht das, wenn der jährliche Zuwachs des konstanten Kapitels nicht 10 % sondern viel größer ist. Tatsächlich findet bei steigender Konjunktur in dem Wirtschaftszyklus ein viel rascheres Wachstum des Kapitals statt, das dann aber nichts mit dem technischen Fortschritt zu tun hat; der Produktionsumfang wird sprunghaft erweitert. Allerdings nimmt dabei auch das variable Kapital rasch und sprunghaft zu. Woher dann nach 5 oder 7 Jahren ein Zusammenbruch kommen muß, bleibt dunkel. Das heißt: die wirklichen Ursachen, die die rasch steigende und dann zusammenbrechende Konjunktur bewirken, sind ganz anderer Natur als was in dem Grossmannschen Reproduktionsschema steht.

Marx spricht von Überakkumulation, die die Krise einleitet, einem Zuviel an akkumuliertem Mehrwert, das keine Anlage findet und den Profit drückt; Grossmanns Zusammenbruch entsteht durch ein Zuwenig an akkumuliertem Mehrwert.

Gleichzeitiger Überfluß an unbeschäftigtem Kapital und an unbeschäftigten Arbeitern ist eine typische Krisenerscheinung; das Schema führt zu einem Mangel an genügendem Kapital, der nur durch den schon erwähnten Fehler Grossmanns zu einem Kapitalüberfluß umkonstruiert werden kann. Also: während das Grossmann'sche Schema einen endgültigen Zusammenbruch nicht beweisen kann, paßt es auch nicht auf die wirklichen Zusammenbrucherscheinungen, die Krisen.

Es mag noch hinzugefügt werden, daß es, seinem Ursprunge nach, an dem gleichen Fehler Otto Bauers leidet: das wirkliche stürmische Vorwärtsdrängen des Kapitalismus



über die Welt, immer mehr Völker in seine Gewalt bringend, wird hier durch eine zahme regelmäßige Bevölkerungszunahme von 5 % jährlich dargestellt, als wäre der Kapitalismus in eine geschlossene Staatswirtschaft eingepfercht.

#### **Grossmann contra Marx**

Grossmann brüstet sich damit, daß er hier zum ersten Male die Theorie von Marx wieder richtig gestellt hat gegenüber den Entstehungen der Sozialdemokraten.

„Eine dieser neu gewonnenen Erkenntnisse“, sagt er stolz im Anfang der Einleitung, „ist die nach folgende Zusammenbruchstheorie, die tragende Säule im ökonomischen Gedankensystem von Karl Marx.“

Wie wenig dasjenige, was er als Zusammenbruchstheorie ansieht, mit Marx zu tun hat, haben wir gesehen. Immerhin konnte er, bei seiner besonderen Interpretation, doch glauben, mit Marx in Übereinstimmung zu sein. Aber es gibt andere Punkte, wo das nicht gilt. Weil er sein Schema für ein richtiges Bild der kapitalistischen Entwicklung hält, leitet er aus ihm zu verschiedenen Punkten Erklärungsweisen ab, die, wie er zum Teil selbst bemerkt hat, den in Das Kapital entwickelten Anschauungen widersprechen.

Das gilt erstens für die industrielle Reservearmee. Nach dem Grossmann'schen Schema muß vom 35. Jahre an eine Anzahl Arbeiter arbeitslos werden, eine Reservearmee entstehen.

Die Entstehung der Reservearmee, d.h. die Freisetzung der Arbeiter, von der hier gesprochen wird, muß streng von der Freisetzung der Arbeiter durch die Maschine unterschieden werden. Die Verdrängung der Arbeiter durch die Maschine, die Marx im empirischen Teil des 1. Bandes des Kapital beschreibt (13. Kapitel), ist eine technische Tatsache ... (S.128-129) ... Aber die Freisetzung der Arbeiter, die Entstehung der Reservearmee, von der Marx im Akkumulationskapitel (Kap. 23) spricht, ist—das wurde bisher in der Literatur gänzlich außer acht gelassen—nicht durch die technische Tatsache der Einführung von Maschinen verursacht, sondern durch die mangelnde Verwertung ... (S.130)

Das kommt auf den Tiefsinn hinaus: daß die Spatzen davongeflogen, kam nicht durch den Flintenschuß, sondern durch ihre Schreckhaftigkeit. Die Arbeiter werden durch die Maschinen verdrängt; durch Erweiterung der Produktion finden sie teilweise wieder Arbeit; in diesem Gehen und Kommen bleibt ein Teil unterwegs oder draußen. Soll nun die Tatsache, daß sie noch nicht wieder eingestellt sind, die Ursache ihrer Arbeitslosigkeit heißen? Liest man das 23. Kapitel des **Kapital**, so handelt es sich dort immer um die Verdrängung durch die Maschine als Ursache der Reservearmee, die je nach der Konjunktur teilweise aufgesogen oder aufs neue freigesetzt wird und sich selbst auch als Überbevölkerung reproduziert. Grossmann bemüht sich einige Seiten um den Nachweis, daß hier das ökonomische Verhältnis  $c : v$ , und nicht das technische Verhältnis  $P_m : A$  wirkt; tatsächlich ist beides identisch. Aber diese Bildung der Reservearmee nach Marx, die von Anfang des Kapitalismus an immerfort und überall stattfindet, wo Arbeiter durch Maschinen ersetzt werden, ist nicht identisch mit der angeblichen Bildung der Reservearmee nach Grossmann, die erst als Folge der Überakkumulation nach 34 Jahren technischen Fortschritts eintritt.

Ähnliches gilt für den Kapitalexport. In langen Ausführungen werden nacheinander alle marxistischen Autoren abgeschlachtet, Varga, Bucharin, Nachimson, Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Rosa Luxemburg, weil sie alle die Ansicht bekunden, daß der Kapitalexport wegen des größeren Profits stattfindet. Mit den Worten Vargas:

Nicht weil es absolut unmöglich wäre, Kapital im Inlande zu akkumulieren ... sondern weil Aussicht auf höheren Profit besteht, wird Kapital ausgeführt. (Vgl. S.498)

Diese Auffassung bekämpft Grossmann als unrichtig und unmarxistisch:

Nicht der höhere Profit des Auslandes, sondern der Mangel an Anlagemöglichkeiten im Inland ist der letzte Grund des Kapitalexports. (S.561)

Er bringt dann viele Zitate aus Marx über Überakkumulation, und verweist auf sein Schema, wo nach dem 35. Jahre steigende Kapitalmassen keine Verwendung im Inlande mehr finden; deshalb müssen sie exportiert werden.

Wir erinnern daran, daß nach dem Schema jedoch zu wenig Kapital vorhanden war für die vorhandene Bevölkerung, und der Überfluß an Kapital bei ihm nur ein Rechenfehler war. Übrigens hat er bei all seinen Marxziten vergessen, dasjenige anzuführen, wo Marx selbst über den Kapitalexport spricht:

Wird Kapital ins Ausland geschickt, so geschieht es nicht, weil es absolut nicht im Inland beschäftigt werden könnte. Es geschieht, weil es zu höherer Profitrate im Auslande beschäftigt werden kann. (**Kapital**, III, S.266)

Das Fallen der Profitrate ist einer der wichtigsten Teile der Kapitaltheorie bei Marx; er hat es zuerst theoretisch erklärt, und nachgewiesen, wie in dieser Falltendenz, die sich periodisch in den Krisen durchsetzt, die Vergänglichkeit des Kapitalismus verkörpert ist. Bei Grossmann ist es ein anderes Phänomen, das hervortritt: nach dem 35. Jahr werden Arbeiter massenhaft freigesetzt und wird zugleich Kapital überflüssig gemacht; dadurch wird das Defizit an Mehrwert im nächsten Jahr schlimmer, werden also noch mehr Arbeiter und noch mehr Kapital stillgelegt; mit der Abnahme der Arbeiterzahl nimmt die Masse des produzierten Mehrwerts ab, und so sinkt der Kapitalismus immer tiefer in die Katastrophe hinein. Hat Grossmann da selbst nicht den Widerspruch bemerkt? Ja doch; und so setzt er sich in dem Kapitel *Die Ursachen der Verkennung der Marx'schen Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchstheorie*, nach einer einleitenden Betrachtung, ans Werk:

„So ist die Zeit für die Rekonstruktion der Marx'schen Zusammenbruchslehre herangereift.“ (S.195) „Äußerlich mochte der Umstand den Anlaß zum Mißverständnis ... gegeben haben“, daß das 3. Kapitel von Bd.III, wie Engels im Vorwort sagte, ‚in einer Reihe unvollständiger mathematischer Bearbeitungen‘ vorlag.“

Engels nahm bei ihrer Bearbeitung die Hilfe seines Freundes, des Mathematikers Samuel Moore in Anspruch.

„Aber Moore war kein Nationalökonom ... Die Entstehungsweise dieses Teiles des Werkes also macht es schon im voraus glaubhaft, daß hier zu Mißverständnissen und Irrtümern reichlich Gelegenheit bestand und daß diese Irrtümer dann auch auf das Kapitel von dem tendenziellen Fall der Profitrate ... leicht übertragen werden konnten.“ (Nota bene: diese Kapitel lagen von Marx fertig vor!) „Die Wahrscheinlichkeit des Irrtums erhebt sich fast zur Gewißheit, wenn wir erwägen, daß es sich dabei um e in Wort handelt, das aber unglücklicherweise den Sinn der ganzen Darstellung vollständig entstellt das unvermeidliche Ende des Kapitalismus wird dem relativen Fall der Profitrate, statt -masse, zugeschrieben. Hier hat sich Engels oder Moore sicher verschrieben.“ (S.195)

So sieht also die Rekonstruktion der Marx'schen Lehre aus! Und in einer Note wird noch ein Zitat angeführt und gesagt:

Bei den in Klammern gesetzten Worten hat sich Engels oder Marx selbst verschrieben, es sollte richtigerweise heißen „und zugleich eine Profitmasse, welche relativ fällt“. (**Kapital**, III, S.229)

Nun ist es Marx selbst schon, der sich verschreibt! Und nun handelt es sich hier um eine Stelle, wo der Sinn unzweideutig klar ist, wie der Wortlaut im **Kapital** sie gibt. Die ganze Darlegung bei Marx, die mit jenem änderungsbedürftigen Satz endet, dient als Fortsetzung eines Satzes, wo Marx erklärt:

Die Masse des von ihm produzierten Mehrwerts, daher die absolute Masse des von ihm produzierten Profits kann also wachsen, trotz des progressiven Falls der Profitrate ... Dies kann nicht nur der Fall sein, es muß der Fall sein—vorübergehende Schwankungen abgerechnet—auf Basis der kapitalistischen Produktion. (**a.a.O.**, S.228)

Dann folgt eine Darlegung, weshalb die Profitmasse wachsen muß, und wieder heißt es:

Im Fortschritt des Produktions- und Akkumulationsprozesses muß also die Masse der aneignungsfähigen und angeeigneten Mehrarbeit und daher die absolute Masse des vom Gesellschaftskapital angeeigneten Profits wachsen. (**a.a.O.**, S.229)

Also das völlige Gegenteil der von Grossmann ausgedachten Zusammenbruchserscheinungen. Und in den folgenden Seiten wird das noch öfters wiederholt; das ganze 13. Kapitel besteht aus einer Darlegung über:

Das Gesetz, das der durch die Entwicklung der Produktivkraft verursachte Fall der Profitrate begleitet ist von einer Zunahme der Profitmasse. (a.a.O., S.236)

Es kann also nicht der geringste Zweifel darüber bestehen, daß Marx genau sagen will, was dort gedruckt steht und sich durchaus nicht verschrieben hat. Und wenn Grossmann schreibt:

Der Zusammenbruch kann indessen durch den Fall der Profitrate nicht erfolgen. Wie könnte ein prozentuales Verhältnis, wie die Profitrate, eine reine Zahl, den Zusammenbruch eines realen Systems herbeiführen! (S.196)

so spricht er damit noch einmal aus, daß er von dem ganzen Marx nichts verstanden hat und daß sein Zusammenbruch sich in völligem Widerspruch zu Marx befindet.

Hier wäre die Stelle, wo er sich von der Haltlosigkeit seiner Konstruktion hätte überzeugen können. Hätte er sich aber hier von Marx belehren lassen, dann wäre seine ganze Theorie gefallen und sein Buch ungeschrieben geblieben.

Das Grossmann'sche Werk kann man am richtigsten bezeichnen als eine Zusammenstoppelung von Hunderten von Zitaten aus Marx, unrichtig angewandt und zusammengeleimt durch eine selbstkonstruierte Theorie. Jedesmal wo eine Beweisführung nötig wäre, wird ein Marxzitat angeführt, das dazu nicht paßt, und die Richtigkeit der Marx'schen Aussagen muß dem Leser den Eindruck der Richtigkeit der Theorie vortäuschen.

#### **Der Historische Materialismus**

Die Frage verdient schließlich Beachtung, wie ein Nationalökonom, der glaubt die Anschauungen von Marx richtig wiederzugeben, ja sogar mit naiver Selbstsicherheit erklärt, als erster die richtige Interpretation zu geben, so völlig daneben hauen kann und sich in völligem Widerspruch zu Marx befindet. Die Ursache liegt in dem Mangel an historisch-materialistischer Einsicht. Die Marx'sche Ökonomie ist gar nicht zu verstehen, wenn man sich nicht die historisch-materialistische Denkweise zu eigen gemacht hat.

Für Marx wird die Entwicklung der menschlichen Gesellschaft, also auch die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Kapitalismus, durch eine feste Notwendigkeit, wie durch ein Naturgesetz bestimmt. Aber zugleich ist sie das Werk der Menschen, die darin ihre Rolle spielen, indem jeder mit Bewußtsein und Absicht—obgleich nicht Bewußtsein des gesellschaftlichen Ganzen—seine Taten bestimmt. Für die bürgerliche Anschauungsweise liegt darin ein Widerspruch; entweder das Geschehen hängt von menschlicher Willkür ab, oder, wenn es durch feste Gesetze beherrscht wird, wirken diese als ein außer- menschlicher, mechanischer Zwang. Für Marx setzt sich alle gesellschaftliche Notwendigkeit mittels der Menschen durch; das bedeutet, daß das menschliche Denken, Wollen und Handeln—obgleich es dem eigenen Bewußtsein als Willkür erscheint—durch die Wirkungen der Umwelt völlig bestimmt wird; und nur durch die Gesamtheit dieser, hauptsächlich durch gesellschaftliche Kräfte bestimmten menschlichen Taten setzt sich in der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung eine Gesetzmäßigkeit durch.

Die gesellschaftlichen Kräfte, die die Entwicklung bestimmen, sind daher nicht nur die rein ökonomischen, sondern auch die dadurch bestimmten allgemein-politischen Taten, die der Produktion die nötigen Rechtsnormen verschaffen müssen. Die Gesetzmäßigkeit liegt nicht nur in der Wirkung der Konkurrenz, die Preise und Profite ausgleicht und Kapitalien konzentriert, sondern auch in der Durchführung der freien Konkurrenz, der freien Produktion durch bürgerliche Revolutionen. Nicht nur in der Bewegung der Löhne, in der Ausdehnung und dem Zusammenschrumpfen der Produktion in Prosperität und Käse, in dem Schließen der Fabriken und dem Entlassen von Arbeitern, sondern auch in der Empörung, dem Kampf der Arbeiter, in ihrer Eroberung der Herrschaft über Gesellschaft und Produktion zwecks Durchführung neuer Rechtsnormen. Die Ökonomie, als Totalität der für ihre Lebensnotwendigkeit arbeitenden und strebenden Menschen, und die Politik (im weitesten Sinne) als das Wirken und Kämpfen dieser Menschen als Gesamtheit, als Klasse, für ihre Lebensnotwendigkeit bilden ein einziges einheitliches Gebiet gesetzmäßiger Entwicklung. Die Kapitalakkumulation, die Krisen, die Verelendung, die proletarische Revolution, die Besitzergreifung der Herrschaft durch

die Arbeiterklasse bilden zusammen eine als Naturgesetz wirkende, untrennbare Einheit, den Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus.

Die bürgerliche Denkweise, die diese Einheit nicht erfaßt, hat nicht nur außerhalb, sondern auch innerhalb der Arbeiterbewegung immer eine große Rolle gespielt. In der alten radikalen Sozialdemokratie galt die—aus historischen Umständen verständliche—fatalistische Anschauung, die Revolution werde naturnotwendig einmal kommen, aber jetzt sollen die Arbeiter keine gefährlichen Aktionen versuchen. Der Reformismus bezweifelte die Notwendigkeit der gewaltsamen“ Revolution, und glaubte die Vernunft der Staatsmänner und Führer werde durch Reform und Organisation das Kapital bändigen. Andere glaubten, das Proletariat müsse durch moralische Predigten zu revolutionärer Tugend erzogen werden. Immer fehlte das Bewußtsein, daß diese Tugend nur durch die ökonomischen Kräfte, die Revolution nur durch die geistigen Kräfte in den Menschen ihre Naturnotwendigkeit finden. Jetzt treten andere Anschauungen auf. Der Kapitalismus hat sich einerseits mächtig und unangreifbar gezeigt gegen allen Reformismus, alle Führerkunst und alle Revolutionsversuche; lächerlich unbedeutend erscheint dies alles gegen seine gewaltige Kraft. Aber zugleich tritt in furchtbaren Krisen seine innere Unhaltbarkeit hervor. Und wer jetzt Marx zur Hand nimmt und studiert, kommt tief unter den Eindruck der unabwendbaren Gesetzmäßigkeit des Zusammenbruchs und nimmt begeistert diesen Gedanken in sich auf.

Wenn aber seine tiefste Denkweise bürgerlich ist, kann er diese Notwendigkeit nicht anders verstehen, als eine außermenschliche Macht. Der Kapitalismus ist ihm ein mechanisches System, in welchem die Menschen als Wirtschaftspersonen, Kapitalisten, Käufer, Verkäufer, Lohnempfänger etc., mitspielen, aber sonst einfach passiv zu erliden haben, was der Mechanismus kraft seiner inneren Struktur über sie verhängt.

Diese mechanistische Auffassung kann man auch erkennen in den Darlegungen Grossmanns über den Arbeitslohn, wo er heftig losfährt gegen Rosa Luxemburg:

Überall begegnet man einer unglaublichem barbarischen Verstümmelung der grundlegendsten Elemente der Marx'chen Lohntheorie (S.585)

gerade dort, wo sie vollkommen richtig den Wert der Arbeitskraft als eine mit der gewonnenen Lebenshaltung selbst dehnbare Größe behandelt. Für Grossmann ist der Wert der Arbeitskraft

keine elastische, sondern eine fixe Größe (S.586);

solche Willkürlichkeiten als Kampf der Arbeiter können keinen Einfluß darauf haben; nur bei einer größeren Intensität der Arbeit muß mehr verausgabte Arbeitskraft ersetzt werden, muß also deshalb der Lohn steigen.

Es ist hier die gleiche maschinenmäßige Auffassung: der Mechanismus bestimmt die ökonomischen Größen, während die kämpfenden und handelnden Menschen außerhalb dieses Zusammenhanges stehen. Er beruft sich dabei wieder auf Marx, wo dieser über den Wert der Arbeitskraft sagt:

Für ein bestimmtes Land, zu einer bestimmten Periode jedoch, ist der Durchschnitts-Umkreis der notwendigen Lebensmittel gegeben. (Kap.1, S.134);

aber er hat leider wieder übersehen, daß bei Marx der Satz unmittelbar vorangeht:

Im Gegensatz zu den anderen Waren enthält also die Wertbestimmung der Arbeitskraft ein historisches und moralisches Element.

Von seiner bürgerlichen Denkweise aus sagt daher Grossmann in seiner Kritik verschiedener sozialdemokratischer Auffassungen:

Wir sehen: der Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus wurde entweder geleugnet, oder aber voluntaristisch mit politischen, außerökonomischen Momenten begründet. Ein ökonomischer Nachweis der Notwendigkeit des Zusammenbruchs des Kapitalismus wurde nicht erbracht. (S.58-59)

Und er zitiert mit Zustimmung einen Ausspruch Tugan-Baranowsky's daß zuerst ein strenger Beweis zu liefern sei für die Unmöglichkeit des Fortbestehens des Kapitalismus und damit erst die Notwendigkeit der Verwandlung des Kapitalismus in sein Gegenteil bewiesen sei. Tugan selbst verneint diese Unmöglichkeit und will dem Sozialismus eine ethische Begründung geben. Daß Grossmann sich diesen liberalen russischen Ökonomen,

der bekanntlich dem Marxismus immer völlig fremd gegenüberstand, als Schwurzeugen wählt, zeigt wie sehr er ihm, trotz entgegengesetztem praktischen Standpunkt, im Grund des Denkens verwandt ist. (Vgl. auch S.108) Die Marx'sche Auffassung daß der Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus die Tat der Arbeiterklasse sein wird, also eine politische Tat ist (in der weitesten Bedeutung dieses Wortes: allgemein-gesellschaftlich, was von Besitzergreifung der ökonomischen Herrschaft untrennbar ist), kann er nur verstehen als „voluntaristisch“, d.h. daß es dem freien Willen, der Willkür der Menschen anheim gestellt wird.

Der Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus bei Marx hängt in der Tat von dem Willen der Arbeiterklasse ab; aber dieser Wille ist nicht Willkür, nicht frei, sondern selbst vollkommen bestimmt durch die ökonomische Entwicklung. Die Widersprüche der kapitalistischen Ökonomie, die in der Arbeitslosigkeit, in den Krisen, in den Kriegen, in den Klassenkämpfen immer aufs neue hervortreten, bestimmen den Willen des Proletariats immer aufs neue auf die Revolution. Nicht weil der Kapitalismus ökonomisch zusammenbricht, und deshalb die Menschen, Arbeiter und andere, durch Notwendigkeit gezwungen, eine neue Organisation schaffen, kommt der Sozialismus. Sondern weil der Kapitalismus, wie er lebt und wächst, für die Arbeiter stets unerträglicher wird und sie in den Kampf treibt, immer wieder, bis in ihnen der Wille und die Kraft gewachsen sind, die Kapitalherrschaft zu stürzen und eine neue Organisation aufzubauen, bricht der Kapitalismus zusammen. Nicht weil diese Unerträglichkeit von außen demonstriert, sondern weil sie spontan als solche empfunden wird, treibt sie zur Tat. Die Marx'sche Theorie, als Ökonomie zeigt, wie jene Erscheinungen unabwendbar immer stärker auftreten, und als Historischer Materialismus, daß aus ihnen dann notwendig der revolutionäre Wille und die revolutionäre Tat entstehen.

#### **Die neue Arbeiterbewegung**

Daß das Buch Grossmanns unter den Wortführern der neuen Arbeiterbewegung einige Beachtung gefunden hat, ist aus dem Grunde verständlich, daß er sich gegen dieselben Gegner wendet wie sie. Sie hat die Sozialdemokratie und den Parteikommunismus der 3. Internationale, zwei Äste desselben Stammes, zu bekämpfen, weil diese die Arbeiterklasse an dem Kapitalismus anpassen. Er wirft den Theoretikern dieser Richtungen vor, daß sie die Marx'schen Lehren verunstaltet und gefälscht haben, und er betont den notwendigen Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus. Seine Schlußfolgerungen klingen ähnlich wie die unsrige; Sinn und Wesen sind jedoch völlig verschieden. Wir sind auch der Meinung, daß die sozialdemokratischen Theoretiker, so gute Kenner der Theorie sie oft waren, doch Marx Lehre verunstaltet haben; aber ihr Irrtum war ein historischer, war der als Theorie festgeronnene Niederschlag einer früheren Kampfperiode des Proletariats. Sein Irrtum ist der eines bürgerlichen Nationalökonomens, der den Kampf des Proletariats praktisch nie kannte, und daher dem Wesen des Marxismus verständnislos gegenübersteht.

Ein Beispiel, wie seine Schlußfolgerungen scheinbar mit den Anschauungen der neuen Arbeiterbewegung übereinstimmen, aber im Wesen völlig entgegengesetzt sind, finden wir in seiner Lohntheorie. Nach seinem Schema tritt nach dem 35. Jahre in dem Zusammenbruch eine rasch steigende Arbeitslosigkeit ein. Dadurch wird der Arbeitslohn tief unter den Wert der Arbeitskraft sinken, ohne daß ein wirksamer Widerstand möglich ist.

Hier ist die objektive Grenze der gewerkschaftlichen Aktion gegeben. (S.599)

So bekannt dies klingt, so ist doch die Grundlage verschieden. Die schon lange eingetretene Machtlosigkeit der gewerkschaftlichen Aktion ist nicht einem ökonomischen Zusammenbruch, sondern einer gesellschaftlichen Machtverschiebung zuzuschreiben. Jedermann weiß, wie die gestiegene Macht der Unternehmerverbände des konzentrierten Großkapitals die Arbeiterklasse relativ machtloser machte. Hier kommt jetzt die Wirkung einer schweren Krise hinzu, die die Löhne herunterdrückt, wie das in jeder früheren Krise geschah. Der reinwirtschaftliche Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus, den Grossmann konstruiert, bedeutet nicht eine völlige Passivität des Proletariats. Denn wenn dieser

Zusammenbruch stattfindet, dann muß eben die Arbeiterklasse aufstehen, um die Produktion auf neuer Grundlage wieder zu errichten.

So drängt die Entwicklung zur Entfaltung und zur Zuspitzung der inneren Gegensätze zwischen Kapital und Arbeit, bis die Lösung nur durch den Kampf beider herbeigeführt werden kann. (S.599)

Und dieser Endkampf steht auch mit dem Lohnkampf im Zusammenhang, wenn (wie schon oben erwähnt) bei Herunterdrückung des Lohnes die Katastrophe etwas aufgeschoben, bei Lohnsteigerung dagegen beschleunigt wird. Aber die ökonomische Katastrophe ist doch das wesentliche Moment, und die Neuregelung wird den Menschen zwangsweise aufgenötigt. Zwar werden die Arbeiter als Bevölkerungsmasse die wuchtige Kraft der Revolution abgeben, genau so wie sie in früheren bürgerlichen Revolutionen die Massenkraft der Aktion bildeten; dies ist aber, wie bei einer Hungerrevolte in, Großen, unabhängig von ihrer revolutionären Reife, von ihrer Fähigkeit selbst, die Herrschaft über die Gesellschaft in die Hand zu nehmen und zu behalten. Das bedeutet, daß eine revolutionäre Gruppe, eine Partei mit sozialistischen Zielen als neue Herrschaft an die Stelle der alten treten muß, um statt des Kapitalismus irgendeine Planwirtschaft einzuführen. Diese Theorie der ökonomischen Katastrophe paßt also gerade für Intelligenzler, die die Unhaltbarkeit des Kapitalismus erkennen und eine Planwirtschaft wollen, welche durch fähige Ökonomen und Führer aufgebaut werden muß. Und man wird darauf rechnen müssen, daß noch manche ähnliche Theorie aus diesen Kreisen aufkommen oder dort Beifall finden wird.

Auch auf revolutionäre Arbeiter wird die Theorie der notwendigen Katastrophe eine gewisse Anziehungskraft ausüben können. Sie sehen die übergroßen Massen des Proletariats noch an den alten Organisationen, den alten Führern, den alten Methoden hängen, Blind für die Aufgaben, die die neue Entwicklung ihnen auferlegt, passiv, unbeweglich, ohne Anzeichen revolutionärer Tatkraft. Und die wenigen Revolutionäre, die die Entwicklung erkennen, möchten den dumpfen Massen eine tüchtige wirtschaftliche Katastrophe wünschen, damit sie endlich aus dem Schlafe erwachen und in Aktion treten. Auch gäbe die Theorie, daß der Kapitalismus jetzt in eine Endkrise getreten ist, eine so schlagende und einfache Widerlegung allen Reformismus und aller Parteiprogramme, die Parlamentsarbeit und Gewerkschaftsbewegung voranstellen, eine so bequeme Beweisführung, daß eine revolutionäre Taktik notwendig ist, daß revolutionäre Gruppen sie sympathisch begrüßen müssen. Aber so einfach und bequem ist nun, einmal der Kampf nicht, auch nicht der theoretische Kampf der Gründe und Beweisführungen.

Der Reformismus war nicht nur in der Krise, sondern auch schon während der Prosperität eine falsche Taktik, die das Proletariat schwächte. Parlamentarismus und Gewerkschaftstaktik haben sich nicht nur in dieser Krise, sondern schon während einiger Jahrzehnte unfähig erwiesen. Nicht wegen eines ökonomischen Zusammenbruchs des Kapitalismus, sondern wegen seiner ungeheuren Machtentfaltung, seiner Ausdehnung über die ganze Erde, seiner Zuspitzung der politischen Gegensätze, seiner gewaltigen Stärkung der inneren Macht muß das Proletariat zu Massenaktionen greifen, zum Aufbieten der Kraft der ganzen Klasse. In dieser Machtverschiebung liegt der Grund für die Neuorientierung der Arbeiterbewegung.

Nicht eine Endkatastrophe, aber viele Katastrophen hat die Arbeiterklasse zu erwarten, politische, wie die Kriege, und ökonomische, wie die Krisen, die periodisch bald regelmäßiger, bald unregelmäßig, aber im Ganzen mit dem zunehmenden Umfang des Kapitalismus immer verheerender werden. Darin werden die Illusionen und die Ruhetendenzen des Proletariats immer wieder zusammenbrechen, werden immer schärfere und tiefere Klassenkämpfe ausbrechen. Es erscheint als Widerspruch, daß die heutige Krise, so tief und verheerend wie keine zuvor, nichts von einer erwachenden proletarischen Revolution zeigt. Aber die Beseitigung alter Illusionen ist ihre erste große Aufgabe; einerseits der Illusion, mittels sozialdemokratischer Parlamentspolitik und gewerkschaftlicher Aktion durch Reformen den Kapitalismus erträglich zu machen, andererseits der Illusion mittels einer sich revolutionär gebärenden kommunistischen

Partei als Führerin den Kapitalismus in einem Sturmloch überrennen zu können. Die Arbeiterklasse selbst, als Masse, hat den Kampf zu führen, und sie hat sich noch in den neuen Kampfformen zurechtzufinden, während die Bourgeoisie schon ihre Macht fester ausbaut. Schwere Kämpfe können nicht ausbleiben. Und mag diese Krise auch abflauen, neue Krisen werden kommen und neue Kämpfe. In diesen Kämpfen wird die Arbeiterklasse ihre Kampfkraft entwickeln, ihre Ziele herausfinden, sich schulen, sich selbständig machen und lernen, die eigenen Geschicke, d.h. die gesellschaftliche Produktion selbst in die Hand zu nehmen. In diesem Prozeß vollzieht sich der Untergang des Kapitalismus. Die Selbstbefreiung des Proletariats ist der Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus.

## Party and Class

(1936)

The old labor movement is organized in parties. The belief in parties is the main reason for the impotence of the working class; therefore we avoid forming a new party—not because we are too few, but because a party is an organization that aims to lead and control the working class. In opposition to this, we maintain that the working class can rise to victory only when it independently attacks its problems and decides its own fate. The workers should not blindly accept the slogans of others, nor of our own groups but must think, act, and decide for themselves. This conception is in sharp contradiction to the tradition of the party as the most important means of educating the proletariat. Therefore many, though repudiating the Socialist and Communist parties, resist and oppose us. This is partly due to their traditional concepts; after viewing the class struggle as a struggle of parties, it becomes difficult to consider it as purely the struggle of the working class, as a class struggle. But partly this concept is based on the idea that the party nevertheless plays an essential and important part in the struggle of the proletariat. Let us investigate this latter idea more closely.

Essentially the party is a grouping according to views, conceptions; the classes are groupings according to economic interests. Class membership is determined by one's part in the process of production; party membership is the joining of persons who agree in their conceptions of the social problems. Formerly it was thought that this contradiction would disappear in the class party, the "workers" party. During the rise of Social Democracy it seemed that it would gradually embrace the whole working class, partly as members, partly as supporters. Because Marxian theory declared that similar interests beget similar viewpoints and aims, the contradiction between party and class was expected gradually to disappear. History proved otherwise. Social Democracy remained a minority, other working class groups organized against it, sections split away from it, and its own character changed. Its own program was revised or reinterpreted. The evolution of society does not proceed along a smooth, even line, but in conflicts and contradictions.

With the intensification of the workers' struggle, the might of the enemy also increases and besets the workers with renewed doubts and fears as to which road is best. And every doubt brings on splits, contradictions, and fractional battles within the labor movement. It is futile to bewail these conflicts and splits as harmful in dividing and weakening the working class. The working class is not weak because it is split up—it is split up because it is weak. Because the enemy is powerful and the old methods of warfare prove unavailing, the working class must seek new methods. Its task will not become clear as the result of enlightenment from above; it must discover its tasks through hard work, through thought and conflict of opinions. It must find its own way; therefore, the internal struggle. It must relinquish old ideas and illusions and adopt new ones, and because this is difficult, therefore the magnitude and severity of the splits.

Nor can we delude ourselves into believing that this period of party and ideological strife is only temporary and will make way to renewed harmony. True, in the course of

the class struggle there are occasions when all forces unite in a great achievable objective and the revolution is carried on with the might of a united working class. But after that, as after every victory, come differences on the question: what next? And even if the working class is victorious, it is always confronted by the most difficult task of subduing the enemy further, of reorganizing production, creating new order. It is impossible that all workers, all strata and groups, with their often still diverse interests should, at this stage, agree on all matters and be ready for united and decisive further action. They will find the true course only after the sharpest controversies and conflicts and only thus achieve clarity.

If, in this situation, persons with the same fundamental conceptions unite for the discussion of practical steps and seek clarification through discussions and propagandize their conclusions, such groups might be called parties, but they would be parties in an entirely different sense from those of today. Action, the actual class struggle, is the task of the working masses themselves, in their entirety, in their real groupings as factory and millhands, or other productive groups, because history and economy have placed them in the position where they must and can fight the working class struggle. It would be insane if the supporters of one party were to go on strike while those of another continue to work. But both tendencies will defend their positions on strike or no strike in the factory meetings, thus affording an opportunity to arrive at a well founded decision. The struggle is so great, the enemy so powerful that only the masses as a whole can achieve a victory—the result of the material and moral power of action, unity and enthusiasm, but also the result of the mental force of thought, of clarity. In this lies the great importance of such parties or groups based on opinions: that they bring clarity in their conflicts, discussions and propaganda. They are the organs of the self-enlightenment of the working class by means of which the workers find their way to freedom.

Of course such parties are not static and unchangeable. Every new situation, every new problem will find minds diverging and uniting in new groups with new programs. They have a fluctuating character and constantly readjust themselves to new situations.

Compared to such groups, the present workers' parties have an entirely different character, for they have a different objective: they want to seize power for themselves. They aim not at being an aid to the working class in its struggle for emancipation but to rule it themselves and proclaim that this constitutes the emancipation of the proletariat. The Social-Democracy which arose in the era of parliamentarism conceived of this rule as a parliamentary government. The Communist Party carried the idea of part rule through to its fullest extreme in the party dictatorship.

Such parties, in distinction to the groups described above, must be rigid structures with clear lines of demarcation through membership cards, statues, party discipline and admission and expulsion procedures. For they are instruments of power—they fight for power, bridle their members by force and constantly seek to extend the scope of their power. It is not their task to develop the initiative of the workers; rather do they aim at training loyal and unquestioning members of their faith. While the working class in its struggle for power and victory needs unlimited intellectual freedom, the party rule must suppress all opinions except its own. In “democratic” parties, the suppression is veiled; in the dictatorship parties, it is open, brutal suppression.

Many workers already realize that the rule of the Socialist or Communist party will be only the concealed form of the rule of the bourgeois class in which the exploitation and suppression of the working class remains. Instead of these parties, they urge the formation of a “revolutionary party” that will really aim at the rule of the workers and the realization of communism. Not a party in the new sense as described above, but a party like those of today, that fight for power as the “vanguard” of the class, as the organization of conscious, revolutionary minorities, that seize power in order to use it for the emancipation of the class.

We claim that there is an internal contradiction in the term: “revolutionary party.” Such a party cannot be revolutionary. It is no more revolutionary than were the creators of the Third Reich. When we speak of revolution, we speak of the proletarian revolution, the seizure of power by the working class itself.



The “revolutionary party” is based on the idea that the working class needs a new group of leaders who vanquish the bourgeoisie for the workers and construct a new government—(note that the working class is not yet considered fit to reorganize and regulate production.) But is not this as it should be? As the working class does not seem capable of revolution, is it not necessary that the revolutionary vanguard, the party, make the revolution for it? And is this not true as long as the masses willingly endure capitalism?

Against this, we raise the question: what force can such a party raise for the revolution? How is it able to defeat the capitalist class? Only if the masses stand behind it. Only if the masses rise and through mass attacks, mass struggle, and mass strikes, overthrow the old regime. Without the action of the masses, there can be no revolution.

Two things can follow. The masses remain in action: they do not go home and leave the government to the new party. They organize their power in factory and workshop and prepare for further conflict in order to defeat capital; through the workers’ councils they establish a form union to take over the complete direction of all society—in other words, they prove, they are not as incapable of revolution as it seemed. Of necessity then, conflict will arise with the party which itself wants to take control and which sees only disorder and anarchy in the self-action of the working class. Possibly the workers will develop their movement and sweep out the party. Or, the party, with the help of bourgeois elements defeats the workers. In either case, the party is an obstacle to the revolution because it wants to be more than a means of propaganda and enlightenment; because it feels itself called upon to lead and rule as a party.

On the other hand the masses may follow the party faith and leave it to the full direction of affairs. They follow the slogans from above, have confidence in the new government (as in Germany and Russia) that is to realize communism—and go back home and to work. Immediately the bourgeoisie exerts its whole class power the roots of which are unbroken; its financial forces, its great intellectual resources, and its economic power in factories and great enterprises. Against this the government party is too weak. Only through moderation, concessions and yielding can it maintain that it is insanity for the workers to try to force impossible demands. Thus the party deprived of class power becomes the instrument for maintaining bourgeois power.

We said before that the term “revolutionary party” was contradictory from a proletarian point of view. We can state it otherwise: in the term “revolutionary party,” “revolutionary” always means a bourgeois revolution. Always, when the masses overthrow a government and then allow a new party to take power, we have a bourgeois revolution—the substitution of a ruling caste by a new ruling caste. It was so in Paris in 1830 when the finance bourgeoisie supplanted the landed proprietors, in 1848 when the industrial bourgeoisie took over the reins.

In the Russian revolution the party bureaucracy came to power as the ruling caste. But in Western Europe and America the bourgeoisie is much more powerfully entrenched in plants and banks, so that a party bureaucracy cannot push them aside as easily. The bourgeoisie in these countries can be vanquished only by repeated and united action of the masses in which they seize the mills and factories and build up their council organizations.

Those who speak of “revolutionary parties” draw incomplete, limited conclusions from history. When the Socialist and Communist parties became organs of bourgeois rule for the perpetuation of exploitation, these well-meaning people merely concluded that they would have to do better. They cannot realize that the failure of these parties is due to the fundamental conflict between the self-emancipation of the working class through its own power and the pacifying of the revolution through a new sympathetic ruling clique. They think they are the revolutionary vanguard because they see the masses indifferent and inactive. But the masses are inactive only because they cannot yet comprehend the course of the struggle and the unity of class interests, although they instinctively sense the great power of the enemy and the immenseness of their task. Once conditions force them into action they will attack the task of self-organization and the conquest of the economic power of capital.

## Trade Unionism

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How must the working class fight capitalism in order to win? This is the all important question facing the workers every day. What efficient means of action, what tactics can they use to conquer power and defeat the enemy? No science, no theory, could tell them exactly what to do. But spontaneously and instinctively, by feeling out, by sensing the possibilities, they found their ways of action. And as capitalism grew and conquered the earth and increased its power, the power of the workers also increased. New modes of action, wider and more efficient, came up beside the old ones. It is evident that with changing conditions, the forms of action, the tactics of the class struggle have to change also. Trade unionism is the primary form of labour movement in fixed capitalism. The isolated worker is powerless against the capitalistic employer. To overcome this handicap, the workers organise into unions. The union binds the workers together into common action, with the strike as their weapon. Then the balance of power is relatively equal, or is sometimes even heaviest on the side of the workers, so that the isolated small employer is weak against the mighty union. Hence in developed capitalism trade unions and employers' unions (Associations, Trusts, Corporations, etc.), stand as fighting powers against each other.

Trade unionism first arose in England, where industrial capitalism first developed. Afterward it spread to other countries, as a natural companion of capitalist industry. In the United States there were very special conditions. In the beginning, the abundance of free unoccupied land, open to settlers, made for a shortage of workers in the towns and relatively high wages and good conditions. The American Federation of Labour became a power in the country, and generally was able to uphold a relatively high standard of living for the workers who were organised in its unions.

It is clear that under such conditions the idea of overthrowing capitalism could not for a moment arise in the minds of the workers. Capitalism offered them a sufficient and fairly secure living. They did not feel themselves a separate class whose interests were hostile to the existing order; they were part of it; they were conscious of partaking in all the possibilities of an ascending capitalism in a new continent. There was room for millions of people, coming mostly from Europe. For these increasing millions of farmers, a rapidly increasing industry was necessary, where, with energy and good luck, workmen could rise to become free artisans, small business men, even rich capitalists. It is natural that here a true capitalist spirit prevailed in the working class.

The same was the case in England. Here it was due to England's monopoly of world commerce and big industry, to the lack of competitors on the foreign markets, and to the possession of rich colonies, which brought enormous wealth to England. The capitalist class had no need to fight for its profits and could allow the workers a reasonable living. Of course, at first, fighting was necessary to urge this truth upon them; but then they could allow unions and grant wages in exchange for industrial peace. So here also the working class was imbued with the capitalist spirit.

Now this is entirely in harmony with the innermost character of trade unionism. Trade unionism is an action of the workers, which does not go beyond the limit of capitalism. Its aim is not to replace capitalism by another form of production, but to secure good living conditions within capitalism. Its character is not revolutionary, but conservative.

Certainly, trade union action is class struggle. There is a class antagonism in capitalism—capitalists and workers have opposing interests. Not only on the question of conservation of capitalism, but also within capitalism itself, with regard to the division of the total product. The capitalists attempt to increase their profits, the surplus value, as much as possible, by cutting down wages and increasing the hours or the intensity of labour. On the other hand, the workers attempt to increase their wages and to shorten their hours of work.

The price of labour power is not a fixed quantity, though it must exceed a certain hunger minimum; and it is not paid by the capitalists of their own free will. Thus this antagonism becomes the object of a contest, the real class struggle. It is the task, the function of the trade unions to carry on this fight.

Trade unionism was the first training school in proletarian virtue, in solidarity as the spirit of organised fighting. It embodied the first form of proletarian organised power. In the early English and American trade unions this virtue often petrified and degenerated into a narrow craft-corporation, a true capitalistic state of mind. It was different, however, where the workers had to fight for their very existence, where the utmost efforts of their unions could hardly uphold their standard of living, where the full force of an energetic, fighting, and expanding capitalism attacked them. There they had to learn the wisdom that only the revolution could definitely save them.

So there comes a disparity between the working class and trade unionism. The working class has to look beyond capitalism. Trade unionism lives entirely within capitalism and cannot look beyond it. Trade unionism can only represent a part, a necessary but narrow part, in the class struggle. And it develops aspects which bring it into conflict with the greater aims of the working class.

With the growth of capitalism and big industry the unions too must grow. They become big corporations with thousands of members, extending over the whole country, with sections in every town and every factory. Officials must be appointed: presidents, secretaries, treasurers, to conduct the affairs, to manage the finances, locally and centrally. They are the leaders, who negotiate with the capitalists and who by this practice have acquired a special skill. The president of a union is a big shot, as big as the capitalist employer himself, and he discusses with him, on equal terms, the interests of his members. The officials are specialists in trade union work, which the members, entirely occupied by their factory work, cannot judge or direct themselves.

So large a corporation as a union is not simply an assembly of single workers; it becomes an organised body, like a living organism, with its own policy, its own character, its own mentality, its own traditions, its own functions. It is a body with its own interests, which are separate from the interests of the working class. It has a will to live and to fight for its existence. If it should come to pass that unions were no longer necessary for the workers, then they would not simply disappear. Their funds, their members, and their officials: all of these are realities that will not disappear at once, but continue their existence as elements of the organisation.

The union officials, the labour leaders, are the bearers of the special union interests. Originally workmen from the shop, they acquire, by long practice at the head of the organisation, a new social character. In each social group, once it is big enough to form a special group, the nature of its work moulds and determines its social character, its mode of thinking and acting. The officials' function is entirely different from that of the workers. They do not work in factories, they are not exploited by capitalists, their existence is not threatened continually by unemployment. They sit in offices, in fairly secure positions. They have to manage corporation affairs and to speak at workers meetings and discuss with employers. Of course, they have to stand for the workers, and to defend their interests and wishes against the capitalists. This is, however, not very different from the position of the lawyer who, appointed secretary of an organisation, will stand for its members and defend their interests to the full of his capacity.

However, there is a difference. Because many of the labour leaders came from the ranks of workers, they have experienced for themselves what wage slavery and exploitation means. They feel as members of the working class and the proletarian spirit often acts as a strong tradition in them. But the new reality of their life continually tends to weaken this tradition. Economically they are not proletarians any more. They sit in conferences with the capitalists, bargaining over wages and hours, pitting interests against interests, just as the opposing interests of the capitalist corporations are weighed one against another. They learn to understand the capitalist's position just as well as the worker's position; they have an eye for "the needs of industry"; they try to mediate. Per-

sonal exceptions occur, of course, but as a rule they cannot have that elementary class feeling of the workers, who do not understand and weigh capitalist interests against their own, but will fight for their proper interests. Thus they get into conflict with the workers.

The labour leaders in advanced capitalism are numerous enough to form a special group or class with a special class character and interests. As representatives and leaders of the unions they embody the character and the interests of the unions. The unions are necessary elements of capitalism, so the leaders feel necessary too, as useful citizens in capitalist society. The capitalist function of unions is to regulate class conflicts and to secure industrial peace. So labour leaders see it as their duty as citizens to work for industrial peace and mediate in conflicts. The test of the union lies entirely within capitalism; so labour leaders do not look beyond it. The instinct of self-preservation, the will of the unions to live and to fight for existence, is embodied in the will of the labour leaders to fight for the existence of the unions. Their own existence is indissolubly connected with the existence of the unions. This is not meant in a petty sense, that they only think of their personal jobs when fighting for the unions. It means that primary necessities of life and social functions determine opinions. Their whole life is concentrated in the unions, only here have they a task. So the most necessary organ of society, the only source of security and power is to them the unions; hence they must be preserved and defended by all possible means, even when the realities of capitalist society undermine this position. This happens when capitalism's expansion class conflicts become sharper.

The concentration of capital in powerful concerns and their connection with big finance renders the position of the capitalist employers much stronger than the workers'. Powerful industrial magnates reign as monarchs over large masses of workers; they keep them in absolute subjection and do not allow "their" men to go into unions. Now and then the heavily exploited wage slaves break out in revolt, in a big strike. They hope to enforce better terms, shorter hours, more humane conditions, the right to organise. Union organisers come to aid them. But then the capitalist masters use their social and political power. The strikers are driven from their homes; they are shot by militia or hired thugs; their spokesmen are railroaded into jail; their relief actions are prohibited by court injunctions. The capitalist press denounces their cause as disorder, murder and revolution; public opinion is aroused against them. Then, after months of standing firm and of heroic suffering, exhausted by misery and disappointment, unable to make a dent on the ironclad capitalist structure, they have to submit and to postpone their claims to more opportune times.

In the trades where unions exist as mighty organisations, their position is weakened by this same concentration of capital. The large funds they had collected for strike support are insignificant in comparison to the money power of their adversaries. A couple of lock-outs may completely drain them. No matter how hard the capitalist employer presses upon the worker by cutting wages and intensifying their hours of labour, the union cannot wage a fight. When contracts have to be renewed, the union feels itself the weaker party. It has to accept the bad terms the capitalists offer; no skill in bargaining avails. But now the trouble with the rank and file members begins. The men want to fight; they will not submit before they have fought; and they have not much to lose by fighting. The leaders, however, have much to lose—the financial power of the union, perhaps its existence. They try to avoid the fight, which they consider hopeless. They have to convince the men that it is better to come to terms. So, in the final analysis, they must act as spokesmen of the employers to force the capitalists' terms upon the workers. It is even worse when the workers insist on fighting in opposition to the decision of the unions. Then the union's power must be used as a weapon to subdue the workers.

So the labour leader has become the slave of his capitalistic task of securing industrial peace—now at the cost of the workers, though he meant to serve them as best he could. He cannot look beyond capitalism, and within the horizon of capitalism with a capitalist outlook, he is right when he thinks that fighting is of no use. To criticise him can only mean that trade unionism stands here at the limit of its power.

Is there another way out then? Could the workers win anything by fighting? Probably they will lose the immediate issue of the fight; but they will gain something else. By

not submitting without having fought, they rouse the spirit of revolt against capitalism. They proclaim a new issue. But here the whole working class must join in. To the whole class, to all their fellow workers, they must show that in capitalism there is no future for them, and that only by fighting, not as a trade union, but as a united class, they can win. This means the beginning of a revolutionary struggle. And when their fellow workers understand this lesson, when simultaneous strikes break out in other trades, when a wave of rebellion goes over the country, then in the arrogant hearts of the capitalists there may appear some doubt as to their omnipotence and some willingness to make concessions.

The trade union leader does not understand this point of view, because trade unionism cannot reach beyond capitalism. He opposes this kind of fight. Fighting capitalism in this way means at the same time rebellion against the trade unions. The labor leader stands beside the capitalist in their common fear of the workers' rebellion.

When the trade unions fought against the capitalist class for better working conditions, the capitalist class hated them, but it had not the power to destroy them completely. If the trade unions would try to raise all the forces of the working class in their fight, the capitalist class would persecute them with all its means. They may see their actions repressed as rebellion, their offices destroyed by militia, their leaders thrown in jail and fined, their funds confiscated. On the other hand, if they keep their members from fighting, the capitalist class may consider them as valuable institutions, to be preserved and protected, and their leaders as deserving citizens. So the trade unions find themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea; on the one side persecution, which is a tough thing to bear for people who meant to be peaceful citizens; on the other side, the rebellion of the members, which may undermine the unions. The capitalist class, if it is wise, will recognize that a bit of sham fighting must be allowed to uphold the influence of the labor leaders over the members.

The conflicts arising here are not anyone's fault; they are an inevitable consequence of capitalist development. Capitalism exists, but it is at the same time on the way to ruin. It must be fought as a living thing, and at the same time, as a transitory thing. The workers must wage a steady fight for wages and working conditions, while at the same time communistic ideas, more or less clear and conscious, awaken in their minds. They cling to the unions, feeling that these are still necessary, trying now and then to transform them into better fighting institutions. But the spirit of trade unionism, which is in its pure form a capitalist spirit, is not in the workers. The divergence between these two tendencies in capitalism and in the class struggle appears now as a rift between the trade union spirit, mainly embodied in their leaders, and the growing revolutionary feeling of the members. This rift becomes apparent in the opposite positions they take on various important social and political questions.

Trade unionism is bound to capitalism; it has its best chances to obtain good wages when capitalism flourishes. So in times of depression it must hope that prosperity will be restored, and it must try to further it. To the workers as a class, the prosperity of capitalism is not at all important. When it is weakened by crisis or depression, they have the best chance to attack it, to strengthen the forces of the revolution, and to take the first steps towards freedom.

Capitalism extends its dominion over foreign continents, seizing their natural treasures in order to make big profits. It conquers colonies, subjugates the primitive population and exploits them, often with horrible cruelties. The working class denounces colonial exploitation and opposes it, but trade unionism often supports colonial politics as a way to capitalist prosperity.

With the enormous increases of capital in modern times, colonies and foreign countries are being used as places in which to invest large sums of capital. They become valuable possessions as markets for big industry and as producers of raw materials. A race for getting colonies, a fierce conflict of interests over the dividing up of the world arises between the great capitalist states. In these politics of imperialism the middle classes are whirled along in a common exaltation of national greatness. Then the trade unions side with the master class, because they consider the prosperity of their own national capital-

ism to be dependent on its success in the imperialist struggle. For the working class, imperialism means increasing power and brutality of their exploiters.

These conflicts of interests between the national capitalisms explode into wars. World war is the crowning of the policy of imperialism. For the workers, war is not only the destruction of all their feelings of international brotherhood, it also means the most violent exploitation of their class for capitalist profit. The working class, as the most numerous and the most oppressed class of society, has to bear all the horrors of war. The workers have to give not only their labour power, but also their health and their lives.

Trade unions, however, in war must stand upon the side of the capitalist. Its interests are bound up with national capitalism, the victory of which it must wish with all its heart. Hence it assists in arousing strong national feelings and national hatred. It helps the capitalist class to drive the workers into war and to beat down all opposition.

Trade unionism abhors communism. Communism takes away the very basis of its existence. In communism, in the absence of capitalist employers, there is no room for the trade union and labour leaders. It is true that in countries with a strong socialist movement, where the bulk of the workers are socialists, the labour leaders must be socialists too, by origin as well as by environment. But then they are right-wing socialists; and their socialism is restricted to the idea of a commonwealth where instead of greedy capitalists honest labour leaders will manage industrial production.

Trade unionism hates revolution. Revolution upsets all the ordinary relations between capitalists and workers. In its violent clashings, all those careful tariff regulations are swept away; in the strife of its gigantic forces the modest skill of the bargaining labour leaders loses its value. With all its power, trade unionism opposes the ideas of revolution and communism.

This opposition is not without significance. Trade unionism is a power in itself. It has considerable funds at its disposal, as material element of power. It has its spiritual influence, upheld and propagated by its periodical papers as mental element of power. It is a power in the hands of leaders, who make use of it wherever the special interests of trade unions come into conflict with the revolutionary interests of the working class. Trade unionism, though built up by the workers and consisting of workers, has turned into a power over and above the workers, just as government is a power over and above the people.

The forms of trade unionism are different for different countries, owing to the different forms of development in capitalism. Nor do they always remain the same in every country. When they seem to be slowly dying away, the fighting spirit of the workers is sometimes able to transform them, or to build up new types of unionism. Thus in England, in the years 1880-90, the "new unionism" sprang up from the masses of poor dockers and the other badly paid, unskilled workers, bringing a new spirit into the old craft unions. It is a consequence of capitalist development, that in founding new industries and in replacing skilled labour by machine power, it accumulates large bodies of unskilled workers, living in the worst of conditions. Forced at last into a wave of rebellion, into big strikes, they find the way to unity and class consciousness. They mould unionism into a new form, adapted to a more highly developed capitalism. Of course, when afterwards capitalism grows to still mightier forms, the new unionism cannot escape the fate of all unionism, and then it produces the same inner contradictions.

The most notable form sprang up in America, in the "Industrial Workers of the World." The I.W.W. originated from two forms of capitalist expansion. In the enormous forests and plains of the West, capitalism reaped the natural riches by Wild West methods of fierce and brutal exploitation; and the worker-adventurers responded with as wild and jealous a defence. And in the eastern states new industries were founded upon the exploitation of millions of poor immigrants, coming from countries with a low standard of living and now subjected to sweatshop labour or other most miserable working conditions.

Against the narrow craft spirit of the old unionism, of the A.F. of L., which divided the workers of one industrial plant into a number of separate unions, the I.W.W. put the principle: all workers of one factory, as comrades against one master, must form one un-

ion, to act as a strong unity against the employer. Against the multitude of often jealous and bickering trade unions, the I.W.W. raised the slogan: one big union for all the workers. The fight of one group is the cause of all. Solidarity extends over the entire class. Contrary to the haughty disdain of the well-paid old American skilled labour towards the unorganised immigrants, it was these worst-paid proletarians that the I.W.W. led into the fight. They were too poor to pay high fees and build up ordinary trade unions. But when they broke out and revolted in big strikes, it was the I.W.W. who taught them how to fight, who raised relief funds all over the country, and who defended their cause in its papers and before the courts. By a glorious series of big battles it infused the spirit of organisation and self-reliance into the hearts of these masses. Contrary to the trust in the big funds of the old unions, the Industrial Workers put their confidence in the living solidarity and the force of endurance, upheld by a burning enthusiasm. Instead of the heavy stone-masoned buildings of the old unions, they represented the principle of flexible construction, with a fluctuating membership, contracting in time of peace, swelling and growing in the fight itself. Contrary to the conservative capitalist spirit of trade unionism, the Industrial Workers were anti-capitalist and stood for Revolution. Therefore they were persecuted with intense hatred by the whole capitalist world. They were thrown into jail and tortured on false accusations; a new crime was even invented on their behalf: that of "criminal syndicalism."

Industrial unionism alone as a method of fighting the capitalist class is not sufficient to overthrow capitalist society and to conquer the world for the working class. It fights the capitalists as employers on the economic field of production, but it has not the means to overthrow their political stronghold, the state power. Nevertheless, the I.W.W. so far has been the most revolutionary organisation in America. More than any other it contributed to rouse class consciousness and insight, solidarity and unity in the working class, to turn its eyes toward communism, and to prepare its fighting power.

The lesson of all these fights is that against big capitalism, trade unionism cannot win. And if at times it wins, such victories give only temporary relief. And yet, these fights are necessary and must be fought. To the bitter end? -- no, to the better end.

The reason is obvious. An isolated group of workers might be equal to a fight against an isolated capitalist employer. But an isolated group of workers against an employer backed by the whole capitalist class is powerless. And such is the case here: the state power, the money power of capitalism, public opinion of the middle class, excited by the capitalist press, all attack the group of fighting workers.

But does the working class back the strikers? The millions of other workers do not consider this fight as their own cause. Certainly they sympathise, and may often collect money for the strikers, and this may give some relief, provided its distribution is not forbidden by a judge's injunction. But this easygoing sympathy leaves the real fight to the striking group alone. The millions stand aloof, passive. So the fight cannot be won (except in some special cases, when the capitalists, for business reasons, prefer to grant concessions), because the working class does not fight as one undivided unit.

The matter will be different, of course, when the mass of the workers really consider such a contest as directly concerning them; when they find that their own future is at stake. If they go into the fight themselves and extend the strike to other factories, to ever more branches of industry, then the state power, the capitalist power, has to be divided and cannot be used entirely against the separate group of workers. It has to face the collective power of the working class.

Extension of the strike, ever more widely, into, finally, a general strike, has often been advised as a means to avert defeat. But to be sure, this is not to be taken as a truly expedient pattern, accidentally hit upon, and ensuring victory. If such were the case, trade unions certainly would have made use of it repeatedly as regular tactics. It cannot be proclaimed at will by union leaders, as a simple tactical measure. It must come forth from the deepest feelings of the masses, as the expression of their spontaneous initiative, and this is aroused only when the issue of the fight is or grows larger than a simple wage contest

of one group. Only then will the workers put all their force, their enthusiasm, their solidarity, their power of endurance into it.

And all these forces they will need. For capitalism also will bring into the field stronger forces than before. It may have been defeated and taken by surprise by the unexpected exhibition of proletarian force and thus have made concessions. But then, afterwards, it will gather new forces out of the deepest roots of its power and proceed to win back its position. So the victory of the workers is neither lasting nor certain. There is no clear and open road to victory; the road itself must be hewn and built through the capitalist jungle at the cost of immense efforts.

But even so, it will mean great progress. A wave of solidarity has gone through the masses, they have felt the immense power of class unity, their self-confidence is raised, they have shaken off the narrow group egotism. Through their own deeds they have acquired new wisdom: what capitalism means and how they stand as a class against the capitalist class. They have seen a glimpse of their way to freedom.

Thus the narrow field of trade union struggle widens into the broad field of class struggle. But now the workers themselves must change. They have to take a wider view of the world. From their trade, from their work within the factory walls, their mind must widen to encompass society as a whole. Their spirit must rise above the petty things around them. They have to face the state; they enter the realm of politics. The problems of revolution must be dealt with.

## Workers Councils

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In its revolutionary struggles, the working class needs organization. When great masses have to act as a unit, a mechanism is needed for understanding and discussion, for the making and issuing of decisions, and for the proclaiming of actions and aims.

This does not mean, of course, that all great actions and universal strikes are carried out with soldierlike discipline, after the decisions of a central board. Such cases will occur, it is true, but more often, through their eager fighting spirit, their solidarity and passion, masses will break out in strikes to help their comrades, or to protest against some capitalist atrocity, with no general plan. Then such a strike will spread like a prairie fire all over the country.

In the first Russian revolution, the strike waves went up and down. Often the most successful were those that had not been decided in advance, while the strikes that had been proclaimed by the central committees often failed.

The strikers, once they are fighting, want mutual contact and understanding in order to unite in an organized force. Here a difficulty presents itself. Without strong organization, without joining forces and binding their will in one solid body, without uniting their action in one common deed, they cannot win against the strong organization of capitalist power. But when thousands and millions of workers are united in one body, this can only be managed by functionaries acting as representatives of the members. And we have seen that then these officials become masters of the organization, with interests different from the revolutionary interests of the workers.

How can the working class, in revolutionary fights, unite its force into a big organization without falling into the pit of officialdom? The answer is given by putting another

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first published in English in the American journal **International Council Correspondence** (Vol. II No. 5 April 1936). (Pannekoek wrote a [book with this title](#) some years later which you can find at that link). The text was published over the initials J.H (John Harper), a pen name Pannekoek often used and the translation may have been by Pannekoek himself. There are a couple of obvious errors in the published text which we have not attempted to correct. The article is in two parts – it would be interesting to know if it was originally two short texts which were then joined together. (Note by Endpage.com)



question: if all that the workers do is to pay their fees and to obey when their leaders order them out and order them in, are they themselves then really fighting their fight for freedom?

Fighting for freedom is not letting your leaders think for you and decide, and following obediently behind them, or from time to time scolding them. Fighting for freedom is partaking to the full of ones capacity, thinking and deciding for oneself, taking all the responsibilities as a self-relying individual amidst equal comrades. It is true that to think for oneself, to think out what is true and right, with a head dulled by fatigue, is the hardest, the most difficult task; it is much harder than to pay and to obey. But it is the only way to freedom. To be liberated by others, whose leadership is the essential part of the liberation, means the getting of new masters instead of the old ones.

Freedom, the goal of the workers, means that they shall be able, man for man, to manage the world, to use and deal with the treasures of the earth, so as to make it a happy home for all. How can they ensure this if they are not able to conquer and defend this themselves?

The proletarian revolution is not simply the vanquishing of capitalist power. It is the rise of the whole working people out of dependence and ignorance into independence and clear consciousness of how to make their life.

True organization, as the workers need it in the revolution, implies that everyone takes part in it, body and soul and brains; that everyone takes part in leadership as well as in action, and has to think out, to decide and to perform to the full of his capacities. Such an organization is a body of self-determining people. There is no place for professional leaders. Certainly there is obeying; everybody has to follow the decisions which he himself has taken part in making. But the full power always rests with the workers themselves.

Can such a form of organization be realized? What must be its structure? It is not necessary to construct it or think it out. History has already produced it. It sprang into life out of the practice of the class struggle. Its prototype, its first trace, is found in the strike committees. In a big strike, all the workers cannot assemble in one meeting. They choose delegates to act as a committee. Such a committee is only the executive organ of the strikers; it is continually in touch with them and has to carry out the decisions of the strikers. Each delegate at every moment can be replaced by others; such a committee never becomes an independent power. In such a way, common action as one body can be secured, and yet the workers have all decisions in their own hands. Usually in strikes, the uppermost lead is taken out of the hands of these committees by the trade unions and their leaders.

In the Russian revolution when strikes broke out irregularly in the factories, the strikers chose delegates which, for the whole town or for an industry or railway over the whole state or province, assembled to bring unity into the fight. They had at once to discuss political matters and to assume political functions because the strikes were directed against Czarism. They were called soviets; councils. In these soviets all the details of the situation, all the workers' interests, all political events were discussed. The delegates went to and fro continually between the assembly and their factories. In the factories and shops the workers, in general meetings, discussed the same matters, took their decisions and often sent new delegates. Able socialists were appointed as secretaries, to give advice based on their wider knowledge. Often these soviets had to act as political powers, as a kind of primitive government when the Czarist power was paralyzed, when officials and officers did not know what to do and left the field to them. Thus these soviets became the permanent center of the revolution; they were constituted by delegates of all the factories, striking or working. They could not think of becoming an independent power. The members were often changed and sometimes the whole soviet was arrested and had to be replaced by new delegates. Moreover they knew that all their force was rooted in the workers will to strike or not to strike; often their calls were not followed when they did not concur with the workers' instinctive feelings of power or weakness, of passion or prudence. So the soviet system proved to be the appropriate form of organization for a revo-

lutionary working class. In 1917 it was at once adopted in Russia, and everywhere workers, and soldiers' soviets came into being and were the driving force of the revolution.

The complementary proof was given in Germany. In 1918, after the breakdown of the military power, workers' and soldiers' councils in imitation of Russia were founded. But the German workers, educated in party and union discipline, full of social-democratic ideas of republic and reform as the next political aims, chose their party and union-officials as delegates into these councils. When fighting and acting themselves, they acted and fought in the right way, but from lack of self-confidence they chose leaders filled with capitalist ideas, and these always spoilt matters. It is natural that a "council congress" then resolved to abdicate for a new parliament, to be chosen as soon as possible.

Here it became evident that the council system is the appropriate form of organization only for a revolutionary working class. If the workers do not intend to go on with the revolution, they have no use for soviets. If the workers are not far enough advanced yet to see the way of revolution, if they are satisfied with the leaders doing all the work of speechifying and mediating and bargaining for reforms within capitalism, then parliaments and party and union-congresses, – called workers parliaments because they work after the same principle – are all they need. If, however, they fight with all their energy for revolution, if with intense eagerness and passion they take part in every event, if they think over and decide for themselves all details of fighting because they have to do the fighting, then workers' councils are the organization they need.

This implies that workers' councils cannot be formed by revolutionary groups. Such groups can only propagate the idea by explaining to their fellow workers the necessity of council-organization, when the working class as a self-determining power fights for freedom. Councils are the form of organization only for fighting masses, for the working class as a whole, not for revolutionary groups.

They originate and grow up along with the first action of a revolutionary character. With the development of revolution, their importance and their functions increase. At first they may appear as simple strike committees, in opposition to the labor leaders when the strikes go beyond the intentions of the leaders, and rebel against the unions and their leaders.

In a universal strike the functions of these committees are enlarged. Now delegates of all the factories and plants have to discuss and to decide about all the conditions of the fight; they will try to regulate into consciously devised actions all the fighting power of the workers; they must see how they will react upon the governments' measures, the doings of soldiers or capitalist gangs. By means of this very strike action, the actual decisions are made by the workers themselves. In the councils, the opinions, the will, the readiness, the hesitation, or the eagerness, the energy and the obstacles of all these masses concentrate and combine into a common line of action. They are the symbols, the exponents of the workers' power; but at the same time they are only the spokesmen who can be replaced at any moment. At one time they are outlaws to the capitalist world, and at the next, they have to deal as equal parties with the high functionaries of government.

When the revolution develops to such power that the State power is seriously affected, then the workers' councils have to assume political functions. In a political revolution, this is their first and chief function. They are the central bodies of the workers' power; they have to take all measures to weaken and defeat the adversary. Like a power at war, they have to stand guard over the whole country, controlling the efforts of the capitalist class to collect and restore their forces and to subdue the workers. They have to look after a number of public affairs which otherwise were state affairs : public health, public security, and the uninterrupted course of social life. They have to take care of the production itself; the most important and difficult task and concern of the working class in revolution.

A social revolution in history never began as a simple change of political rulers who then, after having acquired political power, carried out the necessary social changes by means of new laws. Already, before and during the fight, the rising class built up its new social organs as new sprouting branches within the dead husk of the former organism. In

the French revolution, the new capitalist class, the citizens, the business men, the artisans, built up in each town and village their communal boards, their new courts of justice, illegal at the time, usurping simply the functions of the powerless functionaries of royalty. While their delegates in Paris discussed and made the new constitution, the actual constitution was made all over the country by the citizens holding their political meetings, building up their political organs afterwards legalized by law.

In the same way during the proletarian revolution, the new rising class creates its new forms of organization which step by step in the process of revolution supersede the old State organization. The workers' councils, as the new form of political organization, take the place of parliamentarism, the political form of capitalist rule.

## 2.

Parliamentary democracy is considered by capitalist theorists as well as by social-democrats as the perfect democracy, conform to justice and equality. In reality, it is only a disguise for capitalist domination, and contrary to justice and equality. It is the council system that is the true workers' democracy.

Parliamentary democracy is foul democracy. The people are allowed to vote once in four or five years and to choose their delegates; woe to them if they do not choose the right man. Only at the polls the voters can exert their power; thereafter they are powerless. The chosen delegates are now the rulers of the people; they make laws and constitute governments, and the people have to obey. Usually, by the election mechanism, only the big capitalist parties with their powerful apparatus, with their papers, their noisy advertising, have a chance to win. Real trustees of discontented groups seldom have a chance to win some few seats.

In the soviet system, each delegate can be repealed at any moment. Not only do the workers continually remain in touch with the delegate, discussing and deciding for themselves, but the delegate is only a temporary messenger to the council assemblies. Capitalist politicians denounce this "characterless" role of the delegate, in that he may have to speak against his personal opinion. They forget that just because there are no fixed delegates, only those will be sent whose opinions conform to those of the workers.

The principle of parliamentary representation is that the delegate in parliament shall act and vote according to his own conscience and conviction. If on some question he should ask the opinion of his voters, it is only due to his own prudence. Not the people, but he on his own responsibility has to decide. The principle of the soviet system is just the reverse; the delegates only express the opinions of the workers.

In the elections for parliament, the citizens are grouped according to voting districts and counties; that is to say according to their dwelling place. Persons of different trades or classes, having nothing in common, accidentally living near one another, are combined into an artificial group which has to be represented by one delegate.

In the councils, the workers are represented in their natural groups, according to factories, shops and plants. The workers of one factory or one big plant form a unit of production; they belong together by their collective work. In revolutionary epochs, they are in immediate contact to interchange opinions; they live under the same conditions and have the same interests. They must act together; the factory is the unit which as a unit has to strike or to work, and its workers must decide what they collectively have to do. So the organization and delegation of workers in factories and workshops is the necessary form.

It is at the same time the principle of representation of the communist order growing up in the revolution. Production is the basis of society, or, more rightly, it is the contents, the essence of society; hence the order of production is at the same time the order of society. Factories are the working units, the cells of which the organism of society consists. The main task of the political organs, which mean nothing else but the organs managing the totality of society, concerns the productive work of society. Hence it goes without

saying that the working people, in their councils, discuss these matters and choose their delegates, collected in their production units.

We should not believe, though, that parliamentarism, as the political form of capitalism, was not founded on production. Always the political organization is adapted to the character of production as the basis of society. Representation, according to dwelling place, belongs to the system of petty capitalist production, where each man is supposed to be the possessor of his own small business. Then there is a mutual connection between all these businessmen at one place, dealing with one another, living as neighbors, knowing one another and therefore sending one common delegate to parliament. This was the basis of parliamentarism. We have seen that later on this parliamentary delegation system proved to be the right system for representing the growing and changing class interests within capitalism.

At the same time it is clear now why the delegates in parliament had to take political power in their hands. Their political task was only a small part of the task of society. The most important part, the productive work, was the personal task of all the separate producers, the citizens as business men; it required nearly all their energy and care. When every individual took care of his own small lot, then society as their totality went right. The general regulations by law, necessary conditions, doubtlessly, but of minor extent, could be left to the care of a special group or trade, the politicians. With communist production the reverse is true. Here the all important thing, the collective productive work, is the task of society as a whole; it concerns all the workers collectively. Their personal work does not claim their whole energy and care; their mind is turned to the collective task of society. The general regulation of this collective work cannot be left to a special group of persons; it is the vital interest of the whole working people.

There is another difference between parliamentarism and the soviet system. In parliamentary democracy, one vote is given to every adult man and sometimes woman on the strength of their supreme, inborn right of belonging to mankind, as is so beautifully expressed in celebration speeches. In the soviets, on the other hand, only the workers are represented. Can the council system then be said to be truly democratic if it excludes the other classes of society?

The council system embodies the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx and Engels, more than half a century ago, explained that the social revolution was to lead to the dictatorship of the working class as the next political form and that this was essential in order to bring about the necessary changes in society. Socialists, thinking in terms of parliamentary representation only, tried to excuse or to criticize the violation of democracy and the injustice of arbitrarily excluding persons from the polls because they belong to certain classes. Now we see how the development of the proletarian class struggle in a natural way produces the organs of this dictatorship, the soviets.

It is certainly no violation of justice that the councils, as the fighting centers of a revolutionary working class, do not include representatives of the opposing class. And thereafter the matter is not different. In a rising communist society there is no place for capitalists; they have to disappear and they will disappear. Whoever takes part in the collective work is a member of the collectivity and takes part in the decisions. Persons, however, who stand outside the process of collective production, are, by the structure of the council system, automatically excluded from influence upon it. Whatever remains of the former exploiters and robbers has no vote in the regulation of a production in which they take no part.

There are other classes in society that do not directly belong to the two chief opposite classes : small farmers, independent artisans, intellectuals. In the revolutionary fight they may waver to and fro, but on the whole they are not very important, because they have less fighting power. Mostly their forms of organization and their aims are different. To make friends with them or to neutralize them, if this is possible without impeding the proper aims or to fight them resolutely if necessary, to decide upon the way of dealing with them with equity and firmness, will be the concern, often a matter of difficult tactics, of the fighting working class. In the production-system, insofar as their work is useful and

necessary, they will find their place and they will exert their influence after the principle that whoever does the work has a chief vote in regulating the work.

More than half a century ago, Engels said that through the proletarian revolution the State would disappear; instead of the ruling over men would come the managing of affairs. This was said at a time when there could not be any clear idea about how the working class would come into power. Now we see the truth of this statement confirmed. In the process of revolution, the old State Power will be destroyed, and the organs that take its place, the workers' councils, for the time being, will certainly have important political functions still to repress the remnants of capitalist power. Their political function of governing, however, will be gradually turned into nothing but the economic function of managing the collective process of production of goods for the needs of society.

## State Capitalism and Dictatorship

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### I.

The term "State Capitalism" is frequently used in two different ways: first, as an economic form in which the state performs the role of the capitalist employer, exploiting the workers in the interest of the state. The federal mail system or a state-owned railway are examples of this kind of state capitalism. In Russia, this form of state capitalism predominates in industry: the work is planned, financed and managed by the state; the directors of industry are appointed by the state and profits are considered the income of the state. Second, we find that a condition is defined as state capitalism (or state socialism) under which capitalist enterprises are controlled by the state. This definition is misleading, however, as there still exists under these conditions capitalism in the form of private ownership, although the owner of an enterprise is no longer the sole master, his power being restricted so long as some sort of social insurance system for the workers is accepted.

It depends now on the degree of state interference in private enterprises. If the state passes certain laws affecting employment conditions, such as the hiring and firing of workers, if enterprises are being financed by a federal banking system, or subventions are being granted to support the export trade, or if by law the limit of dividends for the large corporations is fixed – then a condition will be reached under which state control will regulate the entire economic life. This will vary from the strict state capitalism in certain degrees. Considering the present economic situation in Germany we could consider a sort of state capitalism prevailing there. The rulers of big industry in Germany are not subordinated subjects of the state but are the ruling power in Germany thru the fascist officials in the governing offices. The National Socialist Party developed as a tool of these rulers. In Russia, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie was destroyed by the October Revolution and has disappeared completely as a ruling power. The bureaucracy of the Russian government took control of the growing industry. Russian state capitalism could be developed as there was no powerful bourgeoisie in existence. In Germany, as in western Europe and in America, the bourgeoisie is in complete power, the owner of capital and the means of production. This is essential for the character of capitalism. The decisive factor is the character of that class which are the owners in full control of capital and not the inner form of administration nor the degree of state interference in the economic life of the population. Should this class consider it a necessity to bind itself by stricter regulation – a step that would also make the smaller private capitalists more dependent upon the will

of the big capitalists – the character of private capitalism would still remain. We must therefore distinguish the difference between state capitalism and such private capitalism that may be regulated to the highest degree by the state.

Strict regulations are not simply to be looked upon as an attempt to find a way out of the crisis. Political considerations also play a part. Examples of state regulation point to one general aim : preparation for war. The war industry is regulated, as well as the farmers' production of food – in order to be prepared for war. Impoverished by the results of the last war – robbed of provinces, raw materials, colonies, capital, the German bourgeoisie must try to rehabilitate its remaining forces by rigorous concentration. Foreseeing war as a last resort, it puts as much of its resources as is necessary into the hands of state control. When faced with the common aim for new world power, the private interests of the various sections of the bourgeoisie are put into the background. All the capitalist powers are confronted with this question : to what extent the state, as the representative of the common interests of the national bourgeoisie, should be entrusted with powers over persons, finances and industry in the international struggle for power ? This explains why in those nations of a poor but rapidly increasing population, without any or with but few colonies (such as Italy, Germany, Japan) the state has assumed the greatest power.

One can raise the question : is not state capitalism the only “way out” for the bourgeoisie ? Obviously state capitalism would be feasible, if only the whole productive process could be managed and planned centrally from above in order to meet the needs of the population and eliminate crises. If such conditions were brought about, the bourgeoisie would then cease being a real bourgeoisie. In bourgeois society, not only exploitation of the working class exists but there must also exist the constant struggle of the various sections of the capitalist class for markets and for sources of capital investment. This struggle among the capitalists is quite different from the old free competition on the market. Under cover of cooperation of capital within the nation there exists a continuous struggle between huge monopolies. Capitalists cannot act as mere dividend collectors, leaving initiative to state officials to attend to the exploitation of the working class. Capitalists struggle among themselves for profits and for the control of the state in order to protect their sectional interests and their field of action extends beyond the limits of the state. Although during the present crisis a strong concentration took place within each capitalist nation, there still remains powerful international interlacements, (of big capital). In the form of the struggle between nations, the struggle of capitalists continues, whereby a severe political crisis in war and defeat has the effect of an economic crisis.

When, therefore, the question arises whether or not state capitalism – in the sense in which it has been used above – is a necessary intermediate stage before the proletariat seizes power, whether it would be the highest and last form of capitalism established by the bourgeoisie, the answer is No. On the other hand, if by state capitalism one means the strict control and regulation of private capital by the state, the answer is Yes, the degree of state control varying within a country according to time and conditions, the preservation and increase of profits brought about in different ways, depending upon the historical and political conditions and the relationship of the classes.

## II.

The goal of the working class is liberation from exploitation. This goal is not reached and cannot be reached by a new directing and governing class substituting the bourgeoisie. It can only be realised by the workers themselves being master over production.

Nevertheless it is possible and quite probable that state capitalism will be an intermediary stage, until the proletariat succeeds in establishing communism. This, however, could not happen for economic but for political reasons. State capitalism would not be the result of economic crises but of the class struggle. In the final stage of capitalism, the

class struggle is the most significant force that determines the actions of the bourgeoisie and shapes state economy.

It is to be expected that, as a result of great economic tension and conflict, the class struggle of the future proletariat will flare up into mass action; whether this mass action be the came of wage conflicts wars or economic crises, whether the shape it takes be that of mass strikes, street riots or armed struggle; the proletariat will establish council organizations – organs of self-determination and uniform execution of action. This will particularly be the case in Germany. There the old political organs of the class struggle have been destroyed; workers stand side by side as individuals with no other allegiance but to that of their class. Should far-reaching political movements develop in Germany, the workers could function only as a class, fight only as a class when they oppose the capitalist principle of one-man dictatorship with the proletarian principle of self-determination of the masses. In other parliamentary countries, on the other hand, the workers are severely handicapped in their development of independent class action by the activities of the political parties. These parties promise the working class safer fighting methods, force upon the workers their leadership and make the majority of the population their unthinking followers, with the aid of their propaganda machinery. In Germany these handicaps are a dying tradition.

Such primary mass struggles are only the beginning of a period of revolutionary development. Let us assume a situation favorable to the proletariat; that proletarian action is so powerful as to paralyze and overthrow the bourgeois state. In spite of unanimous action in this respect, the degree of maturity of the masses may vary. A clear conception of aims, ways and means will be acquired only during the process of revolution and after the first victory differences as to further tactics will assert themselves. Socialist or communist party spokesmen appear; they are not dead, at least their ideas are alive among the “moderate” section of the workers. Now their time has come to put into practice their program of “state socialism.”

The most progressive workers whose aim must be to put the leadership of the struggle into the control of the working class by means of the council organization, (thereby weakening the enemy power of the state force) will be encountered by “socialist” propaganda in which will be stressed the necessity of speedily building the socialist order by means of a “socialistic” government. There will be warnings against extreme demands, appeals to the timidity of those individuals to whom the thought of proletarian communism is yet inconceivable, compromises with bourgeois reformists will be advised, as well as the buying-out of the bourgeoisie rather than forcing it thru expropriation to embittered resistance. Attempts will be made to hold back the workers from revolutionary aims – from the determined class struggle. Around this type of propaganda will rally those who feel called upon to be at the head of the party or to assume leadership among the workers. Among these leaders will be a great portion of the intelligentsia who easily adapt themselves to “state socialism” but not to council communism and other sections of the bourgeoisie who see in the workers’ struggles a new class position from which they can successfully combat communism. “Socialism against anarchy,” such will be the battle cry of those who will want to save of capitalism what there can be saved.

The outcome of this struggle depends on the maturity of the revolutionary working class. Those who now believe that all one has to do is to wait for revolutionary action, because then economic necessity will teach the workers how to act correctly, are victims of an illusion. Certainly workers will learn quickly and act forcefully in revolutionary times. Meanwhile heavy defeats are likely to be experienced, resulting in the lose of countless victims. The more thorough the work of enlightenment of the proletariat, the more firm will be the attack of the masses against the attempt of “leaders” to direct their actions into the channels of state socialism. Considering the difficulties with which the task of enlightenment now encounters, it seems improbable that there lies open for the workers a road to freedom without setbacks. In this situation are to be found the possibilities for state capitalism as an intermediary stage before the coming of communism.

Thus the capitalist class will not adopt state capitalism because of its own economic difficulties. Monopoly capitalism, particularly when using the state as a fascist dictatorship, can secure for itself most of the advantages of a single organization without giving up its own rule over production. There will be a different situation, however, when it feels itself so far pressed by the working class that the old form of private capitalism can no longer be saved. Then state capitalism will be the way out: the preservation of exploitation in the form of a "socialistic" society, where the "most capable leaders," the "best brains," and the "great men of action" will direct production and the masses will work obediently under their command. Whether or not this condition is called state capitalism or state socialism makes no difference in principle. Whether one refers to the first term "State capitalism" as being a ruling and exploiting state bureaucracy or to the second term "State socialism" as a necessary staff of officials who as dutiful and obedient servants of the community share the work with the laborers, the difference in the final analysis lies in the amount of the salaries and the qualitative measure of influence in the party connections.

Such a form of society cannot be stable, it is a form of retrogression, against which the working class will again rise. Under it a certain amount of order can be brought about but production remains restricted. Social development remains hindered. Russia was able, through this form of organization, to change from semi-barbarism to a developed capitalism, to surpass even the achievements of the Western countries' private capitalism. In this process figures the enthusiasm apparent among the "upstart" bourgeois classes, wherever capitalism begins its course. But such state capitalism cannot progress. In Western Europe and in America the same form of economic organization would not be progressive, since it would hinder the coming of communism. It would obstruct the necessary revolution in production; that is, it would be reactionary in character and assume the political form of a dictatorship.

### III.

Some Marxists maintain that Marx and Engels foresaw this development of society to state capitalism. But we know of no statement by Marx concerning state capitalism from which we could deduce that he looked upon the state when it assumes the role of sole capitalist, as being the last phase of capitalist society. He saw in the state the organ of suppression, which bourgeois society uses against the working class. For Engels "The Proletariat seizes the power of the state and then changes the ownership of the means of production to state ownership."

This means that the change of ownership to state ownership did not occur previously. Any attempt to make this sentence of Engels' responsible for the theory of state capitalism, brings Engels into contradiction with himself. Also, there is no confirmation of it to be found in actual occurrences. The railroads in highly developed capitalist countries, like England and America, are still in the private possession of capitalistic corporations. Only the postal and telegraphic services are owned by the states in most countries, but for other reasons than their high state of development. The German railroads were owned by the state mostly for military reasons. The only state capitalism which was enabled to transfer the means of production to state ownership is the Russian, but not on account of their state of high development, rather on account of their low degree of development. There is nothing, however, to be found in Engels which could be applied to conditions as they exist in Germany and Italy today, these are strong supervision regulation, and limitation of liberty of private capitalism by an all-powerful state.

This is quite natural, as Engels was no prophet; he was only a scientist who was well aware of the process of social development. What he expounds are the fundamental tendencies in this development and their significance. Theories of development are best expressed when spoken of in connection with the future; it is therefore not harmful to use caution in expressing them. Less cautious expression, as is often the case with Engels,



does not diminish the value of the prognostications in the least, although occurrences do not exactly correspond to predictions. A man of his calibre has a right to expect that even his suppositions be treated with care, although they were arrived at under certain definite conditions. The work of deducing the tendencies of capitalism and their development, and shaping them into consistent and comprehensive theories assures to Marx and Engels a prominent position among the most outstanding thinkers and scientists of the nineteenth century, but the exact description of the social structure of half a century in advance in all its details was an impossibility even for them.

Dictatorships, as those in Italy and Germany, became necessary as means of coercion to force upon the unwilling mass of small capitalists the new order and the regulating limitations. For this reason such dictatorship is often looked upon as the future political form of society of a developed capitalism the world over.

During forty years the socialist press pointed out that military monarchy was the political form of society belonging to a concentrated capitalistic society. For the bourgeois is in need of a Kaiser, the Junkers and the army in defense against a revolutionary working class on one side and the neighboring countries on the other side. For ten years the belief prevailed that the republic was the true form of government for a developed capitalism, because under this form of state the bourgeoisie were the masters. Now the dictatorship is considered to be the needed form of government. Whatever the form may be, the most fitting reasons for it are always found. While at the same time countries like England, France, America and Belgium with a highly concentrated and developed capitalism, retain the same form of parliamentary government, be it under a republic or kingdom. This proves that capitalism chooses many roads leading to the same destination, and it also proves that there should be no haste in drawing conclusions from the experiences in one country to apply to the world at large.

In every country great capital accomplishes its rule by means of the existing political institutions, developed thru history and traditions, whose functions are then being changed expressly. England offers an instance. There the parliamentary system in conjunction with a high measure of personal liberty and autonomy are so successful that there is no trace whatever of socialism, communism or revolutionary thought among the working classes. There also monopolistic capitalism grew and developed. There, too, capitalism dominates the government. There, too, the government takes measures to overcome the results of the depression, but they manage to succeed without the aid of a dictatorship. This does not make England a democracy, because already a half a century ago two aristocratic cliques of politicians held the government alternately, and the same conditions prevail today. But they are ruling by different means; in the long run these means may be more effective than the brutal dictatorship. Compared with Germany, the even and forceful rule of English capitalism looks to be the more normal one. In Germany the pressure of a police-government forced the workers into radical movements, subsequently the workers obtained external political power, not thru the efforts of a great inner force within themselves, but thru the military debacle of their rulers, and eventually they saw that power destroyed by a sharp dictatorship, the result of a petty bourgeois revolution which was financed by monopolistic capital. This should not be interpreted to mean that the English form of government is really the normal one, and the German the abnormal one; just as it would be wrong to assume the reverse. Each case must be judged separately, each country has the kind of government which grew out of its own course of political development.

Observing America, we find in this land of greatest concentration of monopolistic capital as little desire to change to a dictatorship as we find in England. Under the Roosevelt administration certain regulations and actions were effected in order to relieve the results of the depression, some were complete innovations. Among these there was also the beginning of a social policy, which was hitherto entirely absent from American politics. But private capital is already rebelling and is already feeling strong enough to pursue its own course in the political struggle for power. Seen from America, the dictatorships in several European countries appear like a heavy armour, destructive of liberty, which the

closely pressed-in nations of Europe must bear, because inherited feuds whip them on to mutual destruction, but not as what they really are, purposeful forms of organization of a most highly developed capitalism.

The arguments for a new labor movement, which we designate with the name of Council-Communism, do not find their basis in state capitalism and fascist dictatorship. This movement represents a vital need of the working classes and is bound to develop everywhere. It becomes a necessity because of the colossal rise of the power of capital, because against a power of this magnitude the old forms of labor movement become powerless, therefore labor must find new means of combat. For this reason any program principles for the new labor movement can be based on neither state capitalism, fascism, nor dictatorship as their causes, but only the constantly growing power of capital and the impotence of the old labor movement to cope with this power.

For the working classes in fascist countries both conditions prevail, for there the risen power of capital is the power holding the political as well as the economic dictatorship of the country. When there the propaganda for new forms of action connects with the existence of the dictatorship, it is as it should be. But it would be folly to base an international program on such principles forgetting that conditions in other countries differ widely from those in fascist countries.

## Party and Working Class

1936

We are only at the very earliest stages of a new workers' movement. The old movement was embodied in parties, and today belief in the party constitutes the most powerful check on the working class' capacity for action. That is why we are not trying to create a new party. This is so, not because our numbers are small—a party of any kind begins with a few people—but because, in our day, a party cannot be other than an organization aimed at directing and dominating the proletariat. To this type of organization we oppose the principle that the working class can effectively come into its own and prevail only by taking its destiny into its own hands. The workers are not to adopt the slogans of any group whatsoever, not even our own groups; they are to think, decide and act for themselves. Therefore, in this transitional period, the natural organs of education and enlightenment are, in our view, work groups, study and discussion circles, which have formed of their own accord and are seeking their own way.

This view directly contradicts the traditional ideas about the role of the party as an essential educational organ of the proletariat. Hence it is resisted in many quarters where, however, there is no further desire to have dealings either with the Socialist Party or the Communist Party. This, no doubt, is to be partly explained by the strength of tradition: when one has always regarded the class war as a party war and a war between parties, it is very difficult to adopt the exclusive viewpoint of class and of the class war. But partly, too, one is faced with the clear idea that, after all, it is incumbent on the party to play a role of the first importance in the proletarian struggle for freedom. It is this idea we shall now examine more closely.

The whole question pivots, in short, on the following distinction: a party is a group based on certain ideas held in common, whereas a class is a group united on the basis of common interests. Membership in a class is determined by function in the production process, a function that creates definite interests. Membership in a party means being one of a group having identical views about the major social questions.

In recent times, it was supposed for theoretical and practical reasons that this fundamental difference would disappear within a class party, the 'workers' party.' During the period when Social Democracy was in full growth, the current impression was that this party would gradually unite all the workers, some as militants, others as sympathizers. And since the theory was that identical interests would necessarily engender identical

ideas and aims, the distinction between class and party was bound, it was believed, to disappear. Social Democracy remained a minority group, and moreover became the target of attack by new workers' groups. Splits occurred within it, while its own character underwent radical change and certain articles of its program were either revised or interpreted in a totally different sense. Society does not develop in a continuous way, free from setbacks, but through conflicts and antagonisms. While the working class battle is widening in scope, the enemy's strength is increasing. Uncertainty about the way to be followed constantly and repeatedly troubles the minds of the combatants; and doubt is a factor in division, of internal quarrels and conflicts within the workers' movement.

It is useless to deplore these conflicts as creating a pernicious situation that should not exist and which is making the workers powerless. As has often been pointed out, the working class is not weak because it is divided; on the contrary, it is divided because it is weak. And the reason why the proletariat ought to seek new ways is that the enemy has strength of such a kind that the old methods are ineffectual. The working class will not secure these ways by magic, but through a great effort, deep reflection, through the clash of divergent opinions and the conflict of impassioned ideas. It is incumbent upon it to find its own way, and precisely therein is the *raison d'être* of the internal differences and conflicts. It is forced to renounce outmoded ideas and old chimeras, and it is indeed the difficulty of this task that engenders such big divisions.

Nor should the illusion be nursed that such impassioned party conflicts and opinion clashes belong only to a transitional period such as the present one, and that they will in due course disappear, leaving a unity stronger than ever. Certainly, in the evolution of the class struggle, it sometimes happens that all the various elements of strength are merged in order to snatch some great victory, and that revolution is the fruit of this unity. But in this case, as after every victory, divergences appear immediately when it comes to deciding on new objectives. The proletariat then finds itself faced with the most arduous tasks: to crush the enemy, and more, to organize production, to create a new order. It is out of the question that all the workers, all categories and all groups, whose interests are still far from being homogeneous, should think and feel in the same way, and should reach spontaneous and immediate agreement about what should be done next. It is precisely because they are committed to finding for themselves their own way ahead that the liveliest differences occur, that there are clashes among them, and that finally, through such conflict, they succeed in clarifying their ideas.

No doubt, if certain people holding the same ideas get together to discuss the prospects for action, to hammer out ideas by discussion, to indulge in propaganda for these attitudes, then it is possible to describe such groups as parties. The name matters little, provided that these parties adopt a role distinct from that which existing parties seek to fulfil. Practical action, that is, concrete class struggle, is a matter for the masses themselves, acting as a whole, within their natural groups, notably the work gangs, which constitute the units of effective combat. It would be wrong to find the militants of one tendency going on strike, while those of another tendency continued to work. In that case, the militants of each tendency should present their viewpoints to the factory floor, so that the workers as a whole are able to reach a decision based on knowledge and facts. Since the war is immense and the enemy's strength enormous, victory must be attained by merging all the forces at the masses' disposal—not only material and moral force with a view to action, unity and enthusiasm, but also the spiritual force born of mental clarity. The importance of these parties or groups resides in the fact that they help to secure this mental clarity through their mutual conflicts, their discussions, their propaganda. It is by means of these organs of self-clarification that the working class can succeed in tracing for itself the road to freedom.

That is why parties in this sense (and also their ideas) do not need firm and fixed structures. Faced with any change of situation, with new tasks, people become divided in their views, but only to reunite in new agreement; while others come up with other programs. Given their fluctuating quality, they are always ready to adapt themselves to the new.

The present workers' parties are of an absolutely different character. Besides, they have a different objective: to seize power and to exercise it for their sole benefit. Far from attempting to contribute to the emancipation of the working class, they mean to govern for themselves, and they cover this intention under the pretence of freeing the proletariat. Social Democracy, whose ascendant period goes back to the great parliamentary epoch, sees this power as government based on a parliamentary majority. For its part, the Communist Party carries its power politics to its extreme consequences: party dictatorship.

Unlike the parties described above, these parties are bound to have formations with rigid structures, whose cohesion is assured by means of statutes, disciplinary measures, admission and dismissal procedures. Designed to dominate, they fight for power by orienting the militants toward the instruments of power that they possess and by striving constantly to increase their sphere of influence. They do not see their task as that of educating the workers to think for themselves; on the contrary, they aim at drilling them, at turning them into faithful and devoted adherents of their doctrines. While the working class needs unlimited freedom of spiritual development to increase its strength and to conquer, the basis of party power is the repression of all opinions that do not conform to the party line. In 'democratic' parties, this result is secured by methods that pay lip service to freedom; in the dictatorial parties, by brutal and avowed repression.

A number of workers are already aware that domination by the Socialist Party or the Communist Party would simply be a camouflaged supremacy of the bourgeois class, and would thus perpetuate exploitation and servitude. But, according to these workers, what should take its place is a 'revolutionary party' that would really aim at creating proletarian power and communist society. There is no question here of a party in the sense we defined above, i.e., of a group whose sole objective is to educate and enlighten, but of a party in the current sense, i.e., a party fighting to secure power and to exercise it with a view to the liberation of the working class, and all this as a vanguard, as an organization of the enlightened revolutionary minority.

The very expression 'revolutionary party' is a contradiction in terms, for a party of this kind could not be revolutionary. If it were, it could only be so in the sense in which we describe revolutionary as a change of government resulting from somewhat violent pressures, e.g., the birth of the Third Reich. When we use the word 'revolution,' we clearly mean the proletarian revolution, the conquest of power by the working class.

The basic theoretical idea of the 'revolutionary party' is that the working class could not do without a group of leaders capable of defeating the bourgeoisie for them and of forming a new government, in other words, the conviction that the working class is itself incapable of creating the revolution. According to this theory, the leaders will create the communist society by means of decrees; in other words, the working class is still incapable of administering and organizing for itself its work and production.

Is there not a certain justification for this thesis, at least provisionally? Given that at the present time the working class as a mass is showing itself to be unable to create a revolution, is it not necessary that the revolutionary vanguard, the party, should make the revolution on the working class' behalf? And is not this valid so long as the masses passively submit to capitalism?

This attitude immediately raises two questions. What type of power will such a party establish through the revolution? What will occur to conquer the capitalist class? The answer is self-evident: an uprising of the masses. In effect, only mass attacks and mass strikes lead to the overthrow of the old domination. Therefore, the 'revolutionary party' will get nowhere without the intervention of the masses. Hence, one of two things must occur.

The first is that the masses persist in action. Far from abandoning the fight in order to allow the new party to govern, they organize their power in the factories and workshops and prepare for new battles, this time with a view to the final defeat of capitalism. By means of workers' councils, they form a community that is increasingly close-knit, and therefore capable of taking on the administration of society as a whole. In a word, the masses prove that they are not as incapable of creating the revolution as was supposed.

From this moment, conflict inevitably arises between the masses and the new party, the latter seeking to be the only body to exercise power and convinced that the party should lead the working class, that self-activity among the masses is only a factor of disorder and anarchy. At this point, either the class movement has become strong enough to ignore the party or the party, allied with bourgeois elements, crushes the workers. In either case, the party is shown to be an obstacle to the revolution, because the party seeks to be something other than an organ of propaganda and of enlightenment, and because it adopts as its specific mission the leadership and government of the masses.

The second possibility is that the working masses conform to the doctrine of the party and turn over to it control of affairs. They follow directives from above and, persuaded (as in Germany in 1918) that the new government will establish socialism or communism, they get on with their day-to-day work. Immediately, the bourgeoisie mobilizes all its forces: its financial power, its enormous spiritual power, its economic supremacy in the factories and the large enterprises. The reigning party, too weak to withstand such an offensive, can maintain itself in power only by multiplying concessions and withdrawals as proof of its moderation. Then the idea becomes current that for the moment this is all that can be done, and that it would be foolish for the workers to attempt a violent imposition of utopian demands. In this way, the party, deprived of the mass power of a revolutionary class, is transformed into an instrument for the conservation of bourgeois power.

We have just said that, in relation to the proletarian revolution, a 'revolutionary party' is a contradiction in terms. This could also be expressed by saying that the term 'revolutionary' in the expression 'revolutionary party' necessarily designates a bourgeois revolution. On every occasion, indeed, that the masses have intervened to overthrow a government and have then handed power to a new party, it was a bourgeois revolution that took place—a substitution of a new dominant category for an old one. So it was in Paris when, in 1830, the commercial bourgeoisie took over from the big landed proprietors; and again, in 1848, when the industrial bourgeoisie succeeded the financial bourgeoisie; and again in 1871 when the whole body of the bourgeoisie came to power. So it was during the Russian Revolution, when the party bureaucracy monopolized power in its capacity as a governmental category. But in our day, both in Western Europe and in America, the bourgeoisie is too deeply and too solidly rooted in the factories and the banks to be removed by a party bureaucracy. Now as always, the only means of conquering the bourgeoisie is to appeal to the masses, the latter taking over the factories and forming their own complex of councils. In this case, however, it seems that the real strength is in the masses who destroy the domination of capital in proportion as their own action widens and deepens.

Therefore, those who contemplate a 'revolutionary party' are learning only a part of the lessons of the past. Not unaware that the workers' parties—the Socialist Party and Communist Party—have become organs of domination serving to perpetuate exploitation, they merely conclude from this that it is only necessary to improve the situation. This is to ignore the fact that the failure of the different parties is traceable to a much more general cause—namely, the basic contradiction between the emancipation of the class, as a body and by their own efforts, and the reduction of the activity of the masses to powerlessness by a new pro-workers' power. Faced with the passivity and indifference of the masses, they come to regard themselves as a revolutionary vanguard. But, if the masses remain inactive, it is because, while instinctively sensing both the colossal power of the enemy and the sheer magnitude of the task to be undertaken, they have not yet discerned the mode of combat, the way of class unity. However, when circumstances have pushed them into action, they must undertake this task by organizing themselves autonomously, by taking into their own hands the means of production, and by initiating the attack against the economic power of capital. And once again, every self-styled vanguard seeking to direct and to dominate the masses by means of a 'revolutionary party' will stand revealed as a reactionary factor by reason of this very conception.

# Society and Mind in Marxian Philosophy

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## I

Marx's theory of social development is known as the "materialistic conception of history" or "historical materialism." Before Marx the word "materialism" had long been used in opposition to idealism, for whereas idealistic philosophical systems assumed some spiritual principle, some "Absolute Idea" as the primary basis of the world, the materialistic philosophies proceeded from the real material world. In the middle of the nineteenth century, another kind of materialism was current which considered physical matter as the primary basis from which all spiritual and mental phenomena must be derived. Most of the objections that have been raised against Marxism are due to the fact that it has not been sufficiently distinguished from this mechanical materialism.

Philosophy is condensed in the well-known quotation "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." Marxism is not concerned with the antithesis matter-mind; it deals with the real world and the ideas derived therefrom. This real world comprises everything observable – that is, all that by observation may be declared an objective fact. The wage-relations between workman and employer, the constitution of the United States, the science of mathematics, although not consisting of physical matter, are quite as real and objective as the factory machine, the Capitol or the Ohio River. Even ideas themselves in their turn act as real, observable facts. Mechanical materialism assumes that our thoughts are determined by the motions of atoms in the cells of our brains. Marxism considers our thoughts to be determined by our social experience observed through the senses or felt as direct bodily needs.

The world for man is society. Of course, the wider world is nature, and society is nature transformed by man. But in the course of history this transformation was so thorough that now society is the most important part of our world. Society is not simply an aggregate of men; men are connected by definite relations not chosen by them at will, but imposed upon them by the economic system under which they live and in which each has his place.

The relations which the productive system establishes between men have the same stringency as biological facts; but this does not mean that men think only of their food. It means that the manner in which man earns his living – that is, the economic organization of production – places every individual in determinate relations with his fellow-men thus determining his thinking and feeling. It is true, of course, that even up to the present nearly all the thoughts of men have been orientated around the getting of food, because a livelihood has never been assured for everybody. The fear of want and hunger has weighed like a nightmare on the minds of men. But, in a socialist system, when this fear will have been removed, when mankind will be master of the means of subsistence, and thinking will be free and creative, the system of production will also continue to determine ideas and institutions.

The mode of production (*Produktionsweise*), which forms the mind of man, is, at the same time, a product of man. It has been built up by mankind during the course of centuries, everyone participating in its development. At any given moment, its structure is determined by given conditions, the most important of which are technics and law. Modern capitalism is not simply production by large scale machinery; it is production by such machines under the rule of private property. The growth of capitalism was not only a change from an economy utilizing small tools to large scale industry, but at the same time, a development of the guild-bound craftsmen into wage laborers and businessmen. A

system of production is a determinate system of technics regulated for the benefit of the owners by a system of juridical rules.

The oft-quoted thesis of the German jurist, Stammler, that law determines the economic system ("*das Recht bestimmt die Wirtschaft*"), is based upon this circumstance. Stammler thought that by this sentence he had refuted Marxism, which proclaimed the dominance of economics over juridical ideas. By proclaiming that the material element, the technical side of the labor process, is ruled and dominated by ideological elements, the juridical rules by which men regulate their relations at their own will, Stammler felt convinced that he had established the predominance of mind over matter. But the antithesis technics-law does not coincide at all with the antithesis matter-mind. Law is not only spiritual rule but also hard constraint, not only an article on the statute books, but also the club of the policeman and the walls of the jail. And technics is not only the material machines but also the power to construct them, including the science of physics.

The two conditions, technics and law, play different roles in determining the system of production. The will of those who control technics cannot by itself create these technics, but it can, and does, make the laws. They are voluntary, but not capricious. They do not determine productive relations, but take advantage of these relations for the benefit of the owners and they are altered to meet advances in the modes of production. Manufacture using the technics of small tools led to a system of craft production, thus making the juridical institution of private property necessary. The development of big industry made the growth of large scale machinery possible and necessary, and induced people to remove the juridical obstacles to its development and to establish laissez-faire trade legislation. In this way technics determines law; it is the underlying force, whereas law belongs to the superstructure resting on it. Thus Stammler, while correct in his thesis in a restricted sense, is wrong in the general sense. Just because law rules economics, people seek to make such laws as are required by a given productive equipment; in this way technics determines law. There is no rigid, mechanical, one-to-one dependence. Law does not automatically adjust itself to every new change of technics. The economic need must be felt and then man must change and adjust his laws accordingly. To achieve this adjustment is the difficult and painful purpose of social struggles. It is the quintessence and aim of all political strife and of all great revolutions in history. The fight for new juridical principles is necessary to form a new system of production adapted to the enormous modern development of technics.

Technics as the productive force is the basis of society. In primitive society, the natural conditions play the chief role in determining the system of production. In the course of history technical implements are gradually improved by almost imperceptible steps. Natural science, by investigating the forces of nature, develops into the important productive force. All the technicalities in developing and applying science, including the most abstract mathematics, which is to all appearances an exercise in pure reason, may therefore be reckoned as belonging to the technical basis of the system of production, to what Marx called the "productive forces." In this way material (in a physical sense) and mental elements are combined in what Marxists call the material basis of society.

The Marxian conception of history puts living man in the center of its scheme of development, with all his needs and all his powers, both physical and mental. His needs are not only the needs of his stomach (though these are the most imperative), but also the needs of head and heart. In human labor, the material, physical side and the mental side are inseparable; even the most primitive work of the savage is brain work as much as muscle work. Only because under capitalism the division of labor separated these two parts into functions of different classes, thereby maiming the capacities of both, did intellectuals come to overlook their organic and social unity. In this way, we may understand their erroneous view of Marxism as a theory dealing exclusively with the material side of life.

## II

Marx's historical materialism is a method of interpretation of history. History consists of the deeds, the actions of men. What induces these actions? What determines the activity of man?

Man, as an organism with certain needs which must be satisfied as conditional to his existence, stands within a surrounding nature, which offers the means to satisfy them. His needs and the impressions of the surrounding world are the impulses, the stimuli to which his actions are the responses, just as with all living beings. In the case of man, consciousness is interposed between stimulus and action. The need as it is directly felt, and the surrounding world as observed through the senses, work upon the mind, produce thoughts, ideas and aims, stimulate the will and put the body in action.

The thoughts and aims of an active man are considered by him as the cause of his deeds; he does not ask where these thoughts come from. This is especially true because thoughts, ideas and aims are not as a rule derived from the impressions by conscious reasoning, but are the product of subconscious spontaneous processes in our minds. For the members of a social class, life's daily experiences condition, and the needs of the class mold, the mind into a definite line of feeling and thinking, to produce definite ideas about what is useful and what is good or bad. The conditions of a class are life necessities to its members, and they consider what is good or bad for them to be good or bad in general. When conditions are ripe men go into action and shape society according to their ideas. The rising French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, feeling the necessity of laissez-faire laws, of personal freedom for the citizens, proclaimed freedom as a slogan, and in the French Revolution conquered power and transformed society.

The idealistic conception of history explains the events of history, as caused by the ideas of men. This is wrong, in that it confuses the abstract formula with a special concrete meaning, overlooking the fact that, for example, the French bourgeoisie wanted only that freedom that was good for itself. Moreover, it omits the real problem, the origin of these ideas. The materialistic conception of history explains these ideas as caused by the social needs arising from the conditions of the existing system of production. According to this view, the events of history are determined by forces arising out of the existing economic system. The historical materialist's interpretation of the French Revolution in terms of a rising capitalism which required a modern state with legislation adapted to its needs does not contradict the conception that the Revolution was brought about by the desire of the citizen for freedom from restraint; it merely goes further to the root of the problem. For historical materialism contends that rising capitalism produced in the bourgeoisie the conviction that economic and political freedom was necessary, and thus awakened the passion and enthusiasm that enabled the bourgeoisie to conquer political power and to transform the state.

In this way Marx established causality in the development of human society. It is not a causality outside of man, for history is at the same time the product of human action. Man is a link in the chain of cause and effect; necessity in social development is a necessity achieved by means of human action. The material world acts upon man, determines his consciousness, his ideas, his will, his actions, and so he reacts upon the world and changes it. To the traditional middle-class mode of thinking this is a contradiction – the source of endless misrepresentations of Marxism. Either the actions of man determine history, they say, and then there is no necessary causality because man is free; or if, as Marxism contends, there is causal necessity it can only work as a fatality to which man has to submit without being able to change. For the materialistic mode of thinking, on the contrary, the human mind is bound by a strict causal dependence to the whole of the surrounding world.

The thoughts, the theories, the ideas, that former systems of society have thus wrought in the human mind, have been preserved for posterity, first in material form in subsequent historical activity. But they have also been preserved in a spiritual form. The ideas, sentiments, passions and ideals that incited former generations to action were laid down in literature, in science, in art, in religion and in philosophy. We come into direct contact with them in the study of the humanities. These sciences belong to the most im-



portant fields of research for Marxian scholars; the differences between the philosophies, the literatures, the religions of different peoples in the course of centuries can only be understood in terms of the molding of men's minds through their societies, that is, through their systems of production. It has been said above, that the effects of society upon the human mind have been deposited in material form in subsequent historical events. The chain of cause and effect of past events which proceeds from economic needs to new ideas, from new ideas to social action, from social action to new institutions and from new institutions to new economic systems is complete and ever reenacted. Both original cause and the final effect are economic and we may reduce the process to a short formula by omitting the intermediate terms which involve the activity of the human mind. We can then illustrate the truth of Marxian principles by showing how, in actual history, effect follows cause. In analyzing the present, however, we see numerous causal chains which are not finished. When society works upon the minds of men, it often produces ideas, ideals and theories which do not succeed in arousing men to social or class-motivated action, or fail to bring about the necessary political, juridical and economic changes. Frequently too, we find that new conditions do not at once impress themselves upon the mind. Behind apparent simplicities lurk complexities so unexpected that only a special instrument of interpretation can uncover them at the moment. Marxian analysis enables us to see things more clearly. We begin to see that we are inside of a process fraught with converging influences, in the midst of the slow ripening of new ideas and tendencies which constitute the gradual preparation of revolution. This is why it is important to the present generation, which today has to frame the society of tomorrow, to know how Marxian theory may be of use to them, in understanding the events and in determining their own conduct. Hence a more thorough consideration of how society acts upon the mind will be necessary here.

### III

The human mind is entirely determined by the surrounding real world. We have already said that this world is not restricted to physical matter only, but comprises everything that is objectively observable. The thoughts and ideas of our fellow men, which we observe by means of their conversation or by our reading are included in this real world. Although fanciful objects of these thoughts such as angels, spirits or an Absolute Idea do not belong to it, the belief in such ideas is a real phenomenon, and may have a notable influence on historical events.

The impressions of the world penetrate the human mind as a continuous stream. All our observations of the surrounding world, all experiences of our lives are continually enriching the contents of our memories and our subconscious minds.

The recurrence of nearly the same situation and the same experience leads to definite habits of action; these are accompanied by definite habits of thought. The frequent repetition of the same observed sequence of phenomena is retained in the mind and produces an expectation of the sequence. The rule that these phenomena are always connected in this way is then acted upon. But this rule – sometimes elevated to a law of nature – is a mental abstraction of a multitude of analogous phenomena, in which differences are neglected, and agreement emphasized. The names by which we denote definite similar parts of the world of phenomena indicate conceptions which likewise are formed by taking their common traits, the general character of the totality of these phenomena, and abstracting them from their differences. The endless diversity, the infinite plurality of all the unimportant, accidental traits, are neglected and the important, essential characteristics are preserved. Through their origin as habits of thought these concepts become fixed, crystallized, invariable; each advance in clarity of thinking consists in more exactly defining the concepts in terms of their properties, and in more exactly formulating the rules. The world of experience, however, is continually expanding and changing; our habits are dis-

turbed and must be modified, and new concepts substituted for old ones. Meanings, definitions, scopes of concepts all shift and vary.

When the world does not change very much, when the same phenomena and the same experiences always return, the habits of acting and thinking become fixed with great rigidity; the new impressions of the mind fit into the image formed by former experience and intensify it. These habits and these concepts are not personal but collective property; they are not lost with the death of the individual. They are intensified by the mutual intercourse of the members of the community, who all are living in the same world, and they are transferred to the next generation as a system of ideas and beliefs, an ideology – the mental store of the community. Where for many centuries the system of production does not change perceptibly, as for example in old agricultural societies, the relations between men, their habits of life, their experience of the world remain practically the same. In every new generation living under such a static productive system the existing ideas, concepts and habits of thinking will petrify more and more into a dogmatic, unassailable ideology of eternal truth.

When, however, in consequence of the development of the productive forces, the world is changing, new and different impressions enter the mind which do not fit in with the old image. There then begins a process of rebuilding, out of parts of old ideas and new experiences. Old concepts are replaced by new ones, former roles and judgments are upset, new ideas emerge. Now every member of a class or group is affected in the same way and at the same time. Ideological strife arises in connection with the class struggles and is eagerly pursued, because all the different individual lives are linked in diverse ways with the problem of how to pattern society and its system of production. Under modern capitalism, economic and political changes take place so rapidly that the human mind can hardly keep pace with them. In fierce internal struggles, ideas are revolutionized, sometimes rapidly, by spectacular events, sometimes slowly, by continuous warfare against the weight of the old ideology. In such a process of unceasing transformation, human consciousness adapts itself to society, to the real world.

Hence Marx's thesis that the real world determines consciousness does not mean that contemporary ideas are determined solely by contemporary society. Our ideas and concepts are the crystallization, the comprehensive essence of the whole of our experience, present and past. What was already fixed in the past in abstract mental forms must be included with such adaptations of the present as are necessary. New ideas thus appear to arise from two sources: present reality and the system of ideas transmitted from the past. Out of this distinction arises one of the most common objections against Marxism. The objection, namely, that not only the real material world, but in no less degree, the ideological elements – ideas, beliefs and ideals – determine man's mind and thus his deeds, and therefore the future of the world. This would be a correct criticism if ideas originated by themselves, without cause, or from the innate nature of man, or from some supernatural spiritual source. Marxism, however, says that these ideas also must have their origin in the real world under social conditions.

As forces in modern social development, these traditional ideas hamper the spread of new ideas that express new necessities. In taking these traditions into account we need not leave the realm of Marxism. For every tradition is a piece of reality, just as every idea is itself a part of the real world, living in the mind of men; it is often a very powerful reality as a determinant of men's actions. It is a reality of an ideological nature that has lost its material roots because the former conditions of life which produced them have since disappeared. That these traditions could persist after their material roots have disappeared is not simply a consequence of the nature of the human mind, which is capable of preserving in memory or subconsciously the impressions of the past. Much more important is what may be termed the social memory, the perpetuation of collective ideas, systematized in the form of prevailing beliefs and ideologies, and transferred to future generations in oral communications, in books, in literature, in art and in education. The surrounding world which determines the mind consists not only of the contemporary economic world, but also of all the ideological influences derived from continuous intercourse with our

fellow men. Hence comes the power of tradition, which in a rapidly developing society causes the development of the ideas to lag behind the development of society. In the end tradition must yield to the power of the incessant battering of new realities. Its effect upon social development is that instead of permitting a regular gradual adjustment of ideas and institutions in line with the changing necessities, these necessities when too strongly in contradiction with the old institutions, lead to explosions, to revolutionary transformations, by which lagging minds are drawn along and are themselves revolutionized.

## Lenin As Philosopher

John Harper, **Lenin als Philosoph. Kritische Betrachtung der philosophischen Grundlagen des Leninismus**, Amsterdam 1938.<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

The Russian Revolution was fought under the banner of Marxism. In the years of propaganda before the First World War the Bolshevist Party came forward as the champion of Marxist ideas and tactics. It worked along with the radical tendencies in the socialist parties of Western Europe, which were also steeped in Marxian theory, whereas the Menshevist Party corresponded rather to the reformist tendencies over here. In theoretical controversies the Bolshevist authors, besides the so-called Austrian and Dutch schools of Marxism, came forward as the defenders of rigid Marxist doctrines. In the Revolution the Bolsheviks, who now had adopted the name of Communist Party, could win because they put up as the leading principle of their fight the class war of the working masses against the bourgeoisie. Thus Lenin and his party, in theory and practice, stood as the foremost representatives of Marxism.

Then, however, a contradiction appeared. In Russia a system of state-capitalism consolidated itself, not by deviating from but by following Lenin's ideas (e.g. in his **State and Revolution**). A new dominating and exploiting class came into power over the working class. But at the same time Marxism was fostered, and proclaimed the fundamental basis of the Russian state. In Moscow a "Marx-Engels Institute" was founded that collected with care and reverence all the well-nigh lost and forgotten works and manuscripts of the masters and published them in excellent editions. Whereas the Communist Parties, directed by the Moscow Comintern, refer to Marxism as their guiding doctrine, they meet with more and more opposition from the most advanced workers in Western Europe and America, most radically from the ranks of Council-communism. These contradictions, extending over all important problems of life and of the social struggle, can be cleared up only by penetrating into the deepest, i.e. the philosophical, principles of what is called Marxism in these different trends of thought.

Lenin gave an exposition of his philosophical ideas in his work **Materialism and Empirio-Criticism** that appeared in Russian in 1908, and was published in 1927 in German and in English translations. Some of the Russian socialist intellectuals about 1904 had taken an interest in modern Western natural philosophy, especially in the ideas of Ernst Mach, and tried to combine these with Marxism. A kind of "Machism", with Bogdanov, Lenin's most intimate collaborator, and Lunatcharsky as spokesmen, developed as an influential trend in the socialist party. After the first revolution the strife flared up

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<sup>2</sup> Lenin as Philosopher was first published in Amsterdam as **Lenin als Philosoph. Kritische Betrachtung der philosophischen Grundlagen des Leninismus**, under the pseudonym John Harper, by the *Bibliothek der Rätekorrespondenz*, No.1. Ausgabe der Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten in Holland, in 1938. This German-language edition was distributed in the US by **International Council Correspondence**. The first French translation was published in 1947 in **Internationalisme** the journal of the Gauche Communiste de France. The first English translation was published by **New Essays** in New York in 1948.

again, connected as it was with all the various tactical and practical differences in the socialist movement. Then Lenin took a decisive stand against these deviations and, aided by Plechanov, the ablest representative of Marxian theory among the Russians, soon succeeded in destroying the influences of Machism in the socialist party.

In the *Introduction* to the German and English editions of Lenin's book, Deborin – at that time the official interpreter of Leninism, but afterwards disgraced – exalts the importance of the collaboration of the two foremost theoretical leaders for the definite victory of true Marxism over all anti-marxist, reformist trends.

“Lenin's book is not only an important contribution to philosophy, but it is also a remarkable document of an intra-party struggle which was of utmost importance in strengthening the general philosophical foundations of Marxism and Leninism, and which to a great degree determined the subsequent growth of philosophical thought amongst the Russian Marxists ... Unfortunately, matters are different beyond the borders of the Soviet Union ... where Kantian scholasticism and positivistic idealism are in full bloom.”

Since the importance of Lenin's book is so strongly emphasised here, it is necessary to make it the subject of a serious critical study. The doctrine of Party-Communism of the Third International cannot be judged adequately unless their philosophical basis is thoroughly examined.

Marx's studies on society, which for a century now have been dominating and shaping the workers' movement in increased measure, took their form from German philosophy. They cannot be understood without a study of the spiritual and political developments of the European world. Thus it is with other social and philosophical trends and with other schools of materialism developing besides Marxism. Thus it is, too, with the theoretical ideas underlying the Russian revolution. Only by comparing these different systems of thought as to their social origin and their philosophical contents can we arrive at a well-founded judgement.

## Chapter 1 Marxism

The evolution of Marx's ideas into what is now called Marxism can be understood only in connection with the social and political developments of the period in which they arose. It was the time when industrial capitalism made its entry into Germany. This brought about a growing opposition to the existing aristocratic absolutism. The ascending bourgeois class needed freedom of trade and commerce, favourable legislation, a government sympathetic to its interests, freedom of press and assembly, in order to secure its needs and desires in an unhampered fight. Instead it found itself confronted with a hostile regime, an omnipotent police, and a press censorship which suppressed every criticism of the reactionary government. The struggle between these forces, which led to the revolution of 1848, first had to be conducted on a theoretical level, as a struggle of ideas and a criticism of the prevailing system of ideas. The criticism of the young bourgeois intelligentsia was directed mainly against religion and Hegelian philosophy.

Hegelian philosophy in which the self-development of the “Absolute Idea” creates the world and then, as developing world, enters the consciousness of man, was the philosophical guise suited to the Christian world of the epoch of the “Restoration” after 1815. Religion handed down by past generations served, as always, as the theoretical basis and justification for the perpetuation of old class relations. Since an open political fight was still impossible, the struggle against the feudal oligarchy had to be conducted in a veiled form, as an attack on religion. This was the task of the group of young intellectuals of 1840 among whom Marx grew up and rose to a leading position.

While still a student Marx admitted, although reluctantly, the force of the Hegelian method of thought, dialectics, and made it his own. That he chose for his doctor's thesis the comparison of the two great materialistic philosophers of ancient Greece, Democritus and Epicurus, seems to indicate, however, that in the deep recesses of sub-consciousness

Marx inclined to materialism. Shortly thereafter he was called upon to assume the editorship of a new paper founded by the oppositional Rheinisch bourgeoisie in Cologne. Here he was drawn into the practical problems of the political and social struggle. So well did he conduct the fight that after a year of publication the paper was banned by the State authorities. It was during this period that Feuerbach made his final step towards materialism. Feuerbach brushed away Hegel's fantastic system, turned towards the simple experiences of everyday life, and arrived at the conclusion that religion was a man-made product. Forty years later Engels still spoke fervently of the liberating effect that Feuerbach's work had on his contemporaries, and of the enthusiasm it aroused in Marx, despite critical reservations. To Marx it meant that now instead of attacking a heavenly image they had to come to grips with earthly realities. Thus in 1843 in his essay *Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie (A Criticism of the Hegelian Philosophy of Law)* he wrote:

“As far as Germany is concerned the criticism of religion is practically completed; and the criticism of religion is the basis of all criticism ... The struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion ... Religion is the moan of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness, the demand to abandon the illusions about their condition is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion therefore contains potentially the criticism of the Vale of Tears whose aureole is religion. Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers which adorned the chain, not that man should wear his fetters denuded of fanciful embellishment, but that he should throw off the chain and break the living flower ... Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of Law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.”

The task confronting Marx was to investigate the realities of social life. In collaboration with Engels during their stay in Paris and Brussels, he made a study of the French Revolution and French socialism, as well as of English economy and the English working-class movement, which led towards further elaboration of the doctrine known as “Historical Materialism”. As the theory of social development by way of class struggles we find it expounded in **La misère de la philosophie** (written in 1846 against Proudhon's **Philosophie de le misère**), in **The Communist Manifesto** (1848), and in the oft-quoted preface to **Zur Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie** (1859).

Marx and Engels themselves refer to this system of thought as materialism, in opposition to the “idealism” of Hegel and the Young Hegelians. What do they understand by materialism? Engels, discussing afterwards the fundamental theoretical problems of Historical Materialism in his **Anti-Dühring** and in his booklet on Feuerbach, states in the latter publication:

“The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being...Those who asserted the primacy of the spirit to nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world-creation in some form or other, comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism.”

That not only the human mind is bound up with the material organ of the brain, but that, also, man with his brain and mind is intimately connected with the rest of the animal kingdom and the inorganic world, was a self-evident truth to Marx and Engels. This conception is common to all “schools of materialism.” What distinguishes Marxist materialism from other schools must be learned from its various polemic works dealing with practical questions of politics and society. Then we find that to Marx materialistic thought was a working method. It was meant to explain all phenomena by means of the material world, the existing realities. In his writings he does not deal with philosophy, nor does he formulate materialism in a system of philosophy; he is utilising it as a method for the study of the world, and thus demonstrates its validity. In the essay quoted above, for example, Marx does not demolish the Hegelian philosophy of Law by philosophical disputations, but through an annihilating criticism of the real conditions in Germany.

In the materialist method philosophical sophistry and disputations around abstract concepts are replaced by the study of the real world. Let us take a few examples to elucidate this point. The statement “Man proposes, God disposes” is interpreted by the theologian from the point of view of the omnipotence of God. The materialist searches for the cause of the discrepancy between expectations and results, and finds it in the social effects of commodity exchange and competition. The politician debates the desirability of freedom and of socialism; the materialist asks: from what individuals or classes do these demands spring, what specific content do they have, and to what social need do they correspond? The philosopher, in abstract speculations about the essence of time, seeks to establish whether or not absolute time exists. The materialist compares clocks to see whether simultaneousness or succession of two phenomena can be established unmistakably.

Feuerbach had preceded Marx in using the materialist method, insofar as he pointed out that religious concepts and ideas are derived from material conditions. He saw in living man the source of all religious thoughts and concepts. “Der Mensch ist, was er isst” (Man is what he eats) is a well-known German pun summarising his doctrine. Whether his materialism would be valid, however, depended on whether he would be successful in presenting a clear and convincing explanation of religion. A materialism that leaves the problem obscure is insufficient and will fall back into idealism. Marx pointed out that the mere principle of taking living man as the starting point is not enough. In his theses on Feuerbach in 1845 he formulated the essential difference between his materialistic method and Feuerbach’s as follows:

“Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence (das menschliche Wesen). But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relationships” (Thesis 6). “His work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis. The fact, however, that the secular foundation lifts itself above itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictions of this secular basis. The latter itself, therefore, must first be understood in its contradictions, and then, by the removal of the contradiction, must be revolutionised in practice” (Thesis 4).

In short, man can be understood only as a social being. From the individual we must proceed to society, and then the social contradictions out of which religion came forth, must be dissolved. The real world, the material, sensual world, where all ideology and consciousness have their origin, is the developing human society – with nature in the background, of course, as the basis on which society rests and of which it is a part transformed by man.

A presentation of these ideas may be found in the manuscript of **Die Deutsche Ideologie (The German Ideology)**, written in 1845 but not published. The part that deals with Feuerbach was first published in 1925 by Rjazanov, then chief of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow; the complete work was not published until 1932. Here the theses on Feuerbach are worked out at greater length. Although it is manifest that Marx wrote it down quite hurriedly, he nevertheless gave a brilliant presentation of all the essential ideas concerning the evolution of society, which later found their short expression, practically, in the proletarian propaganda pamphlet, **The Communist Manifesto** and, theoretically, in the preface to **Zur Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie (Critique of Political Economy)**.

**The German Ideology** is directed first of all against the dominant theoretical view which regarded consciousness as the creator, and ideas developing from ideas as the determining factors of human history. They are treated here contemptuously as “the phantoms formed in the human brain” that are “necessary sublimates of their material, empirically verifiable life process bound to material premises.” It was essential to put emphasis on the real world, the material and empirically-given world as the source of all ideology. But it was also necessary to criticise the materialist theories that culminated in Feuerbach. As a protest against ideology, the return to biological man and his principal needs is correct but it is not possible to find a solution to the question of how and why religious ideas originate if we take the individual as an abstract isolated being. Human society in its his-

torical evolution is the dominant reality controlling human life. Only out of society can the spiritual life of man be explained. Feuerbach, in his attempt to find an explanation of religion by a return to the “real” man did not find the real man, because he searches for him in the individual, the human being generally. From his approach the world of ideas cannot be explained. Thus he was forced to fall back on the ideology of universal human love. “Insofar as Feuerbach is a materialist,” Marx said, “he does not deal with history, and insofar as he considers history, he is not a materialist.”

What Feuerbach could not accomplish was accomplished by the Historical Materialism of Marx: an explanation of man’s ideas out of the material world. A brilliant survey of the historical development of society finds its philosophical summary in the sentence: “Men, developing their material production and their material intercourse along with this, their real existence, alter their thinking and the products of their thinking.” Thus, as relation between reality and thinking, materialism is in practice proven to be right. We know reality only through the medium of the senses. Philosophy, as theory of knowledge, then finds its basis in this principle: the material, empirically given world is the reality which determines thought.

The basic problem in the theory of knowledge (epistemology) was always: what truth can be attributed to thinking. The term “criticism of knowledge” (Erkenntniskritik) used by professional philosophers for this theory of knowledge, already implies a viewpoint of doubt. In his second and fifth theses on Feuerbach Marx refers to this problem and again points to the practical activity of man as the essential content of his life:

“The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking” (Thesis 2). “Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, appeals to sensuous perception (Anschauung), but he does not conceive sensuousness (die Sinnlichkeit) as a practical human-sensuous activity” Thesis 5).

Why practical? Because man in the first place must live. His bodily structure, his faculties and his abilities, and all his activity are adapted to this very end. With these he must assert himself in the external world, i.e. in nature, and as an individual in society. To these abilities belongs the activity of the organ of thought, the brain, and the faculty of thinking itself. Thinking is a bodily faculty. In every phase of life man uses his power of thought to draw conclusions from his experiences, on which expectations and hopes are built, and these conclusions regulate his behaviour and his actions. The correctness of his conclusions, the truth of his thinking, is shown by the very fact of his existence, since it is a condition for his survival. Because thinking is an efficient adaptation to life, it embodies truth, not for every conclusion, but in its general character. On the basis of his experiences man derives generalisations and rules, natural laws, on which his expectations are based. They are generally correct, as is witnessed by his survival. Sometimes, however, false conclusions may be drawn, with failure and destruction in their wake. Life is a continuous process of learning, adaptation, development. Practice is the unsparing test of the correctness of thinking.

Let us first consider this in relation to natural science. In the practice of this science, thought finds its purest and most abstract form. This is why philosophical scientists take this form as the subject of their deductions and pay little attention to its similarity to the thinking of everybody in his everyday activity. Yet thinking in the study of nature is only a highly developed special field in the entire social labour process. This labour process demands an accurate knowledge of natural phenomena and its integration into “laws of nature”, in order to utilise them successfully in the field of technics. The determination of these laws through observation of special phenomena is the task of specialists. In the study of nature it is generally accepted that practice, experiment, is the test of truth. Here, too, we find that the observed regularities, formulated as laws of nature, are generally fairly dependable guides to human practice; though they are frequently not entirely correct and often baffle expectation, they are improved constantly through the progress of sci-

ence, If, therefore, man at times was referred to as the “legislator of nature” it must be added that nature often disregards his laws and summons him to make better ones.

The practice of life, however, comprises much more than the scientific study of nature. The relation of the scientist to the world, despite his experiments, remains observational. To him the world is an external thing to look at. But in reality man deals with nature in his practical life by acting upon it and making it part of his existence. Man does not stand against nature as to an external alien world. By the toil of his hands man transforms the world, to such an extent that the original natural substance is hardly discernible, and in this process transforms himself too. Thus man himself builds his new world: human society, embedded in nature transformed into a technical apparatus. Man is the creator of this world. What meaning, then, has the question of whether his thinking embodies truth? The object of his thinking is what he himself produces by his physical and mental activities, and which he controls through his brain.

This is not a question of partial truths. Engels in his booklet on Feuerbach referred to the synthesising of the natural dye alizarin (contained in madder) as a proof of the truth of human thinking. This, however, proves only the validity of the chemical formula employed; it cannot prove the validity of materialism as against Kant’s “Thing-in-itself.” This concept, as may be seen from Kant’s preface to his **Criticism of Pure Reason**, results from the incapacity of bourgeois philosophy to understand the earthly origin of moral law. The “Thing-in-itself” is not refuted by chemical industry but by Historical Materialism explaining moral law through society. It was Historical Materialism that enabled Engels to see the fallacy of Kant’s philosophy, to prove the fallaciousness of which he then offered other arguments. Thus, to repeat, it is not a question of partial truths in a specific field of knowledge, where the practical outcome affirms or refutes them. The point in question is a philosophical one, namely, whether human thought is capable of grasping the deepest truth of the world. That the philosopher in his secluded study, who handles exclusively abstract philosophical concepts, which are derived in turn from abstract scientific concepts themselves formulated outside of practical life – that he, in the midst of this world of shadows, should have his doubts, is easily understood. But for human beings, who live and act in the practical everyday world, the question cannot have any meaning. The truth of thought, says Marx, is nothing but the power and mastery over the real world.

Of course this statement implies its counterpart: thinking cannot embody truth where the human mind does not master the world. When the products of man’s hand – as Marx expounded in **Das Kapital** – grow into a power over him, which he no longer controls and which in the form of commodity exchange and capital confronts him as an independent social being, mastering man and even threatening to destroy him, then his mind submits to the mysticism of supernatural beings and he doubts the ability of his thinking to distinguish truth. Thus in the course of past centuries the myth of supernatural heavenly truth unknowable to man overshadowed the materialistic practice of daily experiences. Not until society has evolved to a state where man will be able to comprehend all social forces and will have learned to master them – in communist society in short – will his thinking entirely correspond to the world. But already before, when the nature of social production as a fundamental basis of life and future development has become clear to man, when the mind – be it only theoretically at first – actually masters the world, our thinking will be fully true. That means that by the science of society as formulated by Marx, because now his thesis is fulfilled, materialism gains permanent mastery and becomes the only conformable philosophy. Thus Marxian theory of society in principle means a transformation of philosophy.

Marx, however, was not concerned with pure philosophy. “Philosophers have interpreted the world differently, but what matters is to change it,” he says in his last thesis on Feuerbach. The world situation pressed for practical action. At first inspired by the rising bourgeois opposition to absolutism, then strengthened by the new forces that emanated from the struggle of the English and French working class against the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels, through their study of social realities, arrived at the conclusion that the prole-



tarian revolution following on the heels of the bourgeois revolution would bring the final liberation of mankind. From now onward their activity was devoted to this revolution, and in “The Communist Manifesto” they laid down the first directions for the workers’ class struggle.

Marxism has since been inseparably connected with the class fight of the proletariat. If we ask what Marxism is, we must first of all understand that it does not encompass every thing Marx ever thought and wrote. The views of his earlier years, for instance, such as quoted above, are representative only in part; they are phases in a development leading toward Marxism. Neither was it complete at once; whereas the role of the proletarian class struggle and the aim of communism is already outlined in **The Communist Manifesto**, the theory of capitalism and surplus value is developed much later. Moreover, Marx’s ideas themselves, developed with the change of social and political conditions. The character of the revolution and the part played by the State in 1848, when the proletariat had only begun to appear, differed in aspect from that of later years at the end of the century, or today. Essential, however, are Marx’s new contributions to science. There is first of all the doctrine of Historical Materialism, the theory of the determination of all political and ideological phenomena, of spiritual life in general, by the productive forces and relations. The system of production, itself based on the state of productive forces, determines the development of society, especially through the force of the class struggle. There is, furthermore, the presentation of capitalism as a temporary historical phenomenon, the analysis of its structure by the theory of value and surplus value, and the explanation of its revolutionary tendencies through the proletarian revolution towards communism. With these theories Marx has enriched human knowledge permanently. They constitute the solid foundation of Marxism as a system of thought. From them further conclusions may be drawn under new and changed circumstances.

Because of this scientific basis, however, Marxism is more than a mere science. It is a new way of looking at the past and the future, at the meaning of life, of the world, of thought; it is a spiritual revolution, it is a new world-view, a new life-system. As a system of life Marxism is real and living only through the class that adheres to it. The workers who are imbued with this new outlook, become aware of themselves as the class of the future, growing in number and strength and consciousness, striving to take production into their own hands and through the revolution to become masters of their own fate. Hence Marxism as the theory of proletarian revolution is a reality, and at the same time a living power, only in the minds and hearts of the revolutionary working class.

Thus Marxism is not an inflexible doctrine or a sterile dogma of imposed truths. Society changes, the proletariat grows, science develops. New forms and phenomena arise in capitalism, in politics, in science, which Marx and Engels could not have foreseen or surmised. Forms of thought and struggle, that under former conditions were necessary must under later conditions give way to other ones. But the method of research which they framed remains up to this day an excellent guide and tool towards the understanding and interpretation of new events. The working class, enormously increased under capitalism, today stands only at the threshold of its revolution and, hence, of its Marxist development; Marxism only now begins to get its full significance as a living force in the working class. Thus Marxism itself is a living theory which grows, with the increase of the proletariat and with the tasks and aims of its fight.

## Chapter 2

### Middle-Class Materialism<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase “middle class” is here used as a translation for the German word “bürgerlich”. The more modern term used in Marxist discourse for this concept is “bourgeois” (i.e. relating to the capitalist or bourgeois class) in order to distinguish it from the rather imprecise term “middle class”, which is often used as a broad description for white-collar workers, professionals, the self-

Returning now to the political scene out of which Marxism emerged, it must be noted that the German revolution of 1848 did not bring full political power to the bourgeoisie. But after 1850 capitalism developed strongly in France and Germany. In Prussia the Progressive Party began its fight for parliamentarism, whose inner weakness became evident later when the government through military actions met the demands of the bourgeoisie for a strong national State. Movements for national unity dominated the political scene of Central Europe. Everywhere, with the exception of England where it already held power, the rising bourgeoisie struggled against the feudal absolutist conditions.

The struggle of a new class for power in State and society is at the same time always a spiritual struggle for a new world view. The old powers can be defeated only when the masses rise up against them or, at least, do not follow them any longer. Therefore it was necessary for the bourgeoisie to make the working masses its followers and win their adherence to capitalist society. For this purpose the old ideas of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants had to be destroyed and supplanted with new bourgeois ideologies. Capitalism itself furnished the means to this end.

The natural sciences are the spiritual basis of capitalism. On the development of these sciences depends the technical progress that drives capitalism forward. Science, therefore, was held in high esteem by the rising bourgeois class. At the same time this science freed them from the conventional dogmas embodying the rule of feudalism. A new outlook on life and on the world sprang up out of the scientific discoveries, and supplied the bourgeoisie with the necessary arguments to defy the pretensions of the old powers. This new world outlook it disseminated among the masses. To the peasant farm and the artisan workshop belong the inherited biblical faith. But as soon as the sons of the peasants or the impoverished artisans become industrial workers their mind is captured by capitalist development. Even those who remain in pre-capitalistic conditions are lured by the more liberal outlook of capitalist progress and become susceptible to the propaganda of new ideas.

The spiritual fight was primarily a struggle against religion. The religious creed is the ideology of past conditions; it is the inherited tradition which keeps the masses in submission to the old powers and which had to be defeated. The struggle against religion was imposed by the conditions of society; hence it had to take on varying forms with varying conditions. In those countries where the bourgeoisie had already attained full power, as for instance in England, the struggle was no longer necessary and the bourgeoisie paid homage to the established church. Only among the lower middle class and among the workers did more radical trends of thought find some adherence. In countries where industry and the bourgeoisie had to fight for emancipation they proclaimed a liberal, ethical Christianity in opposition to the orthodox faith. And where the struggle against a still powerful royal and aristocratic class was difficult, and required the utmost strength and exertion, the new world view had to assume extreme forms of radicalism and gave rise to middle-class materialism. This was so to a great extent in Central Europe; so it is natural that most of the popular propaganda for materialism (Moleschott, Vogt, Büchner), originated here, though it found an echo in other countries. In addition to these radical pamphlets, a rich literature popularising the modern scientific discoveries appeared, supplying valuable weapons in the struggle to free the masses of the citizens, the workers, and the peasants, from the spiritual fetters of tradition, and to turn them into followers of the progressive bourgeoisie. The middle-class intelligentsia – professors, engineers, doctors – were the most zealous propagandists of the new enlightenment.

The essence of natural science was the discovery of laws operating in nature. A careful study of natural phenomena disclosed recurring regularities which allowed for scientific predictions. The 17th century had already known the Galilean law of falling bodies and gravity, Kepler's laws of the planetary motions, Snell's law of the refraction of light, and Boyle's law of the gas pressure. Towards the end of the century came the discovery

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employed etc. Similarly when this text refers to "the middle class" it is referring to the bourgeoisie or capitalist class. (*Note by MIA*)

of the law of gravitation by Newton, which more than all preceding discoveries exerted a tremendous influence in the philosophical thought of the 18th and 19th centuries. Whereas the others were rules that were not absolutely correct, Newton's law of gravitation proved to be the first real exact law strictly dominating the motions of the heavenly bodies, which made possible predictions of the phenomena with the same precision with which they could be observed. From this the conception developed that all natural phenomena follow entirely rigid definite laws. In nature causality rules: gravity is the cause of bodies falling, gravitation causes the movements of the planets. All occurring phenomena are effects totally determined by their causes, allowing for neither free will, nor chance nor caprice.

This fixed order of nature disclosed by science was in direct contrast to the traditional religious doctrines in which God as a despotic sovereign arbitrarily rules the world and deals out fortune and misfortune as he sees fit, strikes his enemies with thunderbolts and pestilence and rewards others with miracles. Miracles are contradictory to the fixed order of nature; miracles are impossible, and all reports about them in the Bible are fables. The biblical and religious interpretations of nature belong to an epoch in which primitive agriculture prevailed under the overlordship of absolute despots. The natural philosophy of the rising bourgeoisie, with its natural laws controlling all phenomena, belongs to a new order of state and society where the arbitrary rule of the despot is replaced by laws valid for all.

The natural philosophy of the Bible, which theology asserts to be absolute, divine, truth is the natural philosophy of ignorance that has been deceived by outward appearances, that saw an immovable earth as the centre of the universe, and held that all matter was created and was perishable. Scientific experience showed, on the contrary, that matter which apparently disappeared (as for instance in burning) actually changes into invisible gaseous forms. Scales demonstrated that a reduction of the total weight did not occur in this process and that, therefore, no matter disappeared. This discovery was generalised into a new principle; matter cannot be destroyed, its quantity always remains constant, only its forms and combinations change. This holds good for each chemical element; its atoms constitute the building stones of all bodies. Thus science with its theory of the conservation of matter, of the eternity of nature, opposed the theological dogma of the creation of the world some 6,000 years ago.

Matter is not the only persistent substance science discovered in the transient phenomena. Since the middle of the 19th century the law known as the conservation of energy came to be regarded as the fundamental axiom of physics. Here, too, a fixed and far reaching order of nature was observed; in all phenomena changes of the form of energy take place: heat and motion, tension and attraction, electrical and chemical energy; but the total quantity never changes. This principle led to an understanding of the development of cosmic bodies, the sun and the earth, in the light of which all the assertions of theology appeared like the talk of a stuttering child.

Of even greater consequence were the scientific discoveries concerning man's place in the world. Darwin's theory of the origin of species, which showed the evolution of man from the animal kingdom, was in complete contradiction to all religious doctrines. But even before Darwin, discoveries in biology and chemistry revealed the organic identity of all human and living creatures with non-organic nature. The protoplasm, the albuminous substance of which the cells of all living beings are composed and to which all life is bound, consists of the same atoms as all other matter. The human mind, which was elevated into a part of divinity by the theological doctrine of the immortal soul, is closely bound up with the physical properties of the brain; all spiritual phenomena are the accompaniment to or the effect of material occurrences in the brain cells.

Middle-class materialism drew the most radical conclusions from these scientific discoveries. Everything spiritual is merely the product of material processes; ideas are the secretion of the brain, just as bile is the secretion of the liver. Let religion – said Buchner – go on talking about the fugacity of matter and the immortality of the mind; in reality it is the other way around. With the least injury of the brain everything spiritual disappears;

nothing at all remains of the mind when the brain is destroyed, whereas the matter, its carrier, is eternal and indestructible. All phenomena of life, including human ideas, have their origin in the chemical and physical processes of the cellular substance; they differ from non-living matter only in their greater complexity. Ultimately all their processes must be explained by the dynamics and movements of the atoms.

These conclusions of natural-science materialism, however, could not be upheld to their utmost consequences. After all, ideas are different from bile and similar bodily secretions; mind cannot be considered as a form of force or energy, and belongs in a quite different category. If mind is a product of the brain which differs from other tissues and cells only in degree of complexity, then, fundamentally, it must be concluded that something of mind, some sensation, is to be found in every animal cell. And because the cellular substance is only an aggregate of atoms, more complex but in substance not different from other matter, the conclusion must be that something of what we call mind is already present in the atom: in every smallest particle of matter there must be a particle of the "spiritual substance." This theory of the "atom-soul" we find in the works of the prominent zoologist Ernst Haeckel, energetic propagandist of Darwinism and courageous combater of religious dogmatism. Haeckel did not consider his philosophical views as materialism but called them monism – strangely enough since he extends the duality of mind-matter down to the smallest elements of the world.

Materialism could dominate the ideology of the bourgeois class only for a short time. Only so long as the bourgeoisie could believe that its society of private property, personal liberty, and free competition, through the development of industry, science and technique, could solve the life problems of all mankind – only so long could the bourgeoisie assume that the theoretical problems could be solved by science, without the need to assume supernatural and spiritual powers. As soon, however, as it became evident that capitalism could not solve the life problems of the masses, as was shown by the rise of the proletarian class struggle, the confident materialist philosophy disappeared. The world was seen again full of insoluble contradictions and uncertainties, full of sinister forces threatening civilisation. So the bourgeoisie turned to various kinds of religious creeds, and the bourgeois intellectuals and scientists submitted to the influence of mystical tendencies. Before long they were quick to discover the weaknesses and shortcomings of materialist philosophy, and to make speeches on the "limitations of science" and the insoluble "world-riddles."

Only a small number of the more radical members of the lower and middle classes, who clung to the old political slogans of early capitalism, continued to hold materialism in respect. Among the working class it found a fertile ground. The adherents of anarchism always were its most convinced followers. Socialist workers embraced the social doctrines of Marx and the materialism of natural science with equal interest. The practice of labour under capitalism, their daily experience and their awakening understanding of social forces contributed greatly towards undermining traditional religion. Then, to solve their doubts, the need for scientific knowledge grew, and the workers became the most zealous readers of the works of Bachmer and Haeckel. Whilst Marxist doctrine determined the practical, political and social ideology of the workers, a deeper understanding asserted itself only gradually; few became aware of the fact that middle-class materialism had long since been outdated and surpassed by Historical Materialism. This, by the way, concurs with the fact that the working-class movement had not yet reached beyond capitalism, that in practice the class struggle only tended to secure its place within capitalist society, and that the democratic solutions of the early middle class movements were accepted as valid for the working class also. The full comprehension of revolutionary Marxist theory is possible only in connection with revolutionary practice.

Wherein then, do middle-class materialism and Historical Materialism stand opposed to one another?

Both agree insofar as they are materialist philosophies, that is, both recognise the primacy of the experienced material world; both recognise that spiritual phenomena, sensation, consciousness, ideas, are derived from the former. They are opposite in that mid-

middle-class materialism bases itself upon natural science, whereas Historical Materialism is primarily the science of society. Bourgeois scientists observe man only as an object of nature, the highest of the animals, determined by natural Laws. For an explanation of man's life and action, they have only general biological Laws, and in a wider sense, the laws of chemistry, physics, and mechanics. With these means little can be accomplished in the way of understanding social phenomena and ideas. Historical Materialism, on the other hand, lays bare the specific evolutionary laws of human society and shows the interconnection between ideas and society.

The axiom of materialism that the spiritual is determined by the material world, has therefore entirely different meanings for the two doctrines. For middle-class materialism it means that ideas are products of the brain, are to be explained out of the structure and the changes of the brain substance, finally out of the dynamics of the atoms of the brain. For Historical Materialism, it means that the ideas of man are determined by his social conditions; society is his environment which acts upon him through his sense organs. This postulates an entirely different kind of problem, a different approach, a different line of thought, hence, also a different theory of knowledge.

For middle class materialism the problem of the meaning of knowledge is a question of the relationship of spiritual phenomena to the physico-chemical-biological phenomena of the brain matter. For Historical Materialism it is a question of the relationship of our thoughts to the phenomena which we experience as the external world. Now man's position in society is not simply that of an observing being: he is a dynamic force which reacts upon his environment and changes it. Society is nature transformed through labour. To the scientist, nature is the objectively given reality which he observes, which acts on him through the medium of his senses. To him the external world is the active and dynamic element, whilst the mind is the receptive element. Thus it is emphasised that the mind is only a reflection, an image of the external world, as Engels expressed it when he pointed out the contradiction between the materialist and idealist philosophies. But the science of the scientist is only part of the whole of human activity, only a means to a greater end. It is the preceding, passive part of his activity which is followed by the active part; the technical elaboration, the production, the transformation of the world by man.

Man is in the first place an active being. In the Labour process he utilises his organs and aptitudes in order to constantly build and remake his environment. In this procedure he not only invented the artificial organs we call tools, but also trained his physical and mental aptitudes so that they might react effectively to his natural environment as instruments in the preservation of life. His main organ is the brain whose function, thinking, is as good a physical activity as any other. The most important product of brain activity, of the efficient action of the mind upon the world is science, which stands as a mental tool next to the material tools and, itself a productive power, constitutes the basis of technology and so an essential part of the productive apparatus.

Hence Historical Materialism looks upon the works of science, the concepts, substances, natural Laws, and forces, although formed out of the stuff of nature, primarily as the creations of the mental Labour of man. Middle-class materialism, on the other hand, from the point of view of the scientific investigator, sees all this as an element of nature itself which has been discovered and brought to light by science. Natural scientists consider the immutable substances, matter, energy, electricity, gravity, the Law of entropy, etc., as the basic elements of the world, as the reality that has to be discovered. From the viewpoint of Historical Materialism they are products which creative mental activity forms out of the substance of natural phenomena.

This is one fundamental difference in the method of thinking. Another difference lies in dialectics which Historical Materialism inherited from Hegel. Engels has pointed out that the materialist philosophy of the 18th-century disregarded evolution; it is evolution that makes dialectic thinking indispensable. Evolution and dialectics since have often been regarded as synonymous; and the dialectic character of Historical Materialism is supposed to be rendered by saying that it is the theory of evolution. Evolution, however, was well known in the natural science of the 19th century. Scientists were well acquaint-

ed with the growth of the cell into a complete organism, with the evolution of animal species as expressed in Darwinism, and with the theory of evolution of the physical world known as the law of entropy. Yet their method of reasoning was undialectic. They believed the concepts they handled to be fixed objects, and considered their identities and opposites as absolutes. So the evolution of the world as well as the progress of science brought out contradictions, of which many examples have been quoted by Engels in his **Anti-Dühring**. Understanding in general and science in particular segregate and systematise into fixed concepts and rigid laws what in the real world of phenomena occurs in all degrees of flux and transition. Because language separates and defines groups of phenomena by means of names, all items falling into a group, as specimens of the concept, are considered similar and unchangeable. As abstract concepts, they differ sharply, whereas in reality they transform and merge into one another. The colours blue and green are distinct from each other but in the intermediary nuances no one can say where one colour ends and the other begins. It cannot be stated at what point during its life cycle a flower begins or ceases to be a flower. That in practical life good and evil are not absolute opposites is acknowledged every day, just as that extreme justice may become extreme injustice. Judicial freedom in capitalist development manifests itself as actual slavery. Dialectic thinking is adequate to reality in that in handling the concepts it is aware that the finite cannot fully render the infinite, nor the static the dynamic, and that every concept has to develop into new concepts, even into its opposite. Metaphysical, undialectical thinking, on the other hand, leads to dogmatic assertions and contradictions because it views conceptions formulated by thought as fixed, independent entities that make up the reality of the world. Natural science proper, surely, does not suffer much from this shortcoming. It surmounts difficulties and contradictions in practice insofar as it continually revises its formulations, increases their richness by going into finer details, improves the qualitative distinctions by mathematical formulas, completes them by additions and corrections, thereby bringing the picture ever closer to the original, the world of phenomena. The lack of dialectic reasoning becomes disturbing only when the scientist passes from his special field of knowledge towards general philosophical reasonings, as is the case with middle-class materialism.

Thus, for instance, the theory of the origin of species often leads to the notion that the human mind, having evolved from the animal mind, is qualitatively identical with the latter and has only increased in quantity. On the other hand, the qualitative difference between the human and the animal mind, a fact of common experience, was raised by theological doctrine, in enunciating the immortality of the soul, into an absolute anti-thesis. In both cases there is a lack of dialectic thinking according to which a similarity in original character, when through the process of growth the increasing quantitative difference turns into qualitative difference – the so-called inversion of quantity into quality – requires new names and characteristics, without leading to complete antithesis and loss of affinity.

It is the same metaphysical, non dialectic thinking to compare thought, because it is the product of brain processes with such products of other organs as bile; or to assume that mind, because it is a quality of some material substance, must be a characteristic quality of all matter. And especially, to think that because mind is something other than matter, it must belong to an absolutely and totally different world without any transition, so that a dualism of mind and matter, reaching down to the atoms, remains sharp and unbridgeable. To dialectic thinking mind simply is a concept incorporating all those phenomena we call spiritual, which, thus, cannot reach beyond their actual appearance in the lowest living animals. There the term mind becomes questionable, because the spiritual phenomena disappear gradually into mere sensibility, into the more simple forms of life. “Mind” as a characteristic existing quality, a separate something, which either is or is not there, does not exist in nature; mind is just a name we attach to a number of definite phenomena, some perceived clearly, others uncertainly, as spiritual.

Life itself offers a close analogy. Proceeding from the smallest microscopic organisms to still smaller invisible bacteria and viruses, we finally come to highly complicated albuminous molecules that fall within the sphere of chemistry. Where in this succession

living matter ceases to exist and dead matter begins cannot be determined; phenomena change gradually, become simplified, are still analogous and yet already different. This does not mean that we are unable to ascertain demarcation lines; it is simply the fact that nature knows of no boundaries. A condition of quality “life”, which either is or is not present, does not exist in nature: again life is a mere name, a concept we form in order to comprehend the endless variety of gradations in life phenomena. Because middle-class materialism deals with life and death, matter and mind, as if they were genuine realities existing in themselves, it is compelled to work with hard and sharp opposites, whereas nature offers an immense variety of more or less gradual transitions.

Thus the difference between middle-class materialism and Historical Materialism reaches down to basic philosophical views. The former, in contradiction to the comprehensive and perfectly realistic Historical Materialism is illusionary and imperfect – just as the bourgeois class movement, of which it was the theory, represented an imperfect and illusionary emancipation, in contrast to the complete and real emancipation by way of the proletarian class struggle.

The difference between the two systems of thought shows itself practically in their position towards religion. Middle-class materialism intended to overcome religion. However, a certain view arisen out of social life cannot be vanquished and destroyed merely by refuting it with argumentation; this means posing one point of view against another: and every argument finds a counter-argument. Only when it is shown why, and under what circumstances such a view was necessary, can it be defeated by establishing the transient character of these conditions. Thus the disproof of religion by natural science was effective only insofar as the primitive religious beliefs were concerned, where ignorance about natural laws, about thunder and lightning, about matter and energy, led to all kinds of superstition. The theory of bourgeois society was able to destroy the ideologies of primitive agricultural economy. But religion in bourgeois society is anchored in its unknown and uncontrollable social forces; middle-class materialism was unable to deal with them. Only the theory of the workers’ revolution can destroy the ideologies of bourgeois economy. Historical Materialism explains the social basis of religion and shows why for certain times and classes it was a necessary way of thought. Only thus was its spell broken. Historical Materialism does not fight religion directly; from its higher vantage point it understands and explains religion as a natural phenomenon under definite conditions. But through this very insight it undermines religion and foresees that with the rise of a new society religion will disappear. In the same way Historical Materialism is able to explain the temporary appearance of materialist thought among the bourgeoisie, as well as the relapse of this class into mysticism and religious trends. In the same way, too, it explains the growth of materialist thought among the working class as being not due to any anti-religious argument but to the growing recognition of the real forces in capitalist society.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Dietzgen**

Middle-class materialism, when it came up in Western Europe in connection with the fight of the middle class for emancipation, was inevitable in practice; but as theory it was a retrogression compared with Historical Materialism. Marx and Engels were so far ahead that they saw it only as a backsliding into obsolete ideas of the 18th-century enlightenment. Because they saw so very clearly the weaknesses of the bourgeois political fight in Germany – while underrating the vitality of the capitalist system – they did not give much attention to the accompanying theory. Only occasionally they directed at it some contemptuous words, to refute any identification of the two kinds of materialism. During their entire lifetime their attention was concentrated upon the antithesis of their theory to the idealist systems of German philosophy, especially Hegel. Middle-class materialism, however, was somewhat more than a mere repetition of 18th-century ideas; the

enormous progress of the science of nature in the 19th century was its basis and was a source of vigour. A criticism of its foundations had to tackle problems quite different from those of post-Hegelian philosophy. What was needed was a critical examination of the fundamental ideas and axioms which were universally accepted as the results of natural science and which were in part accepted by Marx and Engels too.

Here lies the importance of the writings of Joseph Dietzgen. Dietzgen, an artisan, a tanner living in Rhineland, who afterwards went to America and there took some part in the working-class movement, was a self-made socialist philosopher and author. In social and economic matters he considered himself a pupil of Marx, whose theory of value and capital he entirely comprehended. In philosophy he was an independent original thinker, who set forth the philosophical consequences of the new world view. Marx and Engels, though they honourably mentioned him as “the philosopher of the proletariat” did not agree with everything he wrote; they blamed his repetitions, often judged him confused, and it is doubtful whether they ever understood the essence of his arguments, far removed from their own mode of thinking. Indeed, whereas Marx expresses the new truth of his views as precise statements and sharp logical arguments, Dietzgen sees his chief aim in stimulating his readers to think for themselves on the problem of thinking. For this purpose he repeats his arguments in many forms, exposes the reverse of what he stated before, and assigns to every truth the limits of its truth, fearing above all that the reader should accept any statement as a dogma. Thus he teaches practical dialectics. Whereas in his later writings he is often vague, his first work **The nature of human brain work** (1869). and his later **A socialist’s excursions into the field of epistemology** (1877), as well as some smaller pamphlets are brilliant contributions to the theory of knowledge. They form an essential part in the entirety of the world-view that we denote by the name of Marxism. The first problem in the science of human knowledge: the origin of ideas, was answered by Marx in the demonstration that they are produced by the surrounding world. The second, adjoining problem, how the impressions of the surrounding world are transformed into ideas, was answered by Dietzgen. Marx stated what realities determine thought; Dietzgen established the relation between reality and thought. Or, in the words of Herman Gorter, Marx pointed out what the world does to the mind, Dietzgen pointed out what the mind does itself.

Dietzgen proceeds from the experiences of daily life, and especially from the practice of natural science. “Systematisation is the essence, is the general expression of all activity of science. Science seeks only by our understanding to bring the objects of the world into order and system.” Human mind takes from a group of phenomena what is common to them (e.g. from a rose, a cherry, a setting sun their colour), leaves out their specific differences, and fixes their general character (red) in a concept; or it expresses as a rule what repeats itself (e.g. stones fall to the earth). The object is concrete, the spiritual concept is abstract. “By means of our thinking we have, potentially, the world twofold, outside as reality, inside, in our head, as thoughts, as ideas, as an image. Our brains do not grasp the things themselves but only their concept, their general image. The endless variety of things, the infinite wealth of their characters, finds no room in our mind”. For our practical life indeed, in order to foresee events and make predictions, we do not want all the special cases but only the general rule. The antithesis of mind and matter, of thought and reality, of spiritual and material, is the antithesis of abstract and concrete, of general and special.

This, however, is not an absolute antithesis. The entire world, the spiritual as well as the visible and tangible world, is object to our thinking. Things spiritual do exist, they too are really existing, as thoughts; thus they too are materials for our brain activity of forming concepts. The spiritual phenomena are assembled in the concept of mind. The spiritual and the material phenomena, mind and matter together, constitute the entire real world, a coherent entity in which matter determines mind and mind, through human activity, determines matter. That we call this total world a unity means that each part exists only as a part of the whole, is entirely determined by the action of the whole, that, hence, its qualities and its special character consists in its relations to the rest of the world. Thus also



mind, i.e. all things spiritual, is a part of the world's totality, and its nature consists in the totality of its relations to the world's whole, which we then, as the object of thinking, oppose to it under the name material, outer, or real world. If now we call this material world primary and the mind dependent, it means for Dietzgen simply that the entirety is primary and the part secondary. Such a doctrine where spiritual and material things, entirely interdependent, form one united world, may rightly be called monism.

This distinction between the real world of phenomena and the spiritual world of concepts produced by our thinking is especially suitable to clear up the nature of scientific conceptions. Physics has discovered that the phenomena of light can be explained by rapid vibrations propagated through space, or, as the physicists said, through space-filling ether. Dietzgen quotes a physicist stating that these waves are the real nature of light whereas all that we see as light and colour is only an appearance. "The superstition of philosophical speculation here" Dietzgen remarks "has led us astray from the path of scientific induction, in that waves rushing through the ether with a velocity of 40,000 (German) miles per second, and constituting the true nature of light are opposed to the real phenomena of light and colour. The perversion becomes manifest where the visible world is denoted as a product of the human mind, and the ether vibrations, disclosed by the intellect of the most acute thinkers, as the corporeal reality." It is quite the reverse, Dietzgen says: the coloured world of phenomena is the real world, and the ether waves are the picture constructed by the human mind out of these phenomena.

It is clear that in this antagonism we have to do with different meanings about the terms truth and reality. The only test to decide whether our thoughts are truth is always found in experiment, practice, experience. The most direct of experiences is experience itself; the experienced world of phenomena is the surest of all things, the most indubitable reality. Surely we know phenomena that are only appearances. This means that the evidences of different senses are not in accordance and have to be fitted in a different way in order to get a harmonious world-picture. Should we assume the image behind the mirror, which we can see but cannot touch, as a common reality, then such a confused knowledge would bring practical failure. The idea that the entire world of phenomena should be nothing but appearance could make sense only if we assumed another source of knowledge – e.g. a divine voice speaking in us – to be brought in harmony with the other experiences.

Applying now the same test of practice to the physicist we see that his thinking is correct also. By means of his vibrating ether he not only explained known phenomena but even predicted in the right way a number of unsuspected new phenomena. So his theory is a good, a true theory. It is truth because it expresses what is common to all these experiences in a short formula that allows of easy deduction of their endless diversity. Thus the ether ways must be considered a true picture of reality. The ether itself of course cannot be observed in any way; observation shows only phenomena of light.

How is it then, that the physicists spoke of the ether and its vibrations as a reality? Firstly as a model, conceived by analogy. From experience we know of waves in water and in the air. If now we assume such waves in another, finer substance filling the universe, we may transfer to it a number of well-known wave phenomena, and we find these confirmed. So we find our world of reality growing wider. With our spiritual eyes we see new substances, new particles moving, invisibly because they are beyond the power of our best microscopes, but conceivable after the model of our visible coarser substances and particles.

In this way, however, with ether as a new invisible reality, the physicists landed into difficulties. The analogy was not perfect: the world-filling ether had to be assigned qualities entirely different from water or air; though called a substance it deviated so completely from all known substances that an English physicist once compared it somehow to pitch. When it was discovered that light waves were electromagnetic vibrations, it ensued that the ether had to transmit electric and magnetic phenomena too. For this role, a complicated structure had to be devised, a system of moving, straining, and spinning contrivances, that might be used as a coarse model, but which nobody would call the true reality

of this finest of fluids filling space between the atoms. The thing became worse when in the beginning of the 20th century the theory of relativity came up and denied the existence of ether altogether. Physicists then grew accustomed to deal with a void space, equipped however with qualities expressed in mathematical formulas and equations. With the formulas the phenomena could be computed in the right way; the mathematical symbols were the only thing remaining. The models and images were non-essential, and the truth of a theory does not mean anything more than that the formulas are exact.

Things became worse still when phenomena were discovered that could be represented only by light consisting of a stream of so called quanta, separated particles hurrying through space. At the same time the theory of vibrations held the field too, so that according to needs one theory or the other had to be applied. Thus two strictly contradictory theories both were true, each to be used within its group of phenomena. Now at last physicists began to suspect that their physical entities, formerly considered the reality behind the phenomena, were only images, abstract concepts, models more easily to comprehend the phenomena. When Dietzgen half a century before wrote down his views which were simply a consequence of Historical Materialism, there was no physicist who did not firmly believe in the reality of world ether. The voice of a socialist artisan did not penetrate into the university lecture rooms. Nowadays it is precisely the physicists who assert that they are dealing with models and images only, who are continually discussing the philosophical basis of their science, and who emphasise that science aims solely at relations and formulas through which future phenomena may be predicted from former ones.

In the word phenomenon "that which appears", there is contained an oppositeness to the reality of things; if we speak of "appearings" there must be something else that appears. Not at all, says Dietzgen; phenomena appear (or occur), that is all. In this play of words we must not think, of course, of what appears to me or to another observer; all that happens, whether man sees it or not, is a phenomenon, and all these happenings form the totality of the world, the real world of phenomena. "Sense perception shows an endless transformation of matter ... The sensual world, the universe at any place and any time is a new thing that did not exist before. It arises and passes away, passes and arises under our hands. Nothing remains the same, lasting is only perpetual change, and even the change varies ... The (middle class) materialist, surely, asserts the permanency, eternity, indestructibility of matter ... Where do we find such eternal, imperishable formless matter? In the real world of phenomena we meet only with forms of perishable matter ... Eternal and imperishable matter exists practically, in reality, only as the sum total of its perishable phenomena." In short, matter is an abstraction.

Whereas philosophers spoke of the essence of things, physicists spoke of matter, the lasting background behind the changing phenomena. Reality, they say, is matter; the world is the totality of matter. This matter consists of atoms, the invariable ultimate building stones of the universe, that by their various combinations impose the impression of endless change. On the model of surrounding hard objects, as an extension of the visible world of stones, grams, and dust, these still smaller particles were assumed to be the constituents of the entire world, of the fluid water as well as of the formless air. The truth of the atomic theory has stood the test of a century of experience, in an endless number of good explanations and successful predictions. Atoms of course are not observed phenomena themselves: they are inferences of our thinking. As such they share the nature of all products of our thinking their sharp limitation and distinction, their precise equality belongs to their abstract character. As abstractions they express what is general and common in the phenomena, what is necessary for predictions.

To the physicist, of course, atoms were no abstractions but real small invisible particles, sharply limited, exactly alike for every chemical element, with precise qualities and precise mass. But modern science destroyed also this illusion. Atoms, firstly, have been dissolved into still smaller particles, electrons, protons, neutrons, forming complicated systems, some of them inaccessible to any experiment, mere products of the application of logic. And these smallest elements of the world cannot be considered as precisely de-

finer particles finding themselves at definite points in space. Modern physical theory assigns to each of them the character of a wave motion extending over infinite space. When you ask the physicist what it is that moves in such waves his answer consists in pointing to a mathematical equation. The waves are no waves of matter, of course; that which moves cannot even be called a substance, but is rendered most truly by the concept of probability; the electrons are probability-waves. Formerly a particle of matter in its invariable weight presented a precisely defined quantity, its mass. Now mass changes with the state of motion and cannot be separated accurately from energy; energy and mass change into one another. Whereas formerly these concepts were neatly separated and the physical world was a clear system without contradiction, proudly proclaimed the real world, physics nowadays, when it assumes its fundamental concepts matter, mass, energy as fixed, well separated entities, is plunged into a crowd of unsolvable contradictions. The contradiction is cleared up when we simply consider them as what they are: abstractions serviceable to render the ever extending world of phenomena.

The same holds for the forces and laws of nature. Here Dietzgen's expositions are not adequate and somewhat confused, probably because at the time the German physicists used the word "Kraft" indiscriminately for force and for energy. A simple practical case, such as gravity, may easily clear up the matter. Gravity, physicists said, is the cause of falling. Here cause is not something preceding the effects and different from it; cause and effect are simultaneous and express the same thing in different words. Gravity is a name that does not contain anything more than the phenomena themselves; in denoting them by this word we express the general, the common character of all the phenomena of falling bodies. More essential than the name is the law; in all free movements on earth there is a constant downward acceleration. Writing the law as a mathematical formula we are able to compute the motions of all falling or thrown bodies. It is not necessary now to keep the phenomena all in our head; to know future cases it is sufficient to know the law, the formula. The law is the abstract concept our mind constructed out of the phenomena. As a law it is a precise statement that is assumed to hold good absolutely and universally, whereas the phenomena are diversified and always show deviations which we then ascribe to other, accessory, causes.

Newton extended the law of gravity to the celestial motions. The orbit of the moon was "explained" by showing that it was pulled by the same force that made stones fall onto earth; so the unknown was reduced to the known. His law of universal gravitation is expressed by a mathematical formula through which astronomers are able to compute and predict the celestial phenomena; and the result of countless predictions shows the truth of the law. Scientists now called the gravitation the "cause" of all these motions; they saw it as a reality floating in space, a kind of mysterious imp, a spiritual being called a "force" directing the planets in their course; the law was a command somehow present in nature which the bodies had to obey. In reality there is nothing of the sort; "cause" means the short summary or compendium, "effect" means the diverse multitude of phenomena. The formula binding the acceleration of each particle to its distance from the other ones, expresses in a short form exactly the same course of things as does a lengthy description of the actual motions. Gravitation as a separate something pulling and steering the bodies does not exist in nature but only in our head. As a mysterious command permeating space it has no more real existence than has Snell's law of refraction as a command to the light rays on how they have to go. The course of the light rays is a direct mathematical consequence of the different velocity of light in different substances; instead of by the command of a law it can equally well be represented by the principle that light, as it were an intelligent being, chooses the quickest route to reach the aim. Modern science, in an analogous way, in the theory of relativity renders the motions in space not by gravitational force, but by prescribing the shortest road (the "geodesic") in the distorted four-dimensional space-time. Now again physicists came to consider this warped space as a "reality" behind the phenomena. And again it must be stated that, like Newton's gravitation, it is only a mental abstraction, a set of formulas, better than the former, hence more true, because it represents more phenomena which the old law could not explain.

What is called “causality” in nature, the reign of natural laws-sometimes one even speaks of the “law of causality,” i.e. in nature the law holds that laws hold – simply comes down to the fact that the regularities we find in the phenomena are expressed in the form of prescripts absolutely valid. If there are limitations, exceptions, conditions, they are expressly stated as such, and we try to represent them by correcting the law; this shows that its character is meant to be absolute. We are confident that it holds for future use; and if it fails, as often happens, or does not hold precisely, we represent this by additional “causes.”

We often speak of the inexorable course of events, or of the necessity in nature; or we speak of “determinism,” as if this course had been determined and fixed by somebody in advance. All these human names chosen to express the antithesis to the arbitrariness and free choice in human actions, denoting a kind of compulsion, are a source of much confusion and cannot render exactly the character of nature. Rather we say that the entire nature at this moment depends entirely on what it was a moment before. Or perhaps better still: that nature in its totality and history is a unity, remaining identically itself in all its variations. All parts are interrelated as parts of one whole. and the laws of nature are the humanly imperfect expressions of these interrelations. Necessity can be ascribed to them solely in a partial imperfect degree; absolute necessity may be affirmed for the entirety of nature only. Phenomena may be imperfectly rendered by our laws; but we are convinced that they go on in a way which can be ultimately reduced to simple description, and could not be otherwise than they are.

The significance of Marxism is often expressed, by saying that it presents, for the first time, a natural science of society. Hence society, just as nature, is determined by natural laws; society develops not by chance or incidentally but according to an overall necessity. And since society is human activity, then human action and choice and will are not arbitrary, not chance, but determined by social causes. What this means will now be clear. The totality of the world, consisting of nature and society, is a unity, at any moment determined by what it was before, each part entirely determined by the action of the rest. It remains the same identical world, in which the happenings of one part, of mankind or part of it, depend entirely on the surrounding world, nature and society together. Here too we try to find regularities, rules and laws, and we devise names and concepts; but seldom do we ascribe to them a separate reality. Whereas a physicist easily believes in gravitation as a real something floating in space around the sun and the planets, it is more difficult to believe in “progress” or “liberty” hovering round us and floating over society as real beings that conduct man like a ruling fate. They too are abstractions constructed by the mind out of partial relations and dependencies. With their “necessity” it is as with all necessity in nature. Its basis is the necessity that man must eat to live. In this popular saying the fundamental connection of man with the entirety of the world is expressed.

Through the immense complication of social relations “laws” of society are much more difficult to discern, and they cannot now be put into the form of exact formulas. Still more than in nature they may be said to express not the future but our expectation about the future. It is already a great thing that, whereas former thinkers were groping in the dark, now some main lines of development have been discovered. The importance of Marxism as a science of society is not so much the truth of the rules and expectations it formulated, but rather what is called its method: the fundamental conviction that everything in the world of mankind is directly connected with the rest. Hence for every social phenomenon we have to look for the material and social factors of reality on which it depends.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Mach**

In the later part of the 19th century, middle-class society [\[1\]](#) turned away more and more from materialism. The bourgeoisie, through the development of capitalism, asserted its

social mastery; but the rise of the working-class movements proclaiming as its aim the annihilation of capitalism, led to misgivings as to the durability of the existing social system. World and future appeared full of unsolvable problems. Since the visible, material forces threatened mischief, the ruling class, to quiet its apprehensions and assure its self-reliance, turned to the belief in the superior rule of spiritual powers. Mysticism and religion gained the upper hand, and still more so in the 20th century, after the First World War.

Natural scientists form a part of middle-class society; they are in continual contact with the bourgeoisie and are influenced by its spiritual trends. At the same time, through the progress of science, they have to deal with new problems and contradictions appearing in their concepts. It is not clear philosophical insight that inspires the criticism of their theories, but rather the immediate needs of their practical study of nature. This criticism then takes its form and colour from the anti-materialist trends in the ruling class. Thus modern natural philosophy exhibits two characters: critical reflection over the principles of science, and a critical mood towards materialism. Just as in the time of Hegel, valuable progress in the theory of knowledge is garbed in mystical and idealistic forms.

Critics of the prevailing theories came forward, in the last part of the 19th century, in different countries: e.g. Karl Pearson in England, Gustav Kirchhoff and Ernst Mach in Germany, Henri Poincaré in France, all exhibiting, though in different ways, the same general trend of thought. Among them the writings of Mach have doubtless exerted the greatest influence upon the ideas of the next generation.

Physics, he says, should not proceed from matter, from the atoms, from the objects; these are all derived concepts. The only thing we know directly is experience, and all experience consists in sensations, sense impressions (*Empfindungen*). By means of our world of concepts, in consequence of education and intuitive custom, we express every sensation as the action of an object upon ourselves as subject: I see a stone. But freeing ourselves from this custom we perceive that a sensation is a unit in itself, given directly without the distinction of subject and object. Through a number of similar sensations I come to the distinction of an object, and I know of myself too only by a totality of such sensations. Since object and subject are built up of sensations it is better not to use a name that points to a person experiencing them. So we prefer the neutral name of "elements", as the simplest basis of all knowledge.

Ordinary thinking here finds the paradox that the hard immutable stone, the prototype of the solid "thing" should be formed by, should "consist of" such transient subjective stuff as sensations. On closer examination, however, we see that what constitutes the thing, its qualities, are simply this and nothing else. First its hardness is nothing but the totality of a number of often painful sensations; and secondly its immutability is the sum total of our experiences that on our returning to the same spot the same sensations repeat themselves. So we expect them as a fixed interconnection in our sensations. In our knowledge of the thing there is nothing that has not somehow the character of a sensation. The object is the sum total of all sensations at different times that, through a certain constancy of place and surroundings considered as related, are combined and denoted by a name. It is no more; there is no reason to assume with Kant a "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*) beyond this sensation-mass; we cannot even express in words what we would have to think of it. So the object is formed entirely by sensations; it consists merely of sensations. Mach opposes his views to the current physical theory by the words:

"Not bodies produce sensations, but element-complexes (sensation-complexes) constitute the bodies. When the physicist considers the bodies as the permanent reality, the 'elements' as the transient appearance, he does not realise that all 'bodies' are only mental symbols for element-complexes (sensation-complexes)" (*Analyse der Empfindungen*, p.23).

The same holds for the subject. What we denote by "I myself" is a complex of recollections and feelings, former and present sensations and thoughts connected by continuity of memory, bound to a special body, but only partly permanent.

"What is primary is not myself but the elements ... The elements constitute the myself ... The elements of consciousness of one person are strongly connected, those of different persons are only weakly and passingly connected. Hence everybody thinks he knows only of himself as an indivisible and independent unity" (*Analyse der Empfindungen*, p.19).

In his work *Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung* (1883) (*The Development of Mechanics*) he writes along the same lines:

"Nature consists of the elements given by the senses. Primitive man first takes out of them certain complexes of these elements that present themselves with a certain stability and are most important to him. The first and oldest words are names for 'things'. Here abstraction is made from the surroundings, from the continual small changes of these complexes, which are not heeded because they are not important. In nature there is no invariable thing. The thing is an abstraction, the name is a symbol for a complex of elements of which we neglect the changes. That we denote the entire complex by one word, one symbol, is done because we want to awaken at once all impressions that belong together.... The sensations are no 'symbols of things'. On the contrary the 'thing' is a mental symbol for a sensation-complex of relative stability. Not the things, the bodies, but colours, sounds, pressures, times (what we usually call sensations) are the true elements of the world. The entire process has an economical meaning. In picturing facts we begin with the ordinary more stable and habitual complexes, and afterwards for correction add what is unusual" (p.454).

In this treatment of the historical development of the science of mechanics he comes close to the method of Historical Materialism. To him the history of science is not a sequence of geniuses producing marvellous discoveries. He shows how the practical problems are first solved by the mental methods of common life, until at last they acquire their most simple and adequate theoretical expression. Ever again the economic function of science is emphasised.

"The aim of all science is to substitute and to save experiences through the picturing and the forecastings of facts by thoughts, because these pictures are more easily at hand than the experiences themselves and in many respects may stand for them" (p. 452). "When we depict facts by thoughts we never imitate them exactly, but only figure those sides that are important for us; we have an aim that directly or indirectly arose out of practical interests. Our pictures are always abstractions. This again shows an economic trend" (p.454).

Here we see science, specialised as well as common knowledge, connected with the necessities of life, as an implement of existence.

"The biological task of science is to offer a most perfect orientation to man in the full possession of his senses" (*Analyse der Empfindungen*, p.29).

For man, in order to react efficiently to the impressions of his surroundings in each situation, it is not necessary to remember all former cases of analogous situations with their results. He has only to know what results generally, as a rule, and this determines his actions. The rule, the abstract concept is the instrument ready at hand that saves the mental consideration of all former cases. What natural law states is not what will happen and must happen in nature, but what we expect will happen; and that is the very purpose they have to serve.

The formation of abstract concepts, of rules and laws of nature, in common life as well as in science, is an intuitive process, intended to save brain work, aiming at economy of thinking. Mach shows in a number of examples in the history of science how every progress consists in greater economy, in that a larger field of experiences is compiled in a

shorter way, so that in the predictions a repetition of the same brain operations is avoided. "With the short lifetime of man and his limited memory, notably knowledge is only attainable by the utmost economy of thinking." So the task of science consists in "representing facts as completely as possible by a minimum of brainwork" (**Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung**, p.461).

According to Mach the principle of economy of thinking determines the character of scientific investigation. What science states as properties of things and laws about atoms are in reality relations between sensations. The phenomena between which the law of gravitation establishes relations, consist in a number of visual auditory or tactile impressions; the law says that they occur not by chance, and predicts how we may expect them. Of course we cannot express the law in this form; it would be inappropriate, unsuitable to practice because of its complexity. But as a principle, it is important to state that every law of nature deals with relations between phenomena. If now contradictions appear in our conceptions about atoms and world ether, they lie not in nature but in the forms we choose for our abstractions in order to have them available in the most tractable way. The contradiction disappears when we express the results of our research as relations between observed quantities, ultimately between sensations.

The unconcerned scientific view is easily obscured if a point of view fit for a limited aim is made the basis of all considerations. This is the case, says Mach, "when all experiences are considered as the effects of an outer world upon our consciousness. An apparently inextricable tangle of metaphysical difficulties results. The phantom disappears directly if we take matters in their mathematical form, and make it clear to ourselves that the establishment of functions and relations alone avails, and that the mutual dependence of experiences is the only thing we wish to know" (**Analyse der Empfindungen**, p.28). It might seem that Mach here expresses some doubts about the existence of an outer world independent of man. In countless other sentences, however, he speaks in a clear way of surrounding nature in which we have to live and which we have to investigate. It means that such an outer world as is accepted by physics and by ordinary opinion, the world of matter and forces as producing the phenomena, leads us into contradictions. The contradictions can be removed only if we return to the phenomena and instead of speaking words and abstract terms express our results as relations between observations. This is what was afterwards called Mach's principle: if we ask whether a statement has a meaning and what is its meaning, we have to look for what experiments may test it. It has shown its importance in modern times, first in discussions on time and space in the theory of relativity, and then in the understanding of atomic and radiation phenomena. Mach's aim was to find a broader field of interpretation for physical phenomena. In daily life the solid bodies are most adequate sensation-complexes, and mechanics, the science of their motions, was the first well developed part of physics. But this reason does not justify our establishing the form and science of atoms as the pattern for the entire world. Instead of explaining heat, light, electricity, chemistry, biology, all in terms of such small particles, every realm should develop its own adequate concepts.

Yet there is a certain ambiguity in Mach's expressions on the outer world, revealing a manifest propensity towards subjectivism, corresponding to the general mystical trend in the capitalist world. Especially in later years he liked to discover cognate trends everywhere, and gave praise to idealistic philosophies that deny the reality of matter. Mach did not elaborate his views into a concise coherent system of philosophy with all consequences well developed. His aim was to give critical thoughts, to stimulate new ideas, often in paradoxes sharply pointed against prevailing opinions, without caring whether all his statements were mutually consistent and all problems solved. His was not a philosopher's mind constructing a system, but a scientist's mind, presenting his ideas as a partial contribution to the whole, feeling as part of a collectivity of investigators, sure that others will correct his errors and will complete what he left unachieved. "The supreme philosophy of a natural scientist" he says elsewhere "is to be content with an incomplete world view and to prefer it to an apparently complete but unsatisfactory system" (**Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung**, p.437).

Mach's tendency to emphasise the subjective side of experience appears in that the immediately given elements of the world, which we call phenomena, are denoted as sensations. Surely this means at the same time a deeper analysis of the phenomena; in the phenomenon that a stone falls are contained a number of visual sensations combined with the memory of former visual and spatial sensations. Mach's elements, the sensations, may be called the simplest constituents of the phenomena. But when he says: "Thus it is true that the world consists of our sensations" (*Analyse der Empfindungen*, p.10) he means to point to the subjective character of the elements of the world. He does not say "my" sensations; solipsism (the doctrine that I myself only am existing) is entirely foreign to him and is expressly refuted; "I myself" is itself a complex of sensations. But where he speaks of fellow-men in relation to the world of sensations, he is not entirely clear.

"Just as little as I consider red and green as belonging to an individual body, so little I make an essential difference – from this point of view of general orientation – between my sensations and another's sensations. The same elements are mutually connected in many 'myself's' as their nodal points. These nodal points, however, are nothing perennial, they arise and disappear and change continually" (*Analyse der Empfindungen*, p.294).

Here it must be objected that "red" and "green" as belonging to more bodies are not the simple sensational elements of experience, but themselves already abstract concepts. It seems that Mach here replaces the abstract concepts body and matter by other abstract concepts, qualities and colours, that as realities appear in my and in another's sensations. And when he calls my sensation and another's analogous sensation the same element, this word is taken in another sense.

Mach's thesis that the world consists of our sensations, expresses the truth that we knew of the world only through our sensations; they are the materials out of which we build our world; in this sense the world, including myself, "consists" of sensations only. At the same time, the emphasis upon the subjective character of sensations reveals the same middle-class trend of thought that we find in other contemporary philosophies. It is even more evident when he points out that these views may tend to overcome dualism, this eternal philosophical antithesis of the two worlds of matter and mind. The physical and the psychical world for Mach consist of the same elements, only in a different arrangement. The sensation green in seeing a leaf, with other sensations is an element of the material leaf; the same sensation, with others of my body, my eye, my reminiscences, is an element of "myself," of my psyche.

"Thus I see no antithesis of the physical and the psychical, but I see a simple identity relative to these elements. In the sensual realm of my consciousness every object is physical and psychical at the same time" (*Analyse der Empfindungen*, p36). "Not the stuff is different in both realms, but the tendency of the research" (p.14).

Thus dualism has disappeared; the entire world is a unity, consisting of the self-same elements; and these elements are not atoms but sensations. And in *Erkenntnis und Irrtum* he adds in a footnote

"There is no difficulty in building up every physical happening out of sensations, i.e. psychical elements; but there is no possibility of seeing how out of the usual physical elements, masses and motions, any psychical happening might be constructed ... We have to consider that nothing can be object of experience or science that cannot be in some way a part of consciousness" (p.12).

Here, in this footnote added later, in 1905, the well considered equivalence of both worlds, physical and psychical, the careful neutral characterising of the elements, is given up by calling them psychical, and the anti-materialistic spirit of the bourgeoisie breaks through. Since it is not our aim to criticise and to contest but only to set forth Mach's views we shall not enter into the tautology of the last sentence, that only what is in consciousness can be conscious and that hence the world is spiritual.

The new insight that the world is built up out of sensations as its elements, meets with difficulties, Mach says, because in our uncritical youth we took over a world view that had grown intuitively in the thousands of years of human development. We may break its spell by critically repeating the process through conscious philosophic reason-



ing. Starting with the most simple experiences, the elementary sensations, we construct the world step by step: ourselves, the outer world, our body as part of the outer world, connected with our own feeling, actions and reminiscences. Thus, by analogy, we recognise fellow-men as kindred, and so their sensations, disclosed by their sayings, may be used as additional material in constructing the world. Here Mach stops; further steps toward an objective world are not made.

That this is no accidental incompleteness is shown by the fact that we find the same thing with Carnap, one of the leading thinkers in modern philosophy of science. In his work **Der logische Aufbau der Welt (The logical construction of the world)** he sets himself the same task, but more thoroughly: if we start with knowing nothing, having however our full capacity of thinking, how can we establish ("constitute") the world with all its contents? I start with "my sensations" and make them into a system of "sayings" and "objects" ("object" is the name given to everything about which we may utter a saying); thus I establish physical and psychical "objects" and construct "the world" as an ordered system of my sensations. The problem of dualism of body and mind, of material and spiritual, finds here the same answer as with Mach: both consist of the same materials, the sensations, only ordered in a different way. The sensations of fellow-men, according to their statements, lead to a physical world exactly corresponding to mine. So we call it the "intersubjective world," common to all subjects; this is the world of natural science. Here Carnap stops, satisfied that dualism has been removed, and that any quest about the reality of the world is now shown to be meaningless, because "reality" cannot be tested in another way than by our experience, our sensations. So the chain of progressive constitutings is broken off here.

It is easy to see the limitedness of this world structure. It is not finished. The world thus constituted by Mach and by Carnap is a momentary world supposed unchanging. The fact that the world is in continuous evolution is disregarded. So we must go on past where Carnap stopped. According to our experience people are born and die; their sensations arise and disappear, but the world remains. When my sensations out of which the world was constituted, cease with my death, the world continues to exist. From acknowledged scientific facts I know that long ago there was a world without man, without any living being. The facts of evolution, founded on our sensations condensed into science, establish a previous world without any sensations. Thus from an intersubjective world common to all mankind, constituted as a world of phenomena by science, we proceed to the constitution of an objective world. Then the entire world view changes. Once the objective world is constituted, all phenomena become independent of observing man, as relations between parts of the world, The world is the totality of an infinite number of parts acting upon another; every part consists in the totality of its actions and reactions with the rest, and all these mutual actions are the phenomena, the object of science.

Man also is part of the world; we too are the totality of our mutual interactions with the rest, the outer world. Our sensations are now seen in a new light; they are the actions of the world upon us, only a small part of all happenings in the world but, of course, the only ones immediately given to us. When now man is building up the world out of his sensations, it is a reconstruction in the mind of an already objectively existing world. Again we have the world twofold, with all the problems of epistemology, the theory of knowledge. How they may be solved without metaphysics is shown by Historical Materialism.

If one asks why two such prominent philosophers of science omitted this obvious step toward the constitution of an objective world, the answer can only be found in their middle-class world view. Their instinctive tenet is anti-materialistic. By adhering to the intersubjective world they have won a monistic world system, the physical world consisting of psychical elements, so that materialism is refuted. We have here an instructive example how class views determine science and philosophy.

Summarising Mach's ideas we distinguish two steps. First the phenomena are reduced to sensations expressing their subjective character. Through the desire to find direct reality only in the sensations as psychical entities, he does not proceed by precise deduc-

tions to an objective world that obviously is matter of fact, though in a mystical vague way. Then comes a second step from the world of phenomena to the physical world. What physics, and by the popular dispersion of science also common opinion, assumes as the reality of the world – matter, atoms, energy, natural laws, the forms of space and time. myself – are all abstractions from groups of phenomena. Mach combines both steps into one by saying that things are sensation-complexes.

The second step corresponds to Dietzgen; the similarity here is manifest. The differences are accounted for by their different class views. Dietzgen stood on the basis of dialectic materialism, and his expositions were a direct consequence of Marxism. Mach, borne by the incipient reaction of the bourgeoisie, saw his task in a fundamental criticism of physical materialism by asserting dominance to some spiritual principle. There is a difference, moreover, in personality and aims. Dietzgen was a comprehensive philosopher, eager to find out how our brains work; the practice of life and science was to him material for the knowledge of knowledge. Mach was a physicist who by his criticisms tries to improve the ways in which brains worked in scientific investigations. Dietzgen's aim was to give clear insight into the role of knowledge in social development, for the use of the proletarian struggle. Mach's aim was an amelioration of the practice of physical research, for the use of natural science.

Speaking of practice, Mach expresses himself in different ways. At one time he sees no utility in employing the ordinary abstractions: "We know only of sensations, and the assumption of those nuclei (particles of matter) and their mutual actions as the assigned origins of sensations, shows itself entirely futile and superfluous" (**Analyse der Empfindungen**, p.10). Another time he does not wish to discredit the common view of unsophisticated "naive realism," because it renders great services to mankind in their common life. It has grown as a product of nature, whereas every philosophical system is an ephemeral product of art, for temporary aims. So we have to see "why and to what purposes we usually take one point of view, and why and to what purpose we temporarily give it up. No point of view holds absolutely; each imports for special aims only" (**Analyse der Empfindungen**, p.30).

In the practical application of his views upon physics Mach met with little success. His campaign was chiefly directed against matter and atoms dominating physical science. Not simply because they are and should be acknowledged as abstractions: "Atoms we can observe nowhere, they are as every substance products of thought" (**Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung**, p.463). But because they are impractical abstractions. They mean an attempt to reduce all physics to mechanics, to the motion of small particles, "and it is easy to see that by mechanical hypotheses a real economy of scientific thought cannot be achieved" (**Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung**, p.469). But his criticism of heat as a form of motion of small particles, already in 1873, and of electricity as a streaming fluid, found no echo among physicists. On the contrary these explanations developed in ever wider applications, and their consequences were confirmed ever again; atomic theory could boast of ever more results and was extended even to electricity in the theory of electrons. Hence the generation of physicists that followed him, while sympathising with his general views and accepting them, did not follow him in his special applications. Only in the new century, when atomic and electronic theory had progressed in a brilliant display, and when the theory of relativity arose, there appeared a host of glaring contradictions in which Mach's principles showed themselves the best guides in clearing up the difficulties.

## Chapter 5 Avenarius

The title of Lenin's work **Materialism and Empirio-Criticism** imposes the necessity to treat here the Zürich philosopher Richard Avenarius, because empirio-criticism was the name he gave to his doctrine, in many parts touching upon Mach's views. In his chief

work **Kritik der reinen Erfahrung (Criticism of pure experience)** he starts from simple experience, considers carefully what is certain about it, and then tests critically what man derived and assumed about the world and himself, what is tenable and justifiable in it and what is not.

In the natural world view, he explains, I find the following things. I find myself with thoughts and feelings within a surrounding world; to these surroundings belong fellow-men acting and speaking as I do, whom therefore I assume to be similar to myself. Strictly speaking, the interpretation of the movements and sounds connected with fellow-man as having a meaning just as mine is an assumption, not a real experience. But it is a necessary assumption without which a reasonable world view would be impossible: "the empiriocritical basic assumption of human equality." Then this is my world: first my own statements, e.g. "I see (or touch) a tree" (I call this an observation); I find it, repeatedly, back at the same spot, I describe it as an object in space; I call it "world," distinct from myself, or "outer world." Moreover I have remembrances (I call them ideas), somehow analogous to observations. Secondly there are fellow-men as part of the world. Thirdly there are statements of the fellow-men dealing with the same world; he speaks to me of the tree he, too, is seeing; what he says clearly depends on the "world." So far all is simple and natural, there is nothing more to have thoughts about, nothing of inner and outer, of soul and body.

Now, however, I say: my world is object of the observation of my fellow-man; he is the bearer of the observation, it is part of him; I put it into him, and so I do with his other experiences, thoughts, feelings, of which I know through his sayings. I say that he has an "impression" of the tree, that he makes himself a "conception" of the tree. An impression, a conception, a sensation of another person, however, is imperceptible to me; it finds no place in my world of experience. By so doing I introduce something that has a new character, that can never be experience to me, that is entirely foreign to all that so far was present. Thus my fellow-man has now got an inner world of observations, feelings, knowledge, and an outer world that he observes and knows. Since I stand to him as he stands to me I too have an inner world of sensations and feelings opposite to that which I call the "outer" world. The tree I saw and know is split into a knowledge and an object. This process is called "introjection" by Avenarius; something is introduced, introjected into man that was not present in the original simple empirical world conception.

Introjection has made a cleavage in the world. It is the philosophical fall of man. Before the fall he was in a state of philosophical innocence; he took the world as simple, single, as the senses show it; he did not know of body and soul, of mind and matter, of good and evil. The introjection brought dualism with all its problems and contradictions. Let us look at its consequences already at the lowest state of civilisation. On the basis of experience introjection takes place not only into fellow-man but also into fellow-animals, into fellow-things, into trees, rocks, etc: this is animism. We see a man sleeping; awakened he says he was elsewhere; so part of him rested here, part left the body temporarily. If it does not return, the first part is rotting away, but the other part appears in dreams, ghostly. So man consists of a perishable body and a non-perishing spirit. Such spirits also live in trees, in the air, in heaven. At a higher stage of civilisation the direct experience of spirits disappears; what is experienced is the outer world of senses; the inner spiritual world is super-sensual. "Experience as things and experience as knowledge now stand against one another, incomparable as a material and a spiritual world" (**Kritik der reinen Erfahrung**, p.110).

In this short summary of Avenarius's exposure of his views we omitted one thing that to him is an essential link in the chain. To the sayings of the fellow-man belongs not only himself and his body, but belongs in particular his brain. In my experience, Avenarius says, I have three dependencies: between the sayings of man and his outer world, between his brain and the outer world, and between his brain and his sayings. The second is a physical relation, part of the law of energy; the other two belong to logic.

Avenarius now proceeds first to criticise and then to eliminate introjection. That actions and sayings of fellow-men are related to the outer world is my experience. When I introduce it as ideas into him, it is into his brain that I introduce them. But no anatomical section can disclose them. "We cannot find any characteristic in the thought or in the brain to show that thought is a part or character of the brain" (**Kritik der reinen Erfahrung**, p.125). Man can say truly: I have brain; i.e. to the complex called "myself" brain belongs as a part; he can say truly: I have thoughts, i.e. to the complex "myself" thoughts belong as a part. But that does not imply that my brain have these thoughts. "Thought is thought of myself, but not therefore thought of my brain" (**Kritik der reinen Erfahrung**, p.131) "Brain is no lodging or site, no producer, no instrument or organ, no bearer or substratum, etc., of thinking ... Thinking is no resident or commander, no other side, no product either, not even a physiological function of the brain" (**Kritik der reinen Erfahrung**, p.132).

This imposing enumeration of usual psychological statements discloses why the brain was introduced. To refute our introjection of a mental world into fellow-man, Avenarius emphasises that its place would then be the brain, and the brain when anatomically dissected does not show it. Elsewhere he says: introjection means that my thinking puts itself at the place of fellow-man, hence my thinking combines with his brain, which can be done only in fantasy, not really. As arguments to serve as the basis of a philosophical system they are rather artificial and unconvincing. What is true and important is the disclosure of the fact of introjection, the demonstration that in our assumption that the world of fellow-man is the same kind of thing as my own, I introduce a second world of fantasy of another character, entirely outside my experience. It corresponds point for point with my own; its introduction is necessary; but it means a doubling of the world, or rather a multiplication of worlds not directly accessible to me, no possible part of my world of experience.

Now Avenarius sees as his task the building up of a world-structure free from introjection, by means of the simple data of experience. In his exposition he finds it necessary to introduce a special system of new names, characters and figures with algebraic expressions to designate our ordinary concepts. The laudable intention is this; not to be led astray by instinctive associations and meanings connected with ordinary language. But the result is an appearance of profoundness with an abstruse terminology that needs to be back-translated into our usual terms if we want to understand its meanings, and is a source of easy misunderstandings. His argument expressed thus by himself in a far more intricate way, may be summarised as follows:

We find ourselves, a relative constant, amidst a changing multitude of units denoted as "trees," "fellow-men," etc., which show many mutual relations, "Myself" and "surroundings" are found both at the same time in the same experience; we call them "central-part" and "counter-part" (Zentralglied und Gegenglied). That my fellow-man has thoughts, experiences and a world just as I have, is expressed in the statement that part of my surroundings is central-part itself. When in his brain variations take place (they belong to my world of experience), then phenomena occur in his world; his sayings about them are determined by processes in his brains. In my world of experience the outer world determines the change in his brain (a neurological fact); not my observed tree determines his observation (situated in another world), but the changes caused by the tree in his brain (both belonging to my world) determine his observation. Now my scientific experience declares my brain and his brain to change in the same way through impressions of the outer world; hence the resulting "his world" and my world must be of the same stuff. So the natural world conception is restored without the need of introjection. The argument comes down to this that our practice of assuming similar thoughts and conceptions as our own in fellow-men, which should be illicit notwithstanding our spiritual intercourse, should become valid as soon as we make a detour along the material brains. To which must be remarked that neurology may assume as a valid theory that the outer world produces the same changes in my brain and in another man's; but that, strictly keeping to my experience, I have never observed it and never can observe it.

Avenarius's ideas have nothing in common with Dietzgen; they do not deal with the connection between knowledge and experience. They are cognate to Mach's in that both proceed from experience, dissolve the entire world into experience and believe thus to have done away with dualism.

"If we keep 'complete experience' free from all adulteration, our world-conception will be free from all metaphysical dualism. To these eliminated dualisms belong the absolute antithesis of 'body' and 'mind,' of 'matter' and 'spirit,' in short of physical and psychical" (p.118). "Things physical, matter in its metaphysical absolute sense finds no place in purified 'complete experience,' because 'matter' in this conception is only an abstractum, indicating the entirety of counter-parts when abstraction is made of all 'central-parts'" (**Bemerkungen zum Begriff des Gegenstandes der Psychologie**, p.119).

This is analogous to Mach; but it is different from Mach in being built out into a finished and closed system. The equality of the experience of fellow-man, settled by Mach in a few words, is a most difficult piece of work to Avenarius. The neutral character of the elements of experience is pointed out with more precision by Avenarius; they are not sensations, nothing psychical, but simply something "found present" (Vorgefundenenes).

So he opposes prevailing psychology, that formerly dealt with the "soul," afterwards with "psychic functions," because it proceeds from the assumption that the observed world is an image within us. This, he says, is not a "thing found present," and neither can it be disclosed from what is "found present."

"Whereas I leave the tree before me as something seen in the same relation to me, as a thing 'found present' to me, prevailing psychology puts the tree as 'something seen' into man, especially into his brain" (**Bemerkungen zum Begriff des Gegenstandes der Psychologie**, p.45 Note). Introjection created this false object of psychology; it changed "before me" into "in me," what is "found present" into what is "imagined" it made "part of (real) surroundings" into "part of (ideal) thinking."

For Avenarius, instead, the material changes in the brain are the basis of psychology. He proceeds from the thesis taken over from the special science of physiology that all action of the surroundings produces changes in the brain and that these produce thoughts and sayings – and this certainly lies outside direct experience. It is a curious fact that Mach and Carnap too speak of observing (ideally, not really) the brain (by physical or chemical methods, or by a "brain-mirror") to see what happens there in connection with sensations and thoughts. It seems that middle-class<sup>[1]</sup> theory of knowledge cannot do without having recourse to this materialist conception. Avenarius is the most radical in this respect; for him psychology is the science of the dependence of behaviour upon the brain; what belongs to the actions of man is not psychical but physiological, mere brain processes. When we speak of ideas and ideologies, empirio-criticism speaks of changes in the central nervous system. The study of the great world-moving ideas in the history of mankind turns into the study of their nervous systems. Thus empirio-criticism stands close to middle-class materialism that also, in the problem of the determination of ideas by the surrounding world, appeals to brain-matter. In comparing Avenarius with Haeckel we should rather call him Haeckel reversed. Both can understand mind only as an attribute of the brain; since mind and matter, however, are fundamentally disparate, Haeckel attributes a particle of mind to every atom, whereas Avenarius entirely dispenses with the mind as a special something. But therefore the world for him takes instead the somewhat shadowy character – frightening to materialists and opening the gate to ideological interpretations – of consisting of "my experience" only.

Right as Avenarius may be that it is not strictly expedience, the equalisation of fellow-men with ourselves and the identity of their world with ours is an inevitably natural affair, whatever kind of spiritual or material terms are used to express it. The point is again that middle-class philosophy wants to criticise and correct human thinking instead of trying to understand it as a natural process.

In this context a general remark must be made. The essential character in Mach and Avenarius, as in most modern philosophers of science, is that they start from personal experience. It is their only basis of certainty; to it they go back when asked what is true. When fellow-men enter into the play, a kind of theoretical uncertainty appears, and with difficult reasonings their experience must be reduced to ours. We have here an effect of the strong individualism of the middle-class world. [1] The middle-class individual in his strong feeling of personality has lost social consciousness; he does not know how entirely he is a social being. In everything of himself, in his body, his mind, his life, his thoughts, his feeling, in his most simple experiences he is a product of society, human society made them all what they are. What is considered a purely personal sensation: I see a tree – can enter into consciousness only through the distinctness given to it by names. Without the inherited words to indicate things and species, actions and concepts, the sensation could not be expressed and conceived. Out of the indistinctive mass of the world of impressions the important parts come forward only when they are denoted by sounds and thus become separated from the unimportant mass. When Carnap constructs the world without using the old names, he still makes use of his capacity of abstract thinking. Abstract thinking, however, by means of concepts, is not possible without speech; speech and abstract thinking developed together as a product of society.

Speech could never have originated without human society for which it is an organ of mutual communication. It could develop in a society only, as an instrument in the practical activity of man. This activity is a social process that as the deepest foundation underlies all my experiences. The activity of fellow-man, inclusive his speaking, I experience as co-natural with my activity because they are parts of one common activity; thus we know our similarity. Man is first an active being, a worker, To live he must eat, i.e. he must seize and assimilate other things; he must search, fight, conquer. This action upon the world, a life-necessity, determines his thinking and feeling, because it is his chief life content and forms the most essential part of his experiences. It was from the first a collective activity, a social labour process. Speech originated as part of this collective process, as an indispensable mediator in the common work, and at the same time as an instrument of reflexive thinking needed in the handling of tools, themselves products of collective working. In such a way the entire world of experience of man bears a social character. The simple “natural world view” taken by Avenarius and other philosophers as their starting point, is not the spontaneous view of a primitive single man but, in philosophical garb, the outcome of a highly developed society.

Social development has, through the increasing division of labour, dissected and separated what before was a unit. Scientists and philosophers have the special task of investigating and reasoning so that their science and their conceptions may play their role in the total process of production – now the role chiefly of supporting and strengthening the existing social system. Cut off from the root of life, the social process of labour, they hang in the air and have to resort to artificial reasonings to find a basis. Thus the philosopher starts with imagining himself the only being on earth and suspiciously asks whether he can demonstrate his own existence; till he is happily reassured by Descartes “I think, so I exist.” Then along a chain of logical deductions he proceeds to ascertain the existence of the world and of fellow-men; and so the self-evident comes out along a wide detour – if it comes out. For the middle-class philosopher does not feel the necessity to follow up to the last consequences, to materialism, and he prefers to stay somewhere in-between, expressing the world in ideological terms.

So this is the difference: middle-class philosophy looks for the source of knowledge in personal meditation, Marxism finds it in social labour. All consciousness, all spiritual life of man, even of the most lonely hermit, is a collective product, has been made and shaped by the working community of mankind. Though in the form of personal consciousness – because man is a biological individual – it can exist only as part of the whole. People can have experiences only as social beings; though the contents are personally different, in their essence experiences are super-personal, society being their self-evident basis. Thus the objective world of phenomena which logical thought constructs

out of the data of experience, is first and foremost, by its origin already, collective experience of mankind.

## Chapter 6 Lenin

How Mach's idea could acquire importance in the Russian socialist movement, may be understood from social conditions. The young Russian intelligentsia, owing to the barbarous pre-capitalist conditions, had not yet, as in Western Europe, found its social function in the service of a bourgeoisie. So it had to aspire for the downfall of Czarism, and to join the socialist party. At the same time it stood in spiritual intercourse with the Western intellectuals and so took part in the spiritual trends of the Western world. Thus it was inevitable that efforts should be made to combine them with Marxism.

Of course Lenin had to oppose these tendencies. Marxian theory, indeed, can gain nothing essential from Mach. Insofar as a better understanding of human thinking is needed for socialists, this can be found in Dietzgen's work. Mach was significant because he deduced analogous ideas out of the practices of natural science, for the use of scientists. In what he has in common with Dietzgen, the reduction of the world to experience, he stopped midway and gave, imbued with the anti-materialist trends of his time, a vague idealistic form to his news. This could not be grafted upon Marxism. Here Marxist criticism was needed.

### The Criticism

Lenin, however in attacking Mach, from the start presents the antagonism in a wrong way. Proceeding from a quotation of Engels, he says:

“But the question here is not of this or that formulation of materialism, but of the opposition of materialism to idealism, of the difference between the two fundamental lines in philosophy. Are we to proceed from things to sensation and thought? Or are we to proceed from thought and sensation to things? The first line, i.e., the materialist line, is adopted by Engels. The second line, i.e., the idealist line, is adopted by Mach” (33-4). [\[1\]](#)

It is at once clear that this is not the true expression of the antithesis. According to materialism the material world produces thought, consciousness, mind, all things spiritual. That, on the contrary, the spiritual produces the material world, is taught by religion, is found with Hegel, but is not Mach's opinion. The expression “to proceed from ... to” is used to intermix two quite different meanings. Proceeding from things to sensations and thought means: things create thoughts. Proceeding – not from thoughts to things, as Lenin wrongly imputes to Mach but – from sensations to things, means that only through sensations we arrive at the knowledge of things. Their entire existence is built up out of sensations; to emphasise this truth Mach says: they consist of sensations.

Here the method followed by Lenin in his controversy makes its appearance he tries to assign to Mach opinions different from the real ones. Especially the doctrine of solipsism. Thus he continues:

“No evasions, no sophisms (a multitude of which we shall yet encounter) can remove the clear and indisputable fact that Ernst Mach's doctrine of things as complexes of sensations in subjective idealism and a simple rehash of Berkeleianism. If bodies are ‘complexes of sensations,’ as Mach says, or ‘combulations of sensations,’ as Berkeley said, it inevitably follows that the whole world is but my idea. Starting from such a premise it is impossible to arrive at the existence of other people besides oneself: it is the purest solipsism. Much as Mach, Avenarius, Petzoldt and the others may abjure solipsism, they cannot in fact escape solipsism without falling into howling logical absurdities.” (34)

Now, if anything can be asserted beyond any doubt about Mach and Avenarius, it is that their opinions are not solipsism fellow-men similar to myself, deduced with more or less stringent logic, are the basis of their world conception. Lenin, however, manifestly does not care about what Mach really thinks, but about what he should think if his logic were identical with Lenin's.

"From which there is only one possible inference, namely that the 'world consists only of my sensations.' The word 'our' employed by Mach instead of 'my' is employed illegitimately." (36)

That indeed is an easy way of arguing: what I write down as the opinion of my adversary he replaces unjustifiably by what he wrote down himself. Lenin, moreover, knows quite well that Mach speaks of the objective reality of the world, and himself gives numerous quotations to that effect. But he does not let himself be deceived as so many others were deceived by Mach.

"Similarly, even Mach ... frequently strays into a materialist interpretation of the word experience ... (171). Here nature is taken as primary and sensation and experience as products. Had Mach consistently adhered to his point of view in the mental questions of epistemology ... Mach's special 'philosophy' is here thrown overboard, and the author instinctively accepts the customary standpoint of the scientists." (172)

Would it not have been better if he had tried to understand in what sense it was that Mach assumes that things consist of sensations?

The "elements" also are an object of difficulty to Lenin. He summarises Mach's opinion on the elements in six theses, among which we find, in numbers 3 and 4:

"Elements are divided into the physical and the psychical: the latter is that which depends on the human nerves and the human organism generally; the former does not depend on them: the connection of physical elements and the connection of psychical elements, it is declared, do not exist separately from each other they exist only in conjunction." (49)

Anybody, even if acquainted only superficially with Mach, can see how he is rendered here in an entirely wrong and meaningless way. What Mach really says is this: every element, though described in many words, is an inseparable unity, which can be part of a complex that we call physical, but which combined with different other elements can form a complex that we call psychical. When I feel the heat of a flame, this sensation together with others on heat and thermometers and with visible phenomena combines into the complex "flame" or "heat," treated in physics. Combined with other sensations of pain and pleasure, with remembrances and with observations on nerves, the context belongs to physiology or psychology. "None (of these connections) is the only existing one, both are present at the same time" says Mach. For they are the same elements in different combinations. Lenin makes of this that the connections are not independent and only exist together. Mach does not separate the elements themselves as physical and psychical ones, nor does he distinguish a physical and psychical part in them the same element is physical in one context, psychical in another. If Lenin renders these ideas in such a sloppy and unintelligible way it is no wonder that he cannot make any sense out of it, and speaks of "an incoherent jumble of antithetical philosophical points of view." (49) If one does not take the pains or is unable to unravel the real opinions of his adversary and only snatches up some sentences to interpret them from one's own point of view, he should not wonder that nonsense comes out. This cannot be called a marxian criticism of Mach.

In the same faulty way he renders Avenarius. He reproduces a small summary by Avenarius of a first division of the elements: what I find present I partly call outer world (e.g. I see a tree), partly not (I remember a tree, trunk of a tree). Avenarius denotes them as thing-like (*sachhaft*) and thoughtlike (*gedankenhaft*) elements. Thereupon Lenin indignantly exclaims:

"At first we are assured that the 'elements' are something new, both physical and psychical at the same time then a little correction is surreptitiously inserted: instead of the crude, materialist differentiation of matter (bodies, things) and the psychical (sensations,



recollections, fantasies) we are presented with the doctrine of ‘recent positivism’ regarding elements substantial and elements mental.” (53)

Clearly he does not suspect how completely he misses the point.

In a chapter superscribed with the ironical title *Does man think with his brain?* Lenin quotes Avenarius’s statement that the brain is not the lodging, the site, etc. of thinking; thinking is no resident, no product, etc. of the brain. Hence: man does not think with his brain. Lenin has not perceived that Avenarius further on expresses clearly enough, though garbled in his artificial terminology, that the action of the outer world upon the brain produces what we call thoughts; manifestly Lenin had not the patience to unravel Avenarius’s intricate language. But to combat an opponent you have to know his point ignorance is no argument. What Avenarius contradicts is not the role of the brain but that we call the product thought when we assign to it, as a spiritual being, a site in the brain and say it is living in the brain, is commanding the brain, or is a function of the brain. The material brain, as we saw, occupies precisely the central place of his philosophy. Lenin, however, considers this only as a “mystification”:

“Avenarius here acts on the advice of the charlatan in Turgenev: denounce most of all those vices which you yourself possess. Avenarius tries to pretend that he is combating idealism.... While distracting the attention of the reader by attacking idealism, Avenarius is in fact defending idealism, albeit in slightly different words; thought is not a function of the brain: the brain is not the organ of thought; sensations are – not functions of the nervous system, oh, no: sensations are – ‘elements’ .” (92-3)

The critic rages here against a self-mystification without any basis. He finds “idealism” in that Avenarius, proceeds from elements, and elements are sensations. Avenarius, however, does not proceed from sensations but from what simple unsophisticated man finds present; things, surroundings, a world, fellow-men, remembrances. Man does not find present sensations, he finds present a world. Avenarius tries to construct a description of the world without the common language of matter and mind and its contradictions. He finds trees present, and human brains, and – so he believes – changes in the brains produced by the trees, and actions and talk of fellow-men determined by these changes. Of all this Lenin manifestly has no inkling. He tries to make “idealism” of Avenarius’s system by considering Avenarius’s starting point, experience, to be sensations, something psychical, according to his own materialist view. His error is that he takes the contradiction materialism-idealism in the sense of middle-class materialism, with physical matter as its basis. Thus he shuts himself off completely from any understanding of modern views that proceed from experience and phenomena as the given reality.

Lenin now brings forward an array of witnesses to declare that the doctrines of Mach and Avenarius are idealism or solipsism. It is natural that the host of professional philosophers, in compliance with the tendency of bourgeois thinking to proclaim the rule of mind over matter, try to interpret and emphasise the anti-materialist side of their ideas; they too know materialism only as the doctrine of physical matter. What, we may ask, is the use of such witnesses? When disputed facts have to be ascertained, witnesses are necessary. When, however, we deal with the understanding of somebody’s opinions and theories, we have to read and render carefully what he himself has written to expound them; this is the only way to find out similarities and differences, truth and error. For Lenin, however, matters were different. His book was part of a law-suit, an act of impeachment; as such it required an array of witnesses. An important political issue was at stake; Machism threatened to corrupt the fundamental doctrines, the theoretical unity of the Party; so its spokesmen had to do away with them. Mach and Avenarius formed a danger for the Party; hence what mattered was not to find out what was true and valuable in their teachings in order to widen our own views. What mattered was to discredit them, to destroy their reputation, to reveal them as muddle-heads contradicting themselves, speaking confused fudge, trying to hide their real opinions and not believing their own assertions

All the middle-class philosophical writers, standing before the newness of these ideas, look for analogies and relationships of Mach and Avenarius with former philosophic systems; one welcomes Mach as fitting in with Kant, another sees a likeness to Hume, or

Berkeley, or Fichte. In this multitude and variety of systems it is easy to find out connections and similarities everywhere. Lenin registers all such contradictory judgements and in this way demonstrates Mach's confusion. The like with Avenarius. For instance:

“And it is difficult to say who more rudely unmasks Avenarius the mystifier – Smith by his straightforward and clear refutation, or Schuppe by his enthusiastic opinion of Avenarius's crowning work. The kiss of Wilhelm Schuppe in philosophy is no better than the kiss of Peter Struve or Menshikov in politics.” (73)

If we now read Schuppe's *Open Letter to Avenarius*, in which in flattering words he expresses his agreement, we find that he did not at all grasp the essence of Avenarius's opinion; he takes the “myself” as the starting point instead of the elements found present, out of which Avenarius constructs the “myself”. He misrepresents Avenarius in the same way as Lenin does, with this difference, that what displeased Lenin pleased him. In his answer Avenarius, in the courteous words usual among scholars, testifies to his satisfaction at the assent of such a famous thinker, but then again expounds the real contents of his doctrine. Lenin neglects the contents of these explanations which refute his conclusions, and quotes only the compromising courtesies.

### Natural Science

Over against Mach's ideas Lenin puts the materialistic views, the objective reality of the material world, of matter, light ether, laws of nature, such as natural science and human common sense accept. These last are two respectable authorities; but in this case their weight is not very great. Lenin sneeringly quotes Mach's own confession that he found little consent among his colleagues. A critic, however, who brings new ideas cannot be refuted by the statement that it is the old criticised ideas that are generally accepted. And as to common sense, i.e. the totality of opinions of uninstructed people: they usually represent the dicta of science of a former period, that gradually, by teaching and popular books, seeped down the masses. That the earth revolves around the sun, that the world consists of indestructible matter, that matter consists of atoms, that the world is eternal and infinite – all this has gradually penetrated into the minds, first of the educated classes, then of the masses. When science proceeds to newer and better views, all this old knowledge can, as “common sense,” be brought forward against them.

How unsuspectingly Lenin leans upon these two authorities – and even in a wrong way – is seen when he says:

“For every scientist who has not been led astray by professorial philosophy, as well as for every materialist, sensation is indeed the direct connection between consciousness and the external world: it is the transformation of the energy of external excitation into a state of consciousness. This transformation has been, and is, observed by each of us a million times on every hand.” (45)

This “observing” is of the same kind as when one should say: we see a thousand times that our eye sees and that light falls upon the retina. In reality we do not see our seeing and our retina; we see objects and infer the retina and the seeing. We do not observe energy and its transitions we observe phenomena, and out of these phenomena physicists have abstracted the concept of energy. The transformation of energy is a summarised physical expression for the many phenomena in which one measured quantity decreased, another increased. They are all good expedient concepts and inferences, reliable in the prediction of future phenomena, and so we call them true. Lenin takes this truth in such an absolute way that he thinks he expresses an observed fact “adopted by every materialist,” when he pronounces what is actually a physical theory. Moreover his exposition is wrong. That energy of the light-impression is converted into consciousness may have been the belief of middle-class materialists, but science does not know of it. Physical science says that energy transforms exclusively, and completely, into other energy;

the energy of the light-impression is transformed into other forms: chemical, electrical, heat-energy; but consciousness is not known in physics as a form of energy.

This confounding of the real, observed world and the physical concepts permeates Lenin's work on every page. Engels denoted materialists as those who considered nature the original thing. Lenin speaks of a "materialism which regards nature, matter, as primary" (38). And in another place: "matter is the objective reality given to us in sensations" (144-5). To Lenin nature and physical matter are identical; the name matter has the same meaning as objective world. In this he agrees with middle-class materialism that in the same way considers matter as the real substance of the world. Thus his angry polemics against Mach can be easily understood. To Mach matter is an abstract concept formed out of the phenomena – or more strictly: sensations. So Lenin, now finding the denial of the reality of matter, then reading the simple statement of the reality of the world, sees only confusion; and he pretends, now, that Mach is a solipsist and denies the existence of the world, and then scornfully remarks that Mach throws his own philosophy to the winds and returns to scientific views.

With the laws of nature the case is analogous. Mach's opinion that cause and effect as well as natural laws do not factually exist in nature, but are man-made expressions of observed regularities, is asserted by Lenin to be identical with Kant's doctrine.

"... It is man who dictates laws to nature and not nature that dictates laws to man! The important thing is not the repetition of Kant's doctrine of apriorism ... but the fact that reason, mind, consciousness are here primary, and nature secondary. It is not reason that is a part of nature, one of its highest products, the reflection of its processes, but nature that is a part of reason, which 'thereby is stretched from the ordinary, simple human reason known to us all to a 'stupendous,' as Dietzgen puts it, mysterious, divine reason. The Kantian-Machian formula, that 'man gives laws to nature,' is a fideist formula." (185)

This confused tirade, entirely missing the point, can only be understood if we consider that for Lenin "nature" consists not only in matter but also in natural laws directing its behaviour, floating somehow in the world as commanders who must be obeyed by the things. Hence to deny the objective existence of these laws means to him the denial of nature itself; to make man the creator of natural laws means to him to make human mind the creator of the world. How then the logical salto is made to the deity as the creator must remain an enigma to the unsophisticated reader.

Two pages earlier he writes:

"The really important epistemological question that divides the philosophical trends is ... whether the source of our knowledge of these connections is objective natural law or properties of our mind, its innate faculty of apprehending certain a priori truths, and so forth. This is what so irrevocably divides the materialists Feuerbach, Marx and Engels from the agnostic (Humeans) Avenarius and Mach." (183)

That Mach should ascribe to the human mind the power to disclose certain aprioristic truths is a new discovery or rather fantasy of Lenin. Where Mach deals with the practice of the mind to abstract general rules from experience and to assign to them unlimited validity, Lenin, captivated by traditional philosophical ideas, thinks of disclosing aprioristic truths. Then he continues:

"In certain parts of his works, Mach ... frequently 'forgets' his agreement with Hume and his own subjectivist theory of causality and argues 'simply' as a scientist, i.e., from the instinctive materialist standpoint. For instance, in his **Mechanik**, we read of the 'uniformity ... which nature teaches us to mind in its phenomena.' But if we do find uniformity in the phenomena of nature, does this mean that uniformity exists objectively outside our mind? No. On the question of the uniformity of nature Mach also delivers himself thus: ... 'That we consider ourselves capable of making predictions with the help of such a law only proves that there is sufficient uniformity in our environment, but it does not prove the necessity of the success of our predictions' (**Wärmelehre**, p.383). It follows that we may and

ought to look for a necessity apart from the uniformity of our environment, i.e., of nature.” (183)

The embroilment in this tangle of sentences, further embellished by courtesies here omitted is understandable only when conformity of nature is identical for Lenin with the necessity of success of our prophecies; when, hence, he cannot distinguish between regularities as they occur in various degrees of clearness in nature, and the apodictic expression of exact natural law. And he proceeds:

“Where to look for it is the secret of idealist philosophy which is afraid to recognise man’s perceptive faculty as a simple reflection of nature.” (184)

In reality there is no necessity, except in our formulation of natural law; and then in practice ever again we find deviations, which, again, we express in the form of additional laws. Natural law does not determine what nature necessarily will do, but what we expect her to do. The silly remark that our mind should simply reflect nature we may leave undiscussed now. His concluding remark:

“In his last work, **Erkenntnis und Irrtum**, Mach even defines a law of nature as a ‘limitation of expectation’ (2.Auflage, S.450ff.)! Solipsism claims its own.” (184)

This lacks all sense since the determination of our expectation by natural law is a common affair of all scientists. The embodiment of a number of phenomena in a short formula, a natural law, is denoted by Mach as “economy of thinking”; he exalts it into a principle of research. We might expect that such a reducing of abstract theory to the practice of (scientific) labour should find sympathy among Marxists. In Lenin, however, it meets with no response, and he exposes his lack of understanding in some drolleries:

“That it is more ‘economical’ to ‘think’ that only I and my sensations exist is unquestionable, provided we want to introduce such an absurd conception into epistemology. Is it ‘more economical’ to ‘think’ of the atom as indivisible, or as composed of positive and negative electrons? Is it ‘more economical’ to think of the Russian bourgeois revolution as being conducted by the liberals or as being conducted against the liberals? One has only to put the question in order to see the absurdity, the subjectivism of applying the category of ‘the economy of thought’ here.” (196-7)

And he opposes to it his own view:

“Human thought is ‘economical’ only when it correctly reflects objective truth, and the criterion of this correctness is practice, experiment and industry. Only by denying objective reality, that is, by denying the foundations of Marxism, can one seriously speak of economy of thought in the theory of knowledge.” (197)

How simple and evident that looks. Let us take an example. The old, ptolemaic world-system placed the earth as resting in the centre of the world, with the sun and the planets revolving around it, the latter in epicycles, a combination of two circles. Copernicus placed the sun in the centre and had the earth and the planets revolving around it in simple circles. The visible phenomena are exactly the same after both theories, because we can observe the relative motions only, and they are absolutely identical. Which, then, pictures the objective world in the right way? Practical experience cannot distinguish between them; the predictions are identical. Copernicus pointed to the fixed stars which by the parallax could give a decision; but in the old theory we could have the stars making a yearly circle just as the planets did; and again both theories give identical results. But then everybody will say: it is absurd to have all those thousands of bodies describe similar circles, simply to keep the earth at rest. Why absurd? Because it makes our world-picture needlessly complicated. Here we have it – the Copernican system is chosen and stated to be true because it gives the most simply world system. This example may suffice to show the naïveté of the idea that we choose a theory because after the criterion of experience it pictures reality rightly.

Kirchhoff has formulated the real character of scientific theory in the same way by his well-known statements that mechanics, instead of “explaining” motions by means of the “forces” producing them, has the task “to describe the motions in nature in the most

complete and simple way.” Thus the fetishism of forces as causes, as a kind of working imps, was removed; they are a short form of description only. Mach of course pointed to the analogy of Kirchhoff’s views and his own. Lenin, to show that he does not understand anything of it, because he is entirely captivated in this fetishism, calls out in an indignant tone: “Economy of thought, from which Mach in 1872 inferred that sensations alone exist ... is declared to be ... equivalent to the simplest description (of an objective reality, the existence of which it never occurred to Kirchhoff to doubt ! )” (198)

It must be remarked, besides, that thinking never can picture reality completely; theory is an approximate picture that renders only the main features, the general traits of a group of phenomena.

After having considered Lenin’s ideas on matter and natural laws, we take as a third instance space and time.

“Behold now the ‘teachings’ of ‘recent positivism’ on this subject. We read in Mach: ‘Space and time are well ordered (wohlgeordnete) systems of series of sensations’ (**Mechanik**, 3. Auflage, p.498). This is palpable idealist nonsense, such as inevitably follows from the doctrine that bodies are complexes of sensations. According to Mach, it is not man with his sensations that exists in space and time, but space and time that exist in man, that depend upon man and are generated by man. He feels that he is falling into idealism, and ‘resists’ by making a host of reservations and ... burying the question under lengthy disquisitions ... on the mutability of our conceptions of space and time. But this does not save him, and cannot save him, for one can really overcome the idealist position on this question only by recognising the objective reality of space and time. And this Mach will not do at any price. He constructs his epistemological theory of time and space on the principle of relativism, and that is all. Resisting the idealist conclusions which inevitably follow from his premises, Mach argues against Kant and insists that our conception of space is derived from experience (**Erkenntnis und Irrtum**, 2. Auflage, p.530, 385). But if objective reality is not given us in experience (as Mach teaches) ...” (206)

What is the use of going on quoting? It is all a sham battle, because we know that Mach assumes the reality of the world; and all phenomena, constituting the world, take place in space and time. And Lenin could have been warned that he was on a false track, by a number of sentences he knows and partly quotes, where Mach discusses the mathematical investigations on multi-dimensional spaces. There Mach says: “That which we call space is a special real case among more general imagined cases ... The space of vision and touch is a threefold manifold, it has three dimensions ... The properties of given space appear directly as objects of experience ... About the given space only experience can teach us whether it is finite, whether parallel lines intersect, etc.... To many divines who do not know where to place hell, and to spiritists, a fourth dimension might be very convenient.” But “such a fourth dimension would still remain a thing of imagination.” These quotations may suffice. What has Lenin to say to all this, besides a number of groundless squibs and invectives?

“But how does he (Mach) dissociate himself from them in his theory of knowledge? By stating that three-dimensional space alone is real! But what sort of defence is it against the theologians and their like when you deny objective reality to space and time?” (211)

What difference might there be between real space and objective reality of space? At any rate he sticks to his error.

What, then, is that sentence of Mach that was the basis of this fantasy? In the last chapter of his **Mechanik**, Mach discusses the relation between different branches of science. There he says: “First we perceive that in all experiences on spatial and temporal relations we have more confidence, and a more objective and real character is ascribed to them, than to experiences on colour, heat or sound ... Yet, looking more exactly, we cannot fail to see that sensations of space and time are sensations just as those of colour,

sound or smell; only, in the former we are more trained and clear than in the latter. Space and time are well-ordered systems of series of sensations ...” Mach proceeds here from experience; our sensations are the only source of knowledge; our entire world, including all we know about space and time, is built up out of them. The question of what is the meaning of absolute space and time is to Mach a meaningless question; the only sensible question is how space and time appear in our experience. Just as with bodies and matter we can form a scientific conception of time and space only through abstraction out of the totality of our experiences. With the space-and-time pattern in which we insert these experiences we are versed, as most simple and natural, from early youth. How it then appears in experimental science cannot be expressed in a better way than by the words of Mach: well-ordered systems of series of experiences.

What, contrariwise, Lenin thinks of space and time, transpires from the following quotation:

“In modern physics, he says, Newton’s idea of absolute time and space prevails (pp.442-4), of time and space as such. This idea seems ‘to us’ senseless, Mach continues – apparently not suspecting the existence of materialists and of a materialist theory of knowledge. But in practice, he claims, this view was harmless (unschädlich, p.442) and therefore for a long time escaped criticism.” (208)

Hence, according to Lenin, “materialism” accepts Newton’s doctrine, the basis of which is that there exists an absolute space and an absolute time. This means that the place in space is fixed absolutely without regard to other things, and can be ascertained without any doubt. When Mach says that this is the point of view of contemporary physicists he surely represents his colleagues as too old-fashioned; in his time already it was rather generally accepted that motion and rest were relative conceptions, that the place of a body is always the place relative to other bodies, and that the idea of absolute position has no sense.

Still there was a certain doubt whether or not space-filling world ether did not offer a frame for absolute space; motion or rest relative to world-ether could be rightly called then absolute motion or rest. When, however, physicists tried to determine it by means of the propagation of light, they could find nothing but relativity. Such was the case with Michelson’s famous experiment in 1889, arranged in such a way that in its result nature should indicate the motion of our earth relative to the ether. But nothing was found; nature remained mute. It was as if she said: your query has no sense. To explain the negative result it was assumed that there always occurred additional phenomena that just cancelled the expected effect – until Einstein in 1905 in his theory of relativity combined all facts in such a way that the result was self-evident. Also within the world-occupying ether – absolute position was shown to be a word without meaning. So gradually the idea of ether itself was dropped, and all thought of absolute space disappeared from science.

With time it seemed to be different; a moment in time was assumed to be absolute. But it was the very ideas of Mach that brought about a change here. In the place of talk of abstract conceptions, Einstein introduced the practice of experiment. What are we doing when we fix a moment in time? We look at a clock, and we compare the different clocks, there is no other way. In following this line of argument Einstein succeeded in refuting absolute time and demonstrating the relativity of time. Einstein’s theory was soon universally adopted by scientists, with the exception of some anti-semitic physicists in Germany who consequently were proclaimed luminaries of national-socialist “German” physics.

The latter development could not yet be known to Lenin when he wrote his book. But it illustrates the character of such expositions as where he writes:

“The materialist view of space and time has remained ‘harmless,’ i.e., compatible, as heretofore, with science, while the contrary view of Mach and Co. was a ‘harmful’ capitulation to the position of fideism.” (210)

Thus he denotes as materialist the belief that the concepts of absolute space and absolute time, which science once wanted as its theory but had to drop afterwards, are the true re-

ality of the world.<sup>4</sup> Because Mach opposes their reality and asserts for space and time the same as for every concept, viz. that we can deduce them only from experience, Lenin imputes to him “idealism leading to ‘fideism’.”

### Materialism

Our direct concern here is not with Mach but with Lenin. Mach occupies considerable space here because Lenin’s criticism of Mach discloses his own philosophical views. From the side of Marxism there is enough to criticise in Mach; but Lenin takes up the matter from the wrong end. As we have seen he appeals to the old forms of physical theory, diffused into popular opinion, so as to oppose them against the modern critique of their own foundations. We found, moreover, that he identifies the real objective world with physical matter, as middle class materialism did formerly. He tries to demonstrate it by the following arguments:

“If you hold that it is given, a philosophical concept is needed for this objective reality, and this concept has been worked out long, long ago. This concept is matter. Matter is a philosophical category designating the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.” (144)

Fine; with the first sentence we all can agree. When then, however, we would restrict the character of reality to physical matter, we contradict the first given definition. Electricity too is objective reality; is it physical matter? Our sensations show us light; it is reality but not matter, and the concepts introduced by the physicists to explain its phenomena, first the world ether, then the photons, can not easily be denoted as a kind of matter. Is not energy quite as real as is physical matter? More directly than the material things, it is their energy that shows itself in all experience and produces our sensations. For that reason Ostwald, half a century ago, proclaimed energy the only real substance of the world; and he called this “the end of scientific materialism.” And finally, what is given to us in our sensations, when fellow-men speak to us, is not only sound coming from lips and throat, not only energy of air vibrations, but besides, more essentially, their thoughts, their ideas. Man’s ideas quite as certainly belong to objective reality as the tangible objects; things spiritual constitute the real world just as things called material in physics. If in our science, needed to direct our activity, we wish to render the entire world of experience, the concept of physical matter does not suffice; we need more and other concepts; energy, mind, consciousness.

If according to the above definition matter is taken as the name for the philosophical concept denoting objective reality, it embraces far more than physical matter. Then we come to the view repeatedly expressed in former chapters, where the material world was spoken of as the name for the entire observed reality. This is the meaning of the word material, matter in Historical Materialism, the designation of all that is really existing in the world, “including mind and fancies,” as Dietzgen said. It is not, therefore, that the modern theories of the structure of matter provoke criticism of his ideas, as Lenin indicates above on the same page, but the fact that he identifies physical matter at all with the real world.

The meaning of the word matter in Historical Materialism, as pointed out here, is of course entirely foreign to Lenin; contrary to his first definition he will restrict it to physical matter. Hence his attack on Dietzgen’s “confusion”:

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<sup>4</sup> Three obsolete ideas, as an essential part of Leninism as the Russian State philosophy, were afterwards imposed upon Russian science, as may be inferred from the following communication in Waldemar Kaempfert, **Science in Soviet-Russia**: “Toward the end of the Trotsky purge, the Astronomical Division of the Academy of sciences passed some impassioned resolutions, which were signed by the president and eighteen members and which declared that ‘modern bourgeois cosmogony is in a state of deep ideological confusion resulting from its refusal to accept the only true dialectic-materialistic concept, namely the unity of the universe with respect to space as well as time’, and a belief in relativity was branded as ‘counter-revolutionary’.”

“Thinking is a function of the brain, says Dietzgen. ‘My desk as a picture in my mind is identical with my idea of it But my desk outside of my brain is a separate object and distinct from my idea.’ These perfectly clear materialistic propositions are, however, supplemented by Dietzgen thus: ‘Nevertheless, the non-sensible idea is also sensible, material, i.e., real....’ This is obviously false. That both thought and matter are ‘real,’ i.e., exist, is true. But to say that thought is material is to make a false step, a step towards confusing materialism and idealism. As a matter of fact this is only an inexact expression of Dietzgen.” (290)

Here Lenin repudiates his own definition of matter as the philosophical expression of objective reality. Or is perhaps objective reality something different from really existing? What he tries to express but cannot without “inexactness of expression” – is this: that thought may really exist, but the true genuine reality is only found in physical matter.

Middle-class materialism, identifying objective reality with physical matter, had to make every other reality, such as all things spiritual, an attribute or property of this matter. We cannot wonder, therefore, that we find with Lenin similar ideas. To Pearson’s sentence: “It is illogical to assert that all matter has consciousness” he remarks:

“It is illogical to assert that all matter is conscious but it is logical to assert that all matter possesses a property which is essentially akin to sensation, the property of reflection.” (98)

And still more distinctly he avers against Mach:

“As regards materialism, ... we have already seen in the case of Diderot<sup>5</sup> what the real views of the materialists are. These views do not consist in deriving sensation from the movement of matter or in reducing sensation to the movement of matter, but in recognising sensation as one of the properties of matter in motion. On this question Engels shared the standpoint of Diderot.” (40)

Where Engels may have said so, is not indicated. We may doubt whether Lenin’s conviction that Engels on this point agreed with him and Diderot, rests on precise statements. In his **Anti-Dühring** Engels expressed himself in another way: “Life is the form of existence of albuminous substances”; i.e. life is not a property of all matter but appears only in such complicated molecular structures as albumen. So it is not probable that he should have considered sensitiveness, which we know as a property of living matter only, a property of all matter, Such generalisations of properties observed only in special cases, to matter in general, belong to the undialectic middle-class frame of mind.

The remark may be inserted here that Plechanov exhibits ideas analogous to Lenin’s. In his **Grundprobleme des Marxismus** he criticises the botanist France on the subject of the “spirituality of matter,” the “doctrine that matter in general and organic matter especially always has a certain sensitivity.” Plechanov then expresses his own view in the words: “France considers this contradictory to materialism. In reality it is the transfer of Feuerbach’s materialistic doctrine. We may assert with certainty that Marx and Engels would have given attention to this trend of thought with the greatest interest.” This is a cautious assertion testifying that Marx and Engels in their writings never showed any interest in this trend of thought. France as a limited-minded naturalist knows only the antithesis of views in middle-class thinking; he assumes that materialists believe in matter only, hence the doctrine that in all matter there is something spiritual is, to him, no materialism at all. Plechanov, on the other hand, considers it a small modification of materialism that makes it more resistant.

Lenin was quite well aware of the concordance of his views with middle-class materialism of the 19th century. For him “materialism” is the common basis of Marxism and middle-class materialism. After having expounded that Engels in his booklet on Feuerbach charged these materialists with three things – that they remained with the materialist doctrine of the 18th century, that their materialism was mechanical, and that in the realm

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<sup>5</sup> Diderot, one of the Encyclopaedists of the 18th century, had written “that the faculty of sensation is a general property of matter, or a product of its organisation” (Lenin, p.29). The wider scope admitted in the latter expression was dropped by Lenin.



of social science, they held fast to idealism and did not understand Historical Materialism – he proceeds:

“Exclusively for these three things and exclusively within these limits, does Engels refute both the materialism of the eighteenth century and the doctrines of Buchner and Co.! On all other, more elementary, questions of materialism (questions distorted by the Machians) there is and can be no difference between Marx and Engels on the one hand and all these old materialists on the other,” (286)

That this is an illusion of Lenin’s has been demonstrated in the preceding pages these three things carry along as their consequences an utter difference in the fundamental epistemological ideas. And in the same way, Lenin continues, Engels was in accordance with Dühring in his materialism:

“For Engels ... Dühring was not a sufficiently steadfast, clear and consistent materialist.” (288)

Compare this with the way Engels finished Dühring off in words of scornful contempt.

Lenin’s concordance with middle-class materialism and his ensuing discordance with Historical Materialism is manifest in many consequences. The former waged its main war against religion; and the chief reproach Lenin raises against Mach and his followers is that they sustain fideism. We met with it in several quotations already; in hundreds of places all through the book we find fideism as the opposite of materialism. Marx and Engels did not know of fideism; they drew the line between materialism and idealism. In the name fideism emphasis is laid upon religion. Lenin explains whence he took the word. “In France, those who put faith above reason are called fideists (from the Latin fides, faith).” (306)

This oppositeness of religion to reason is a reminiscence from pre-marxian times, from the emancipation of the middle-class, appealing to “reason” in order to attack religious faith as the chief enemy in the social struggle; “free thinking” was opposed to “obscurantism.” Lenin, in continually pointing to fideism as the consequence of the contested doctrines indicates that also to him in the world of ideas religion is the chief enemy.

Thus he scolds Mach for saying that the problem of determinism cannot be settled empirically: in research, Mach says every scientist must be determinist but in practical affairs he remains indeterminist.

“Is this not obscurantism ... when determinism is confined to the field of ‘investigation,’ while in the field of morality, social activity, and all fields other than ‘investigation’ the question is left to a ‘subjective estimate’.” (223) ... “And so things have been amicably divided: theory for the professors, practice for the theologians!” (224)

Thus every subject is seen from the point of view of religion. Manifestly it was unknown to Lenin that the deeply religious Calvinism was a rigidly deterministic doctrine, whereas the materialist middle class of the 19th century put their faith into free will, hence proclaimed indeterminism. At this point a real Marxian thinker would not have missed the opportunity of explaining to the Russian Machists that it was Historical Materialism that opened the way for determinism in the field of society; we have shown above that the theoretical conviction that rules and laws hold in a realm – this means determinism – can find a foundation only when we succeed in establishing practically such laws and connections. Further, that Mach because he belonged to the middle class and was bound to its fundamental line of thought, by necessity was indeterminist in his social views; and that in this way his ideas were backward and incompatible with Marxism. But nothing of the sort is found in Lenin; that ideas are determined by class is not mentioned; the theoretical differences hang in the air. Of course theoretical ideas must be criticised by theoretical arguments. When, however, the social consequences are emphasised with such vehemence, the social origins of the contested ideas should not have been left out of consideration. This most essential character of Marxism does not seem to exist for Lenin.

So we are not astonished that among former authors it is especially Ernst Haeckel who is esteemed and praised by Lenin. In a final chapter inscribed “Ernst Haeckel and Ernst Mach” he compares and opposes them. “Mach ... betrays science into the hands of

fideism by virtually deserting to the camp of philosophical idealism” (422). But “every page” in Haeckel’s work “is a slap in the face of the ‘sacred’ teachings of all official philosophy and theology.” Haeckel “instantly, easily and simply revealed ... that there is a foundation. This foundation is natural-scientific materialism.” (423).

In his praise it does not disturb him that the writings of Haeckel combine, as generally recognised, popular science with a most superficial philosophy – Lenin himself speaks of his “philosophical naïvité” and says “that he does not enter into an investigation of philosophical fundamentals.” What is essential to him is that Haeckel was a dauntless fighter against prominent religious doctrines.

“The storm provoked by Ernst Haeckel’s **The Riddle of the Universe** in every civilised country strikingly brought out, on the one hand, the partisan character of philosophy in modern society and, on the other, the true social significance of the struggle of materialism against idealism and agnosticism. The fact that the book was sold in hundreds of thousands of copies, that it was immediately translated into all languages and that it appeared in special cheap editions, clearly demonstrates that the book ‘has found its way to the masses’, that there are numbers of readers whom Ernst Haeckel at once won over to his side. This popular little book became a weapon in the class struggle. The professors of philosophy and theology in every country of the world set about denouncing and annihilating Haeckel in every possible way.” (423)

What class-fight was this? Which class was here represented by Haeckel against which other class? Lenin is silent on this point. Should his words be taken to imply that Haeckel, unwittingly, acted as a spokesman of the working class against the bourgeoisie? Then it must be remarked that Haeckel was a vehement opponent to socialism, and that in his defence of Darwinism he tried to recommend it to the ruling class by pointing out that it was an aristocratic theory, the doctrine of the selection of the best, most fit to refute “the utter nonsense of socialist levelling”. What Lenin calls a tempest raised by the **Weltraetsel** was in reality only a breeze within the middle class, the last episode of its conversion from materialism to idealistic world conception. Haeckel’s **Weltraetsel** was the last flare up, in a weakened form, of middle-class materialism, and the idealist, mystic, and religious tendencies were so strong already among the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals that from all sides they could pounce upon Haeckel’s book and show up its deficiencies. What was the importance of the book for the mass of its readers among the working class we have indicated above. When Lenin speaks here of a class fight he demonstrates how little he knew of the class fight in countries of developed capitalism, and saw it only as a fight for and against religion.

### Plechanov’s Views

The kinship with middle-class materialism revealed in Lenin’s book is not simply a personal deviation from Marxism. Analogous views are found in Plechanov, at the time the acknowledged first and prominent theorist of Russian socialism. In his book **Grundprobleme des Marxismus (Fundamental Problems of Marxism)**, first written in Russian, with a German translation in 1910, he begins by broadly treating the concordance between Marx and Feuerbach. What usually is called Feuerbach’s Humanism, he explains, means that Feuerbach proceeds from man to matter. “The words of Feuerbach quoted above on the ‘human head’ show that the question of ‘brain matter’ was answered at the time in a materialist sense. And this point of view was also accepted by Marx and Engels. It became the basis of their philosophy.” Of course Marx and Engels assumed that human thoughts are produced in the brain, just as they assumed that the earth revolved around the sun. Plechanov, however, proceeds: “When we deal with this thesis of Feuerbach, we get acquainted at the same time with the philosophical side of Marxism.” He then quotes the sentences of Feuerbach: ‘Thinking comes from being, but being comes not from thinking. Being exists in itself and by itself, existence has its basis in itself;’ and he concludes by adding “Marx and Engels made this opinion on the relation

between being and thinking the basis of their materialist conception of history.” Surely; but the question is what they mean by “being”. In this colourless word many opposing concepts of later times are contained undistinguished. All that is perceptible to us we call being; from the side of natural science it can mean matter, from the side of social science the same word can mean the entire society. To Feuerbach it was the material substance of man: “man is what he eats”; to Marx it is social reality, i.e. a society of people, tools, production-relations, that determines consciousness.

Plechanov then speaks of the first of Marx’s theses on Feuerbach; he says that Marx here “completes and deepens Feuerbach’s ideas”; he explains that Feuerbach took man in his passive relations, Marx in his active relation to nature. He points to the later statement in **Das Kapital**: “Whilst man works upon outside nature and changes it, he changes at the same time his own nature,” and he adds: “The profundity of this thought becomes clear in the light of Marx’s theory of knowledge ... It must be admitted, though, that Marx’s theory of knowledge is a direct offspring of Feuerbach’s or, more rightly, represents Feuerbach’s theory of knowledge which, then, has been deepened by Marx in a masterly way.” And again, on the next page, he speaks of “modern materialism, the materialism of Feuerbach, Marx and Engels.” What must be admitted, rather, is that the ambiguous sentence: being determines thought, is common to them, and that the materialist doctrine that brain produces thought is the most unessential part of Marxism and contains no trace yet of a real theory of knowledge.

The essential side of Marxism is what distinguished it from other materialist theories and what makes them the expression of different class struggles. Feuerbach’s theory of knowledge, belonging to the fight for emancipation of the middle class, has its basis in the lack of science of society as the most powerful reality determining human thinking. Marxian theory of knowledge proceeds from the action of society, this self-made material world of man, upon the mind, and so belongs to the proletarian class struggle. Certainly Marx’s theory of knowledge descended, historically, from Hegel and Feuerbach; but equally certainly it grew into something entirely different from Hegel and Feuerbach. It is a significant indication of the point of view of Plechanov that he does not see this antagonism and that he assigns the main importance to the trivial community of opinion – which is unimportant for the real issue – that thoughts are produced by the brain.

## Chapter 7

### The Russian Revolution

The concordance of Lenin and Plechanov in their basic philosophical views and their common divergence from Marxism points to their common origin out of the Russian social conditions. The name and garb of a doctrine or theory depend on its spiritual descent; they indicate the earlier thinker to whom we feel most indebted and whom we think we follow. The real content, however, depends on its material origin and is determined by the social conditions under which it developed and has to work. Marxism itself says that the main social ideas and spiritual trends express the aims of the classes, i.e. the needs of social development, and change with the class struggles themselves. So they cannot be understood isolated from society and class struggle. This holds for Marxism itself.

In their early days Marx and Engels stood in the first ranks of the middle-class opposition, not yet disjoined into its different social trends, against absolutism in Germany. Their development towards Historical Materialism, then, was the theoretical reflex of the development of the working class towards independent action against the bourgeoisie. The practical class-antagonism found its expression in the theoretical antagonism. The fight of the bourgeoisie against feudal dominance was expressed by middle-class materialism, cognate to Feuerbach’s doctrine, which used natural science to fight religion as the consecration of the old powers. The working class in its own fight has little use for natural science, the instrument of its foe: its theoretical weapon in social science, the science of social development. To fight religion by means of natural science has no significance

for the workers; they know, moreover, that its roots will be cut off anyhow first by capitalist development, then by their own class struggle. Neither have they any use for the obvious fact that thoughts are produced by the brain. They have to understand how ideas are produced by society. This is the content of Marxism, as it grows among the workers as a living and stirring power, as the theory expressing their growing power of organisation and knowledge. When in the second half of the 19th century capitalism gained complete mastery in Western and Central Europe as well as in America, middle-class materialism disappeared. Marxism was the only materialist class-view remaining.

In Russia, however, matters were different. Here the fight against Czarism was analogous to the former fight against absolutism in Europe. In Russia too church and religion were the strongest supports of the system of government: they held the rural masses, engaged in primitive agrarian production, in complete ignorance and superstition. The struggle against religion was here a prime social necessity. Since in Russia there was no significant bourgeoisie that as a future ruling class could take up the fight, the task fell to the intelligentsia during scores of years it waged a strenuous fight for enlightenment of the masses against Czarism. Among the Western bourgeoisie, now reactionary and anti-materialist, it could find no support whatever in this struggle. It had to appeal to the socialist workers, who alone sympathised with it, and it took over their acknowledged theory, Marxism. Thus it came about that even intellectuals who were spokesmen of the first rudiments of a Russian bourgeoisie, such as Peter Struve and Tugan Baranovski, presented themselves as Marxists. They had nothing in common with the proletarian Marxism of the West: what they learned from Marx was the doctrine of social development with capitalism as the next phase. A power for revolution came up in Russia for the first time when the workers took up the fight, first by strikes only, then in combination with political demands. Now the intellectuals found a revolutionary class to join up with, in order to become its spokesmen in a socialist party.

Thus the proletarian class struggle in Russia was at the same time a struggle against Czarist absolutism, under the banner of socialism. So Marxism in Russia, developing as the theory of those engaged in the social conflict, necessarily assumed another character than in Western Europe. It was still the theory of a fighting working class, but this class had to fight first and foremost for what in Western Europe had been the function and work of the bourgeoisie, with the intellectuals as its associates. So the Russian intellectuals, in adapting the theory to this local task, had to find a form of Marxism in which criticism of religion stood in the forefront. They found it in an approach to earlier forms of materialism, and in the first writings of Marx from the time when in Germany the fight of the bourgeoisie and the workers against absolutism was still undivided.

This appears most clearly in Plechanov, the "father of Russian Marxism." At the time that in Western countries theorists occupied themselves with political problems, he turned his attention to the older materialists. In his **Beiträge zur Geschichte des Materialismus (Contributions to the History of Materialism)** he treats the French materialists of the 18th century, Helvetius, Lamettrie, and compares them with Marx, to show how many valuable and important ideas were already contained in their works. Hence we understand why in his **Grundprobleme des Marxismus** he stresses the concordance between Marx and Feuerbach and emphasises the viewpoints of middle-class materialism.

Yet Plechanov was strongly influenced by the Western, especially the German workers' movement. He was known as the herald of the Russian working-class struggle, which he predicted theoretically at a time when practically there was hardly any trace. He was esteemed as one of the very few who occupied themselves with philosophy; he played an international role and took part in the discussions on Marxism and reformism. Western socialists studied his writings without perceiving at the time the differences hidden within them. Thus he was determined by Russian conditions less exclusively than Lenin.

Lenin was the practical leader of the Russian revolutionary movement. Hence in his theoretical ideas its practical conditions and political aims are shown more clearly. The conditions of the fight against Czarism determined the basic views exposed in his book.

Theoretical, especially philosophic views are not determined by abstract studies and chance reading in philosophical literature, but by the great life-tasks which, imposed by the needs of practical activity, direct the will and thought of man. To Lenin and the Bolshevik party the first life-task was the annihilation of Czarism and of the backward barbarous social system of Russia. Church and religion were the theoretical foundations of that system, the ideology and glorification of absolutism, expression and symbol of the slavery of the masses. Hence a relentless fight against them was needed; the struggle against religion stood in the centre of Lenin's theoretical thought; any concession however small to "fideism" was an attack on the life-nerve of the movement. As a fight against absolutism, landed property, and clergy, the fight in Russia was very similar to the former fight of bourgeoisie and intellectuals in Western Europe; so the thoughts and fundamental ideas of Lenin must be similar to what had been propagated in middle-class materialism, and his sympathies went to its spokesmen. In Russia, however, it was the working class who had to wage the fight; so the fighting organisation had to be a socialist party, proclaiming Marxism as its creed, and taking from Marxism what was necessary for the Russian Revolution: the doctrine of social development from capitalism to socialism, and the doctrine of class war as its moving force. Hence Lenin gave to his materialism the name and garb of Marxism, and assumed it to be the real – i.e. peculiarly working-class as contrasted with middle-class – Marxism.

This identification was supported by still another circumstance. In Russia capitalism had not grown up gradually from small-scale production in the hands of a middle class, as it had in Western Europe. Big industry was imported from outside as a foreign element by Western capitalism, exploiting the Russian workers. Moreover Western financial capital, by its loans to Czarism, exploited the entire agrarian Russian people, who were heavily taxed to pay the interests. Western capital here assumed the character of colonial capital, with the Czar and his officials as its agents. In countries exploited as colonies all the classes have a common interest in throwing off the yoke of the usurious foreign capital, to establish their own free economic development, leading as a rule to home capitalism. This fight is waged against world-capital, hence often under the name of socialism; and the workers of the Western countries, who stand against the same foe, are the natural allies. Thus in China Sun Yat-Sen was a socialist; since, however, the Chinese bourgeoisie whose spokesman he was, was a numerous and powerful class, his socialism was "national" and he opposed the "errors" of Marxism.

Lenin, on the contrary, had to rely on the working class, and because his fight had to be implacable and radical, he espoused the most radical ideology of the Western proletariat fighting world-capitalism, viz. Marxism. Since, however, the Russian revolution showed a mixture of two characters, middle-class revolution in its immediate aims, proletarian revolution in its active forces, the appropriate bolshevist theory too had to present two characters, middle-class materialism in its basic philosophy, proletarian evolutionism in its doctrine of class fight. This mixture was termed Marxism. But it is clear that Lenin's Marxism, as determined by the special Russian attitude toward capitalism, must be fundamentally different from the real Marxism growing as their basic view in the workers of the countries of big capitalism. Marxism in Western Europe is the world view of a working class confronting the task of converting a most highly developed capitalism, its own world of life and action, into communism. The Russian workers and intellectuals could not make this their object; they had first to open the way for a free development of a modern industrial society. [2] To the Russian Marxists the nucleus of Marxism is not contained in Marx's thesis that social reality determines consciousness, but in the sentence of young Marx, inscribed in big letters in the Moscow People's House, that religion is the opium of the people.

It may happen that in a theoretical work there appear not the immediate surroundings and tasks of the author, but more general and remote influences and wider tasks. In Lenin's book, however, nothing of the sort is perceptible. It is a manifest and exclusive reflection of the Russian Revolution at which he was aiming. Its character so entirely corresponds to middle-class materialism that, if it had been known at the time in Western

Europe – but only confused rumours on the internal strifes of Russian socialism penetrated here – and if it could have been rightly interpreted, one could have predicted that the Russian revolution must somehow result in a kind of capitalism based on a workers' struggle.

There is a widespread opinion that the bolshevist party was marxist, and that it was only for practical reasons that Lenin, the great scholar and leader of Marxism, gave to the revolution another direction than what Western workers called communism – thereby showing his realistic marxian insight. The critical opposition to the Russian and C.P. politics tries indeed to oppose the despotic practice of the present Russian government – termed Stalinism – to the “true” Marxist principles of Lenin and old bolshevism. Wrongly so. Not only because in practice these politics were inaugurated already by Lenin. But also because the alleged Marxism of Lenin and the bolshevist party is nothing but a legend. Lenin never knew real Marxism. Whence should he have taken it? Capitalism he knew only as colonial capitalism; social revolution he knew only as the annihilation of big land ownership and Czarist despotism. Russian bolshevism cannot be reproached for having abandoned the way of Marxism: for it was never on that way. Every page of Lenin's philosophical work is there to prove it; and Marxism itself, by its thesis that theoretical opinions are determined by social relations and necessities, makes clear that it could not be otherwise. Marxism, however, at the same time shows the necessity of the legend; every middle-class revolution, requiring working-class and peasant support, needs the illusion that it is something different, larger, more universal. Here it was the illusion that the Russian revolution was the first step of world revolution liberating the entire proletarian class from capitalism; its theoretical expression was the legend of Marxism.

Of course Lenin was a pupil of Marx; from Marx he had learnt what was most essential for the Russian revolution, the uncompromising proletarian class struggle. Just as for analogous reasons, the social-democrats were pupils of Marx. And surely the fight of the Russian workers, in their mass actions and their soviets, was the most important practical example of modern proletarian warfare. That, however, Lenin did not understand Marxism as the theory of proletarian revolution, that he did not understand capitalism, bourgeoisie, proletariat in their highest modern development, was shown strikingly when from Russia, by means of the Third International, the world revolution was to be started, and the advice and warnings of Western Marxists were entirely disregarded. An unbroken series of blunders, failures, and defeats, of which the present weakness of the workers' movement was the result, showed the unavoidable shortcoming of the Russian leadership.

Returning now to the time that Lenin wrote his book we have to ask what then was the significance of the controversy on Machism. The Russian revolutionary movement comprised wider circles of intellectuals than Western socialism; so part of them came under the influence of anti-materialist middle-class trends. It was natural that Lenin should sharply take up the fight against such tendencies. He did not look upon them as would a Marxist who understands them as a social phenomenon, explaining them out of their social origin, and thus rendering them ineffectual; nowhere in his book do we find an attempt at or a trace of such an understanding. To Lenin materialism was the truth established by Feuerbach, Marx and Engels, and the middle-class materialists; but then stupidity, reaction, money-interests of the bourgeoisie and the spiritual power of theology had brought about a revulsion in Europe. Now this corruption threatened to assail bolshevism too; so it had to be opposed with the utmost vigour.

In this action Lenin of course was entirely right. To be sure, it was not a question of the truth of Marx or Mach, nor whether out of Mach's ideas something could be used in Marxism. It was the question whether middle-class materialism or middle-class idealism, or some mixture, would afford the theoretical basis for the fight against Czarism. It is clear that the ideology of a self-contented, already declining bourgeoisie can never fit in with a rising movement, not even with a rising middle class itself. It would have led to weakness, where unfolding of the utmost vigour was necessary. Only the rigour of materialism could make the Party hard, such as was needed for a revolution. The tendency of Machism, somehow parallel to revisionism in Germany, was to break the radicalism of

struggle and the solid unity of the party, in theory and in practice. This was the danger that Lenin saw quite clearly. "When I read it (Bogdanov's book) I became exceedingly provoked and enraged," he wrote to Gorky, February 1908. Indeed, we perceive this in the vehemence of his attack upon the adversary, in every page of the work; it seems to have been written in a continuous fury. It is not a fundamental discussion clearing the ideas, as was, for example Engels's book against Dühring; it is the war-pamphlet of a party leader who has to ward off by any means the danger to his party. So it could not be expected that he should try really to understand the hostile doctrines; in consequence of his own unmarxian thinking he could only misinterpret and misrepresent them. The only thing needed was to knock them down, to destroy their scientific credit, and thus to expose the Russian Machists as ignorant parrots of reactionary blockheads.

And he succeeded. His fundamental views were the views of the bolshevist party at large, as determined by its historical task. As so often, Lenin had felt exactly the practical exigencies. Machism was condemned and expelled from the party. As a united body the party could take its course again, in the van of the working class, towards the revolution.

The words of Deborin quoted in the beginning thus are only partially true. We cannot speak of a victory of Marxism, when there is only question of a so-called refutation of middle-class idealism through the ideas of middle-class materialism. But doubtless Lenin's book was an important feature in the history of the Party, determining in a high degree the further development of philosophic opinions in Russia. Hereafter the revolution, under the new system of state capitalism – a combination of middle class materialism and the marxian doctrine of social development, adorned with some dialectic terminology – was, under the name "Leninism," proclaimed the official State-philosophy. It was the right doctrine for the Russian intellectuals who, now that natural science and technics formed the basis of a rapidly developing production system under their direction, saw the future open up before them as the ruling class of an immense empire.

## Chapter 8

### The Proletarian Revolution

The publication first of a German, then of an English translation of Lenin's work shows that it was meant to play a wider role than its function in the old Russian party conflict. It is presented now to the younger generation of socialists and communists in order to influence the international workers' movement. So we ask what can the workers in capitalist countries learn from it? Of the refuted philosophical ideas it gives a distorted view; and under the name of Marxism another theory, middle class materialism is expounded. It does not aim at bringing the reader to a clear independent judgement in philosophical questions; it intends to instruct him that the Party is right, and that he has to trust and to follow the party leaders. What way is it that this party leader shows to the international proletariat? Let us read Lenin's view of the world-contest of the classes in his final sentences: "... behind the epistemological scholasticism of empirio-criticism it is impossible not to see the struggle of parties in philosophy, a struggle which in the last analysis rejects the tendencies and ideology of the antagonistic classes in modern society ... The contending parties are essentially ... materialism and idealism. The latter is merely a subtle, refined form of fideism, which stands fully armed, commands vast organisations and steadily continues to exercise influence on the masses, turning the slightest vacillation in philosophical thought to its own advantage. The objective class role played by empirio-criticism entirely consists in rendering faithful service to the fideists in their struggle against materialism in general and Historical Materialism in particular." (371)

Nothing here of the immense power of the foe, the bourgeoisie, master of all the riches of the world, against which the working class hardly can make any progress. Nothing of its spiritual power over the minds of the workers, still strongly dominated by middle-class culture and hardly able to overcome it in a continuous struggle for knowledge. Nothing of the new powerful ideologies of nationalism and imperialism threatening to

gain a hold over the workers too, and indeed, soon afterwards, dragging them along into the world war. No, the Church, the organisation of “fideism” in full armour, that is to Lenin the most dangerous hostile power. The fight of materialism against religious belief is to him the theoretical fight accompanying the class struggle. The limited theoretical opposition between the former and the later ruling class appears to him the great world fight of ideas which he connects with the proletarian class fight, the essence and ideas of which lie far outside his view. Thus in Lenin’s philosophy the Russian scheme is transferred upon Western Europe and America, the anti-religious tendency of a rising bourgeoisie is transferred to the rise of the proletariat. Just as among German reformists at that time the division was made between “reaction” and “progress” and not according to class but according to political ideology – thus confusing the workers – so here it is made according to religious ideology, between reactionaries and free-thinkers, instead of establishing its class-unity against bourgeoisie and State, to get mastery over production, the Western proletarian class is invited to take up the fight against religion. If this book and these ideas of Lenin had been known in 1918 among Western Marxists, surely there would have been a more critical attitude against his tactics for world revolution.

The Third International aims at a world revolution after the model of the Russian revolution and with the same goal. The Russian economic system is state capitalism, there called state-socialism or even communism, with production directed by a state bureaucracy under the leadership of the Communist Party. The state officials, forming the new ruling class, have the disposal over the product, hence over the surplus-value, whereas the workers receive wages only, thus forming an exploited class. In this way it has been possible in the short time of some dozens of years to transform Russia from a primitive barbarous country into a modern state of rapidly increasing industry on the basis of advanced science and technics. According to Communist Party ideas, a similar revolution is needed in the capitalist countries, with the working class again as the active power, leading to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the organisation of production by a state bureaucracy. The Russian revolution could be victorious only because a well-disciplined united bolshevist party led the masses, and because in the party the clear insight and the unyielding assurance of Lenin and his friends showed the right way. Thus, in the same way, in world revolution the workers have to follow the Communist Party, leave to it the lead and afterwards the government; and the party members have to obey their leaders in rigid discipline. Essential are the qualified capable party leaders, the proficient, experienced revolutionaries; what is necessary for the masses is the belief that the party and its leaders are right.

In reality, for the working class in the countries of developed capitalism, in Western Europe and America, matters are entirely different. Its task is not the overthrow of a backward absolutist monarchy. Its task is to vanquish a ruling class commanding the mightiest material and spiritual forces the world ever knew. Its object cannot be to replace the domination of stockjobbers and monopolists over a disorderly production by the domination of state officials over a production regulated from above. Its object is to be itself master of production and itself to regulate labour, the basis of life. Only then is capitalism really destroyed. Such an aim cannot be attained by an ignorant mass, confident followers of a party presenting itself as an expert leadership. It can be attained only if the workers themselves, the entire class, understand the conditions, ways and means of their fight; when every man knows from his own judgement, what to do. They must, every man of them, act themselves, decide themselves, hence think out and know for themselves. Only in this way will a real class organisation be built up from below, having the form of something like workers’ councils. It is of no avail that they have been convinced that their leaders know what is afoot and have gained the point in theoretical discussion – an easy thing when each is acquainted with the writings of his own party only. Out of the contest of arguments they have to form a clear opinion themselves. There is no truth lying ready at hand that has only to be imbibed; in every new case truth must be contrived by exertion of one’s own brain.



This does not mean, of course, that every worker should judge on scientific arguments in fields, that can be mastered only by professional study. It means, first, that all workers should give attention not only to their direct working and living conditions but also to the great social issues connected with their class struggle and the organisation of labour; and should know how to take decisions here. But it implies, secondly, a certain standard of argument in propaganda and political strife. When the views of the opponent are rendered in a distorted way because the willingness or the capacity to understand them is lacking, then in the eyes of the believing adherents you may score a success; but the only result – intended indeed in party strife – is to bind them with stronger fanaticism to the party. For the workers however, what is of importance is not the increase of power of a party but the increase of their own capacity to seize power and to establish their mastery over society. Only when, in arguing and discussing, the opponent is given his full pound, when in weighing arguments against one another each solid opinion is understood out of social class relations, will the participant hearers gain such well-founded insight as is necessary for a working class to assure its freedom.

The working class needs Marxism for its liberation. Just as the results of natural science are necessary for the technical construction of capitalism, so the results of social science are necessary for the organisational construction of communism. What was needed first was political economy, that part of Marxism that expounds the structure of capitalism, the nature of exploitation, the class-antagonism, the tendencies of economic development. It gave, directly, a solid basis to the spontaneously arising fight of the workers against the capitalist masters. Then, in the further struggle, by its theory of the development of society from primitive economy through capitalism to communism, it gave confidence and enthusiasm through the prospect of victory and freedom. When the not yet numerous workers took up their most difficult fight, and the hopeless indifferent masses had to be roused, this insight was the first thing needed.

When the working class has grown more numerous, more powerful, and society is full of the proletarian class struggle, another part of Marxism has to come to the forefront. That they should know that they are exploited and have to fight, is not the main point any more; they must know how to fight, how to overcome their weakness, how to build up their unity and strength. Their economic position is so easy to understand, their exploitation so manifest that their unity in struggle, their common will to seize power over production should presumably result at once. What hampers them is chiefly the power of the inherited and confused ideas, the formidable spiritual power of the middle-class world, enveloping their minds into a thick cloud of beliefs and ideologies, dividing them, and making them uncertain and confused. The process of enlightenment, of clearing up and vanquishing this world of old ideas and ideologies is the essential process of building the working-class power, is the progress of revolution. Here that part of Marxism is needed that we call its philosophy, the relation of ideas to reality.

Among these ideologies the least significant is religion. As the withered husk of a system of ideas reflecting conditions of a far past, it has only an imaginary power as a refuge for all, who are frightened by capitalist development. Its basis has been continually undermined by capitalism itself. Middle-class philosophy then put up in its place the belief in all those lesser idols, deified abstractions, such as matter, force causality in nature, liberty and progress in society. In modern times these now forsaken idols have been replaced by new, more powerful objects of veneration: state and nation. In the struggle of the old and the new bourgeoisies for world power, nationalism, now the most needed ideology, rose to such power as to carry with it even broad masses of the workers. Most important are, besides such spiritual powers as democracy, organisation, union, party, because they have their roots in the working class itself as results of their life practice, their own struggle. Just because there is connected with them the remembrance of passionate exertion, of devoted sacrifices, of feverish concern with victory or defeat, their merit – which is bound as a class tool to those particular past times and conditions – is exalted to the belief in their absolute excellence. That makes the transition to new necessities under new conditions difficult. The conditions of life frequently compel the workers to take up

new forms of fight; but the old traditions can hamper and retard it in a serious way. In the continuous contest between inherited ideology and practical needs, it is essential for the workers to understand that their ideas are not independently existing truths but generalisations of former experiences and necessities; that human mind always has the tendency to assign to such ideas an unlimited validity, as absolutely good or bad, venerated or hated, and thus makes the people slaves to superstition; but that by understanding limits and conditions, superstition is vanquished and thought is made free. And, conversely, what is recognised as the lasting interest, as the essential basis of the fight for his class, must be unerringly kept in mind – though without being deified – as the brilliant guiding star in all action. This – besides its use as explanation of daily experience and class struggle – is the significance of Marxian philosophy, the doctrine of the connection of world and mind, as conceived by Marx, Engels, and Dietzgen; this gives strength to the working class to accomplish its great task of self-liberation.

Lenin's book, on the other hand, tries to impose upon the readers, the author's belief in the reality of abstractions. So it cannot be helpful in any way for the workers' task. And as a matter of fact its publication in Western languages was not meant to be that. Workers aiming at the self-liberation of their class stand beyond the horizon of the Communist Party. What the Communist Party can see is the competitor, the rival party, the Second International trying to keep the leadership over the working class. As Deborin was quoted in the Preface, the aim of the publication was to win social-democracy, corrupted by middle class idealistic philosophy, back to materialism – or else to browbeat it by the more captivating radical terms of materialism – as a theoretical contribution to the Red Front. For the rising class-movement of the workers it matters little which of these unmarxian party-lines of thought should get the upper hand.

But in another way Lenin's philosophy may be of importance for their struggle. The aim of the Communist Party – which is called world-revolution – is to bring to power, by means of the fighting force of the workers, a layer of leaders who then establish planned production by means of State-Power; in its essence it coincides with the aims of social democracy. The social ideals growing up in the minds of the intellectual class now that it feels its increasing importance in the process of production: a well-ordered organisation of production for use under the direction of technical and scientific experts – are hardly different. So the Communist Party considers this class its natural allies which it has to draw into its circle. By an able theoretical propaganda it tries to detach the intelligentsia from the spiritual influences of the declining bourgeoisie and of private capitalism, and to win them for the revolution that will put them into their proper place as a new leading and ruling class. Or, in philosophical terms, to win them for materialism. A revolution cannot be made with the meek, softening ideology of a system of idealism, but only under the inspiring daring radicalism of materialist thought. For this the foundation is afforded by Lenin's book. On this basis an extensive literature of articles, reviews, and books has already been published, first in German and then in still greater numbers in English, in Europe and in America, with the collaboration of well-known Russian scholars and Western scientists sympathising with the Communist Party. The contents of these writings make clear at first sight that they are not destined for the working class but for the intellectuals of these countries. Leninism is here expounded before them – under the name of Marxism, or "dialectics" – and they are told that it is the fundamental all-embracing world-doctrine, in which the special sciences must be seen as subordinate parts. It is clear that with real Marxism, as the theory of the real proletarian revolution, such a propaganda would have no chance; but with Leninism, as a theory of middle-class revolution installing a new ruling class, it might be successful.

There is of course this difficulty, that the intellectual class is too limited in number, too heterogeneous in social position, hence too feeble to be able single-handed to seriously threaten capitalist domination. Neither are the leaders of the Second and the Third International a match for the power of the bourgeoisie, even if they could impose themselves by strong and dear politics instead of being rotten through opportunism. When, however, capitalism is tumbling into a heavy economic or political crisis which rouses the

masses, when the working class has taken up the fight and succeeds in shattering capitalism in a first victory – then their time will come. Then they will intervene and slide themselves in as leaders of the revolution, nominally to give their aid by taking part in the fight, in reality to deflect the action in the direction of their party aims. Whether or not the beaten bourgeoisie will then rally with them to save of capitalism what can be saved, in any case their intervention comes down to cheating the workers, leading them off from the road to freedom.

Here we see the possible significance of Lenin's book for the future working-class movement. The Communist Party, though it may lose ground among the workers, tries to form with the socialists and the intellectual class a united front, ready at the first major crisis of capitalism to take in its hands the power over and against the workers. Leninism and its philosophical textbook then will serve, under the name of Marxism, to overawe the workers and to impose upon the intellectuals, as the leading system of thought by which the reactionary spiritual powers are beaten. Thus the fighting working class, basing itself upon Marxism, will find Lenin's philosophical work a stumbling-block in its way, as the theory of a class that tries to perpetuate its serfdom.

Some additional remarks to Anton Pannekoek's recent criticism of Lenin's book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*

By Karl Korsch

### Leninism Goes West

There is a striking contrast between the impression produced in the minds of West-European revolutionaries by those short pamphlets of Lenin and Trotsky which appeared in poorly translated and poorly printed editions during the final stage and the aftermath of the war, and the response called forth in Europe and U.S.A. by the belated appearance, in 1927, of the first extra-Russian versions of Lenin's philosophical work of 1908, on **Materialism and Empirio-Criticism**.

Those earlier pamphlets on **The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletarian Revolution** and on **The Next Tasks of the Soviet-Power** were eagerly studied by the European radicals as the first reliable news from a victorious proletarian revolution and as practical guides for their own impending revolutionary uprisings. They were, at the same time, ignored, falsified, calumniated, despised, and frightfully feared by the bourgeoisie and its reformist and Kautskyan-centrist backers within the Marxist camp. When Lenin's philosophical work appeared the whole scene had changed. Lenin was dead. The Russia of the Soviets had been gradually transformed into just another state immersed in the competitive struggles between the various "blocks" of powers which had been formed in a Europe apparently quickly recovering from the war and from the deep but transitory economic crisis resulting from the war. Marxism had been replaced by Leninism or, more recently, by Stalinism which was now no more regarded primarily as a theory of the proletarian class struggle but rather as the ruling philosophy of a state, different but not entirely different from such other state philosophies as fascism in Italy and democracy in the U.S.A. Even the last remnants of the proletarian "unrest" following the war had flickered out with the crushing defeat of the English general strike and miners' strike in 1926 and the bloody termination of the first and so-called "communist" phase of the Chinese revolution. Thus, the European intelligentsia was quite ready to accept, along with the hitherto unknown earliest philosophical writings of Marx which were now published in a princely fashion by the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Institute in Moscow, the equally "piquant" philosophical revelations of his great Russian disciple who, after all, had swept the empire of the Czar and until his death maintained an unchallenged dictatorship there.

But those strata of the West-European proletariat who had been the first and the most serious and persistent readers of Lenin's revolutionary pamphlets of 1917-20 had

apparently disappeared from the scene. They had been replaced in the public eye either by those all-adaptable careerists of Stalinism who form the only stable sector of the rapidly shifting membership of all extra-Russian Communist parties today, or as typical of recent English C.P. development, by progressive members of the ruling class itself and its natural supporters within the better educated, most cultured, and well to do strata of the old and new intelligentsia who have practically replaced the former proletarian membership. Revolutionary proletarian communism seemed to survive only in isolated individual thinkers and in such small groups as the Dutch Council Communists from which the pamphlet under discussion originated.

We might expect that Lenin's book when it was finally made available to the West-European and American public for the express purpose of spreading there those philosophical principles of Marxism which form the basis of the present Russian state and of its ruling Communist party would have met with almost universal applause. Nothing of the kind has happened. No doubt the philosophy of Lenin as expressed in that book is infinitely superior, even from a strictly theoretical viewpoint, to those scattered crumbs from the systems of bygone counter-revolutionary philosophers and sociologists that have been formed into the semblance of a philosophical system of fascism by Mussolini, with the help of the former Hegelian philosopher, Gentile, and other intellectual aides-de-camps. It is incomparably superior to that huge mass of trite everyday talk and senseless trash which figure as a politico-philosophical Weltanschauung in the "theoretical" work of Adolf Hitler. Thus the people who could find novelty and wisdom in the ideas of Mussolini and discover sense in the vapourings of the German leader, certainly should not have felt any difficulty in swallowing also that considerable amount of misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and general backwardness which mar the theoretical value of Lenin's philosophical attempt. Even those few who today are acquainted with the works of the philosophers and scientists discussed by Lenin in 1908 and with the developments of modern science generally might have been able to dig out of this work of Lenin (to speak in the favourite style of its author) that "gem" of clear and persistent revolutionary thought which is "hidden in the rubbish" of unqualified acceptance of the obsolete "materialist" concepts of a past historical epoch and equally unqualified abuse of some of the most genuine attempts of modern scientists to promote the theory of materialism. Nevertheless, the response of the progressive bourgeois intelligentsia at large to the belated propaganda of Lenin's materialist philosophy must have proved disappointing to the Russians, who had shown on several occasions that they were by no means above desiring some applause for their pet achievements in matters of theory even from such Marxistically "unholy" quarters as the philosophical and scientific circles of Western Europe and America. There was not so much open hostility as indifference and, even more awkward, just among those whose applause would have been most cherished, a kind of polite embarrassment.

Nor was this embarrassing silence disturbed, for a long time, by any vigorous attack from that left radical Marxist minority which formerly had so violently assailed every attempt of Lenin and his successors to transform the political and tactical principles successfully applied by the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution into universally valid principles of the proletarian world revolution. The remaining representatives of that leftist tendency were very slow to raise an equally fierce attack against the analogous attempt of a world-wide application of Lenin's philosophical principles as the only true philosophical doctrine of revolutionary Marxism. Here at last, thirty years after the first (Russian) publication of Lenin's book and eleven years after the appearance of its first German and English translations – is the first critical re-examination of Lenin's contribution to the materialist philosophy of Marxism, written by one who undoubtedly and for many reasons is better qualified for this particular task than any other contemporary Marxist.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [Original footnote] Anton Pannekoek, **Lenin als Philosoph. Kritische Betrachtung der philosophischen Grundlagen des Leninismus.** *Bibliothek der Ratekorrespondenz*, No.1.

Even so there is little hope that this first important criticism of Lenin's philosophy will reach even that relatively small minority of revolutionary Marxists to whom it is mainly addressed. It is published under an almost impenetrable pseudonym and, most characteristically, up to now in the shape of a stencilled manuscript only.

There was, then, a considerable lag of time on both sides of that world-wide struggle between Western European Marxist left radicalism on the one hand and Russian Bolshevism on the other, before the opposed camps discovered that their political, tactical and organisational contrasts depended, in the last instance, on those deeper principles which had hitherto been neglected in the heat of the practical fight and thus could not be thoroughly elucidated without going back to those underlying philosophical principles. It seems as if even here old Hegel was right when he said that "the bird of Minerva begins its flight when the day is gone." It does not follow, however, that this last, "philosophical phase" of the social movement going on in a given epoch should be, at the same time, the highest and most important phase. The philosophical fight of ideas is, from a proletarian point of view, not the basis but just a transitory ideological form of the revolutionary class struggle determining the historical development of our time.

### **Leninism versus Machism**

It is impossible to discuss in a single article the many important results of this masterly pamphlet. After a short and luminous account of the historical development of Marxism since the days of Marx and of early bourgeois materialism, Pannekoek goes on to restate in an irreproachable manner the true theoretical contents of the attempts by Joseph Dietzgen on the one hand and by the bourgeois scientists, Mach and Avenarius, on the other, to improve upon their predecessors by completing their materialistic representation of the objective world by an equally materialistic representation of the process of knowledge itself. He shows conclusively the incredible distortions those later theories have suffered in Lenin's utterly biased account. There does not exist, so far as we know, an equally masterly report of the main scientific contents of the work of Mach and Avenarius as is contained in the twenty-five pages devoted to their theories in this pamphlet. Nor is there an equally powerful refutation of the theoretical blunders committed by Lenin and his followers in their naive criticism of the modern scientific definitions of such terms as "matter", "energy", "laws of nature", "necessity", "space", "time" etc., from the standpoint of so-called "common sense" which is, in fact, in most cases nothing else but a rehash of the physics theories of bygone epochs of scientific development. (It was for this reason, by the way, that Frederick Engels already had described so-called common sense as "the worst of all metaphysicians".)

Nevertheless, this is only one, and perhaps not the most important aspect of Pannekoek's critical revision of Lenin's work. The main weakness of Lenin's attack on Machism is not its general unfairness, outright misrepresentation of the essentially materialistic approach underlying the new positivistic philosophy, and complete unawareness of the real achievements made since the days of Marx and Engels in the field of modern physical science. The main weakness of Lenin's "materialistic" criticism of what he called an idealistic (solipsistic, mystical and, in the last instance, plainly religious and reactionary) tendency hidden in the pseudo materialistic and scientific theories of Mach and his followers, is his own inability to go beyond the intrinsic limitations of bourgeois materialism. Much as he talks of the superiority of "modern" Marxist materialism over the abstract philosophical and mainly naturalistic approach of the early bourgeois materialists, he still conceived this difference between the old and new materialism as a difference not in kind but in degree. At the utmost he described "modern materialism" as founded by Marx, as a materialism "immeasurably richer in content, and incomparably better grounded than all previous forms of materialism." [3] He never conceived of the difference between the "historical materialism" of Marx and the "previous forms of mate-

rialism” as an unbreachable opposition arising from a real conflict of classes. He conceived it rather as a more or less radical expression of one continuous revolutionary movement. Thus Lenin’s “materialistic” criticism of Mach and the Machians, according to Pannekoek, failed even in its purely theoretical purpose mainly because Lenin attacked the later attempts of bourgeois naturalistic materialism not from the viewpoint of the historical materialism of the fully developed proletarian class, but from a proceeding and scientifically less developed phase of bourgeois materialism.

This judgement of Lenin’s materialist philosophy of 1908 is corroborated by the later developments of Lenin’s philosophical theory which are not dealt with here.

The recent publication by the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Institute of Lenin’s philosophical papers dated from 1914 *et seq.* shows the first germs of that particular significance which during the last phases of Lenin’s activity and after his death the philosophical thought of Hegel assumed in Lenin’s “materialistic philosophy.” A belated revival of the whole of the formerly disowned idealistic dialectics of Hegel served to reconcile the acceptance by the Leninists of old bourgeois materialism with the formal demands of an apparently anti-bourgeois and proletarian revolutionary tendency. Whilst in the preceding phases historical materialism still had been conceived, though not with sufficient clearness, as different from the “previous forms of materialism” the emphasis was now shifted from “historical” materialism to dialectical materialism or, as Lenin said in his latest contribution to the subject, to “a materialistic application of Hegelian (idealistic) dialectics”. Thus the whole circle not only of bourgeois materialistic thought but of all bourgeois philosophical thought from Holbach to Hegel was actually repeated by the Russian dominated phase of the Marxist movement, which passed from the adoption of 18th century and Feuerbachian materialism by Plechanov and Lenin in the pre-war period to Lenin’s appreciation of the “intelligent idealism” of Hegel and other bourgeois philosophers of the 19th century as against the “unintelligent materialism” of the earlier 18th century philosophers.

### **Present Impact of Lenin’s Materialistic Philosophy**

In the last parts of the pamphlet Pannekoek deals with the historical and practical significance of the peculiar theoretical aspects of Lenin’s materialist philosophy as discussed in the preceding chapters. He fully acknowledges the tactical necessity, under the conditions in pre-revolutionary Czarist Russia, of Lenin’s relentless fight against the left bolshevik, Bogdanov, and other more or less outspoken followers of Mach’s ideas who in spite of their good revolutionary intentions actually jeopardised the unity and weakened the proven revolutionary energy of the Marxist party by a revision of its “monolithic” materialistic ideology. In fact, Pannekoek goes somewhat further in his positive appreciation of Lenin’s philosophical tactics of 1908 than seems justified to this writer even in a retrospective analysis of the past. If he had investigated, in his critical revision of Lenin’s anti-Machist fight, the tendencies represented by the Russian Machists as well as those of their German masters he might have been warned against the unimpeachable correctness of Lenin’s attitude in the ideological struggles of 1908 by a later occurrence. When Lenin, after 1908, was through with the Machist opposition which had arisen within the central committee of the Bolshevik party itself, he regarded that whole incident as closed. In the preface to the second Russian edition of his book, in 1920, he mentioned the fact that he had “no opportunity to examine Bogdanov’s latest works,” but was quite convinced, by what he had been told by others, that “under the guise of ‘proletarian culture’ Bogdanov is introducing bourgeois and reactionary views.” Yet he did not deliver him to the G.P.U. to be instantly shot for this horrible crime. He was quite content, in those pre-Stalinist days, to leave the spiritual execution to the good and reliable party-worker whose article he annexed to his book. Thus we learn from the faithful Leninist, V.I. Nevsky, that Bogdanov had not only unrepentantly persisted in his former Machist errors, but even had added to them a new and more glaring crime of omission. It is a “curious circumstance,” reports Nevsky, that in all his writings on theoretical topics and on the problems of prole-

tarian culture published during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Bogdanov never mentioned a single word about “production and the system of its management during the dictatorship of the proletariat, just as there is not mentioned a word about the dictatorship itself.” The fact proves, indeed, the unreformed and unreformable character of that “idealistic” sinner against the very principles underlying the materialist philosophy of Lenin and his followers. We do not want to imply here that Bogdanov’s definitions of the physical world as “socially organised experience,” of matter as “nothing else than resistance to collective labour efforts”, and nature as the “unfolding panorama of work-experience,” contain a really materialistic and proletarian solution of the problem raised by Marx in his *Theses on Feuerbach* of 1845 when he said that “the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism was that the given world, reality, sensuousness, was conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation but not subjectively as human sensuous activity or as revolutionary practice. The real point is that we should not under any conditions, either today or even retrospectively, make the slightest concession to that basic fallacy inherent in Lenin’s philosophical fight against Machism and faithfully repeated by his minor followers in their struggle against the materialistic attempts of scientific positivism today.

This fallacy is that the militant character of a revolutionary materialist theory can and must be maintained against the weakening influences of other apparently hostile theoretical tendencies by any means to the exclusion of modifications made imperative by further scientific criticism and research. This fallacious conception caused Lenin to evade discussion on their merits of such new scientific concepts and theories that in his judgement jeopardised the proved fighting value of that revolutionary (though not necessarily proletarian revolutionary) materialist philosophy that his Marxist party had adopted, less from Marx and Engels than from their philosophical teachers, the bourgeois materialists from Holbach to Feuerbach and their idealistic antagonist, the dialectical philosopher Hegel. Rather he stuck to his guns, preferring the immediate practical utility of a given ideology to its theoretical truth in a changing world. This doctrinaire attitude, by the way, runs parallel to Lenin’s political practice. It corresponds to his unshakeable jacobinic belief in a given political form (of a party, a dictatorship, or a state) which has been found useful to the aims of the bourgeois revolution of the past and can therefore be trusted as useful to the aims of the proletarian revolution as well. Both in his revolutionary materialist philosophy and in his revolutionary jacobinic politics, Lenin hid from himself the historical truth that his Russian revolution, in spite of a temporary attempt to break through its particular limitations in connection with the simultaneous revolutionary movement of the proletarian class in the West, was bound to remain in fact a belated successor of the great bourgeois revolutions of the past.

It is a long way from Lenin’s violent philosophical attack on Mach and Avenarius’s “idealistic” positivism and empirio-criticism to that refined scientific criticism of the latest developments within the positivist camp which was published in 1938 in the extremely cultured periodical of the English Communist party. [5] Yet there is underlying this critical attack on the most progressive form of modern positivistic thought the same old Leninist fallacy. The critic carefully avoids committing himself to any school of philosophical thought. He would most likely agree with Ludwig Wittgenstein who in his final phase dealt with all philosophy as a curable disease rather than a series of problems. Yet he bases his whole argument against modern positivism on the assumption that the vigorous fight waged by the old militant positivism against all philosophy was founded on the very fact that this old positivism had started from a distinctly philosophical creed itself. When therefore the latest and in some respects most scientific school of the modern “Logical Positivists” as represented by R. Carnap recently withdrew temporarily from the “philosophical” attempt of constructing “one homogeneous system of laws for the whole of science,” and instead concentrated on the more modest task of establishing a “unity of the language of all science” it would follow from the argument brought forward by their pseudo-Leninist critic that by the same process by which they abandon their former philo-

sophical basis they must necessarily weaken also the crusading ardour of their former anti-philosophical fight. "The positivist who disturbed every philosophical backwater with rude cries of nonsense," says the critics, "is now reduced to saying, in the mildest and most inoffensive manner, nonsense is my language". It is easy to see that this argument can be used in a twofold manner, as a theoretical attack against the confusion between philosophy and science underlying the earlier phases of positivism, and as a practical justification for keeping up that philosophical basis in spite of the belated discovery of its scientific unsoundness. However, the whole argument is not founded on any sound logical or empirical reasoning. There is no need either for the modern bourgeois scientist or for the Marxist to stick to an obsolete (positivistic or materialistic) "philosophy" for the purpose of preserving his full and unbroken "militancy" in the fight against that necessarily in all its forms "idealistic" system of ideas which during the last century under the name of "philosophy" has widely (though not completely) replaced medieval religious faith in the ideology of modern society.

Pannekoek, although not fully abandoning the belief in the need of a "Marxist philosophy" for the revolutionary struggle of the modern proletarian class, is aware of the fact that present-day Leninist "materialism" is absolutely unfit to serve this purpose. It is rather a suitable ideological base of that no longer essentially anti-capitalistic but only "anti-reactionary" and "anti-fascist" movement which has recently been inaugurated by the Communist parties all over the world under the new slogans of a "People's Front" or in some cases even of a "National Front." This present-day Leninist ideology of the Communist parties which in principle conforms to the traditional ideology of the old Social Democratic party does no longer express any particular aims of the proletarian class. According to Pannekoek, it is rather a natural expression of the aims of the new class of the intelligentsia i.e., an ideology which the various strata belonging to this so-called new class would be likely to adopt as soon as they were freed from the ideological influence of the decaying bourgeoisie. Translated into philosophical terms, this means that the "new materialism" of Lenin is the great instrument which is now used by the Communist parties in the attempt to separate an important section of the bourgeoisie from the traditional religion and idealistic philosophies upheld by the upper and hitherto ruling strata of the bourgeois class, and to win them over to that system of state capitalistic planning of industry which for the workers means just another form of slavery and exploitation. This, according to Pannekoek, is the true political significance of Lenin's materialistic philosophy.

## General Remarks on the Question of Organisation

(1938)

Organisation is the chief principle in the working class fight for emancipation. Hence the forms of this organisation constitute the most important problem in the practice of the working class movement. It is clear that these forms depend on the conditions of society and the aims of the fight. They cannot be the invention of theory, but have to be built up spontaneously by the working class itself, guided by its immediate necessities.

With expanding capitalism the workers first built their trade unions. The isolated worker was powerless against the capitalist; so he had to unite with his fellows in bargaining and fighting over the price of his labour-power and the hours of labour. Capitalists and workers have opposite interests in capitalistic production; their class struggle is over the division of the total product between them. In normal capitalism, the workers' share is the value of their labour power, i.e., what is necessary to sustain and restore continually their capacities to work. The remaining part of the product is the surplus value, the share of the capitalist class. The capitalists, in order to increase their profit, try to low-



er wages and increase the hours of labour. Where the workers were powerless, wages were depressed below the existence minimum; the hours of labour were lengthened until the bodily and mental health of the working class deteriorated so as to endanger the future of society. The formation of unions and of laws regulating working conditions—features rising out of the bitter fight of workers for their very lives—were necessary to restore normal conditions of work in capitalism. The capitalist class itself recognised that trade unions are necessary to direct the revolt of the workers into regular channels to prevent them from breaking out in sudden explosions.

Similarly, political organisations have grown up, though not everywhere in exactly the same way, because the political conditions are different in different countries. In America, where a population of farmers, artisans and merchants free from feudal bonds could expand over a continent with endless possibilities, conquering the natural resources, the workers did not feel themselves a separate class. They were imbued, as were the whole of the people, with the bourgeois spirit of individual and collective fight for personal welfare, and the conditions made it possible to succeed to a certain extent. Except at rare moments or among recent immigrant groups, no need was seen for a separate working class party. In the European countries, on the other hand, the workers were dragged into the political struggle by the fight of the rising bourgeoisie against feudalism. They soon had to form working class parties and, together with part of the bourgeoisie, had to fight for political rights: for the right to form unions, for free press and speech, for universal suffrage, for democratic institutions. A political party needs general principles for its propaganda; for its fight with other parties it wants a theory having definite views about the future of society. The European working class, in which communistic ideas had already developed, found its theory in the scientific work of Marx and Engels, explaining the development of society through capitalism toward communism by means of the class struggle. This theory was accepted in the programs of the Social Democratic Parties of most European countries; in England, the Labour Party formed by the trade unions, professed analogous but vaguer ideas about a kind of socialist commonwealth as the aim of the workers.

In their program and propaganda, the proletarian revolution was the final result of the class struggle; the victory of the working class over its oppressors was to be the beginning of a communistic or socialist system of production. But so long as capitalism lasted, the practical fight had to centre on immediate needs and the preservation of standards in capitalism. Under parliamentary government parliament is the battlefield where the interests of the different classes of society meet; big and small capitalists, land owners, farmers, artisans, merchants, industrialists, workers, all have their special interests that are defended by their spokesmen in parliament, all participate in the struggle for power and for their part in the total product. The workers have to take part in this struggle. Socialist or labour parties have the special task of fighting by political means for the immediate needs and interests of the workers within capitalism. In this way they get the votes of the workers and grow in political influence.

With the modern development of capitalism, conditions have changed. The small workshops have been superseded by large factories and plants with thousands and tens of thousands of workers. With this growth of capitalism and of the working class, its organisations also had to expand. From local groups the trade unions grew to national federations with hundreds of thousands of members. They had to collect large funds for support in big strikes, and still larger ones for social insurance. A large staff of managers, administrators, presidents, secretaries, editors of their papers, an entire bureaucracy of organisation leaders developed. They had to haggle and bargain with the bosses; they became the specialists acquainted with methods and circumstances. Eventually they became the real leaders, the masters of the organisations, masters of the money as well as of the press, while the members themselves lost much of their power. This development of the organisations of the workers into instruments of power over them has many examples in history; when organisations grow too large, the masses lose control of them.

The same change takes place in the political organisations, when from small propaganda groups they grow into big political parties. The parliamentary representatives are the leading politicians of the party. They have to do the real fighting in the representative bodies; they are the specialists in that field; they make up the editorial, propaganda, and executive personnel: their influence determines the politics and tactical line of the party. The members may send delegates to debate at party congresses, but their power is nominal and illusory. The character of the organisation resembles that of the other political parties—organisations of politicians who try to win votes for their slogans and power for themselves. Once a socialist party has a large number of delegates in parliament it allies with others against reactionary parties to form a working majority. Soon socialists become ministers, state officials, mayors and aldermen. Of course, in this position they cannot act as delegates of the working class, governing for the workers against the capitalist class. The real political power and even the parliamentary majority remain in the hands of the capitalist class. Socialist ministers have to represent the interests of the present capitalist society, i.e., of the capitalist class. They can attempt to initiate measures for the immediate interests of the workers and try to induce the capitalist parties to acquiesce. They become middlemen, mediators pleading with the capitalist class to consent to small reforms in the interests of the workers, and then try to convince the workers that these are important reforms that they should accept. And then the Socialist Party, as an instrument in the hands of these leaders, has to support them and also, instead of calling upon the workers to fight for their interests, seeks to pacify them, deflect them from the class struggle.

Indeed, fighting conditions have grown worse for the workers. The power of the capitalist class has increased enormously with its capital. The concentration of capital in the hands of a few captains of finance and industry, the coalition of the bosses themselves, confronts the trade unions with a much stronger and often nearly unassailable power. The fierce competition of the capitalists of all countries over markets, raw materials and world power, the necessity of using increasing parts of the surplus value for this competition, for armaments and welfare, the falling rate of profit, compel the capitalists to increase the rate of exploitation, i.e., to lower the working conditions for the workers. Thus the trade unions meet increasing resistance, the old methods of struggle grow useless. In their bargaining with the bosses the leaders of the organisation have less success; because they know the power of the capitalists, and because they themselves do not want to fight—since in such fights the funds and the whole existence of the organisation might be lost—they must accept what the bosses offer. So their chief task is to assuage the workers' discontent and to defend the proposals of the bosses as important gains. Here also the leaders of the workers' organisations become mediators between the opposing classes. And when the workers do not accept the conditions and strike, the leaders either must oppose them or allow a sham fight, to be broken off as soon as possible.

The fight itself, however, cannot be stopped or minimised; the class antagonism and the depressing forces of capitalism are increasing, so that the class struggle must go on, the workers must fight. Time and again they break loose spontaneously without asking the union and often against their decisions. Sometimes the union leaders succeed in regaining control of these actions. This means that the fight will be gradually smothered in some new arrangement between the capitalists and labour leaders. This does not mean that without this interference such wildcat strikes would be won. They are too restricted. Only indirectly does the fear of such explosions tend to foster caution by the capitalists. But these strikes prove that the class fight between capital and labour cannot cease, and that when the old forms are not practicable any more, the workers spontaneously try out and develop new forms of action. In these actions revolt against capital is also revolt against the old organisational forms.

The aim and task of the working class is the abolition of capitalism. Capitalism in its highest development, with its ever deeper economic crises, its imperialism, its armaments, its world wars, threatens the workers with misery and destruction. The proletarian

class fight, the resistance and revolt against these conditions, must go on until capitalist domination is overthrown and capitalism is destroyed.

Capitalism means that the productive apparatus is in the hands of the capitalists. Because they are the masters of the means of production, and hence of the products, they can seize the surplus value and exploit the working class. Only when the working class itself is master of the means of production does exploitation cease. Then the workers control entirely their conditions of life. The production of everything necessary for life is the common task of the community of workers, which is then the community of mankind. This production is a collective process. First each factory, each large plant, is a collective of workers, combining their efforts in an organised way. Moreover, the totality of world production is a collective process; all the separate factories have to be combined into a totality of production. Hence, when the working class takes possession of the means of production, it has at the same time to create an organisation of production.

There are many who think of the proletarian revolution in terms of the former revolutions of the middle class, as a series of consecutive phases: first, conquest of government and instalment of a new government, then expropriation of the capitalist class by law, and then a new organisation of the process of production. But such events could lead only to some kind of state capitalism. As the proletariat rises to dominance it develops simultaneously its own organisation and the forms of the new economic order. These two developments are inseparable and form the process of social revolution. Working class organisation into a strong body capable of united mass actions already means revolution, because capitalism can rule only unorganised individuals. When these organised masses stand up in mass fights and revolutionary actions, and the existing powers are paralysed and disintegrated, then simultaneously the leading and regulating functions of former governments fall to the workers' organisations. And the immediate task is to carry on production, to continue the basic process of social life. Since the revolutionary class fight against the bourgeoisie and its organs is inseparable from the seizure of the productive apparatus by the workers and its application to production, the same organisation that unites the class for its fight also acts as the organisation of the new productive process.

It is clear that the organisational forms of trade union and political party, inherited from the period of expanding capitalism, are useless here. They developed into instruments in the hands of leaders unable and unwilling to engage in revolutionary fight. Leaders cannot make revolutions: labour leaders abhor a proletarian revolution. For the revolutionary fights the workers need new forms of organisation in which they keep the powers of action in their own hands. It is pointless to try to construct or to imagine these new forms; they can originate only in the practical fight of the workers themselves. They have already originated there; we have only to look into practice to find its beginnings everywhere that the workers are rebelling against the old powers.

In a wildcat strike, the workers decide all matters themselves through regular meetings. They choose strike committees as central bodies, but the members of these committees can be recalled and replaced at any moment. If the strike extends over a large number of shops, they achieve unity of action by larger committees consisting of delegates of all the separate shops. Such committees are not bodies to make decisions according to their own opinion, and over the workers; they are simply messengers, communicating the opinions and wishes of the groups they represent, and conversely, bringing to the shop meetings, for discussion and decision, the opinion and arguments of the other groups. They cannot play the roles of leaders, because they can be momentarily replaced by others. The workers themselves must choose their way, decide their actions; they keep the entire action, with all its difficulties, its risks, its responsibilities, in their own hands. And when the strike is over, the committees disappear.

The only examples of a modern industrial working class as the moving force of a political revolution were the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Here the workers of each factory chose delegates, and the delegates of all the factories together formed the 'soviet,' the council where the political situation and necessary actions were discussed. Here the opinions of the factories were collected, their desires harmonised, their decisions

formulated. But the councils, though a strong directing influence for revolutionary education through action, were not commanding bodies. Sometimes a whole council was arrested and reorganised with new delegates; at times, when the authorities were paralysed by a general strike, the soviets acted as a local government, and delegates of free professions joined them to represent their field of work. Here we have the organisation of the workers in revolutionary action, though of course only imperfectly, groping and trying for new methods. This is possible only when all the workers with all their forces participate in the action, when their very existence is at stake, when they actually take part in the decisions and are entirely devoted to the revolutionary fight.

After the revolution this council organisation disappeared. The proletarian centres of big industry were small islands in an ocean of primitive agricultural society where capitalist development had not yet begun. The task of initiating capitalism fell to the Communist Party. Simultaneously, political power centred in its hands and the soviets were reduced to subordinate organs with only nominal powers.

The old forms of organisation, the trade union and political party and the new form of councils (soviets), belong to different phases in the development of society and have different functions. The first has to secure the position of the working class among the other classes within capitalism and belongs to the period of expanding capitalism. The latter has to secure complete dominance for the workers, to destroy capitalism and its class divisions, and belongs to the period of declining capitalism. In a rising and prosperous capitalism, council organisation is impossible because the workers are entirely occupied in ameliorating their conditions, which is possible at that time through trade unions and political action. In a decaying crisis-ridden capitalism, these efforts are useless and faith in them can only hamper the increase of self-action by the masses. In such times of heavy tension and growing revolt against misery, when strike movements spread over whole countries and hit at the roots of capitalist power, or when, following wars or political catastrophes, the government authority crumbles and the masses act, the old organisational forms fail against the new forms of self-activity of the masses.

Spokesmen for socialist or communist parties often admit that, in revolution, organs of self-action by the masses are useful in destroying the old domination; but then they say these have to yield to parliamentary democracy to organise the new society. Let us compare the basic principles of both forms of political organisation of society.

Original democracy in small towns and districts was exercised by the assembly of all the citizens. With the big population of modern towns and countries this is impossible. The people can express their will only by choosing delegates to some central body that represents them all. The delegates for parliamentary bodies are free to act, to decide, to vote, to govern after their own opinion by 'honour and conscience,' as it is often called in solemn terms.

The council delegates, however, are bound by mandate; they are sent simply to express the opinions of the workers' groups who sent them. They may be called back and replaced at any moment. Thus the workers who gave them the mandate keep the power in their own hands.

On the other hand, members of parliament are chosen for a fixed number of years; only at the polls are the citizens masters—on this one day when they choose their delegates. Once this day has passed, their power has gone and the delegates are independent, free to act for a term of years according to their own 'conscience,' restricted only by the knowledge that after this period they have to face the voters anew; but then they count on catching their votes in a noisy election campaign, bombing the confused voters with slogans and demagogic phrases. Thus not the voters but the parliamentarians are the real masters who decide politics. And the voters do not even send persons of their own choice as delegates; they are presented to them by the political parties. And then, if we suppose that people could select and send persons of their own choice, these persons would not form the government; in parliamentary democracy the legislative and the executive powers are separated. The real government dominating the people is formed by a bureaucracy of officials so far removed from the people's vote as to be practically independent. That is

how it is possible that capitalistic dominance is maintained through general suffrage and parliamentary democracy. This is why in capitalistic countries, where the majority of the people belongs to the working class, this democracy cannot lead to a conquest of political power. For the working class, parliamentary democracy is a sham democracy, whereas council representation is real democracy: the direct rule of the workers over their own affairs.

Parliamentary democracy is the political form in which the different important interests in a capitalist society exert their influence upon government. The delegates represent certain classes: farmers, merchants, industrialists, workers; but they do not represent the common will of their voters. Indeed, the voters of a district have no common will; they are an assembly of individuals, capitalists, workers, shopkeepers, by chance living at the same place, having partly opposing interests.

Council delegates, on the other hand, are sent out by a homogeneous group to express its common will. Councils are not only made up of workers, having common class interests; they are a natural group, working together as the personnel of one factory or section of a large plant, and are in close daily contact with each other, having the same adversary, having to decide their common actions as fellow workers in which they have to act in united fashion; not only on the questions of strike and fight, but also in the new organisation of production. Council representation is not founded upon the meaningless grouping of adjacent villages or districts, but upon the natural groupings of workers in the process of production, the real basis of society.

However, councils must not be confused with the so-called corporative representation propagated in fascist countries. This is a representation of the different professions or trades (masters and workers combined), considered as fixed constituents of society. This form belongs to a medieval society with fixed classes and guilds, and in its tendency to petrify interest groups it is even worse than parliamentarism, where new groups and new interests rising up in the development of capitalism soon find their expression in parliament and government.

Council representation is entirely different because it is the representation of a class engaged in revolutionary struggle. It represents working class interests only, and prevents capitalist delegates and capitalist interests from participation. It denies the right of existence to the capitalist class in society and tries to eliminate capitalists by taking the means of production away from them. When in the progress of revolution the workers must take up the functions of organising society, the same council organisation is their instrument. This means that the workers' councils then are the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This dictatorship of the proletariat is not a shrewdly devised voting system artificially excluding capitalists and the bourgeoisie from the polls. It is the exercise of power in society by the natural organs of the workers, building up the productive apparatus as the basis of society. In these organs of the workers, consisting of delegates of their various branches in the process of production, there is no place for robbers or exploiters standing outside productive work. Thus the dictatorship of the working class is at the same time the most perfect democracy, the real workers' democracy, excluding the vanishing class of exploiters.

The adherents of the old forms of organisation exalt democracy as the only right and just political form, as against dictatorship, an unjust form. Marxism knows nothing of abstract right or justice; it explains the political forms in which mankind expresses its feelings of political right, as consequences of the economic structure of society. In Marxian theory we can find also the basis of the difference between parliamentary democracy and council organisation. As bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy respectively they reflect the different character of these two classes and their economic systems.

Bourgeois democracy is founded upon a society consisting of a large number of independent small producers. They want a government to take care of their common interests: public security and order, protection of commerce, uniform systems of weight and money, administering of law and justice. All these things are necessary in order that everybody can do his business in his own way. Private business takes the whole attention,

forms the life interests of everybody, and those political factors are, though necessary, only secondary and demand only a small part of their attention. The chief content of social life, the basis of existence of society, the production of all the goods necessary for life, is divided up into private business of the separate citizens, hence it is natural that it takes nearly all their time, and that politics, their collective affair, is a subordinate matter, providing only for auxiliary conditions. Only in bourgeois revolutionary movements do people take to the streets. But in ordinary times politics are left to a small group of specialists, politicians, whose work consists just of taking care of these general, political conditions of bourgeois business.

The same holds true for the workers, as long as they think only of their direct interests. In capitalism they work long hours, all their energy is exhausted in the process of exploitation, and little mental power and fresh thought is left them. Earning their wage is the most immediate necessity of life; their political interests, their common interest in safeguarding their interests as wage earners may be important, but are still secondary. So they leave this part of their interests also to specialists, to their party politicians and their trade union leaders. By voting as citizens or members the workers may give some general directions, just as middle-class voters may influence their politicians, but only partially, because their chief attention must remain concentrated upon their work.

Proletarian democracy under communism depends upon just the opposite economic conditions. It is founded not on private but on collective production. Production of the necessities of life is no longer a personal business, but a collective affair. The collective affairs, formerly called political affairs, are no longer secondary, but the chief object of thought and action for everybody. What was called politics in the former society—a domain for specialists—has become the vital interest of every worker. It is not the securing of some necessary conditions of production, it is the process and the regulation of production itself. The separation of private and collective affairs and interests has ceased. A separate group or class of specialists taking care of the collective affairs is no longer necessary. Through their council delegates, which link them together, the producers themselves are managing their own productive work.

The two forms of organisation are not distinguished in that the one is founded upon a traditional and ideological basis, and the other on the material productive basis of society. Both are founded upon the material basis of the system of production, one on the declining system of the past, the other on the growing system of the future. Right now we are in the period of transition, the time of big capitalism and the beginnings of the proletarian revolution. In big capitalism the old system of production has already been destroyed in its foundations; the large class of independent producers has disappeared. The main part of production is collective work of large groups of workers; but the control and ownership have remained in a few private hands. This contradictory state is maintained by the strong power factors of the capitalists, especially the state power exerted by the governments. The task of the proletarian revolution is to destroy this state power; its real content is the seizure of the means of production by the workers. The process of revolution is an alternation of actions and defeats that builds up the organisation of the proletarian dictatorship, which at the same time is the dissolution, step by step, of the capitalist state power. Hence it is the process of the replacement of the organisation system of the past by the organisation system of the future.

We are only in the beginnings of this revolution. The century of class struggle behind us cannot be considered a beginning as such, but only a preamble. It developed invaluable theoretical knowledge, it found gallant revolutionary words in defiance of the capitalist claim of being a final social system; it awakened the workers from the hopelessness of misery. But its actual fight remained bound within the confines of capitalism, it was action through the medium of leaders and sought only to set easy masters in the place of hard ones. Only a sudden flickering of revolt, such as political or mass strikes breaking out against the will of the politicians, now and then announced the future of self-determined mass action. Every wildcat strike, not taking its leaders and catchwords from the offices of parties and unions, is an indication of this development, and at the same

time a small step in its direction. All the existing powers in the proletarian movement, the socialist and communist parties, the trade unions, all the leaders whose activity is bound to the bourgeois democracy of the past, denounce these mass actions as anarchistic disturbances. Because their field of vision is limited to their old forms of organisation, they cannot see that the spontaneous actions of the workers bear in them the germs of higher forms of organisation. In fascist countries, where bourgeois democracy has been destroyed, such spontaneous mass actions will be the only form of future proletarian revolt. Their tendency will not be a restoration of the former middle class democracy but an advance in the direction of the proletarian democracy, i.e., the dictatorship of the working class.

## Why Past Revolutionary Movements Have Failed

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Thirty years ago every socialist was convinced that the approaching war of the great capitalist powers would mean the final catastrophe of capitalism and would be succeeded by the proletarian revolution. Even when the war did break out and the socialist and labor movement collapsed as a revolutionary factor, the hopes of the revolutionary workers ran high. Even then they were sure that the world revolution would follow in the wake of the world war. And indeed it came. Like a bright meteor the Russian revolution flared up and shone all over the earth, and in all the countries the workers rose and began to move.

Only a few years alter it became clear that the revolution was decaying, that social convulsions were decreasing, that the capitalist order was gradually being restored. Today the revolutionary workers' movement is at its lowest ebb and capitalism is more powerful than ever. Once again a great war has come, and again the thoughts of workers and communists turn to the question: will it affect the capitalistic system to such a degree that a workers revolution will arise out of it? Will the hope of a successful struggle for freedom of the working class come true this time?

It is clear that we cannot hope to get an answer to this question so long as we do not understand why the revolutionary movements after 1918 failed. Only by investigating all the forces that were then at work can we get a clear insight into the causes of that failure. So we must turn our attention to what happened twenty years ago in the workers' movement of the world.

### II.

The growth of the workers movement was not the only important nor even the most important fact in the history of the past century. Of primary importance was the growth of capitalism itself. It grew not only in intensity—through concentration of capital, the increasing perfection of industrial tecnics, the increase of productivity—but also in extensivity. From the first centers of industry and commerce- England, France, America and Germany—capitalism began to invade foreign countries, and now is conquering the whole earth. In former centuries foreign continents were subdued to be exploited as colonies. But at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries we see a higher form of conquest. These continents were assimilated by capitalism; they became themselves capitalistic. This most important process, that went on with increasing rapidity in the last century, meant a fundamental change in their economic structure. In short, there was the basis of a series of world-wide revolutions.

The central countries of developed capitalism, with the middle class—the bourgeoisie—as the ruling class, were formerly surrounded by a fringe of other, less developed countries. Here the social structure was still entirely agrarian and more-or-less feudal; the

large plains were cultivated by farmers who were exploited by landowners and stood in continuous, more-or-less open struggle against them and the reigning autocrats. In the case of the colonies this internal pressure was intensified through exploitation by European colonial capital that made the landowners and kings its agents. In other cases this stronger exploitation by European capital was brought about by financial loans of governments, which laid heavy taxes upon the farmers. Railways, introducing the factory products that destroyed the old home industries and carried away raw material and food, were built. This gradually drew the farmers into world commerce and aroused in them the desire to become free producers for the market. Factories were constructed; a class of business men and dealers developed in the towns who felt the necessity of better government for their interest. Young people, studying at western universities, became the revolutionary spokesmen of these tendencies. They formulated these tendencies in theoretical programs, advocating chiefly national freedom and independence, a responsible democratic government, civil rights and liberties, in order that they may find their useful place as officials and politicians in a modern state.

This development in the capitalistic world proper took place simultaneously with the development of the workers' movement within the central countries of big capitalism. Here then were two revolutionary movements, not only parallel and simultaneous, but also with many points of contact. They had a common foe, capitalism, that in the form of industrial capitalism exploited the workers, and in the form of colonial and financial capitalism exploited the farmers in the Eastern and colonial countries and sustained these despotic rulers. The revolutionary groups from these countries found understanding and assistance only from the socialist workers of western Europe. So they called themselves socialists too. The old illusions that middle class revolutions would bring freedom and equality to the entire population were reborn.

In reality there was a deep and fundamental difference between these two kinds of revolutionary aims, the so-called Western and eastern. The proletarian revolution can be the result only of the highest development of capitalism. It puts an end to capitalism. The revolutions in the eastern countries were the consequences of the beginning of capitalism in these countries. Viewed thus, they resemble the middle class revolutions in the Western countries and—with due consideration for the fact that their special character must somewhat differ in different countries— they must be regarded as middle class revolutions. Though there was not such a numerous middle class of artisans, petty bourgeois and wealthy peasants as there was in the French and the English revolutions (because in the East, capitalism came suddenly, with a smaller number of big factories) still the general character is analogous. Here also we have the awakening out of the provincial view of an agrarian village to the consciousness of a nation-wide community and to interest in the whole world; the rising of individualism that frees itself from the old group bonds; the growth of energy to win personal power and wealth; the liberation of the mind from old superstitions, and the desire for knowledge as a means of progress. All this is the mental equipment necessary to bring mankind from the slow life of pre-capitalist conditions into the rapid industrial and economic progress that later on will open the way for communism.

The general character of a proletarian revolution must be quite different. Instead of reckless fighting for personal interests there must be a common action for the interests of the class community. A worker, a single person, is powerless; only as part of his class, as a member of a strongly connected economic group can he get power. Workers individualities are disciplined into line by their habit of working and fighting together. Their minds must be freed from social superstitions and they must see as a commonplace truth that once they are strongly united that they can produce abundance and liberate society from misery and want. This is part of the mental equipment necessary to bring mankind from class exploitation, the misery, the mutual destruction of capitalism into communism itself.

Thus the two kinds of revolution are as widely different as are the beginning and end of capitalism. We can see this clearly now, thirty years later. We can understand too, how at the time they could be considered not only as allies, but were thrown together as two



sides of the same great world-revolution. The great day was supposed to be near; the working class, with its large socialist parties and still larger unions, would soon conquer power. And then at the same time, with the power of western capitalism breaking down, all the colonies and eastern countries would be freed from western domination and take up their own national life.

Another reason for confusing these different social aims was that at that time the minds of the western workers were entirely occupied by reformist ideas about reforming capitalism into the democratic forms of its beginning and only a few among them realized the meaning of a proletarian revolution.

### III.

The world war of 1914-18, with its utter destruction of productive forces, cut deep furrows through the social structure, especially of central and eastern Europe. emperors disappeared, old out-moded governments were overthrown, social forces from below were loosened, different classes of different peoples, in a series of revolutionary movements, tried to win power and to realize their class aims.

In the highly industrialized countries the class struggle of the workers was already the dominating factor of history. Now these workers had gone through a world war. They learned that capitalism not only lays claim on their working power, but upon their lives too; completely, body and soul, they are owned by capital. The destruction and impoverishment of the productive apparatus, the misery and privation suffered during the war, the disappointment and distress after the peace brought waves of unrest and rebelliousness over all participating countries. Because Germany had lost, the rebellion here of the workers was greatest. In the place of pre-war conservatism, there arose a new spirit in the German workers, compounded of courage, energy, yearnings for freedom and for revolutionary struggle against capitalism. It was only a beginning but it was the first beginning of a proletarian revolution.

In the eastern countries of Europe the class struggle had a different composition. the land owning nobility was dispossessed; the farmers seized the land; a class of small or middle-sized free landowners arose. Former revolutionary conspirators became leaders and ministers and generals in the new national states. These revolutions were middle-class revolutions and as such indicated the beginning of an unlimited development of capitalism and industry.

In Russia this revolution went deeper than anywhere else. Because it destroyed the Czarist world power which for a century had been a dominating power in Europe and the most hated enemy of all democracy and socialism, the Russian revolution led all the revolutionary movements in Europe. Its leader had been associated for many years with the socialist leaders of Western Europe just as the Czar had been the ally of the English and French governments. It is true that the chief social contents of the Russian Revolution—the land seizures by the peasants and the smashing of the autocracy and nobility—show it to be a middle-class revolution and the Bolsheviks themselves accentuated this character by often comparing themselves with the jacobins of the French Revolution.

But the workers in the west, themselves full of traditions of petty bourgeois freedom, did not consider this foreign to them. And the Russian revolution did more than simply rouse their admiration; it showed them an example in methods of action. Its power in decisive moments was the power of spontaneous mass action of the industrial workers in the big towns. Out of these actions the Russian workers also built up that form of organization most appropriate to independent action—the soviets or councils. Thus they became the guides and teachers of the workers in other countries.

When a year later, November 1918, the German empire collapsed, the appeal to world revolution issued by the Russian Bolsheviks was hailed and welcomed by the foremost revolutionary groups in Western Europe. these groups, calling themselves communists, were so strongly impressed by the proletarian character of the revolutionary

struggle in Russia that they overlooked the fact that, economically, Russia stood only at the threshold of capitalism, and that the proletarian centers were only small islands in the ocean of primitive peasantry. Moreover they reasoned that when a world revolution came, Russia would be only a world-province—the place where the struggle started—whereas the more advanced countries of big capitalism would soon take the lead and determine the world's real course.

But the first rebellious movement among the German workers was beaten down. It was only an advanced minority that took part; the great mass held aloof, nursing the illusion that quiet and peace were now possible. Against these rebels stood a coalition of the Social-Democratic party, whose leaders occupied the government seats, and the old governing classes, bourgeoisie and army officers. While the former lulled the masses into inactivity, the latter organized armed bands that crushed the rebellious movement and murdered the revolutionary leaders, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

The Russian revolution, through fear, had aroused the bourgeoisie to greater energy than it had aroused the proletariat through hope. Though, for the moment, the political organization of the bourgeoisie had collapsed, its real material and spiritual power was enormous. The socialist leadership did nothing to weaken this power; they feared the proletarian revolution no less than the bourgeoisie did. They did everything to restore the capitalist order, in which, for the moment, they were ministers and presidents.

This did not mean that the proletarian revolution in Germany was a complete failure. Only the first attack, the first rebellion had failed. The military collapse had not led directly to proletarian rule. The real power of the working class—clear consciousness on the part of the masses of their social position and the necessity for fighting, eager activity in all these hundreds of thousands, enthusiasm, solidarity and strong unity in action, awareness of the supreme aim: to take the means of production in their own hands—had to come up and grow gradually in any case. So much misery and crisis was threatening in the exhausted, shattered and impoverished post-war society that new fights were bound to come.

In all capitalist countries, in England, France, America as well as Germany, revolutionary groups arose among the workers in 1919. They published papers and pamphlets, they showed their fellow workers new facts, new conditions and new methods of fighting, and they found a good hearing among the alarmed masses. They pointed to the Russian revolution as their great example, its methods of mass action and its soviet or council form of organization. They organized into communist parties and groups, associating themselves with the Bolshevik, the Russian Communist party. Thus the campaign for world revolution was launched.

#### IV.

Soon, however, these groups became aware with increasingly painful surprise that under the name of communism other principles and ideas than their own were being propagated from Moscow. They pointed to the Russian Soviets as the worker's new organs for self-rule in production. But gradually it became known that the Russian factories were again ruled by directors appointed from above, and that, the important political position had been seized by the Communist Party. These Western groups promulgated the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in opposition to the parliamentary democracy embodied the principle of self-rule of the working class as the political form of the proletarian revolution.

But the spokesmen and leaders which Moscow sent to Germany and Western Europe proclaimed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was embodied in the dictatorship of the Communist Party.

The Western Communists saw as their chief task the enlightening of workers concerning the role of the socialist party and the unions. They pointed out that in these organizations the actions and decisions of the leaders were substituted for actions and deci-

sions of the workers, and that the leaders were never able to wage a revolutionary fight because a revolution consists in this very self-action of the workers; that the trade union actions and parliamentary practice are good in a young and quiet capitalist world, but are entirely unfit for revolutionary times, where, by diverting the attention of the workers from important aims and goals and directing them to unreal reforms, they work as hostile, reactionary forces; that all the power of these organizations, in the hands of leaders, is used against the revolution. Moscow, however, demanded that communist parties should take part in parliamentary elections as well as in all union work. The Western communists preached independence, development of initiative, self-reliance, the ejection of dependence on and belief in leaders. But Moscow preached, in ever stronger terms that obedience to the leaders was the chief virtue of the true communist.

Western communists did not immediately realize how fundamental was the contradiction. They saw that Russia, attacked from all sides by counter-revolutionary armies, which were supported by the English and French governments, needed sympathy and assistance from the western working classes; not from small groups that fiercely attacked the old organizations, but from the old mass organizations themselves. They tried to convince Lenin and the Russian leaders that they were ill-informed about the real conditions and the future of the proletarian movement in the West. In vain, of course. They did not see, at the time, that in reality it was the conflict of two concepts of revolution, the middle class revolution and the proletarian revolution.

It was only natural that Lenin and his comrades were utterly unable to see that the impending proletarian revolution of the West was quite a different thing from their Russian revolution. Lenin did not know capitalism from within, at its highest development, as a world of enlarging proletarian masses, moving up to the time when they could seize power to lay hands on a potentially perfect production apparatus. Lenin knew capitalism only from without, as a foreign, robbing, devastating usurer, such as the western financial and colonial capital must have appeared to him in Russia and other Asiatic countries. His idea was that in order to conquer, the Western masses had only to join the anti-capitalistic power established in Russia; they should not obstinately try to seek other ways but were to follow the Russian example. Hence flexible tactics were needed in the west to win the great masses of socialist and union members as soon as possible, to induce them to leave their own leaders and parties that were bound to their national governments, and to join the communist parties, without the necessity of changing their own ideas and convictions. So Moscow tactics followed logically from the basic misunderstanding.

And what had Moscow propagated had by far the greatest weight. it had the authority of a victorious against a defeated (German) revolution. Will you be wiser than your teachers? The moral authority of Russian Communism was so undisputed that even a year later the excluded German opposition asked to be admitted as a 'sympathizing' adherent to the Third International. But besides moral authority, the Russians had the material authority of money behind them. An enormous amount of literature, easily paid for by Moscow subsidies, flooded the western countries: weekly papers, pamphlets, exciting news about successes in Russia, scientific reviews, all explaining Moscow's views. Against this overwhelming offensive of noisy propaganda, the small groups of Western communists, with their lack of financial means, had no chance. So the new and sprouting recognition of the conditions necessary for revolution were beaten down and strangled by Moscow's powerful weapons. Moreover Russian subsidies were used to support a number of salaried party secretaries, who, under threat of being fired, naturally turned into defenders of Russian tactics.

When it became apparent that even all this was not sufficient, Lenin himself wrote his well known pamphlet "Left-Wing Communism \_ An Infantile Disorder." Though his arguments showed only his lack of understanding of western conditions, the fact that Lenin, with his still unbroken authority, so openly took sides in the internal differences, had a great influence on a number of western communists. And yet, notwithstanding all this, the majority of the German communist party stuck to the knowledge they had gained through their experience of proletarian struggles. So at their next congress at Heidelberg, Dr. Levi,

by some dirty tricks, had first to divide the majority—to excluded one part, and then to outvote the other part—in order to win a formal and apparent victory for the Moscow tactics.

The excluded groups went on for some years disseminating their ideas. But their views were drowned out by the enormous noise of Moscow propaganda, they had no appreciable influence on the political events of the next years. They could only maintain and further develop, by mutual theoretical discussions and some publications, their understanding of the conditions of proletarian revolution and keep them alive for times to come.

The beginnings of a proletarian revolution in the West had been killed by the powerful middle class revolution of the East.

## V.

Is it correct to call this Russian revolution that destroyed the bourgeoisie and introduced socialism a middle class revolution?

Some years afterwards in the big towns of poverty-stricken Russia special shops with plate glass fronts and exquisite, expensive delicacies appeared, especially for the rich, and luxurious night clubs were opened, frequented by gentlemen and ladies in evening dress—chiefs of departments, high officials, directors of factories and committees. they were stared at in surprise by the poor in the streets, and the disillusioned communists said: “There go the new bourgeoisie.” They were wrong. It was not a new bourgeoisie; but it was a new ruling class. When a new ruling class comes up, disappointed revolutionaries always call it by the name of the former ruling class. In the French revolution, the rising capitalists were called “the new aristocracy.” Here in Russia the new class firmly seated in the saddle as masters of the production apparatus was the bureaucracy. It had to play in Russia the same role that in the West the middle class, the bourgeoisie, had played: to develop the country by industrialization from primitive conditions to high productivity.

Just as in Western Europe the bourgeoisie had risen out of the common people of artisans and peasants, including some aristocrats, by ability, luck and cunning, so the Russian ruling bureaucracy had risen from the working class and the peasants (including former officials) by ability, luck and cunning. The difference is that in the USSR they did not own the means of production individually but collectively; so their mutual competition, too, must go on in other forms. This means a fundamental difference in the economic system; collective, planned production and exploitation instead of individual haphazard production and exploitation; state capitalism instead of private capitalism. For the working masses, however, the difference is slight, not fundamental; once more they are exploited by a middle class. But now this exploitation is intensified by the dictatorial form of government, by the total lack of all those liberties which in the West render fighting against the bourgeoisie possible.

This character of modern Russia determined the character of the fight of the Third International. Alternating red-hot utterances with the flattest parliamentary opportunism, or combining both, the 3<sup>rd</sup> International tried to win the adherence of the working masses of the West. It exploited the class antagonism of the workers against capitalism to win power for the Party. It caught up all the revolutionary enthusiasm of youth and all the rebellious impulses of the masses, prevented them from developing into a growing proletarian power, and wasted them in worthless political adventures. It hoped thus to get power over the Western bourgeoisie; but it was not able to do so, because understanding of the inner-most character of big capitalism was totally lacking. This capitalism cannot be conquered by an outside force; it can be destroyed only from within, by the proletarian revolution. Class domination can be destroyed only by the initiative and insight of a self-reliant proletarian class: party discipline and obedience of the masses to their leaders can

only lead to a new class domination. Indeed in Italy and Germany this activity of the Communist Party prepared the way for fascism.

The Communist Parties that belong to the Third International are entirely—materially and mentally—dependent on Russia, are the obedient servants of the rulers of Russia. Hence, when Russia, after 1933, felt that it must line up with France against Germany, all former intransigence was forgotten. The Comintern became the champion of “democracy” and united not only with socialists but even with some capitalist parties into the so-called Popular Front. Gradually its power to attract, through pretending that it represented the old revolutionary traditions, began to disappear; its proletarian following diminished.

But at the same time, its influence on the intellectual middle classes in Europe and America began to grow. A large number of books and reviews in all fields of social thought were issued by more or less camouflaged C.P. publishing houses in England, France and America. Some of them were valuable historical studies or popular compilations; but mostly they were worthless expositions of so-called Leninism. All this was literature evidently not intended for workers, but for intellectuals, in order to win them over to Russian communism.

The new approach met with some success. The ex-soviet diplomat Alexander Barmine tells in his memoirs how he perceived with surprise in western Europe that just when he and other Bolsheviks began to have their doubts as to the outcome of the Russian revolution, the western middle class intellectuals, misled by the lying praises of the successes of the Five Year Plan, began to feel a sympathetic interest in Communism. The reason is clear: now that Russia was obviously not a worker’s state any more, they felt that this state-capitalistic rule of a bureaucracy came nearer to their own ideals of rule by the intelligentsia than did the European and American rule of big finance. Now that a new ruling minority over and above the masses was established in Russia, the Communist Party, its foreign servant had to turn to those classes from which, when private capitalism collapsed, new rulers for exploiting the masses could arise.

Of course, to succeed in this way, they needed a worker’s revolution to put down capitalist power. Then they must try to divert it from its own aims and make it an instrument for their party rule. So we see what kind of difficulties the future working class revolution may have to face. It will have to fight not only the bourgeoisie but the enemies of the bourgeoisie as well. It has not only to throw off the yoke of its present masters; it must also keep from those who would try to be its future masters.

## VI.

The world has now entered into its new great imperialistic war. Cautious though the warring governments may be in handling the economic and social forces and in trying to prevent hell from breaking loose entirely, they will not be able to hold back a social catastrophe. With the general exhaustion and impoverishment, most severe on the European continent, with the spirit of fierce aggressiveness still mighty, violent class struggles will accompany the unavoidable new adjustments of the system of production. Then, with private capitalism broken down, the issues will be planned economy, state capitalism, worker’s exploitation on the one side; worker’s freedom and mastery over production on the other.

The working class is going into this war burdened with the capitalistic tradition of Party leadership and the phantom tradition of a revolution of the Russian kind. the tremendous pressure of this war will drive the workers into spontaneous resistance against their governments and into the beginnings of new forms of real fight. When it happens that Russia enters the field against the Western powers, it will reopen its old box of slogans and make an appeal to the workers for “world revolution against capitalism” in an attempt to get the rebellious-minded workers on its side. So Bolshevism would have its chance once more. But this would be no solution for the problems of the workers. when

the general misery increases and conflicts between classes become fiercer, the working class must, out of its own necessity, seize the means of production and find ways to free itself from the influence of Bolshevism.

## Materialism And Historical Materialism

(1942)

### I

The evolution of Marxism to its present stage can be understood only in connection with the social and political developments of the period in which it arose. With the coming of capitalism in Germany there developed simultaneously a growing opposition to the existing aristocratic absolutism. The ascending bourgeois class needed freedom of trade and commerce, favorable legislation, a government sympathetic to its interests, freedom of press and assembly in order to fight unhindered for its needs and desires. But the bourgeoisie found itself confronted instead with a hostile regime, an omnipotent police, and press censorship which suppressed every criticism of the reactionary government. The struggle between these forces, which led to the revolution of 1848, was first conducted on a theoretical level, as a struggle of ideas and a criticism of the prevailing ideology. The criticism of the young bourgeois intelligentsia was directed mainly against religion and Hegelian philosophy.

Hegelian philosophy in which the self-development of the *Absolute Idea* creates the world and then, as the developing world, enters the consciousness of men, was the philosophical guise suited to the Christianity of the Restoration after 1815. Religion, handed down by past generations, served as always as the theoretical basis and justification for the perpetuation of old class relations. Since an open political struggle was still impossible, the fight against the feudal oligarchy had to be conducted in a veiled form, as an attack on religion. This was the task of the group of young intellectuals of 1840 among whom Marx grew up and rose to a leading position.

While still a student Marx submitted, although reluctantly, to the force of the Hegelian method of thought and made it his own. That he chose for his doctoral dissertation the comparison of two great materialist philosophies of ancient Greece, Democritus and Epicurus, seems to indicate, however, that in the deep recesses of his consciousness Marx inclined towards materialism. Shortly thereafter he was called upon to assume the editorship of a new paper founded by the oppositional Rhenish bourgeoisie in Cologne. Here he was drawn into the practical problems of the political and social struggles. So well did he conduct the fight that after one year of publication the paper was banned by the state. It was during this period that Feuerbach made his final step towards materialism. Feuerbach brushed aside Hegel's fantastic system, turned to the simple experiences of every day life, and arrived at the conclusion that religion was a man-made product. Forty years later Engels still spoke fervently of the liberating effect that Feuerbach's work had on his contemporaries, and of the enthusiasm with which Marx embraced the new ideas despite some critical reservations. To Marx this meant a new turn in the social struggle: from attacking a heavenly image to coming to grips openly with earthly realities. Thus in 1843 in his essay *A Criticism of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right* he wrote:

“As far as Germany is concerned the criticism of religion is practically completed, and the criticism of religion is the basis of all criticism ... The struggle against religion is the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion ... . Religion is the moan of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion, as the illusory happiness of the people, is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to abandon the illusions about their conditions is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illu-

sions. The criticism of religion therefore contains potentially the criticism of the Vale of Tears whose aureole is religion. Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers which adorned the chain, not that man should wear his fetters denuded of fanciful embellishment, but that he should throw off the chain, and break the living flower ... Thus the criticism of heaven transforms itself into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of right, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.”

The task confronting Marx was to inquire into the realities of social life. His study of the French Revolution and French socialism as well as English economy and the English working class movement, in collaboration with Engels during their stay in Paris and Brussels, led towards further elaboration of the doctrine known as *Historical Materialism*. As the doctrine of social development by way of class struggles we find the theory expounded in “*Poverty of Philosophy*” (in French 1846), the “*Communist Manifesto*” (1847), and in the preface to “*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*” (1859).

Marx and Engels themselves refer to this system of thought as materialism in opposition to the idealism of Hegel and the neo-Hegelians. What do they understand by materialism? Engels, discussing the fundamental theoretical problems of historical materialism in his *Anti-Dühring* and in his booklet on Feuerbach, states in the latter publication:

“The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being ... Those who asserted the primacy of the spirit to nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other – comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism.”

That not only the human mind is bound up with the brain, but also that man with his brain and mind is part and parcel of the rest of the animal kingdom and the unorganic world, was a self-evident truth to Marx and Engels. This conception is common to all “schools of materialism.” What distinguishes Marxism materialism from other schools must be learned from its various polemical works dealing with practical questions of politics and society. To Marx materialistic thought was a working method. In his writing he does not deal with philosophy nor does he formulate materialism into a system of philosophy; he is utilizing it as a method for the study of the world and thus demonstrates its validity. In the essay quoted above, for example, Marx does not demolish the Hegelian philosophy of right by philosophical disputations, but through an annihilating criticism of the real conditions existing in Germany.

The materialist method replaces philosophical sophistry and disputations around abstract concepts with the study of the real material world. Feuerbach preceded Marx in this respect in so far as he was the first to point out that religious concepts and ideas are derived from material conditions. Let us take a few examples to elucidate this point. The statement “Man proposes, God disposes” the theologian interprets from the point of view of the omnipotence of God. The materialist on the other hand searches for the cause of the discrepancy between expectations and results and finds it in the social effects of commodity exchange and competition. The politician debates the desirability of freedom and socialism; the materialist asks: from what individuals or classes do these demands spring, what specific content do they have, and to what social need do they correspond? The philosopher, in abstract speculations about the essence of time, seeks to establish whether or not absolute time exists. The materialist compares the clocks to see whether it can be established unreservedly that two phenomena occur simultaneously, or follow one another.

Feuerbach, too, utilized the materialist method. He saw in living man the source of all religious ideas and concepts. The validity of his materialism, however, depended on whether he was successful in presenting a clear and comprehensive interpretation of religion. A materialism that leaves the problem obscure is insufficient and will lead back to idealism. Marx pointed out that the mere principle of taking living man as the starting point for investigation is not enough to lead to clarity. In his theses on Feuerbach in 1845 he formulated the essential difference between his materialist method and that of Feuerbach. We quote:

“Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.” (Thesis 6) “His work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular foundation lifts itself above itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictions of this secular basis. The latter must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionised in practice.” (Thesis 4)

Briefly, man can be understood only as a social being. From the individual one must proceed to society and dissolve the social contradictions out of which religion has evolved. The real world, that is the sensual and material world, where all ideology and consciousness have their origin, is human society – with nature in the background, of course, as the basis on which society rests and of which it is a part altered by man.

A presentation of these ideas is to be found in the book “*The German Ideology*,” written in 1845-46. The part that deals with Feuerbach, however, was first published in 1925 by Rjazanoff, then head of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. The complete work was not published until 1932. Here the theses on Feuerbach are worked out in greater length. Although it is apparent that Marx wrote quite hurriedly, he nevertheless gave a brilliant presentation of all essential ideas concerning the evolution of society which, later, found further illumination in the propaganda pamphlet “*The Communist Manifesto*” and in the preface to “*The Critique of Political Economy*.”

The *German Ideology* is directed first of all against the theoretical view which regarded creative consciousness and ideas developing from ideas as the only factors that determine human history. Marx has nothing but contempt for this point of view, “The phantoms formed in the human brain,” he says on page 14, “are necessary sublimates of their material, empirically-verifiable life process bound to material premises.” It was essential to put emphasis on the real world, the material and empirically-given world as the source of all ideology. But it was also necessary to criticise the materialist theories that culminated in Feuerbach. As a protest against ideology the return to biological man and his physical needs is correct, but taking the individual as an abstract being does not offer a solution to the question of how and why religious ideas originate. Human society in its historical evolution is the only reality controlling human life. Only out of society can the spiritual life of man be explained. Feuerbach, in attempting to find an explanation of religion by a return to the “real” man did not find the real man, because he searched for him in the individual, in the human being generally. From this approach the world of ideas cannot be explained. Thus he was forced to fall back on the ideology of universal human love. “Insofar as Feuerbach is a materialist,” Marx said, “he does not deal with history, and insofar as he considers history, he is not a materialist.” (*The German Ideology*, pp. 37-38).

What Feuerbach did not accomplish was accomplished by the historical Materialism of Marx: an explanation of the development of man’s ideas out of the material world. The historical development of society is brilliantly rendered in the following sentence: “... Men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.” (*German Ideology*, p. 14). We know reality only through experience which, as the external world, comes to us through the medium of our senses. A philosophical theory of knowledge will then be based on this principle: the material, empirically given world is the reality which determines thought.

The basic epistemological problem was always what truth can be attributed to thinking. The term “critique of knowledge,” used by the professional philosophers for “theory of knowledge,” already implies a view point of doubt. In his second and fifth theses on Feuerbach Marx refers to this problem and again points out that the practical activity of man is the essential content of his life.



“The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. In practice man must prove the truth, i. e., the reality and power, the “this-sidedness” of his thinking:” (Thesis 2) ... “Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thinking*, appeals to *sensuous contemplation*, but he does not conceive sensuousness as a practical, human-sensuous activity.” (Thesis 5).

Why practical? Because man in the first place must live. His biological organism, his faculties and his abilities and all his activity are adapted to this very end. With these he must adapt himself to and assert himself in the external world, i. e. nature, and as an individual in society, as well as with his faculty of thinking, the activity of the organ of thought, the brain, and with thought itself. Thinking is a bodily faculty. In every phase of life man uses his power of thought to draw conclusions from his experiences on which expectations and hopes are built and which regulate his mode of living and his actions. The correctness of his conclusions, a condition for his survival, is determined by the very fact of his being. Thinking is a purposeful adaptation to life, and therefore truth can be attributed to it though not truth in an absolute sense. But on the basis of his experiences, man derives generalizations and laws on which his expectations are based. They are generally correct as is witnessed by his survival. In particular instances, however, false conclusions may be derived and hence failure and destruction. Life is a continuous process of learning, adaptation, development. Practice alone is the unsparing test of the correctness of thinking.

Let us first consider this in relation to natural science. Here thought finds in practice its purest and most abstract form. This is why philosophers of nature accept this form as the subject for their observations and pay no attention to its similarity to the thought of every individual in his every day activity. Yet thinking in the study of nature is only a highly developed special field of the entire social labor process. This labor process demands an accurate knowledge of natural phenomena and its integration into laws, in order to be able to utilize them successfully in the field of technics. The determination of these laws through observation of special phenomena is the task of specialists. In the study of nature it is generally accepted that practice, in this instance experiment, is the test of truth. Here, too, it is accepted that observed regularities, known as “natural laws,” are generally fairly dependable guides to human practice, and although they are frequently not altogether correct and even disappointing, they are improved constantly and elaborated upon through the progress of science. If at times man is referred to as the “lawmaker of nature,” it must be added that nature very often disregards these laws and summons man to make better ones.

The practice of life, however, comprises much more than the scientific study of nature. The relation of the natural scientist to the world, despite his experimentation, remains sensuous-observational. To him the world is an external thing. But in reality people deal with nature in their practical activities by acting upon her and making her part of their existence: Through his labor man does not oppose nature as an external or alien world. On the contrary, by the toil of his hands he transforms the external world to such an extent that the original natural substance is no longer discernable, and while this process goes on, man changes, too. Thus, man creates his own world: human society in a nature changed by him. What meaning, then, has the question of whether his thinking leads to truth? The object of his thinking is that which he himself produces by his physical and mental activities and which he controls through his brain. This is not a question of partial truths such as, for instance, those of which Engels wrote in his book on Feuerbach that the artificial production of the natural dye *alizarin* would prove the validity of the chemical formula employed.<sup>7</sup> This is not, to repeat, a question of partial truths in a specific field of knowledge, where the practical consequence either affirms or refutes them. Ra-

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<sup>7</sup> This formula did not prove – as Engels believed – the validity of materialism as against Kant’s “Thing in itself.” The “Thing in itself” results from the incapacity of bourgeois philosophy to explain the earthly origin of moral law. The “Thing in itself” has thus not been contradicted and proven false by the chemical industry but by historical materialism. It was the latter that enabled Engels to see the fallacy in the “Thing in itself,” although he offered other arguments.

ther the point in question here is a philosophical one, namely, whether human thought is capable of encompassing the real, the deepest truth of the world. That the philosopher, in his secluded study, who is concerned exclusively with abstract philosophical concepts, which are derived in turn from abstract scientific concepts also formulated outside of practical life experiences, should have his doubts in the midst of this world of shadows is easily understood. But for human beings who live and act in the real every day world the question has no meaning. The truth of thought, says Marx, is nothing other than power and mastery over the real world.

Of course this statement embodies a contradiction: Thinking cannot be said to be true where the human mind does not master the world. Whenever – as Marx pointed out in *Capital* – the products of man's hand grows beyond his intellectual power, which he no longer controls and which confronts him in the form of commodity production and capital as an independent social entity, mastering man and even threatening to destroy him, then his mental activity submits to the mysticism of a supernatural being and he begins to doubt his ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. Thus, in the course of many centuries the myth of supernatural deity overshadowed the daily materialistic experiences of man. Not until society has evolved to a point where man will be able to comprehend all social forces and will have learned to master his environment – not until a communist society prevails, in short – will his ideas be in full accord with the realities of the world. Only after the nature of social production as a fundamental basis of all life and therefore of future development has become clear to man, only when the mind – be it only theoretically at first – actually masters the world, only then will our thinking be fully correct. And only then will materialism, the science of society as formulated by Marx, gain permanent mastery and become the only applicable philosophy. The Marxian theory of society in principle means the renewal of philosophy.

Marx, however, was not concerned with pure philosophy. "Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but the point is to change it," he says in the theses on Feuerbach. The world situation pressed for practical action. At first inspired by the bourgeois opposition to feudal absolutism, later strengthened by the new forces that emanated from the struggle of the English and French proletariat against the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels, thanks to their careful study of social realities, arrived at the conclusion that the proletarian revolution following on the heels of the bourgeois revolution would bring the real liberation of humanity. Their activity was devoted to this revolution, and in the *Communist Manifesto* they laid down the first directions for the workers' class struggle.

Marxism has since been inseparably connected with the class struggle of the proletariat. If we ask what Marxism is, we must first of all understand that it does not mean everything Marx ever thought and wrote. The views of his earlier years, for instance, are representative only in part; they are developmental phases leading toward Marxism. While the role of the proletarian class struggle and the aim of communism is already outlined in the *Communist Manifesto*, the theory of surplus value is developed much later. All of Marx's developing ideas are determined by the social relation, the character of the revolution, the part played by the state. And all these ideas had a different content in 1848 when the proletariat had only begun to develop than they had later or have today. Of vital importance, however, are Marx's original scientific contributions. There is first of all the theory of historical materialism, according to which the development of society is determined by its productive forces that make for a certain mode of production, especially through the productive force of class struggles. There is the theory of the determination of all political and ideological phenomena of intellectual life in general by the productive forces and relations. And there is the presentation of capitalism as a historical phenomena, the analysis of its structure by the theory of value and surplus value, and the explanation of capitalism's evolutionary tendencies through the proletarian revolution towards communism. With these theories Marx has enriched the knowledge of humanity permanently. They constitute the solid fundament of Marxism. From these premises further conclusions can be derived under new and changed circumstances. Because of this scientific basis Marxism is a new way of looking at the past and the future, at the meaning of

life, the world and thought; it is a spiritual revolution, a new view of the world. As a view of life, however, Marxism is real only through the class that adheres to it. The workers who are imbued with this new outlook become aware of themselves as the class of the future, growing in number and strength and consciousness, striving to take production into their own hands and through the revolution to become masters of their own fate. Thus Marxism as the theory of the proletarian revolution is a reality, and at the same time a living power, only in the minds and hearts of the revolutionary proletariat.

Yet Marxism is not an inflexible doctrine or a sterile dogma. Society changes, the proletariat grows, science develops. New forms and phenomena arise in capitalism, in politics, in science, which Marx and Engels could not have foreseen or surmised. But the method of research which they formed remains to this day an excellent guide and tool towards the understanding and interpretation of new events. The proletariat, enormously increased under capitalism, today stands only at the threshold of its revolution and Marxist development; Marxism only now begins to play its role as a living power in the proletariat. Thus Marxism itself is a living theory which grows with the increase of the proletariat and with the tasks and aims of the class struggle.

## Anthropogenesis

(summary)

There are three characteristics, which, to a great extent, distinguish man from the animals; abstract thinking by means of conceptions, speech, and the use of tools fashioned by himself. The problem of anthropogenesis is to find out how, from the small traces of analogous properties in animals, these qualitatively entirely different human characteristics could develop.

Animals too make use of dead objects to suit their own purposes, but only man shapes them into tools according to a conscious plan. The tool in the human hand performs the same function as the bodily organ of the animal. The grasping hand was a necessary condition for the manipulating of tools and this was inherited from the arboreal life of man's ancestors. Social life was another condition for the use of tools, because only in communities could it be preserved and knowledge about it thus be transferred to the next generation. Because the tool is a separate and dead object it can easily be replaced when damaged, interchanged for a better one, and differentiated into a multiplicity of forms for various uses. It can be improved upon continually by new inventions, thus raising man into increasing superiority above the animals.

Animals too have consciousness and a certain intelligence. The stimulus of bodily needs and sense impressions induce direct action as a response. In man this direct connection is broken; the impressions are collected in the mind, and afterwards action comes spontaneously. Thinking follows a detour, or rather many detours which must be compared; numbers of images interpose between impressions and actions, forming chains of ideas that are objects of observation by our own consciousness, and take the character of abstract concepts. In the brain the distinction between man and animal appears only as a quantitative difference; the brain-weight of man (for the same body size) is four times larger than with the anthropoids, and so is the surface of the cortex. Whether the frontal lobes, usually considered as the organ of abstract reasoning, are relatively larger in man is uncertain.

Animals utter sounds of emotion, which in social groups serve as signals of warning and communication. In man these sounds are words, auditory symbols conventionally designating quite different things, names for objects and actions. They constitute a language, a perfect and complicated apparatus of intercourse serving for co-ordination of action. Speech is an organ of community that can only originate and exist in a community, as a condition of collaborate activity and fight; it embodies and preserves the ever increasing mass of knowledge. It can only exist with a certain faculty for thinking; on the

other hand human thinking would not be possible without speech. Concepts can be formed and retained only by expressing them in names and words; conscious thinking is always speaking with one self by means of words.

The use of tools was an important factor in the origin of human thinking. The tool interposes itself between organism and outer world, between stimulus and action. It compels action, and hence thinking, to make a detour, from the sense impression via the tool to the object. Because there are many tools there are many detours, and a choice must be made after following out all of them in the mind before acting. The separation between the construction of the tool beforehand and its use afterwards produces a separation in the mental processes and makes theoretical thinking a distinctive activity. The tool objectivates the previously instinctive action, and by the visible results of its working awakens consciousness of the concept of causality. Speech too was greatly induced by the use of tools. Since a tool was alternatively object and part of the subject it struck the attention first of all as a separate object; and by its importance for labour and life some sound, accompanying action which involved its use, became attached to it. These dependencies are shown by the anatomical fact that in the cortex the speech centre is formed only in that hemisphere which innervates and directs the hand holding the tools. For most people this is the left hemisphere, whereas for left-handed people it is the right hemisphere.

Because these three special human characteristics are all dependent on one another they could develop only together. This they did from mere traces, each in common growth mutually strengthening the others, and each by its small increment inducing increases in the others, the whole of the process being supported by the previous growth of the brain. The first impulse came from a change of life conditions that made man's ancestors inhabitants of the plains with an erect posture. Then, in some hundreds of thousands of years, with extreme slowness at first, and afterwards more and more rapidly, the use of tools, the faculty of speech, and abstract thinking developed. The previous development of the animals, because the changes in bodily organs depend on biological processes, took place extremely slowly, and always by the formation of new species. The rapid development of this one species *Homo Sapiens* was possible because the early interchangeable and artificial tools had replaced the bodily organs and could be improved increasingly rapidly by the struggle for life. Thus man became master of the earth, and his rising put an end to the development of the animal kingdom. In the last part of his rise, some thousands of years ago, the invention of writing, adding visible and lasting symbols to the passing sounds of spoken language, marks the beginning of civilization. It produced theoretical science as a basis for a continuous technical progress, which is now nearly about to unite all mankind into one self-controlling community.

## The Failure of the Working Class

(1947)

In former issues of *Politics* the problem has been posed: Why did the working class fail in its historical task? Why did it not offer resistance to national socialism in Germany? Why is there no trace of any revolutionary movement amongst the workers of America? What has happened to the social vitality of the world working class? Why do the masses all over the globe no longer seem capable of initiating anything new aimed at their own self-liberation? Some light may be thrown upon this problem by the following considerations.

It is easy to ask: why did not the workers rise against threatening fascism? To fight you must have a positive aim. Opposed to fascism there were two alternatives: either to maintain, or to return to the old capitalism, with its unemployment, its crises, its corruption, its misery—whereas Nationalism Socialism preserved itself as an anti-capitalist reign of labor, without unemployment, a reign of national greatness, of community poli-

tics that could lead to a socialist revolution. Thus, indeed, the deeper question is: why did the German workers not make their revolution?

Well, they had experienced a revolution: 1918. But it had taught them the lesson that neither the Social Democratic Party, nor the trade unions was the instrument of their liberation; both turned out to be instruments for restoring capitalism. So what were they to do? The Communist Party did not show a way either; it propagated the Russian system of state-capitalism, with its still worse lack of freedom.

Could it have been otherwise? The avowed aim of the Socialist Party in Germany—and then in all countries—was state socialism. According to program the working class had to conquer political dominance, and then by its power over the state, had to organize production into a state-directed planned economic system. Its instrument was to be the Socialist Party, developed already into a huge body of 300,000 members, with a million trade-union members and three million voters behind them, led by a big apparatus of politicians, agitators, editors, eager to take the place of the former rulers. According to program, then, they should expropriate by law the capitalist class and organize production in a centrally-directed planned system.

It is clear that in such a system the workers, though their daily bread may seem to be secured, are only imperfectly liberated. The upper echelons of society have been changed, but the foundations bearing the entire building remain the old ones: factories with wage-earning workers under the command of directors and managers. So we find it described by the English socialist G.D.H. Cole, who after World War 1 strongly influenced the trade unions by his studies of guild socialism and other reforms of the industrial system. He says:

“The whole people would no more be able than the whole body of shareholders in a great enterprise to manage an industry....It would be necessary, under socialism as much as under large scale capitalism, to entrust the actual management of industrial enterprise to salaried experts, chosen for their specialized knowledge and ability in particular branches of work....There is no reason to suppose that the methods of appointing the actual managers in socialized industries would differ widely from those already in force in large scale capitalist enterprise....There is no reason to suppose that the socialization of any industry would mean a great change in its managerial personnel.”

Thus the workers will have got new masters instead of the old ones. Good humane masters instead of the bad, rapacious masters of today. Appointed by a socialist government or at best chosen by themselves. But, once chosen, they must be obeyed. The workers are not master over their shops, they are not master of the means of production. Above them stands the commanding power of a state bureaucracy of leaders and managers. Such a state of affairs can attract the workers as long as they feel powerless against the power of the capitalists: so in their first rise during the 19<sup>th</sup> century this was put up as the goal. They were not strong enough to drive the capitalists out of the command over the production installations; so their way out was state socialism, a government of socialists expropriating the capitalists.

Now that the workers begin to realize that state socialism means new fetters, they stand before the difficult task of finding and opening new roads. This is not possible without a deep revolution of ideas, accompanied by much internal strife. No wonder that the vigor of the fight slackens, that they hesitate, divided and uncertain, and seem to have lost their energy.

Capitalism, indeed, cannot be annihilated by a change in the commanding persons; but only by the abolition of commanding. The real freedom of the workers consists in their direct mastery over the means of production. The essence of the future free world community is not that the working masses get enough food, but they direct their work themselves, collectively. For the real content of their life is their productive work; the fundamental change is not a change in the passive realm of consumption, but in the active realm of production. Before them now the problem arises of how to unite freedom and organization; how to combine mastery of the workers over the work with the binding up of all this work into a well-planned social entirety. How to organize production, in every

shop as well as over the whole of world economy, in such a way that they themselves as parts of a collaborating community regulate their work. Mastery over production means that the personnel, the bodies of workers, technicians and experts that by their collective effort run the shop and put into action the technical apparatus are at the same time the managers themselves. The organization into a social entity is then performed by delegates of the separate plants, by so-called workers councils, discussing and deciding on the common affairs. The development of such a council organization will afford the solution of the problem; but this development is a historical process, taking time and demanding a deep transformation of outlook and character.

This new vision of a free communism is only beginning to take hold of the minds of the workers. And so now we begin to understand why former promising workers' movements could not succeed. When the aims are too narrow there can be no real liberation. When the aim is a semi- or mock-liberation, the inner forces aroused are insufficient to bring about fundamental results. So the German socialist movement, unable to provide the workers with arms powerful enough to fight successfully monopolistic capital, had to succumb. The working class had to search for new roads. But the difficulty of disentangling itself from the net of socialist teachings imposed by old parties and old slogans made it powerless against aggressive capitalism, and brought about a period of continuous decline, indicating the need for a new orientation.

Thus what is called the failure of the working class is the failure of its narrow socialist aims. The real fight for liberation has yet to begin; what is known as the workers' movement in the century behind us, seen in this way, was only a series of skirmishes of advance guards. Intellectuals, who are wont to reduce the social struggle to the most abstract and simple formulas, are inclined to underrate the tremendous scope of the social transformation before us. They think how easy it would be to put the right name into the ballot box. They forget what deep inner revolution must take place in the working masses; what amount of clear insight, of solidarity, of perseverance and courage, of proud fighting spirit is needed to vanquish the immense physical and spiritual power of capitalism.

The workers of the world nowadays have two mighty foes, two hostile and suppressing powers over against them: the monopolistic capitalism of America and England, and Russian state capitalism. The former is drifting toward social dictatorship camouflaged in democratic forms; the latter proclaims dictatorship openly, formerly with the addition "of the proletariat," although nobody believes that any more. They both try to keep the workers in a state of obedient well-drilled followers, acting only at the command of the party leaders, the former by the aid of the socialist program of socialist parties, the latter by the slogans and wily tricks of the Communist party. The tradition of glorious struggle helps keep them spiritually dependent on obsolete ideas. In the competition for world domination, each tries to keep the workers in its fold, by shouting against capitalism here, against dictatorship there.

In the awakening resistance to both, the workers are beginning to perceive that they can fight successfully only by adhering to and proclaiming the exactly opposite principle—the principle of devoted collaboration of free and equal personalities. Theirs is the task of finding out the way in which the principle can be carried out in their practical action.

The paramount question here is whether there are indications of an existing or awakening fighting spirit in the working class. So we must leave the field of political party strife, now chiefly intended to fool the masses, and turn to the field of economic interests, where the workers intuitively fight their bitter struggle for living conditions. Here we see that with the development of small business into big business, the trade unions cease to be instruments of the workers' struggle. In modern times these organizations ever more turn into the organs by which monopoly capital dictates its terms to the working class.

When the workers begin to realize that the trade unions cannot direct their fight against capital they face the task of finding and practicing new forms of struggle. These new forms are the wildcat strikes. Here they shake off direction by the old leaders and the

old organizations; here they take the initiative in their own hands; here they have to think out time and ways, to take the decisions, to do all the work of propaganda, of extension, of directing their actions themselves. Wildcat strikes are spontaneous outbursts, the genuine practical expression of class struggle against capitalism, though without wider aims as yet; but they embody a new character already in the rebellious masses: self-determination instead of determination by leaders, self-reliance instead of obedience, fighting spirit instead of accepting the dictates from above, unbreakable solidarity and unity with the comrades instead of duty imposed by membership. The unit in action and strike is, of course, the same as the unit of daily productive work, the personnel of the shop, the plant, the docks; it is the common work, the common interest against the common capitalist master that compels them to act as one. In these discussions and decisions all the individual capabilities, all the forces of character and mind of all the workers, exalted and strained to the utmost, are co-operating towards the common goal.

In the wildcat strikes we may see the beginnings of a new practical orientation of the working class, a new tactic, the method of direct action. They represent the only actual rebellion of man against the deadening suppressing weight of world-dominating capital. Surely, on small scale such strikes mostly have to be broken off without success—warning signs only. Their efficiency depends on their extension over larger masses; only fear for such indefinite extension can compel capital to make concessions. If the pressure by capitalist exploitation grows heavier—and we may be sure it will—resistance will be aroused ever anew and will involve ever larger masses. When the strikes take on such dimensions as to disturb seriously the social order, when they assail capitalism in its inner essence, the mastery of the shops, the workers will have to confront state power with all its resources. Then their strikes must assume a political character; they have to broaden their social outlook; their strike committees, embodying their class community, assume wider social functions, taking the character of workers' councils. Then the social revolution, the breakdown of capitalism, comes into view.

Is there any reason to expect such a revolutionary development in coming times, through conditions that were lacking until now? It seems that we can, with some probability, indicate such conditions. In Marx's writings we find the sentence: a production system does not perish before all its innate possibilities have developed. In the persistence of capitalism, we now begin to detect some deeper truth in this sentence than was suspected before. As long as the capitalist system can keep the masses alive, they feel no stringent necessity to do away with it. And it is able to do so as long as it can grow and expand its realm over wider parts of the world. Hence, so long as half the world's population stands outside capitalism, its task is not finished. The many hundreds of millions thronged in the fertile plains of Eastern and Southern Asia are still living in pre-capitalist conditions. As long as they can afford a market to be provided with rails and locomotives, with trucks, machines and factories, capitalist enterprise, especially in America, may prosper and expand. And henceforth it is on the working class of America that world-revolution depends.

This means that the necessity of revolutionary struggle will impose itself once capitalism engulfs the bulk of mankind, once a further significant expansion is hampered. The threat of wholesale destruction in this last phase of capitalism makes this fight a necessity for all the producing classes of society, the farmers and intellectuals as well as the workers. What is condensed here in these short sentences is an extremely complicated historical process filing a period of revolution, prepared and accompanied by spiritual fights and fundamental changes in basic ideas. These developments should be carefully studied by all those to whom communism without dictatorship, social organization on the basis of community-minded freedom, represents the future of mankind.

## Anton Pannekoek to J.A. Dawson

(Letter 1946)

Amsterdam

Dear Comrade.

My friend, Paul Mattick, advised me to get into communication with you in order to investigate the possibility of publishing a book on the new aspect of working class movement.

Under the influence of the depression and confusion in the 1920'ies among the socialist and labor groups, there arose in a group of leftist militants in Holland. (connected with friends in Germany, England and France) the opinion that this crisis and apparent decline was in reality a transition and preliminary to the real coming fight for worker's freedom.

Whereas all socialist writers proclaim as their goal State-socialism, where the workers are dominated and commanded by managers in the shops, by a bureaucracy of intellectuals in social life (look, e.g. the writings of Cole in England), these comrades (calling themselves groups of international communists) demonstrated that freedom from exploitation is only possible when the workers are themselves masters of the shops, direct and manage the shops by their community, and build up a social organisation of all the shops and enterprises into a united system of production by means of *workers' councils*.

At present we see how State-socialism in making headway, as propagated by the socialist and communist parties, just means the tendencies of monopolist capital linking itself narrower to State Power (what the English Labor Government is doing is only modernising capitalism, abolishing its worst ignominies while securing State-guaranteed profits to capital).

So we see the future of the real classfight of the workers in bi strike movements, increasing in importance, against big capital growing into a united world capital and State (perhaps growing into a world-government), acquiring the character of political strikes, finding its organization the germ of future world organization in their strike-committees turned into workers' councils.

These ideas stand behind the propaganda made by a weekly *Spartacus*, our only weekly that stands by the workers in all their strikes and fights.

A book, explaining these ideas, has been published, and finds rapid approval among the workers here. So now we are desirous to make them known among the English-speaking workers also.

We have an English translation, or better, a version (it has been written separately) of it ready, and are now investigating the possibilities of having it published. So Mattick advised me to write to you. I have just received the [.. Southern Socialist Review..?], published [..by ..] the Workers Literature Bureau.

I realise there are many difficulties.

The book is about 110.000 words or [?.] pages such as in *Rebels and Renegades*. Hence it would demand a large financial expense to publish it. ... On the other hand it will certainly be worth [.. while to make ... efforts to bring it out ... give you a short .. of its contents..]

It consists of first Three Parts written 1941-42, and then an epilogue as Fourth Part, written in 1944, all under the German occupation of Holland; its intention is to summarise and collect the teachings of the workers' movement during half a century and draw the conclusions out of it.

*Part I: The Task*, brings—after a short exposure of labor under capitalism, and the functions of Law and property—the fundamental ideas of the workers' [councils,] their structure and function, a comparison with parliamentarism as the preceding form of social organisation of middle class domination before the period of worker's revolution, and then their functions after the revolution in the growth of freedom of society.



*Part II: The Fight*, gives the development of the forms of class-struggle: the trade-unionism, the wild strikes, the shop occupation; these bring a historical survey and discussion of political strikes and the Russian Revolution, to end with an examination of the deep-seated fundamental difference of such former fights with workers' revolution as a liberation from exploitation.

*Part III: The Foe*, gives a historical survey of the growth of the bourgeoisie in England, in France, in Germany, in their different characters, of American capitalism, of the nature of nationalism and of democracy, to treat then fascism and national-socialism, in order to expound their social roots and principles. In the later written

*Part IV: The War*, different topics are treated that were brought to the fore by the extension of the war into a world war: the Japanese imperialism, the rise of China, the problem of the colonies, the relation of Russia to Europe, the low ebb of workers' power through this war. We think that with this orientation about the past fights and problems and resulting tasks the readers among the working class will be better prepared to face and understand the new problems that every day are confronting them.

Another difficulty would be this: our intention is chiefly to bring it among the workers in England and America, the chief masses on which the future depends. ... A good publishing house or group in England or America would make things easier. But I fear that an independent middle-class social-minded publisher perhaps would shrink back when he sees that the contents, though written in a mild style, are so entirely uncompromising working-class radicalism. And I do not know of any radical-minded group in England who could do it. ... Surely all leaders and groups who aspire at power for themselves will try to keep down such a propaganda, .eg. by a conspiracy of silence about everything that appears from our side. So I think we must not be all too optimistic in the beginning, though probably gradually these ideas will find [...] hearing among workers with fighting spirit, and the publishing of them will be highly appreciated later on ...

I will be glad to hear your opinion about these points, also whether you think it better to look for a publisher in England.

Yours truly

Ant. Pannekoek

## Anton Pannekoek to J.A. Dawson

[The following text is that of J.A. Dawson's containing extracts from Pannekoek's letter in citation marks]

A recent letter from Dr. Anton Pannekoek contains such sound logic that I feel it should be passed along to all workers seeking the way to emancipation.

Dr. Pannekoek writes me that he and his fellow Dutch workers have now hopes that their book (See S.S.R. December issue) will be published by a leading publishing house in London. Inter alia, he mentions that comrade Harris, of Newport, Socialist Party of Great Britain, has contacted him and offered an assurance of help by the Party in furthering the matter if negotiations with the particular publishing house fall through.

Comrades in Australia will be heartened in our fight that such a valiant fighter as Pannekoek should write:

"It was an extraordinary pleasure for me to hear from you of your work and your steady faith in our common cause. I admire your steadfastness on that lonely post. We know that conditions in Australia are difficult for revolutionary ideas and tactics: the English tradition of personal freedom, with all its illusions, and the young economy of colonial lands, with its rich possibilities of personal enterprise, work hand in hand here: 40 years ago New Zealand was praised by H.D. [Joyd] as "Newest England", with its culminating chapter entitled "And so we smashed the money ring" — the petty bourgeois illusion that by staying off the usurious finance capital they were saved from capitalism. But the fact that you mention of the many young workers being caught up by the Communist

Party in their fighting desires, and thus spoilt, shows that at least there is now a younger generation of workers numerous enough to make a real proletarian fight.

“That the C.P is able — in all countries this is the case — to catch them must be ascribed chiefly, I think, to the fact that they have had nothing to awaken real enthusiasm, and do not see their future in the light of pure ideals of freedom.

“We must show them the higher ideals of self-action, self-reliance, self-mastery over the means of production, self-responsibility, as the result of their fight; then the aims the Communist Party sets before them with big noise and passionate fanaticism: organised labor under dictatorship of leaders and officials will fade and lose their attractiveness..

“I think that our propaganda formerly had too little positive content to direct and attract their thoughts.

“Socialist theory, by a primitive or mistaken interpretation of Marx’s thesis of the conquest of political power, was restricted to the programme of party rule in politics and over-government; it did not see that the thesis should mean at the same time destroying of the State power and its substitution by self-rule of the working class, which as now see, must take the form of workers’ councils or soviets. [*Italics mine—J.A.D.*] The same holds for communism. Theory and practice of the C.P. simply steps in at the place of the old ‘radical’ social-democracy, distinguishing itself only by its dishonesty in political intrigue for power. In their essence, the communist and the [labor] socialist parties aspire to the same aim (though in different tones): public ownership (instead of common ownership by the working class) of the means of production, dominance (dictatorial or democratic) of the State officials, and the entire class of leaders, over the workers. So it is no wonder that the workers’ movement all over the world shows a decline, and wants a new orientation along true class lines, to come up to real power.

“But I consider it as an unavoidable intermezzo, a time of transition, to arrive at new clear opinions and aims, and so to come to a new class fight, after overcoming the old socialist illusions of party role.

“I will not live to see the new real fight for freedom (I am nearly 74), but I foresee it with confidence. And I see all the strains in the world that inevitably must result in this development. Old capitalism does not come back, State capitalism will not be able to fix itself as a stable condition; we have entered the transitory state between capitalism and free communism.”

Further on, Dr. Pannekoek stresses that “the book on Workers’ Councils will appear under a pseudonym, for several reasons, a.o., that the ideas therein contained are not personally formed by me, but grown out of the discussions of the entire group.”

He will be sending me matter for the S.S.R, viz.: “a number of theses shortly summarising the viewpoints of our group of T.C. (not officially adopted in a session, but written down by myself), strongly influenced by what we experienced after the war.”

## Religion

(1947)

*(Annexe to the Workers Councils)*

Religion is the oldest and most deeply rooted of the ideologies which still play a role today. Religion has always been the form in which men have expressed the consciousness that their life was dominated by superior and incomprehensible forces. In religion was expressed the idea that there is a deep unity between Man and the world, between Man and nature, and between men and other men. With the evolution of labour, of the various modes of production, and of knowledge about nature, as well as with changes in society and the evolution of the relations between people, religious ideas changed.

Today’s religious ideas were mainly formed four centuries ago during the violent class struggle which the period of the Reformation knew. This struggle — a struggle of the rising bourgeoisie and commercial capital against the mediaeval domination by land-

ed property, a struggle of the peasants against their exploitation by the nobles and clergy — also assumed a religious form. At that time nature, like society, was badly understood and the profound sense of submissiveness which resulted led to the idea that a supernatural force ruled both the world and humanity. But the content of this idea varied with the environment, the poverty and the basic needs of the believer: it took one form for the rich and the petty bourgeois, another for the prince and the prelate, and yet another for the proletariat of the towns. Organisation into sects with different beliefs and creeds which expressed the class interests and antagonisms of that time recalls the organisation into political parties in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Changes of belief, the setting up of new churches were forms of passionate social struggle. When in 1752 the Dutch towns rose against Spain and put William of Orange at their head, they did so by abandoning the Catholic and joining the Calvinist church.

The forms and names which the various creeds took — the way in which religion presented itself — then as later, was of course linked to mediaeval and primitive forms of Christianity. But their basic content, their essential character, was determined by the birth of bourgeois society, of commodity-production. The forces which dominated the life of Man were no longer natural forces — for these had already been mastered to a certain extent by the new form of labour which was developing — but were still unknown social forces. The producers were forced to transform the commodities they produced into money. But for a producer to know if he could sell his commodities and how many depended on something beyond his control, on the market and its prices, determined by social production as a whole and competition. However hardworking or capable he was he could just as easily become impoverished and even be eliminated as succeed and become rich. This power which dominated him was the commodity transformed into money and concentrated in the form of capital. He was no longer the master of his fate. “Man proposes, but God disposes.” But it was no longer as it had been previously, where it was the inner being which a physical power could raise or bring down which was involved; now it concerned the most minor activities of the mind, of thought, of calculations, of the will, of passion; it was a question of a mental force dominating social activity. This society is a single unit; despite the differences between peoples and races, trade connects its various parts and makes them a homogeneous whole. Consequently there is only one god, a pure all-powerful mind, who reigns over the world and decides the fate of men as he pleases. Thus do the religious ideas of the bourgeois express the basic experience which their world has of the social forces which dominate it.

But the influence of the bourgeois mode of production is just as great on the moral consciousness of men as on their spiritual conceptions. The free producers are independent of each other; it is everyone for himself in unbridled competition. Egoism is the first condition of existence: let someone make a mistake in this implacable struggle of each against all and all against each and he risks being crushed. The producers nevertheless form a coherent whole: they have need of each other and work to satisfy their mutual needs. They are linked by buying and selling: despite all the struggles they engage in, they form a community. But community means that each member's will is limited by obligatory rules. No regular exchange of commodities could take place if everyone lets himself be guided purely by personal egoism: the mutual exchanges demand conformity to certain rules of behaviour and a knowledge of what is permitted and what is not. Without such norms defining honesty and good faith no lasting trade would be possible. It goes without saying that these rules are not always respected by everybody. On the contrary, if personal interest or the needs of self-preservation demand it, they are violated, to a greater or lesser extent as the case may be. But this is done knowingly and this general norm, considered as an eternal moral imperative, is still kept in mind. This conflict between personal interest and the common social interest, between the act and the rule, is the manifestation in the sphere of ethics of the internal ambiguity of the bourgeois world. The moral law — according to Kant — does not rule because it is obeyed but precisely because it is not. This law is not a practical fact but the internal consciousness of what ought to be done. In bourgeois society the idea predominates that in this world people can only sur-

vive by sinning against the rules of morality. And it is indeed a sin which we are talking about for the spiritual forces, whose origin in society is not understood, are felt as divine emanations: the moral law is an order that has come from God. And any offence against this law is an offence against God.

One problem dominates all the religious thought of past centuries: how can the sinner redeem himself before God, how can he obtain his salvation, how can he avoid the punishment he has merited. Later 19<sup>th</sup> century critics posed the following very logical question: why does Man need a remission of his supposed sins since the Creator himself must alone be responsible for what he created? And they justly mocked the strange lucubrations of a clever theology which sought to make all this intelligible. But they forgot the incontestable fact that the idea of sin was at this time very well established and could not have been eradicated from people's minds by arguments. This proves that this notion had a deeply rooted social origin; it drew its strength, both at the time of the Reformation and in the later periods, from the contradictions of the bourgeoisie, i.e. from the contradictions of bourgeois production.

The religious struggles of the century of the Reformation, the ideological form which the class struggle took at that time, were expressed theologically in the discussion about Grace. In the countries of the South where the bourgeoisie was not very strong, where absolute monarchs reigned and where the central power and apparatus of a mediæval Catholic church was maintained, indeed strengthened through re-organisation, this church declared that salvation could not be obtained without it and required a total submission to the clergy. The bourgeoisie of Western Europe, on the other hand, whose strength was continually growing and who were ready to conquer the new world which was opening up before them, affirmed their freedom by means of the Protestant doctrine which saw Grace as a result of personal faith without having to have recourse to priests. In Germany where the inevitable resistance to the exploitation of Rome coincided with the beginning of an economic decline, this faith took the form of Lutheranism, of a submission to the orders of the princes. The poor peasants, exploited to death, and the proletarians scarcely felt themselves to be God's creatures, but rather victims in this world; they considered themselves charged with a sacred duty: to establish the Kingdom of God, that of equality and justice, on Earth. All these religious differences were embodied in as many theological doctrines which reflected the differences and antagonisms between classes and social groups: but these religious differences were in fact not understood as this by those involved; they did not perceive their social origin, even though in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during a desperate class struggle, wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions followed one another.

When these struggles died down order was re-established; the differences and antagonisms lost their sharpness; the churches became rigidified into small groups; they became dogmatic; their new members always came from the same families: people entered through birth. In fact the dividing line between the different churches were the results of past struggles and wars, and their stability and cohesion were the result of the tradition and solidarity of their members. But within each small group new class antagonisms developed: the centuries which followed saw rich and poor, landowners and farmers, bourgeois and workers living together in each church. In the period immediately after the Reformation, however, class differences only appeared in the form of beliefs and the struggle for these beliefs. But, for the rich bourgeois, religion was no longer so important; it played a much weaker role for them than for the petty bourgeois and the impoverished and oppressed peasants and they were consequently much more tolerant. Among the latter it took impassioned and fanatical forms (as for example the German Pietists, the Dutch Reformed Church and the English Methodists) which sometimes led to a split in the original church.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the struggle of the bourgeoisie for power sometimes took the form of an ideological struggle against traditional religion. The power of the princes, nobles and clergy was in fact supported by a religious doctrine, by the authority of a church (the Catholic Church in fact) which guaranteed the sacred character of the old

institutions. The church, as in France before the 1789 Revolution, was often the biggest landowner; the expropriation of its land and its redistribution to the peasants — a precondition for capitalist exploitation — was a prime source of wealth for the bourgeoisie. They appealed to and favoured the development of the natural sciences since these were the basis of industrial technology and machinery, but they also used them in their ideological struggle. For the laws of nature which were discovered showed that it was impossible to retain the primitive ideas of traditional religion and sacred truths. Thus in using the new knowledge against the old teachings they pursued their then interest, and they sought to remove the vast mass of petty bourgeois and peasants from the influence of the church and to line them up on their side. By making these masses pass from a belief in the church to a belief in science, they undermined the political power of the dominant class and strengthened their own.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the struggle against traditional religion led in all countries to a retreat of obscurantism and to undeniable progress; but in ways which differed according to the particular situation. Where, as in England, a rich bourgeoisie reigned, these showed themselves prudent and tolerant since they did not want to break their links with the nobility and the church and consequently it was the petty bourgeoisie and the workers who waged the most fierce and radical struggle in the spiritual sphere. But where, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie had still to raise itself and met an obstinate resistance (as in Germany) the anti-religious struggle immediately took extreme radical forms. Scientists and intellectuals in general placed themselves in the front line of propagandists: a wave of books and articles aimed at popularising scientific discoveries spread. And it was precisely because the practical, political struggle of the German bourgeoisie was so noticeably weak that the theoretical side had to develop. It did this with very different results ranging from benign and liberal Christianity to the most total atheism.

The struggle waged by the bourgeoisie whether for or against religion remained on the ideological level: that of Truth, of general and abstract concepts. In this form it had nothing to do with social objectives. It goes without saying that the bourgeoisie could hardly have revealed its social objective, that of installing the domination of capitalist exploitation; it had to disguise this behind ideas, ideals, those of a political and abstract legal liberty. Thus the struggle between religion and science remained in appearance on the level of ideas. The most radical opponents of religion, most often from the petty bourgeoisie, called themselves “freethinkers”, wishing to show thus that they were free of the dogmas and old teachings of the churches and that they sought the truth, by their own thought, in the most complete of liberties. But the idea that men’s thought was determined by society, that religious and anti-religious conceptions were born in fact from the mode of production, could not occur to them, since their own knowledge did not extend beyond the natural sciences. But they were to get a good illustration of this, to experience it live, through the intermediary of the fate of their own doctrine.

For the majority of the bourgeois class in fact atheism was not the best theory. It is possible that in their first enthusiasm they believed that, with the coming of the bourgeois order, an era of general well-being, of universal happiness, would commence and that all the problems of everyday life would be solved and that consequently no supernatural or unknown power could dispose of Man’s fate; humanity in solving, thanks to science and its technical applications, the practical problems of material life would at the same time solve problems of theory. But this was only a passing illusion. For, in the end, at the bottom of their subconscious remained the idea that with the struggle of men against each other, with competition, no man was in fact the master of his fate. And it was soon revealed that other new forces were at work in this new world. Periodic commercial and industrial crises, unforeseeable and mysterious catastrophes, brutally interrupted progress. The irresistible growth of industry reduced workers and artisans to the most atrocious poverty: the uprisings of the starving in England already showed the beginning of the organised class struggle. From the depths of these insurgent masses new ideas sprung forth which, like a new “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsim” traced in letters of fire by a prophetic hand, announced to the bourgeoisie their future decline. But the bourgeoisie could not

reach a clear, scientific understanding of the true character of society for this would at the same time have revealed their own exploiting and slavist character and would have taught them that their mode of production was transitory. That would have meant that they would have had to sacrifice themselves, with the result that the internal strength to continue the struggle would have been lacking. But the bourgeoisie did feel itself a young enough force to continue to fight to conquer the world and impose its domination on the working masses. A class which feels itself capable of waging a practical struggle cannot do this without the theoretical conviction that it is right and will win; so it constructs a suitable theory and disseminates it. This is why the bourgeoisie had to draw their strength from an instinctive belief that it was not material forces which dominated the world and their own future, but transcendental spiritual forces. Thus the bourgeoisie as a class had to allow religion to survive; the religious way of thinking was completely adapted to their social situation. But this religion was of course quite a different thing from the traditional doctrine of the church. The intolerant and intransigent dogmas were succeeded by more flexible, more rational ideas and the vague feeling that instead of God the avenger, terrifying Jehovah, there reigned in heaven a tolerant and debonair god, sometimes even so vague and so little existing that he transformed himself into a simple moral ideal.

But to the extent that the workers' movement later arose as a threat, the bourgeoisie more and more turned back to religion. Mystical ideas got more and more of a hold on the general thought and output of its spokesmen. Certainly from time to time one saw some signs of rationalism resurging, especially at the time when the big bourgeoisie felt itself strong enough to conquer the universe with its industry and its capital; but, strengthened by violent world crises and destructive wars, the feeling of uncertainty, of anguish in the face of the future, developed in the bourgeoisie and, with this, mystical and religious tendencies grew.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there appeared within the working class a completely different materialist conception, connected with its way of life and class position. It was different from the atheism which had played a role in the struggle of the bourgeoisie. Atheism is opposed to theism, to belief in God; for it, the essential problem is: does there exist a God who rules the world. Materialism does not deal with this problem; it is interested in the forces which really dominate the world: these are material forces, that is real and observable forces. For the forces which dominate the workers are visible and clearly identifiable: they are social forces. As soon as the workers reach an understanding of their class position they realise that their common fate is determined by capitalism; they realise that their exploitation is the result of the necessity for capital to accumulate by making profits; they realise that through the struggle which they wage in increasing numbers they will become capable of overthrowing capital and abolishing exploitation. Their thought moves within the realities of the world; the old question of whether or not there exists a God who rules the world does not arise for them. It is meaningless, just as is the question posed in the Middle Ages of how many angels can dance on a pinhead. Religious questions and problems have no interest for the workers since they play no role in the questions which really move them to act. And because they play no role, religious questions and problems disappear from the consciousness of the workers and finally disappear altogether.

This then is the difference between atheism and materialism. Atheism essentially attacks religion, considering it the main cause of ignorance and oppression, and fights it because it sees in it the most dangerous enemy of progress. Materialism sees religion as a product of social relations and consequently does not interest itself at all in religious questions as such, but in so doing does not any the less undermine religion. Materialism has to deal with religion from the theoretical point of view alone, to show that it is an important historical phenomenon, and thus to understand and explain it. In practice, however, atheism and materialism have existed side by side in the workers' movement. It often happens in fact that a worker brought up in a religious tradition, begins to think on the basis of his personal experience of reality, i.e. in a materialist way, and then notes that his previous beliefs disappear. In this period of doubt and internal contradiction, he has re-

course to atheist works and to books popularising science in order to triumph over tradition by coming to understand.

Atheism has only once played an important role: during the Russian revolution. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia was an immense country peopled by uncultivated and poverty-stricken peasants, just freed from serfdom, living in a quite primitive poverty and subjected to the cruel and incompetent despotism of the Tsar and the landed nobility. West European capitalism exploited the country as a sort of colony: the starving peasants had to pay heavy taxes which went to repay the debts contracted by the Tsar for his war policy and his wasteful expenditure. Nevertheless in some large towns were to be found a constantly increasing number of factories managed by foreigners which employed a working class population recruited from the peasantry and deprived of all rights. The struggle against Absolutism and to obtain a more liberal political structure was waged by small groups of intellectuals who, as in Western Europe, were the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie and fought on their side. But here in Russia, where no powerful bourgeoisie existed, the first struggles — the most well known being those of the Nihilists — were brutally crushed. It was only at the beginning of the century when the workers' movement with its strikes was born that the activities of the intellectuals acquired a solid basis. The revolutionary intellectuals then became the spokesmen, propagandists and educators of the working class. And to this end they turned to the workers' movement of Western Europe and particularly to Social Democracy. They borrowed the ideas and theories of the Social Democrats and in particular the Marxist theory of the class struggle and the economic development of capitalism. They dedicated themselves body and soul to the struggle, carrying out unrelenting propaganda for the workers to organise into the "Bolshevik party" and to thus undermine the Tsarist regime. And when the Tsarist regime collapsed, worn out by two unsuccessful wars, this party took power in 1917 in the course of a workers' and peasants' revolution.

The character of the Bolshevik party, its doctrine, ideas and propaganda were thus ambiguous. They had to accomplish a task which in Western Europe had been the work of the bourgeois revolution: to wage the struggle against royal absolutism, against the domination of the nobles and the church and to clear the way for industrial development and the education of the people. But here the force which had to accomplish this task was the working class which had already shown signs of socialist tendencies going beyond capitalism. But the corresponding socialist doctrine was influenced by ideas connected with the struggle of the nascent bourgeoisie against the princes, nobles and the church. Russian religion had a nature even more ignorantly and primitively bigoted than in western Europe, resting even more on a flowery liturgy and on the worship of images, the miracle-working icons. The spiritual struggle had to be largely directed against this ignorance on which Tsarism rested and to do this recourse had to be had explicitly to atheist and anti-religious propaganda. This is why the writings of the "young Marx," i.e. his works before 1846, dating from a time when their author was one of the leading fighters for a mainly bourgeois German revolution, provided arguments and slogans of prime importance for this struggle.

When, once in power, the Bolsheviks began to organise industry and had to consolidate their domination over the peasant masses, anti-religious and atheist propaganda became even more significant and important. It was an essential part, even the basis, of the intense campaign to educate the people. The illiterate muzhiks were not affected much by arguments drawn from the natural sciences, but the fact that the atheist propagandists were not reduced to dust by lightning seemed to them a sufficient proof to get them to burn the images of the saints and to let the priests die of hunger. The young peasants willingly attended the agricultural and professional schools to acquire the new knowledge. There thus appeared in Russia a new generation, brought up outside of all religion.

Under Bolshevik rule industry, with its central planning and its organisation based on scientific techniques, developed at an impressive speed, despite the difficulty of changing old habits of work, adapting them to the pace of machines. Agriculture too underwent a transformation, imposed by force, which made it a network of big mechanised

enterprises. A large bureaucracy of political and technical leaders became master of the State, the means of production and the products. And, despite the name of Communism which is frequently attributed to this regime, and which is in fact false, the working class does not rule industry: it receives low wages which are fixed by higher authorities and is in fact exploited, the surplus value being at the disposal of the government which applies it to further develop the productive apparatus and for its own use. In this economic system, State capitalism, the bureaucracy plays the role of a new ruling class, a role in many respects the same as that played by the bourgeoisie in Western Europe.

The harsh oppression which this system imposed on the mass of workers and the often fierce struggle which the peasants waged against the setting up of large agricultural enterprises and for the defence of private property led to opposition which, in the absence of political freedom, frequently took ideological forms. In many cases a revival of religion occurred. For, aware of its impotence in the face of the central power, this opposition had to take a form hostile to the official doctrine of the leaders of the regime and, as religious belief was the only means of active opposition and collective protest, this led to a strengthening of former ignorance. And in retaliation this opposition led to campaigns against religion.

Such is the basis of the revival of religion which is often pointed out in Russia. This development proves the groundlessness of the atheist theory which sees religion as the outcome of a tradition resulting from the trickery of the priests which is forcibly imposed upon children, and which should consequently disappear with this practice and with the study of scientific truth. In fact religion rests on a mode of production and cannot disappear until working humanity is free and the master of its labour, of its fate, or when it sees this possibility. It can thus be said, as regards Russia, that to the extent that State capitalism, by permanently developing production, either places the masses before the necessity to take their fate completely into their own hands by a more and more determined struggle for their liberation or, on the other hand, leads to a strengthening of the dictatorship, atheist ideology will either be transformed into conscious materialism or will retreat before a return of religious beliefs.

For the first time in human history there appears a life without religion amongst the working masses; but this is not a question of an aggressive anti-religious attitude, of a struggle against religion as such. Important fractions of the working class in fact remain on the surface and quite formally faithful to churches and religious forms. But in reality they have learned to consider the phenomena of the world and the happenings of life as governed by natural forces, to such an extent that traditional religious ideas and beliefs take second place. This is the reason why the materialist conception, while it progresses in thinking, does not do so in full consciousness, nor in an absolute manner, nor everywhere. Where the workers' labour power is permanently pitted against terrifying natural forces which are not properly dominated as a result of the weakness of capitalism, and which threaten them with death (as is the case for example with miners and fishermen), it is natural that their consciousness remains full of religious ideas and belief. Further, where the church, whose strange collection of political positions is known, chooses the workers' side and puts its strength at their disposal in the struggle against capital as if it were its own cause, for dozens of years the workers feel linked to it, even if the church's position later comes to change. The development of the materialist conception is thus itself subject to variations of historical conditions.

This type of phenomenon first appeared during the ardent struggle which Chartism waged. The English workers, who were the first to do so, had to find their own way, both practically and theoretically. Their struggle coincided with that of the bourgeoisie against landed property; this is why bourgeois radicalism had such an influence on the English workers. It is only the more remarkable that, amidst traditional ideas, there can be found in the Chartist press new radical, atheist, materialist ideas already expressed with considerable force. Certainly a good part of these came from the past being inherited from a radical tradition — rationalist thought. After 1848, however, when the English bourgeoisie had achieved its aims and had made itself, thanks to its industry and trade, masters of the



world, it recuperated for its own account almost the entire traditional doctrine of the Church; and when the working class itself had, thanks to the trade union movement and the winning of the right to vote, taken its place in capitalism and received its share of the profits of monopoly capital — in other words when it in fact accepted capitalism — it adapted its ideas to this new situation. It set about adopting the ideas of the bourgeoisie: its modes of thought were bourgeois, but ones which followed those of the radical petty bourgeoisie. This happened, for example, with its acceptance of religious tradition, of the ruling belief, which most often took the form of adhesion to the petty-bourgeois, non-conformist church (Low Church) as opposed to the official Anglican Church (High Church).

It was quite different in Germany where, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism and the workers' movement were born simultaneously. The accelerated development of large-scale industry and the agreement between the bourgeoisie and the landed proprietors who then held power meant that the workers had to fight these two enemies at the same time; as a result there was a rapid growth of Social-Democracy. The German working class benefited from an important advantage in the formation of its new conception of the world, that of having available the scientific studies of Karl Marx. These uncovered the forces and tendencies of the social development which governed the birth and future decline of the capitalist mode of production and thus showed the working class what were its task and destiny. Marx, in the course of his historical studies, at the same time perfected a method, historical materialism, which not only uncovered the relation of dependence between the course of history and the economic development of society, but which also traced the way which leads to a naturalist conception of all mental phenomena which until then had been tied to religious and mystical theories. Thanks to this method, the materialist ideas of the Social Democratic workers were able to develop without hindrance and to grow stronger. They were expressed in a whole literature. But this did not occur without struggle or discussion. For modes of both religious and atheist thought had been inherited from the bourgeois world. And it often happens that when the bourgeoisie renounces its former fighting positions, these are taken up by the petty bourgeoisie and the workers who do not want to accept this "betrayal of principles" and who continue the old tradition. It was thus with atheism which had come to be considered a basic and radical principle. But atheism only considered the ideological forms without paying attention to the deeper fundamental differences between the bourgeois revolution and the proletarian revolution. It had little influence on Marxist ideas, as was reflected in practice in the programme of the Social Democratic Party where it could be read that religion is a private matter (*Religion ist Privatsache*). This point of view, however, had the result not only of correctly limiting the Party's aims to the economic transformation of the mode of production, but of serving as an open door through which all sorts of opportunist ideas could pour through into propaganda. In the end it became and remained a matter of controversy in the political discussions within the Party.

Later, when in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reformism, connected with prosperity, came to dominate thinking more and more consciously, bourgeois points of view progressively took over in all spheres. The bourgeoisie, its power strengthened, forced the working class to espouse its cause in the struggle for world domination; this is why certainty as to the coming of Socialism waned. This new doubt led to a revival of religious feelings amongst the workers. In Germany the acceptance of the leadership of the bourgeoisie resulted in a receding of independent and materialist ideas. It was the same everywhere.

But as soon as the working class comes to wage its struggle for power, to conquer the factories, to master production, all this will change. This struggle more than ever demands an ever clearer consciousness of the economic aim. Unity of action is more than ever needed. The workforce must form coherent units of action: ideological divergences such as exist in the trade union movement cannot be admitted. The workforce discusses its action as the unit which will carry out the task; if religious divergences were to be admitted the unity of this whole would be threatened and all practical action would become impossible. This is why such divergences must be entirely kept out of the discussions

amongst members of a factory. For it is here that the most ardent, the deepest and the most self-aware social struggle develops, which no longer disguises itself under ideological tinsel. A clear consciousness takes hold of the combatants. All deviation from the direction which leads to the objective must be ceaselessly corrected, since it means a weakening and defeat.

It is probable, however, that, even during such a struggle, religion will play a role since it still dominates the thought of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants. The bourgeoisie will try to organise these classes and to range them against the workers. It will first of all appeal to the instinct of property, thus disguising its exploiting interest. But it will also try to give this fight an ideological form and will present it as a clash between belief and unbelief. And this will make the class struggle harsher; it will become more cruel as a blind fanaticism comes to dominate and to replace all discussion on the subject in the interests of these classes. But, here again, the strength of the working class lies in their putting the economic aim to the forefront, viz., the organisation of work by the working and producing classes themselves, thus excluding all domination by the interests of the exploiters. It is thus that all trace of the oppression of former modes of thought will disappear since, with the collective management of production, the basis and condition for a genuine expansion of the thought and cultural life of all will appear. Finally, if the economic necessities force these classes to collaborate with the working class, if their participation in the work of uniting promises them emancipation from all capitalist exploitation, so that the old class relations disappear, it must be expected that a new cultural life which will replace former religious convictions will flourish for them also.

Thus, in all probability, the sources which, in the history of mankind have up until now fed the forces of religion will dry up. No natural power will any longer be able to frighten Man; no natural catastrophe, no storm, no floods, no earthquake or epidemic will be able to put his existence in danger. By ever more accurate predictions, by an ever greater development of the sciences and of an ever more wonderful technology, the dangers will be limited to the maximum: no human life will be wasted. Science and its applications will make mankind the master of natural forces which it will use for its own needs. No powerful or not understood social force will be able to attack or frighten mankind: they will master their fate by organising their work and at the same time master all the mental forces of the will and passion. The anguish of having to go before a supreme judge who will decide the fate of each person for eternity — an anguish which has been responsible for centuries for so many terrors for defenceless mankind — will disappear as soon as co-operation between men and sacrifice for the community are no longer fettered by moral laws. Thus all the functions which religion fulfilled in men's thought and feelings will be filled by other ways of thinking and feeling.

But will not an eternal function of religion remain: to give consolation and certainty in the moments of dying and death? The certainty of being able to ensure one's life by one's work, the disappearance of many of the causes of premature death, poverty, illness and accident have no influence on the biological fact that every living being has a temporary existence. The significance of this fact, however, and its influence on mankind's ideas is strongly dependent on social relations. Belief in the survival of the mind, of the soul, the psychological basis of all religion (which can already be seen forming among primitive peoples on the basis of dreams), is, in its present form, a product of the bourgeois mode of production. The very strong sentiment of individual personality which has its roots in individual work carried on under one's own responsibility, in the separation from the other's activity, reduces this belief to the need to believe, to be convinced, that the individual, in his real, i.e. mental, essence is eternal. Each individual was isolated — or loosely held by the very lax links which unite the members of any grouping — in the struggle for life. Around each individual there existed, however, a small group, such as the family, a sort of small isolated and independent fortified town at war with other towns. Thus the biological links between couples and between parents and children became the only solid links between men, both on the economic and material level and on the mental. The breaking of these links, whether expectedly or unexpectedly, was in eve-

rybody's eyes the greatest of all catastrophes: the worries which the dying had for those they left behind, the loneliness of the latter, which was often aggravated by economic ruin, were only feebly compensated by the presence of parents and friends, who were themselves preoccupied mainly by their own struggle to live. This is why, thanks to a belief in a new meeting in eternity for those who were separating, and to a faith in the providence to which Man had to submit in order to be able to bear the caprices of fate, religion served for centuries as a consolation.

With the establishment of the new mode of production many of the reasons for believing will disappear and particularly those we have just examined. The feeling of individuality will be profoundly changed by the feeling of solidarity which will develop, to which one will dedicate oneself and from which one will derive one's greatest strength. Then, there will no longer be any need for the illusion of believing in the eternal life of the individual or the soul: it is in fact the community to which one belongs which is eternal. Everything which has been produced by Man, everything to which he has dedicated the best of his forces survives within this community. His mental being is eternal insofar as it forms part of the mentality of all mankind and has no need to survive as some spectre separated from it. Links of solidarity, much stronger than those which in the past united the members of the same family will unite all men. There will no longer be any need to worry about the economic consequences of death, nor to concern oneself for the survivors — worries which, formerly, often made dying more distressing. And the pain of having to leave for ever will weaken since the strengthened links of human fraternity will no longer retreat before feelings of isolation and loneliness. Death will lose its frightening character for a generation which will have learned, in the course of a fierce struggle for its freedom, to sacrifice its own life. And the feeling of love for the community which will thenceforth dominate will grow stronger in the community of work in which the free producers will be grouped together. For the fortunate generation in which the new mankind will be born, each individual life will only be the temporary form taken by a social life which will more and more develop.

## **5 Thesen über den Kampf der Arbeiterklasse gegen den Kapitalismus**

**I.** In einem Jahrhundert des Wachstums hat der Kapitalismus seine Macht enorm vermehrt nicht nur dadurch, daß er sich auf der gesamten Erde ausbreitete, sondern auch dadurch, daß er sich veränderte.

Im Kampf dagegen wuchs die Arbeiterklasse an Macht, Zahl, Konzentration und Organisation. Gegen die kapitalistische Ausbeutung und für die Beherrschung der Produktionsmittel entwickelte sich ihr Kampf unaufhörlich, aber unter neuen Formen.

Die Entwicklung des Kapitalismus hat – in den wichtigsten Produktionszweigen – die Macht in den Händen von großen Trusts und Monopolen konzentriert, die aufs engste mit der Staatsmacht verbunden sind, die sie tatsächlich beherrschen. Sie kontrollieren den größten Teil der Presse und bestimmen die öffentliche Meinung. Die bürgerliche Demokratie offenbarte sich als beste Tarnung der politischen Herrschaft des großen Kapitals. Gleichzeitig vollzieht sich in den meisten Ländern ein Prozeß, die organisierte Staatsmacht einzusetzen, um die Kontrolle der Schlüsselindustrien in die Hände zu bekommen, als Beginn der "Planwirtschaft". So hatte im Hitlerdeutschland eine durch den Staat gelenkte Wirtschaft die politische Führung und die kapitalistische Verwaltung zu einer Klasse verbunden. Im staatskapitalistischen Rußland beherrscht die Bürokratie kollektiv die Produktionsmittel und unterdrückt diktatorisch die ausgebeuteten Massen.

**II.** Der Sozialismus, der als Ziel des Arbeitskampfes dargestellt wird, ist tatsächlich lediglich die Organisierung der Produktion durch den Staat. Er ist Staatssozialismus,

Leitung der Produktion durch Staatsbeamte, Herrschaft der Direktoren, der Intelligenz und der Kader in der Fabrik.

In der sozialistischen Wirtschaft bildet dieser Apparat eine gut organisierte Bürokratie, die als Beherrscherin des Produktionsprozesses fungiert. Der Apparat verfügt vollständig über die Produktion und bestimmt, welchen Anteil davon die Arbeiter in Form von Lohn erhalten; den Rest behält sie für die allgemeinen Bedürfnisse und für ihre eigenen ein. In der Demokratie können die Arbeiter ihre Herren wählen, sind selbst jedoch nicht die Herren über ihre Arbeit. Sie erhalten lediglich einen Teil von dem, was sie produziert haben; dieser Anteil wird ihnen von anderen zugeteilt. Sie sind also nach wie vor ausgebeutet und müssen der neuen Führungsgruppe gehorchen. Die demokratischen Formen dieses Systems werden weder heute noch morgen etwas an seiner zugrundeliegenden Struktur ändern.

Der Sozialismus wurde als Ziel der Arbeiterklasse in einer Epoche proklamiert, wo sie machtlos und unfähig war, die Herrschaft über die Fabriken selbst zu erobern; so erstrebte die Arbeiterklasse durch soziale Reformen den Schutz durch den Staat vor den Kapitalisten. Die großen politischen Parteien, die ihnen diese Ziele setzten, die Arbeiterparteien und die sozialdemokratischen Parteien verwandelten sich in ein Instrument zur Sammlung der ganzen Arbeiterklasse für die Interessen des Kapitalismus, sowohl für seine Kriege zur Eroberung der Welt als auch für seine Politik im Inneren des Landes in Friedenszeiten. (Man kann nicht einmal sagen, daß die englische Labour-Regierung sozialistisch ist.) Ihre Aufgabe ist nicht die Befreiung der Arbeiter, sondern die Modernisierung des Kapitalismus. Indem sie die auffallenden Schweinereien verschwinden läßt, indem sie die Verspätungen zudeckt, indem sie die Staatskontrolle einführt, um die Profite zu garantieren, verstärkt sie die Herrschaft des Kapitals und verewigt die Ausbeutung der Arbeiter.

**III.** Es ist Aufgabe der Arbeiterklasse, sich von der Ausbeutung zu befreien. Dieses Ziel wird und kann nicht durch eine neue Führungsgruppe, die die Bourgeoisie ersetzt, erreicht werden. Dies kann nur dadurch erreicht werden, daß die Arbeiter selbst Herren über die Produktion werden.

“Arbeiter als Herren der Produktion” drückt an erster Stelle aus, daß in jeder Fabrik, in jedem Unternehmen die Organisation der Arbeit das Werk der Arbeiter sein muß. Anstatt durch einen Direktor und dessen Aufpasser reglementiert zu werden, werden die Produktionsabläufe durch die Gesamtheit der Arbeiter bestimmt. Diese alle Arbeiter, Spezialisten, Techniker umfassende Gesamtheit, also alle, die an der Produktion teilnehmen, bestimmt in Versammlungen über alles, was sie bei der gemeinsamen Arbeit betrifft. Diejenigen, die eine Arbeit erfolgreich durchführen sollen, müssen auch über sie die Leitung haben, die Verantwortung übernehmen in den Grenzen der Gesamtheit. Diese Regelung kann auf alle Zweige der Produktion angewendet werden. Sie setzt voraus, daß die Arbeiter ihre eigenen Organe schaffen, um die vereinzeltten Unternehmer zu einer Einheit planvoller Produktion zusammenzuschließen. Diese Organe sind die Arbeiterräte. Arbeiterräte sind Gremien von Delegierten, Beauftragten der verschiedenen Fabriken oder Abteilungen großer Unternehmen, als Wortführer ihrer Absichten, Meinungen; um gemeinsame Probleme zu diskutieren, Beschlüsse zu fassen und ihren Auftraggebern Rechenschaft abzulegen.

Sie bestimmen die verschiedenen Regeln und legen sie fest; indem sie die verschiedenen Meinungen zu einer gemeinsamen Position vereinigen, verbinden sie untereinander die getrennten Einheiten, machen daraus ein gut organisiertes Ensemble. Sie bilden kein permanent leitendes Gremium. Alle können jederzeit von ihren Funktionen abberufen werden. Die ersten Ansätze der Arbeiterräte gab es in der russischen und deutschen Revolution (Sowjets und Arbeiterräte). Bei den künftigen Aufgaben der Arbeiterklasse müssen sie eine mehr und mehr wachsende Aufgabe erfüllen.

**IV.** Bis heute haben die politischen Parteien zwei Aufgaben erfüllt. Zum ersten trachten sie nach der politischen Macht, nach der Beherrschung des Staates, nach der Regierungsgewalt, nach der Ausnutzung dieser Macht, um ihre Programme praktisch anzuwenden. Zum zweiten mußten sie – gemäß dieser Absicht – die Masse der Arbeiter für ihr Programm gewinnen: Ihre Schulung behauptet, das Bewußtsein der Arbeiter zu entwickeln, ihre Propaganda versucht ganz einfach, sie in eine Herde von Schafen zu verwandeln.

Die Arbeiterparteien haben zum Ziel die Eroberung der politischen Macht, um im Interesse der Arbeiter zu “regieren” und um den Kapitalismus abzuschaffen. Sie versichern die Avantgarde der Arbeiterklasse zu sein, ihr bewußtester Teil, fähig, die unorganisierte Mehrheit der Klasse zu leiten, in ihrem Namen zu handeln, sie zu vertreten. Sie behaupten, die Arbeiter von der Ausbeutung befreien zu können. Eine ausgebeutete Klasse kann jedoch nicht durch ein simples Votum oder durch eine an die Macht gekommene neue Gruppe von Führern befreit werden. Eine politische Partei kann keine Freiheit bringen. Nach ihrem Sieg wird sie lediglich neue Formen von Unterdrückung einführen. Die arbeitenden Massen können ihre Freiheit nur durch die eigene organisierte Aktion gewinnen, indem sie ihr Schicksal in die eigene Hand nehmen, durch eine Anstrengung aller ihrer Abteilungen, um ihren Kampf und ihre Arbeit selbst durchzuführen und zu organisieren durch ihre Räte.

Den Parteien fällt also so die zweite Funktion zu, also Verbreitung von Wissen und Ideen, studieren, diskutieren, die sozialen Ideen zu formulieren, durch Propaganda den Geist der Massen zu erhellen. Die Arbeiterräte sind die Organe der praktischen Aktion, des Kampfes der Arbeiterklasse; den Parteien kommt die Aufgabe zu, die geistige Gewalt zu entwickeln. Ihre Arbeit ist ein unersetzbarer Bestandteil der Selbstbefreiung der Arbeiterklasse.

**V.** Die wirksamste Form des Kampfes gegen die Kapitalisten ist der Streik. Streiks sind mehr denn je nötig, um gegen die Tendenz der Kapitalisten zu kämpfen, ihre Profite zu erhöhen, indem sie die Löhne herabdrücken, indem sie Dauer und Intensität der Arbeit erhöhen.

Die Gewerkschaften als Instrumente des organisierten Widerstandes haben sich gebildet, indem an die starke Solidarität und die gegenseitige Hilfe appelliert wurde. Die Entwicklung des “big business” ließ die Macht des Kapitals enorm anwachsen, zugleich konnten die Arbeiter die Verschlechterung ihrer Lage nur in einzelnen Fällen herabmindern. Die Gewerkschaften verwandelten sich in Vermittlungsinstanzen zwischen Arbeitern und Kapitalisten. Sie unterzeichneten Verträge mit den Unternehmern und versuchten, diese den oft widerspenstigen Arbeitern aufzudrängen. Die Gewerkschaftsführer hofften, sich dem Machtapparat des Staates und des Kapitals, der die Arbeiterklasse beherrscht, unersetzlich zu machen. Die Gewerkschaften wurden so Instrumente des Monopolkapitals, das sich ihrer bediente, um den Arbeitern ihre Bedingungen zu diktieren.

Unter diesen Verhältnissen nimmt der Kampf der Arbeiterklasse mehr und mehr die Form von wilden Streiks an. Diese sind spontane und massive Explosionen eines lange unterdrückten Widerstandswillens, direkte Aktionen, in denen die Arbeiter ihren eigenen Kampf in ihre Hände nehmen, indem sie Gewerkschaften und Führer zum Teufel jagen.

Die Organisation des Kampfes führen die Streikkomitees durch, die sich aus Delegierten der Streikenden, von der Belegschaft gewählt und beauftragt, zusammensetzen. Die Diskussion innerhalb dieser Komitees erlaubt den Arbeitern, ihre Aktionseinheit zu realisieren. Die Ausdehnung der Streiks auf immer größere Massen ist die einzige geeignete Taktik, um den Kapitalisten Konzessionen zu entreißen. Sie ist genau entgegengesetzt zur Gewerkschaftstaktik, die versucht, den Kampf zu begrenzen und so früh wie möglich zu beenden. Heute sind die wilden Streiks die einzigen wirklichen Klassenkämpfe der Arbeiter gegen den Kapitalismus. Hierbei bejahen sie ihre Freiheit, bestimmen sie und führen sie selbst ihre Aktionen aus, hier unterliegen sie nicht Leitungen, die ihnen fremd sind und die andere Interessen haben.

Das alles zeigt die Bedeutung in der Zukunft von diesen Klassenkämpfen. Wenn die wilden Streiks sich immer mehr ausweiten, dann wird sich gegen sie die gesamte Staatsgewalt richten. Dann haben sie revolutionären Charakter. Da der Kapitalismus sich in eine weltweit organisierte Macht verwandelt, (heute setzt er sich aus zwei konkurrierenden Mächten zusammen, die die Menschheit mit der völligen Vernichtung bedrohen), wird der Klassenkampf der Arbeiter ein Kampf gegen die Macht des Staates. Die Streiks nehmen den Charakter von großen Massenstreiks an. Die Streikkomitees müssen also allgemeine, politische und soziale Aufgaben erfüllen, d.h. die Rolle von Arbeiterräten erfüllen. Der revolutionäre Kampf um die Herrschaft der Gesellschaft wird im selben Moment ein Kampf um die Beherrschung der Fabriken. Dann verwandeln sich die Arbeiterräte aus Kampforganen in Organe der Produktion.

## Public Ownership and Common Ownership

Source: Western Socialist, November 1947; written in English

The acknowledged aim of socialism is to take the means of production out of the hands of the capitalist class and place them into the hands of the workers. This aim is sometimes spoken of as public ownership, sometimes as common ownership of the production apparatus. There is, however, a marked and fundamental difference.

Public ownership is the ownership, i.e. the right of disposal, by a public body representing society, by government, state power or some other political body. The persons forming this body, the politicians, officials, leaders, secretaries, managers, are the direct masters of the production apparatus; they direct and regulate the process of production; they command the workers. Common ownership is the right of disposal by the workers themselves; the working class itself — taken in the widest sense of all that partake in really productive work, including employees, farmers, scientists — is direct master of the production apparatus, managing, directing, and regulating the process of production which is, indeed, their common work.

Under public ownership the workers are not masters of their work; they may be better treated and their wages may be higher than under private ownership; but they are still exploited. Exploitation does not mean simply that the workers do not receive the full produce of their labor; a considerable part must always be spent on the production apparatus and for unproductive though necessary departments of society. Exploitation consists in that others, forming another class, dispose of the produce and its distribution; that they decide what part shall be assigned to the workers as wages, what part they retain for themselves and for other purposes. Under public ownership this belongs to the regulation of the process of production, which is the function of the bureaucracy. Thus in Russia bureaucracy as the ruling class is master of production and produce, and the Russian workers are an exploited class.

In Western countries we know only of public ownership (in some branches) of the capitalist State. Here we may quote the well-known English "socialist" writer G. D. H. Cole, for whom socialism is identical with public ownership. He wrote

"The whole people would be no more able than the whole body of shareholders in a great modern enterprise to manage an industry . . . It would be necessary, under socialism as much under large scale capitalism, to entrust the actual management of industrial enterprise to salaried experts, chosen for their specialized knowledge and ability in particular branches of work" (p. 674).

"There is no reason to suppose that socialisation of any industry would mean a great change in its managerial personnel" (p. 676 in *An Outline of Modern Knowledge* ed. By Dr W. Rose, 1931).

In other words: the structure of productive work remains as it is under capitalism; workers subservient to commanding directors. It clearly does not occur to the "socialist"

author that "the whole people" chiefly consists of workers, who were quite able, being producing personnels, to manage the industry, that consists of their own work.

As a correction to State-managed production, sometimes workers' control is demanded. Now, to ask control, supervision, from a superior indicates the submissive mood of helpless objects of exploitation. And then you can control another man's business; what is your own business you do not want controlled, you do it. Productive work, social production, is the genuine business of the working class. It is the content of their life, their own activity. They themselves can take care if there is no police or State power to keep them off. They have the tools, the machines in their hands, they use and manage them. They do not need masters to command them, nor finances to control the masters.

Public ownership is the program of "friends" of the workers who for the hard exploitation of private capitalism wish to substitute a milder modernized exploitation. Common ownership is the program of the working class itself, fighting for self liberation.

We do not speak here, of course, of a socialist or communist society in a later stage of development, when production will be organized so far as to be no problem any more, when out of the abundance of produce everybody takes according to his wishes, and the entire concept of "ownership" has disappeared. We speak of the time that the working class has conquered political and social power, and stands before the task of organizing production and distribution under most difficult conditions. The class fight of the workers in the present days and the near future will be strongly determined by their ideas on the immediate aims, whether public or common ownership, to be realized at that time.

If the working class rejects public ownership with its servitude and exploitation, and demands common ownership with its freedom and self-rule, it cannot do so without fulfilling conditions and shouldering duties. Common ownership of the workers implies, first, that the entirety of producers is master of the means of production and works them in a well planned system of social production. It implies secondly that in all shops, factories, enterprises the personnel regulate their own collective work as part of the whole. So they have to create the organs by means of which they direct their own work, as personnel, as well as social production at large. The institute of State and government cannot serve for this purpose because it is essentially an organ of domination, and concentrates the general affairs in the hands of a group of rulers. But under Socialism the general affairs consist in social production; so they are the concern of all, of each personnel, of every worker, to be discussed and decided at every moment by themselves. Their organs must consist of delegates sent out as the bearers of their opinion, and will be continually returning and reporting on the results arrived at in the assemblies of delegates. By means of such delegates that at any moment can be changed and called back the connection of the working masses into smaller and larger groups can be established and organization of production secured.

Such bodies of delegates, for which the name of workers' councils has come into use, form what may be called the political organization appropriate to a working class liberating itself from exploitation. They cannot be devised beforehand, they must be shaped by the practical activity of the workers themselves when they are needed. Such delegates are no parliamentarians, no rulers, no leaders, but mediators, expert messengers, forming the connection between the separate personnel of the enterprises, combining their separate opinions into one common resolution. Common ownership demands common management of the work as well as common productive activity; it can only be realized if all the workers take part in this self-management of what is the basis and content of social life; and if they go to create the organs that unite their separate wills into one common action.

Since such workers' councils doubtlessly are to play a considerable role in the future organization of the workers' fights and aims, they deserve keen attention and study from all who stand for uncompromising fight and freedom for the working class.

# Theses On The Fight Of The Working Class Against Capitalism

**I. Capitalism in one century of growth has enormously increased its power, not only through expansion over the entire earth, but also through development into new forms.** With it the working class has increased in power, in numbers, in massal concentration, in organisation. Its fight against capitalist exploitation, for mastery over the means of production, also is continually developing and has to develop into new forms.

The development of capitalism led to the concentration of power over the chief branches of production in the hands of big monopolistic concerns. They are intimately connected with State Power, and dominate it, they control the main part of the press, they direct public opinion. Middle-class democracy has proved the best camouflage of the political dominance of big capital. At the same time there is a growing tendency in most countries to use the organised power of the State in concentration the management of the key industries in its hands, as beginning of the planned economy. In Germany a State-directed economy united political leadership and capitalist management into one combined exploiting class. In Russia State-capitalism the bureaucracy is collectively master over the means of production, and by dictatorial government keeps the exploited masses in submission.

**II. Socialism, put up as the goal of the workers' fight, is the organisation of production by Government. It means State-socialism, the command of the State-officials over production and the command of managers, scientists, shop-officials in the shop.** In socialist economy this body, forming a well-organised bureaucracy, is the direct master over the process of production. It has the disposal over the total product, determining what part shall be assigned as wages to the workers, and takes the rest for general needs and for itself. The workers under democracy may choose their masters, but they are not themselves master of their work; they receive only part of the produce, assigned to them by others; they are still exploited and have to obey the new master class. The democratic forms, supposed or intended to accompany it, do not alter the fundamental structure of this economic system.

Socialism was proclaimed the goal of the working class when in its first rise it felt powerless, unable by itself to conquer command over the shops, and looking to the State for protection against the capitalist class by means of social reforms. The large political parties embodying these aims, the Social Democratic and the Labour Parties, turned into instruments for regimenting the entire working class into the service of capitalism, in its wars for world power, as well as in peace time home politics. The Labour Government of the British L.P. cannot even be said to be socialistic; but modernizing capitalism. By abolishing its ignominies and backwardness, by introducing State management under preserving State-guaranteed profits for the capitalists, it strengthens capitalist domination and perpetuates the exploitation of the workers.

**III. The goal of the working class is liberation from exploitation. This goal is not reached and cannot be reached by a new directing and governing class substituting the bourgeoisie. It can only be realised by the workers themselves being master over production.**

Mastery of the workers over production means, first, organisation of the work in every shop and enterprise by its personnel. Instead of through command of a manager and his underlings all the regulation are made through decision of the entire body of the workers. This body, comprising all kinds of workers, specialists and scientists, all taking part in the production, in assembly decides everything related to the common work. The role that those who have to do the work also have to regulate their work and take the re-



sponsibility, within the scope of the whole, can be applied to all branches of production. It means, secondly, that the workers create their organs for combining the separate enterprises into an organised entirety of planned production. These organs are the workers' councils

The workers councils are bodies of delegates, sent out by the personnels of the separate shops or sections of big enterprises, carrying the intentions and opinions of the personnel, in order to discuss and take decisions on the common affairs, and to bring back the results to their mandatories. They state and proclaim the necessary regulations, and by uniting the different opinions into one common result, form the connection of the separate units into a well-organised whole. They are no permanent board of leaders, but can be recalled and changed at every moment. Their first germs appeared in the beginning of the Russian and German revolutions (Soviets, Arbitrate). They are to play an increasing role in future working class developments.

**IV. Political parties to the present times have two functions. They aspire, first, at political power, at dominance in the State, to take government into their hands and use its power to put their program into practice. For this purpose they have, secondly, to win the masses of the working people to their programs: by means of their teachings clarifying the insight, or, by their propaganda, simply trying to make of them a herd of followers.**

Working class parties put up as their goal the conquest of political power, thereby to govern in the interest of the workers, and especially to abolish capitalism. They assert themselves as the advance guard of the working class, its most clear-sighted part, capable of leading the uninstructed majority of the class, acting in its name as its representative. They pretend to be able to liberate the workers from exploitation. An exploited class, however, cannot be liberated by simply voting and bringing into power a group of new governors. A political party cannot bring freedom, but, when it wins, only new forms of domination. Freedom can be won by the working masses only through their own organised action, by taking their lot into their own hands, in devoted exertion of all their faculties, by directing and organising their fight and their work themselves by means of their councils.

**For the parties—then remains the second function, to spread insight and knowledge, to study, discuss and formulate social ideas, and by their propaganda to enlighten the minds of the masses. The workers' councils are the organs for practical action and fight of the working class; to the parties falls the task of the bolding up of its spiritual power. Their work forms an indispensable part in the self-liberation of the working class.**

**V. The strongest form of fight against the capitalist class is the strike. Strikes are necessary, ever again, against the capitalists' tendency to increase their profits by lowering wages and increase the hours or the intensity of work.**

The trade unions have been formed as instruments of organised resistance, based on strong solidarity and mutual help. With the growth of big business capitalist power has increased enormously, so that only in special cases the workers are able to withstand the lowering of their working conditions. The Trade Unions grow into instruments of mediation between capitalists and workers; they make treaties with the employers which they try to enforce upon the often unwilling workers. The leaders aspire to become a recognised part of the power apparatus of capital and State dominating the working class; the Unions grow into instruments of monopolist capital, by means of which it dictates its terms to the workers.

**The right of the working class, under these circumstances, ever more takes the form of wild strikes. They are spontaneous, massal outbursts of the long suppressed spirit of resistance. They are direct actions in which the workers take their fight entirely into their own hands, leaving the Unions and their leaders outside.**

The organisation of the fight is accomplished by the strike-committees, delegates of the strikers, chosen and sent out by the personnel's. By means of discussions in these committees the workers establish their unity of action. Extension of the strike to ever larger masses, the only tactics appropriate to wrench concessions from capital, is fundamentally opposed to the Trade Union tactics to restrict the fight and to put an end to it as soon as possible. Such wild strikes in the present times are the only real class fights of the workers against capital. Here they assert their freedom, themselves choosing and directing their actions, not directed by other powers for other interests.

That determines the importance of such class contests for the future. When the wild strikes takes on ever larger extension they find the entire physical power of the State against them. So they assume a revolutionary character. When capitalism turns into an organised world government—though as yet only in the form of two contending powers, threatening mankind with entire devastation—the fight for freedom of the working class takes the form of a fight against State Power. Its strikes assume the character of big political strikes, sometimes universal strikes. Then the strike-committees need acquire general social and political functions, and assume the character of workers' councils. Revolutionary fight for dominance over society is at the same time a fight for mastery over and in the shops. Then the workers' councils, as the organs of fight, grow into organs of production at the same time.

(in *Southern Advocate for Workers Councils*, Melbourne, no. 33, Mai 1947.)

## The “Group of International Communists” In Holland

The first world war and the ensuing Russian and German revolutions raised new problems and brought about profound changes in the ideas of workers and Socialists. The German Socialist Party, the apparently powerful organisation ready to conquer political dominance and thereby to establish Socialism, when in power turned out a means for re-establishing capitalism. In Russia the workers had beaten down Czarism and taken possession of the factories and the land; now State Capitalism brought them into stricter slavery under a new master class. And not reformism only was to be blamed; the most notable spokesmen of uncompromising radicalism, renowned as Marxists, such as Kautsky and Lenin, were agents in this development. Clearly there must be something wrong in the current doctrine.

The current doctrine was that the workers by ballot elect a Parliament and determine Government of Socialists; then these politicians and officials have to do the essential work of expropriating the capitalists, of abolishing private ownership of the means of production, and of organising production. The ensuing system of public ownership, where the workers are wage-earners in service of the State, is entirely different from common ownership, where the workers are direct masters of the enterprises and regulate their work themselves. In the latter case the problem arises of how these enterprises can be combined into a well-planned social organisation. In fervent discussions, intense spiritual activity, the different leftist groups that had split off from the Socialist and the Communist Parties, tried to discover what other ways of action should lead the working class to the goal of freedom.

Political refugees to Holland who had taken part in the fight of the German workers, 1920-21, in the Ruhr rebellion and in that of the Saxonian plants, had experienced what a wealth of initiative and capacities sprang up in the masses when they stood before the task of organising themselves, their life and their fight. In Holland, owing to its situation in the midst of English, French, and German influences, fundamental theoretical understanding had penetrated into rather broad groups of workers and intellectuals. Out of their collaboration a group of militants, calling themselves “Group of International Communists” (G.I.C.), came forward and set themselves to the study of the economic basis of

the new society. They knew quite well that the workers' revolution would not bring at once, as by miracle, a world of abundance where everybody had only to take according to his wishes. The new socialist order has to be built up in hard fight and deliberate work, by means of a well-devised organisation, according to strict rules of proletarian equity. Every form of society has its solid material basis in an economic system, a mode of production and distribution, that determines its structure and character. Already before but still more after the war many authors had occupied themselves with this economic problem (Kautsky, Hilferding, Neurath, Leichter, Max Weber, Cole etc.), but they had all assumed as its base that a central leading power is necessary, a government that imposes its regulations upon the separate units of production. Anarchist writers surely, had proclaimed the autonomy of the separate shops; but there the connection into a social organisation was left to goodwill only.

The G.I.C. in studying the problem, the main problem of Socialism, of how to combine freedom with organisation, perceived that they had only to continue along the lines of thought laid down by Marx in occasional small notes, in the *Capital* and in his remarks on the Gotha programme of the German S.D.. Marx did not speak therein of State-socialism, which he opposed strongly, but of "the association of free and equal producers", directing their work themselves; he pointed out that instead of value and money the "average time of production", measured in hours of work, will form the basis of the new economic system. These ideas which the "Marxist" writers had entirely abandoned, were now worked out by the G.I.C. authors in an important booklet: *Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* that in 1930 appeared in German, and in Dutch. There it is shown that by the book-keeping of every enterprise, completed by registration and book-keeping of the processes of social production, on the basis of the hours spent, the workers are able themselves to supervise and direct production and distribution. Bodies of delegates, "workers councils" are the instruments in organising the separate enterprises into a social entirety. It is shown that this is not simply a possible and better form than State-directed Socialism, but that it is the only possible form. It is not possible for a central bureaucracy of officials and experts to ascertain all needs, prescribe all the work and supervise all the processes in their details; all the proposed systems lead to arbitrariness in distribution by a ruling minority. Self-rule of the free and equal producers, on the one hand, is able to regulate production and distribution without difficulty, the rules and dealings being imposed by economic realities. The difficulties arise by interposing a State-power between production and consumption. Thus the aspirations of self-determination arising in the workers, from mere sentiment and political programme were turned into embodiment of an economic necessity. Thus a scientific foundation was laid for the task of self-liberation of the working class.

It is to be regretted that this book was not accessible to English workers (the bulk of the German edition moreover was destroyed with the ascendancy of Nazism), because its practical basis could appeal strongly to the practical English mind. Now that Capitalism grows into an international power, and fighting conditions tend to be more equalised over the world, the workers in every country should look for more international exchange of experiences and ideas.

For the time being this study gave a strong impulse to the propaganda of the little group. In its statement of principles the G.I.C. rejected party politics and union leadership, and put up the workers councils as the form of organisation of self-rule. It called upon the workers to take up the fight for communist production, to take into their own hands the direction and administration of production and distribution according to general rules, and thus to realise the association of free and equal producers.

The G.I.C. did not constitute itself as a new party trying to get adherents; it put up the principle that in all practical action of real fight the workers have to act — and will act — as one solid unity, against which the differences between the groups and parties and unions are futile. Besides several pamphlets it brought out regularly "press materials" put at the disposal of all groups who should wish to publish it, in which current events were treated from this new point of view. Thus, in friendly discussion with other leftist

groups, strongly and fundamentally opposing the Socialists in power and the Communist Parties, it disseminated its ideas. In an irregularly appearing *Raete-korrespondenz* (Council correspondence) theoretical questions were treated. In 1938 it published in German *Lenin als Philosoph* (Lenin as a Philosopher), wherein it is shown that Lenin, in his basic philosophical ideas, stands over against Marxism; by lack of financial means it could only be issued in a limited number of cyclostyled copies. After the war the G.I.C. combined with the group *Spartacus* that to a great extent had gone in the same direction; that had a broader membership, but in the underground fight against the Germans had lost its most prominent spokesmen. Together they publish now the weekly *Spartacus*, the only weekly paper that makes uncompromising class fight of the working class for freedom and mastery of production the basis and contents of all its propaganda. A book on *De Arbeidersraven* (The Workers' Councils), expounding these views (which also exists in an English version in manuscript) was published by them last year.

## Anton Pannekoek to J.A. Dawson

(Letter — October 12, 1947)

Holland

October 12, 1947

Dear Comrade Dawson:

I thank you very much for your letter of Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, wherein you consent to my proposal to publish *The Workers' Councils*, eventually; in parts as part of your monthly. So I send to-morrow the first part of the MSS. by sea-mail. It will take probably some months to reach you. . . .

When you publish it I must make one very strict condition: That proof-reading is made with utmost care. Because of the distance I, of course, cannot make the proofreading myself; so I cannot take care that everything is correct. So I have carefully scrutinised the manuscript, that every letter and every comma is correct; you know that in English the omission or displacement of one comma can entirely change or revert the meaning of a sentence. So I must be sure that when the book is printed it is carefully corrected, so that no error remains. I know how difficult it is with a review, where time is pressing; in the Five Thesis you printed there is found in Thesis 5 such an error of printing: "The fight of the working class" has been changed into "the right of the working class"; but I assume that every reader will have understood what is meant. . . .

I understand that you do not have a large adherence among the workers of Australia; everywhere the majority follows the easy way of having themselves redeemed by leaders and politicians, and have to learn by experience the fallaciousness of these hopes. You rightly consider yourself as a herald of uncompromising fight and clear opposition to capitalism, enabled to do that by clear understanding of capitalism and Marxian science. So your work has a broader significance than only Australian; in the English-speaking world—since Mattick's *Living Marxism* ceased—there is no other organ that in criticising all the Labor and socialist "reformers" (really defenders of capitalism) at the same time could show the *positive* aims of pure class fight. For in England the most radical socialism is the S.P.G.B., that believes in "pure" parliamentarism, and *Left*, that thinks a United Socialist Europe should be the slogan (rightly criticised in your October issue); then at once come the anarchists who often rightly criticise all that reformism, but have only an ideological slogan of freedom to oppose against it. Thus if you can publish in a good way *The Worker's Councils* you fulfill an international function for the English-speaking working class, for which there is no other organ available at the moment. Hence, if you could succeed in providing more funds and more paper to accelerate the publication by appealing to friends and readers, it will be highly important for our cause. . . . especially when again there should break out wild strikes, this book should be propagated among [workers] in order that they see and understand the wider aspects of their actions. . . .

I received your address on *The Dollar Crisis*; it is excellent, and I learned from it many details that were not so entirely clear to me. I have not yet received your Sept. issue, nor Nos. 35 and 36, for July and August. No. 38, however, I have in hand, with the very clear articles on Nationalization, and on the Ideological Justification. Yes, indeed, every new number of your monthly, and most articles in it are full of good interesting stuff. Even the articles on special Australian matters are instructive for such as are not acquainted with these subjects by their mode of treatment.

You ask my opinion on your abstract of an address on Nationalisation etc. I find it highly instructive and convincing; with the [matter] somewhat more systematically arranged, some points worked out in more detail, it would give a [..?..] pamphlet for mass-propaganda in all English-speaking countries, and also be widely known among British, as well as American workers. Of course, none of our speeches or pamphlets or books will be able to create class movements [...?...] revolution. Such arise only out of practical social conditions. But the more clear understanding there is in the masses, the better will they direct their movements and see their aims—how often power positions of the workers in rev. times were inefficient broke down by lack of insight, by massal ignorance and illusions. So it is our task to spread such knowledge as much as possible.

Yours fraternally  
Ant. Pannekoek

## Strikes

Source: *Western Socialist*, January 1948, written in English;

In the workers' movement two chief forms of fight are distinguished, often denoted as the political and the economic field of fight. The former centred about elections for parliamentary or analogous bodies, the latter consisted in strikes for higher wages and better working conditions. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a common opinion among socialists that the former had a fundamental importance, was revolutionary, because it set up the aim of conquering political power, and thereby revolutionising the structure of society, abolishing capitalism and introducing a socialist system. Whereas the latter was only a means of reform, to maintain or improve the standard of life within capitalism, hence accepting this system as the basis of society.

That this distinction could not be entirely right was soon shown by the practice of parliamentarism. Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto*, had already indicated some measures of reform preparing for the future revolution. In later times the socialist parliamentarians were working and struggling continually for reforms; the socialist parties to which they belonged, put up an elaborate program of "immediate demands"; and they could win increasing numbers of voters. First, and most manifestly, in Germany; then in other European countries. The final aim of a socialist revolution gradually receded to the background. What, under the name of fighting for socialism, this political fight really achieved, was to secure for the working class a certain acknowledged place in capitalist society, with certain standards of working and living conditions, of course never really secure, always unstable but existing somehow, always disputed and always in need of defense.

Both these forms of fight, trade-unionism with its strikes as well as parliamentary socialism were now instruments of reform only — for a large part handled by the same persons, union leaders sitting in parliament. And reformist doctrine asserted that by their activity, by accumulated reform in parliament and "industrial democracy" in the shops, they would gradually transform capitalism into socialism.

But capitalism had its own ways. What Marx had expounded in his economic studies, the concentration of capital, came true in a far mightier degree than perhaps its author had surmised. The growth and development of capitalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought

about numbers of new social phenomena and economic conditions. Every socialist who stands for uncompromising class fight, has to study these changes attentively, because it is on them that depends how the workers have to act to win victory and freedom; many old conceptions of revolution can now take more distinct shape. This development increased the power of capital enormously, gave to small groups of monopolists dominance over the entire bourgeoisie, and tied State power ever faster to big business. It strengthened in this class the instincts of suppression, manifest in the increase of reactionary and fascist trends. It made the trade unions ever more powerless over against capital, less inclined to fight; their leaders ever more became mediators and even agents of capital, whose job it is to impose the unsatisfactory capital-dictated working conditions upon the unwilling workers. The strikes ever more take the form of wild strikes, breaking out against the will of the union leaders, who then, by seizing the leadership, as soon as possible quell the fight. Whereas in the field of politics all is collaboration and harmony of the classes — in the case of the C. P. accompanied by a semblance of revolutionary talk, such wild strikes become ever more the only real bitter class-fight of the workers against capital.

After the war these tendencies are intensified. Reconstruction, reparation of the devastation or shortness of productive forces, means capitalist reconstruction. Capitalist reconstruction implies more rapid accumulation of capital, more strenuous increase of profits, depression of the standard of life of the workers. State power acquires now an important function in organizing business life. In the devastated Europe it takes the supreme lead; its officials become the directors of a planned economy, regulating production and consumption. Its special function is to keep the workers down, and stifle all discontent by physical or spiritual means. In America, where it is subjected to big business, this is its chief function. The workers have now over against them the united front of State power and capitalist class, which usually is joined by union leaders and party leaders, who aspire to sit in conference with the managers and bosses and having a vote in fixing wages and working conditions. And, by this capitalist mechanism of increasing prices, the standard of life of the workers goes rapidly downward.

In Europe, in England, Belgium, France, Holland — and in America too, we see wild strikes flaring up, as yet in small groups, without clear consciousness of their social role and without further aims, but showing a splendid spirit of solidarity. They defy their “Labor” government in England, and are hostile to the Communist Party in government, in France and Belgium. The workers begin to feel that State power is now their most important enemy; their strikes are directed against this power as well as against the capitalist masters. Strikes become a political factor; and when strikes break out of such extent that they lay flat entire branches and shake social production to its core, they become first-rate political factors. The strikers themselves may not be aware of it — neither are most socialists — they may have no intention to be revolutionary, but they are. And gradually consciousness will come up of what they are doing intuitively, out of necessity; and it will make the actions more direct and more efficient.

So the roles are gradually reversed. Parliamentary action deteriorates into a mere quarrel of politicians, and serves to fool the people, or at best to patch up dirty old capitalism. At the same time mass strikes of the workers tend to become most serious attacks against State power, that fortress of capitalism, and most efficient factors in increasing the consciousness and social power of the working class. Surely it is still a long way to the end; so long as we see workers going on strike and returning to work simply at the command of an ambitious chief, they are not yet ripe for great actions of self-liberation. But looking backward on the developments and changes in the past half-century we cannot fail to recognize the importance of these genuine proletarian class-fights for our ideas of social revolution. How thereby the propaganda-tasks for socialists are widened, may be considered another time.

# Revolt of the Scientists

From: *Retort*, Vol.4, No.2, Spring 1948;

Written: 1948

Transcription\HTML Markup: Greg Adargo

Panic pervades the intellectual layers of American society. Whereas the peoples of Europe were used to war and damage, to destruction and insecurity in life, Americans felt safe in being separated by oceans from dangerous foes, until the atom bomb fell upon Hiroshima; the first scientists, realizing what it meant, called themselves “frightened men.”

There is no secret; and there is no defense. Within some few years Russia and many smaller countries can have their installations ready to make atom bombs by the hundreds, just like America, Atom bombs are the cheapest means of town-destruction; General H. H. Arnold computed that destruction per square mile by means of B-29 bombs cost 3 million dollars by means of the Hiroshima bomb only half a million (destroying a value of 160 million). Carried by airplanes or rockets, they can cross the ocean in numbers, and by agents of foreign powers—Russia has numbers of devoted agents in every country—they can easily be smuggled in and hidden, to destroy everything for miles around at the fixed moment. An immense army of security officers and spies will be needed, continually to inspect every box or case in any house. In penetrating words Urey, one of the foremost physicists in America, points out how the deadly fear of annihilation will destroy all the liberties of American citizens. Nor will an attempt to forestall the danger through world conquest by America be a way out. “Not only may our own culture be destroyed by these weapons of mass destruction, but all civilizations as they exist in the world may be retarded and weakened for centuries to come. It all adds up to the most dangerous situation that humanity has ever faced in all history.”

In this all his colleagues agree, and they rebel. They refuse now that the German war is over and won, to take part in further research for military use, to construct and perfect weapons. (The government, to break this strike has already imported hundreds of German Nazi-physicists.) The atomic scientists propose international control of all atomic technics and research, and give out the slogan: no more war. An extensive propaganda is put out to impress the American people that a new age, “the atomic age” has begun, and that it is incumbent upon them all to fight the impending danger. Professor Langmuir explains that America must come to an understanding with Russia and overcome the mutual mistrust. “We don’t like their form of government and they don’t like ours,” but he adds, quoting the Atlantic Charter “we have to respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live., Manifestly, he thinks that the Russian people have deliberately, by preference, chosen their dictatorship.

There is now, ever again, talk of an understanding between Russia and America. Certainly, between the peoples, the working masses, there would be no difficulty, if only they could reach one another. But “Russia”: that is the group of dictatorially ruling officials, for whom the chief thing is to keep their power over the exploited, gagged masses. Or “America”: that is the group of millionaires, ruling by means of their agents, senators, presidents, congressmen, editors, for whom the chief thing is to keep their power over the exploited fooled masses. And to extend their power over the world; American capitalism as the most powerful aspiring to complete world-domination, Russian state-capitalism as the more advanced economic organization, expecting superiority by delaying the conflict, Theoretically it does not seem entirely impossible that these two groups of exploiters should come to an agreement of uniting into one, though not homogenous world-dominating class; just as now within one political unit the capitalist groups compete and fight one another without killing or shooting. In America many Voices are raised already, demanding one supreme world-government (“One world or none!”)--they feel quite sure that it would mean an American world-government; of course the Russian rulers refuse.

But as long as there are large populations and countries still to be conquered by capitalism—as in China—by destruction of old settled conditions and heavier suffering of the masses, violence and bloodshed will not disappear from the earth, and passionate greed will engender a warlike spirit. Moreover in world war capital makes the biggest profits; 19 shipbuilding companies with a total capital of 23,000,000 made profits amounting to 356,000,000 in the last war. So it does not seem probable that world peace and unity of the ruling classes will be reached.

Capitalist society with its mighty technical and its entirely inadequate spiritual and moral powers is often compared to a powerful racing car with a baby at the wheel. Now the car is seen steering downright towards the abyss. President Truman a year ago in a message to Congress said: “the release of atomic energy constitutes a force too revolutionary to consider in the framework of old ideas.” What we see in politics and international talk is the steadfast, nearly invariable dominance of the old ideas. The Army, here and yonder, prepares in secret more and more destructive atomic weapons. Performing their narrow duty in accordance with civil government; international talk goes on in the old frame; the mutual proposals of the governments have the old-fashion sound of war-threats and peace-phrases.

Is that mere clumsiness of thought? No, the still reigning “old ideas” represent the still existing old foundations of society, the mastery of rapacious exploiters. The words of the president were idle words. The atom bomb surely is a revolutionary factor. But it has not revolutionized the basis of society.

Will the “revolting” scientists change this basis? They do no more than try to impress the danger of atomic war upon the citizens, They cannot do any more, they are only learned physicists; they are not social guides; they are not acquainted with the real nature of social relations. Learned societies in different countries now demand for the scientist control of and a say in politics, part of the responsibility in government. They are not aware that the right of governing is not given but must be conquered. In one of the pamphlets issued to rouse the people, the question asked by the readers: what can I do?—is answered thus: “Let your Congressmen know that you expect them to find a way to banish from the world both the causes and the weapons of war, regardless of how many presidents and prejudices must be set aside.” That will do it! Indeed, tens of thousands of letters were received already by Congress (from among tens of million, of voters, hence 99.9 percent showed no interest). Probably the Congressmen receiving such letters went to their party bosses inside or outside of the Administration to take counsel and instructions: and so everything remains in the same hands directed by the “old ideas” of politics.

World-threatening dangers cannot be averted by means of unimportant trifles.

## II

Could anything otherwise be done, then, to prevent atomic war? Certainly. But in order to see this, the question must be put in a wider context. Can the people, in extreme cases, force its will upon the rulers—directly, hence otherwise than by the long, notoriously illusionary way of electing an entirely new and new-minded Congress? Suppose an immediate danger of war threatens, have the working masses, provided they have the decided will to prevent the war, any possibility of enforcing their will upon an unwilling war-preparing government? They have, if they are really prepared to uphold their aim resolutely.

It must be borne in mind that a government, a ruling class cannot go to war if the people are unwilling and resisting. Therefore a moral and intellectual preparation is no less necessary than a technical and organizational preparation. They know intuitively what Clausewitz the well-known German author of “On War” expressed in this way: that in every war spiritual forces play the main role. Systematic propaganda in the press, on the radio and in the movies, must awaken the patriotic bellicose spirit and suppress the instinctive but unorganized resistance. So it is certain that a decided, conscious refusal by the masses of the people, manifested in an outspoken, widely heard protest, is a first-rank



political factor and can have a determining influence upon government policy. Such protest can assume different forms of increasing stringency.

It may appear first in mass meetings voting sharp resolutions. The protest will be more effective, if—in tens and hundreds—of thousands—the masses go into the streets in endless processions; against such numbers all riot-acts and court injunctions are meaningless. And if these are not sufficient, or are suppressed by military force, the workers and employees in transport and industry can strike. Not for wages, but to save society. A mass political strike is not a mechanical impediment to war, but a means of moral pressure. It is the most serious admonition to government of the resolute will of the people for peace. Surely it would be a revolutionary action; but as Truman said, the atom bomb is a revolutionary factor.

Such an action is not lightly to be entered upon. Government and the ruling class will try to break this resistance with all the means of moral and physical suppression. So it will be a hard fight, demanding sacrifices, steadfastness and endurance. The psychological factors for such a fight are not at once present in full vigor; they need time to develop under heavy spiritual strain. As long as citizens can be lulled by an appeal to nationalism—even in the illustrated leaflets against atomic war the star-spangled banner made its appearance—and listen to the promise that the big profits of American world-domination will pour out over the entire business world; as long as the workers go on strike and go to work at the command of some union chieftain, instead of taking action and decision over their lot entirely into their own hands—the psychological conditions for such actions of protest will be lacking. But it must be emphasized that in them lies the only warrant of world peace.

Will not such actions, by laming the war-preparations, play into the hands of the foe and prepare for the defeat of the home country? Everybody in America knows that Russia is a dictatorship able to go its course unimpaired by the powerless masses, But in Russia the workers, to the last child, know that the USA is ruled by big capitalism aspiring to world-domination, and to that end is able to muster the entire American people, workers as well as middle-class. At least up to now. Will they, then, blame their rulers for preparing for a war of defense? Thus the ring of fate, fettering each working class to masters is closed. How can it be broken?

In Russia the workers are powerless, kept in spiritual as well as physical bondage. The American workers are free to take up the fight, free to act, to read, to publish, to discuss, to instruct themselves, to combine in unions, to assemble in meeting, to strike. Hence it is only here that the fight for peace can begin. If there is any way to encourage, from the outside, resistance of oppositional elements among the Russian masses against the dictatorship, it consists in mass-actions of American workers against capitalist power. If they should proceed to wrench the decision on policy from big capital, the most essential step to deter the threat of atomic war would be made.

At the same time such action would be the first step towards social revolution overthrowing capitalism itself. Then the atom bomb would be a revolutionary factor indeed, revolutionizing the basis of society. Then the “atomic age” would inaugurate the age of freedom.

Of course nobody expects the atomic scientists to go that far. They have given their expert warning, as physicists. More they cannot do. It is up to others to take the warning.

## Letter on Workers Councils

1952

I would like to make some critical and complementary remarks about Comrade Kondor's observations on “Bourgeois or Socialist Organisation” in the issue of “Funken” for December 1951. When firstly he criticises the present-day role of the trade unions ( and parties ), he is completely right. With the changes in the economic structure the

function of the different social structures must also change. The trade unions were and are indispensable as organs of struggle for the working-class under private capitalism. Under monopoly and state-capitalism, towards which capitalism increasingly develops, they turn into a part of the ruling bureaucratic apparatus, which has to integrate the working class into the whole. As organisations maintained and developed by the workers themselves they are better than any apparatus of compulsion for installing the working class as a section within the social structure as smoothly as possible. In today's transitional period this new character comes to the fore ever more strongly. This realisation shows that it would be wasted effort to repair the old relationship. But at the same time it can be used to give the workers greater freedom in choosing the forms of struggle against capitalism.

The development towards state-capitalism—often propagated under the name Socialism in Western Europe—does not mean the liberation of the working class but greater servitude. What the working class strives for in its struggle, liberty and security, to be master of its own life, is only possible through control of the means of production. State socialism is not control of the means of production by the workers, but control by the organs of the state. If it is democratic at the same time, this means that workers themselves may select their masters. By contrast direct control of production by workers means that the employees direct the enterprises and construct the higher and central organisations from below. This is what is called the system of workers councils. The author is thus perfectly correct when he emphasises this as the new and future principle of organisation of the working class. Organised autonomy of the productive masses stands in sharp contrast to the organisation from above in state socialism. But one must keep the following in mind. “Workers’ councils” do not designate a form of organization whose lines are fixed once and for all, and which only requires a subsequent elaboration of the details. It means a principle—the principle of the workers’ self-management of enterprises and of production.

This principle can in no way be implemented by a theoretical discussion about the best practical forms it should take. It concerns a practical struggle against the apparatus of capitalist domination. In our day, the slogan of “workers’ councils,” does not mean assembling fraternally to work in co-operation; it means class struggle—in which fraternity plays its part—it means revolutionary action by the masses against state power. Revolutions cannot, of course, be summoned up at will; they arise spontaneously in moments of crisis, when the situation becomes intolerable. They occur only if this sense of the intolerable lives in the masses, and if at the same time there exists a certain generally accepted consciousness of what ought to be done. It is at this level that propaganda and public discussion play their part. And these actions cannot secure a lasting success unless large sections of the working class have a clear understanding of the nature and goal of their struggle. Hence the necessity for making workers councils a theme for discussion.

So, the idea of workers councils does not involve a program of practical objectives to be realized—either tomorrow or in a few years—, it serves solely as a guide for the long and heavy fight for freedom, which still lies ahead for the working class. Marx once put it in these words : the hour of capitalism has sounded; however he left no doubt about the fact that this hour would mean an entire historical epoch.

## Letter to Castoriadis

Dear Comrade Chaulieu,

I offer you many thanks for the series of eleven issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* that you gave to comrade B.... to give to me. I read them (though I haven't yet finished) with great interest, because of the great agreement between us that they reveal. You probably remarked the same thing when reading my book *Les Conseils ouvriers*. For many years it seemed to me that the small number of socialists who expounded these ideas hadn't grown; the book was ignored and was met with silence by almost the entire social-

ist press (except, recently, in the *Socialist Leader* of the ILP). So I was happy to get to know a group that had arrived at the same ideas through an independent route. The complete domination by workers of their labor, which you express by saying: "The producers themselves organize the management of production," I described in the chapters on "the organization of workshops" and "social organization." The organisms the workers need for deliberations, formed of assemblies of delegates that you call "soviet organisms," are the same as those that we call "*conseils ouvriers*," "*arbeitrrate*," "workers councils."

Certainly there are differences. I will deal with them, considering this as an essay in contribution to the discussion in your review. While you restrict the activity of these organisms to the organization of labor in factories after the taking of social power by the workers, we consider them as also being the organisms by means of which the workers will conquer this power. In the conquest of power we have no interest in a "revolutionary party" that will take the leadership of the proletarian revolution. This "revolutionary party" is a Trotskyist concept that (since 1930) has found adherents among many former partisans of the Communist Party who have been disappointed by the practice of the latter. Our opposition and criticism go back to the first years of the Russian Revolution, and were directed at Lenin and were caused by his turn towards political opportunism. We have remained outside the Trotskyist road: we have never been under his influence. We consider Trotsky the most able spokesman for Bolshevism, and he should have been Lenin's successor. But after having recognized in Russia a nascent capitalism, our attention was principally on the western world of big capital where the workers will have to transform the most highly developed capitalism into real communism (in the literal sense of the word). By his revolutionary fervor Trotsky captivated all the dissidents that Stalinism had thrown out of the Communist Parties, and in inoculating them with the Bolshevik virus it rendered them almost incapable of understanding the great new tasks of the proletarian revolution.

Because the Russian Revolution and its ideas still have such a strong influence over people's spirits, it's necessary to more profoundly penetrate its fundamental character. In a few words, it was the last bourgeois revolution, though carried out by the working class. "Bourgeois revolution" signifies a revolution that destroys feudalism and opens the way to industrialization, with all the social consequences this implies. The Russian Revolution is thus in the direct line of the English Revolution of 1647, and the French Revolution of 1789, as well as those that followed in 1830, 1848 and 1871. During the course of these revolutions the artisans, the peasants and the workers furnished the massive strength needed to destroy the *ancien régime*. Afterwards, the committees and political parties of the men representing the rich strata that constituted the future dominant class came to the forefront and took control of governmental power. This was a natural result, since the working class was not yet mature enough to govern itself. In this new class society, where the workers were exploited, such a dominant class needs a government composed of a minority of functionaries and politicians. In a more recent era, the Russian Revolution seemed to be a proletarian revolution, the workers having been its authors through their strikes and mass actions. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik Party, little by little, later succeeded in appropriating power (the laboring class being a small minority among the peasant population). Thus the bourgeois character (in the largest sense of the term) of the Russian Revolution became dominant and took the form of state capitalism. Since then, due to its ideological and spiritual influence in the world, the Russian Revolution has become the exact opposite of a proletarian revolution that liberates the workers and renders them masters of the productive apparatus.

For us the glorious tradition of the Russian Revolution consists in the fact that in its first explosions, in 1905 and 1917, it was the first to develop and show to the workers of the whole world the organizational form of their autonomous revolutionary action: the soviets. From that experience, confirmed later on, on a smaller scale in Germany, we drew our ideas on the forms of mass action that are proper to the working class, and that it should apply in order to obtain its own liberation.

Precisely opposed to this are the traditions, the ideas, and the methods that come from the Russian Revolution when the Communist Party takes power. These ideas, which only serve as obstacles to correct proletarian action, constituted the essence and the basis of Trotsky's propaganda.

Our conclusion is that the forms of organization of autonomous power, expressed by the terms "soviets" or "workers councils" must serve as much in the conquest of power as in the direction of productive labor after this conquest. In the first place this is because the power of the workers over society cannot be obtained in any other way, for example by what is called a revolutionary party; in the second place, because these soviets, which will later be necessary for production, can only be formed through the class struggle for power.

It seems to me that in this concept the "knot of contradictions" of the problem of "revolutionary leadership" disappears. For the source of contradictions is the impossibility of harmonizing the power and the freedom of a class governing its own destiny, with the requirement that it obey a leadership formed by a small group or party. But can such a requirement be maintained? It clearly contradicts the most quoted idea of Marx's, i.e., that the liberation of the workers will be the task of the workers themselves. What is more, the proletarian revolution can't be compared to a simple rebellion or a military campaign led by a central command, nor even to a period of struggle similar, for example, to the great French revolution, which itself was nothing but an episode in the bourgeois ascension to power. The proletarian revolution is much more vast and profound; it is the accession of the mass of the people to the consciousness of their existence and their character. It will not be a simple convulsion; it will form the content of an entire period in the history of humanity, during which the working class will have to discover and realize its own faculties and potential, as well as its own goals and means of struggle. I attempted to elaborate on certain aspects of this revolution in my book *Les Conseils Ouvriers* in the chapter entitled "The Workers' Revolution." Of course, all of this only provides an abstract schema that can be used to bring to the forefront the diverse forces in action and their relations.

It's possible that you will now ask: Within the framework of this orientation what purpose does a party or a group serve, and what are its tasks? We can be sure that our group won't succeed in commanding the working masses in their revolutionary action: besides us there are a half-dozen or more groups or parties who call themselves revolutionary, but who all differ in their programs and ideas, and compared to the great Socialist Party, these are nothing but Lilliputians. Within the framework of the discussion in issue number 10 of your review it was correctly asserted that our task is essentially theoretical: to find and indicate, through study and discussion, the best path of action for the working class. Nevertheless, the education based on this should not be intended solely for members of a group or party, but the masses of the working class. It will be up to them to decide the best way to act in their factory meetings and their Councils. But in order for them to decide in the best way possible they must be enlightened by well-considered advice coming from the greatest number of people possible. Consequently, a group that proclaims that the autonomous action of the working class is the principal form of the socialist revolution will consider that its primary task is to go talk to the workers, for example by means of popular tracts that will clarify the ideas of the workers by explaining the important changes in society, and the need for the workers to lead themselves in all their actions, including in future productive labor.

Here you have some of the reflections raised by the reading of the very interesting discussions published in your review. In addition, I'd like to say how satisfied I was by the articles on "The American worker," which clarifies a large part of the enigmatic problem of that working class without socialism, and the instructive article on the working class in East Germany. I hope that your group will have the chance to publish more issues of its review.

You will excuse me for having written this letter in English; it's difficult for me to express myself satisfactorily in French.

Sincerely yours,

Ant. Pannekoek

November 8, 1953

## The Politics of Gorter

Written: 1952;

First Published: in French in *La Révolution Proletarienne*, Aug-Sept 1952;

Introduction by *Révolution Proletarienne*: Circumstances beyond our control delayed the publication of the following article by Professor Pannekoek: loss of a first manuscript between Holland and Paris, then difficulties of translation. However this delay may have an unforeseen advantage worth being announced: the comrades who publish the weekly socialist paper *De Vlam* in Amsterdam have formed a committee to commemorate the twenty fifth anniversary of the death of Gorter and they are publishing Pannekoek's article at the same time as us.

In an article in *Revolution Proletarienne* No 50 ( May 1951, page 171 ) in which S. Tas speaks of Herman Gorter, he is described as having "a rather bad politics." It seems necessary to compensate for this article with some remarks on the positive character of Gorter's politics.

Gorter became a member of the socialist party where he discovered and studied Marxism. From this he drew the conviction that the proletariat can only gain the management of society through class struggle against the bourgeoisie, and that this is how it will destroy capitalism. He was then of the opinion, like the whole of the radical wing of the party, that good parliamentary politics could be an effective means to organize the working masses, to awaken their class consciousness and, by this means, increase their power in respect of the dominant bourgeoisie. For him the socialists in Parliament ought to have vigorously opposed the bourgeois politicians, the representatives of the dominant class. It would be a misunderstanding to say that this politics sought to transform the world through a single blow. The goal of this politics was to increase the strength of the proletariat so that through a series of engagements it became capable of obtaining power. It was in the politics of the German socialist party that one saw the most clear incarnation of this radical position.

This attitude was opposed by reformism, which sought to achieve reforms that would make capitalism bearable, through compromises with the other parties. In the western countries, because of the much longer and slower development of capitalism, class divisions were marked in a much less acute way than they were in Germany, due to the feverish rise of its industrial capitalism. Thus reformism generally dominated the practical activity of the socialist parties. The struggle of the Dutch Marxists, in which Gorter distinguished himself, was directed against this practise because they were of the opinion that reforms could not be obtained through the cunning of politicians, but only through the power of the working class. Only once were they successful. However they were finally expelled. In other Western countries, this was not even necessary; the reformism of the members of parliament, "good politics", reigned in absolute mastery. If we now consider the results of this politics, we see that after a half-century of reformism, capitalism is more powerful than ever and society is threatened with annihilation, while the workers must continue to fight for their crumbs of bread.

In Germany, reformism continued to gain influence in practise, although theoretically this was not recognised in the face of the intensity of the class struggle. It was here that the conviction was born, within the Marxists and the most progressive circles of the proletariat, that one could not achieve power by purely parliamentary means. For that one needed the action of the masses, of the workers themselves. The Party passed resolutions on the general strike and we started demonstrations for the right to vote. The extent and

strength of these frightened the party chiefs even more than it did the dominant class; they put an end to it for fear of the consequences and all forces were channelled into the elections and parliamentary politics. Only, a minority, “the extreme left,” continued propaganda in favour of mass action. The German bourgeoisie, its power unshaken, could prepare to conquer world power without meeting any obstacles. Naturally, Gorter was at the side of the extreme left, whose politics were as his own

After this the danger of war became ever more menacing. The socialists and pacifists of France and Germany organised a Peace congress at Basle in 1912. Beautiful and solemn speeches were made against the war. Gorter himself went there to provoke a discussion about the practical means of fighting against war. Mandated by a certain number of elements of the left, he had proposed a resolution according to which, in all countries, workers had to discuss the danger of war and consider the possibility of mass action against it. But he was not allowed to speak. The leadership of the congress refused any discussion about means or methods. It acted, supposedly, so as not to destroy the impression of our imposing unity. Actually it feared the consequences of such mass struggles. The governments, not misled by appearances, now knew that they had no serious resistance awaiting them in the socialist parties. Gorters “bad politics” which wanted to prevent war by all means, had been repulsed, the “good politics” of the party politicians remained dominant, it imposed itself on the proletariat and soon led Europe into the first world war.

In this war the socialist politicians were revealed as being what they always had been fundamentally : nationalist politicians, or in other words bourgeois politicians. In every country they supported their own government, helped it to contain the workers and to stifle any resistance to the war. All this was the good politics of skilful politicians. The “bad politics” of Gorter consisted of attempting in his pamphlets on imperialism and on the world revolution, to inform the workers of the reasons for the war and the need for a revolution after the war.

In 1918 when the war ended, revolution erupted in Germany. Or, to be more exact, on November 6<sup>th</sup> it erupted in Kiel, and three days later the counter-revolution erupted in Berlin; Ebert, the leader of the socialist party, came into government to repress the action of the revolutionary workers, in association with the generals. Naturally Gorter was at the side of Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and the Spartacists... The workers action was cut down by the military, Liebknecht and Rosa were assassinated. Ebert, the model of a socialist politician was victorious; through good politics he brought the bourgeoisie back to power in Germany and was its first president.

In 1917, the Russian Revolution destroyed tsarism and brought the Bolsheviks into power. In every country the workers were stirred up and communist groups were formed. Naturally Gorter was immediately at their side with all his heart. He saw this as the beginning of the world revolution, and in Lenin, its supreme leader; in the strike movements in Russia he saw the beginnings of a new form of independent action by workers, and in the soviets the beginning of a new form of organisation of the revolutionary proletariat. But divergences soon appeared. When the defeat of the Spartacists in Germany prevented a world revolution, Lenin sought to return to the tactics of parliamentarism to win over the left wing of the socialist parties. The majority of German communists vigorously opposed this. They were expelled, and it was against them that Lenin wrote his pamphlet on the “infantile disorder”. Lenin’s action meant the end of the Russian revolution as a positive factor in the world proletarian revolution. Gorter, as spokesman of the opposition, replied with his “Open letter to Lenin”<sup>8</sup>. Two fundamentally different conceptions were opposed in these two works. Lenin was a great politician, much greater than his socialist contemporaries, because he had greater tasks and objectives. His historical task, as leader of the Bolshevik party, was to raise Russia up from its primitive and agrarian form of production into industrialization, by means of a social and political dictatorship which led

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<sup>8</sup> It is an error of fact when Tas designates Lenin’s pamphlet as “a formidable response” to that of Gorter. The order of succession was precisely the reverse.

to State socialism. And because he only knew capitalism from the outside and not from the inside, he believed it was possible to free the workers of the world by making some the disciplined troops of the "Communist party". From then on they only had to follow the Russian example. Gorter replied that in Russia the revolution had only been able to conquer thanks to the aid of the peasant masses, and that, precisely this aid was missing in the West, where the peasants themselves were property owners. In Russia it was only necessary to get rid of a crumbling Asiatic despotism. In the West the workers were opposed by the formidable power of capitalism. They would only free themselves from it if they themselves raised the levels of revolutionary strength, of class unity, of independence and of intelligence. Thereafter Lenin's politics have logically ended in Stalinism in Russia, they have divided the proletariat in the West and been rendered impotent by the fanatic and boastful quasi-revolutionism of the communist party. In the years after 1920, Gorter in contact with the small groups of the extreme left, worked to clarify the idea of the organisation of workers councils and thus collaborated in the future renewal of the class struggle of the proletariat. During this time the socialist politicians of the second international, as members of parliament and ministers, were occupied in bailing out a bankrupt capitalism for the bourgeoisie, but nonetheless without halting the crisis or being able to blur class divisions. In this way they prepared the ground for the accession of Hitler and the second world war.

If we take in at a glance the whole of the political history of the last century, we constantly see the opposition of two political methods, which are themselves an expression of the class struggle. Why is one called good and the other bad politics? Politics is the art of dominating men. Skilful politicians endeavour to reform, in other words patch up the old system of antiquated and shaky domination, or, when its fall is inevitable, erect a new system of domination. This is what is called good politics. Others endeavour to help the exploited masses acquire the strength to deliver themselves from exploitation and domination. It is this which in parliamentary terms is called bad politics.