



THE  
COUNCIL  
COMMUNIST  
READER

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*with an introduction from  
Paul Mattick Jr.*

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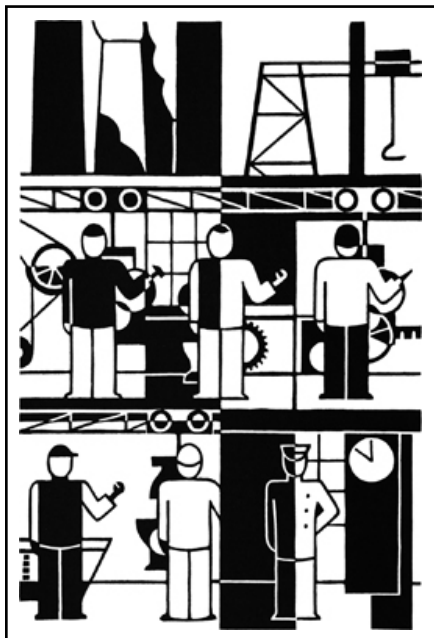
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A Radical Reprint



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Gerd Arntz, Factory 1927

# Introduction

It is certainly not true that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Human history is such a complex web of structures and activities, with different elements changing at different speeds, that any attempt to reproduce some feature of the past is bound to be inhibited by novel contexts. In fact, the real problem, far from that suggested by Santayana’s famous phrase, is that signaled by Marx’s observation that “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” Actions guided by assumptions inherited from the past are likely to misfire, or at least lead in unexpected directions.

This is actually the real reason to pay attention to the (unrepeatable) past—to clarify the differences as well as continuities defining the present. For example, the recent revival of socialist ideas in the United States has led to a revival of social democracy, the idea of the gradual extension of democratic governance from politics to the economy, as if this old idea could simply be transplanted to a different historical moment. It seemed logical to 19<sup>th</sup>-century socialists that as the majority of people became wage-workers, the winning of voting rights by the whole adult population would eventually bring a party representing them to power, to legislate a reorganization of social life in their interests. Indeed, social-democratic parties came into existence all over Europe and even began to stir in the U.S. As they grew to the point of actually participating in government, however, they adapted to the realities of operating within the terms of capitalist politics, just as the trade unions associated with them naturally came to function as brokers of labor-power rather than as opponents

of the wages system. This development was made painfully clear when the parliamentary representatives of the largest of the socialist parties, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), voted to pay for the First World War, thus abandoning their claimed fidelity to the international proletariat to support the national interests of the German ruling class.

This brought to a head the dissensions among socialists already aroused by the conflict between official revolutionary goals and the compromises with political reality required by practical party activity. The more radical members of the organization split to form the Independent Socialist Party, within which a minority agitated directly against the war. Apart from these political positions, the privations and destruction the war brought fostered popular opposition to it ; by 1916 there were already large strikes and demonstrations against the war in Berlin. Since the official political and trade-union organizations supported the war, these were organized unofficially, largely through a network of shop stewards in various workplaces.<sup>1</sup>

The war was finally ended when German sailors ordered into one more big battle mutinied, arresting their officers and sending delegates to shore where they were immediately joined by tens of thousands of civilian workers and soldiers. Since the official left organizations were committed to the war, they organized themselves into sailors', soldiers', and workers' councils, based on their workplaces; the shop stewards continued to play an important role in networking. Trains were commandeered by groups who traveled the country spreading the revolt.

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1. For an outstanding short history of these experiences, see Martin Comack, *Wild Socialism: Workers Councils in Revolutionary Berlin, 1918-1921* (University Press of America, 2012).

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Prisons were emptied of political prisoners, including antiwar activists. The imperial government fled the country and the SPD took political power, proclaiming a socialist republic. The socialists received support from the military in exchange for a promise to get rid of the left. This was in their own interests, as the leftists, drawing the lesson of the revolutionary failure of party politics, looked instead to the direct rule of society by the workplace councils, linked through delegates sent to higher-order councils. These organizations, directly responsible to particular workplaces, in principle represented not political ideologies but the workers who elected delegates to them.

The war had also brought revolution to Russia. There, Lenin's faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party, the Bolsheviks, had taken state power with the support of soldiers and workers who had occupied their factories, governing them with workers' committees. The more politically active people, both workers and political activists from different parties, met in "soviets," citywide councils, to set policy. The decisive action of the Bolsheviks offered a different model of organization to the former social democrats in Germany who wanted to extend the German upheaval into a social revolution; they formed a Communist Party in emulation of the Russians.

By 1921 both revolutions were at an end. In Russia the Bolshevik state, while fighting a civil war for control of the country, established a dictatorial regime, complete with secret police and prison system, crushing the other revolutionary groupings and using military force at Kronstadt to end a workers' revolt demanding democratic rule by workers and soldiers. In Germany, the socialist government had employed the old imperial military to put down a revolt of Communists demanding that political power remain with the associated workers'

councils and not be passed to a parliament in which all parties, socialist and bourgeois, would be represented. This process was easier because the majority of workers had allegiance to the SPD; as a result the councils themselves voted their dissolution.

Although they ended in defeat, these attempts at socialist revolution, echoed at the time in many other countries (including even the United States, where a general strike in Seattle in 1919 led to the city's brief governance by an elected workers' committee) showed that, while the political forms inherited from the nineteenth century—parliamentary parties and trade unions—were incapable of serving revolutionary ends, when they want to act workers can improvise new organizational forms on the basis of their relations to each other in workplaces and living areas. These were the “councils” explored by activists who tried, during the events and afterwards, to understand this novel experience, in writings collected here.

Social-democratic parties could find room in the political landscape of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries because an expanding capitalism generated enough profits to be able to afford wage increases and welfare measures for the working class. The stagnation of the capitalist economy today explains the impossibility of reviving social-democratic parties and trade unions. In the same way, the Leninist type of revolutionary party was an adaptation of social-democracy to the special conditions of capitalistically underdeveloped countries, such as Russia was in 1917, which such parties sought to take in hand and turn into modern industrial states. Despite the efforts of numerous little groups, there is no place for them in today's capitalism, already established throughout the world.

In contrast, the workers' council, although this political form too first showed itself in the past, develops

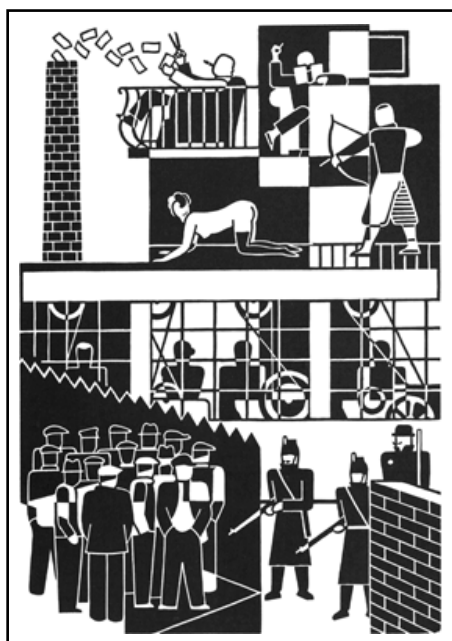


out of basic features of capitalism, which remain with us today. The “workers council” is not a recipe, but a principle. It is rooted in the social character of capitalist society, in which individuals are dependent on each others’ highly organized productive activity—today through global supply chains—for their material life. It is rooted also in the capacity of people, demonstrated in all the revolts that have disrupted the surface of capitalism since it first came into being, to break with assumptions about “the way things are.” The importance of the council idea is not the particular forms that radical activity took in the first decades of the twentieth century, but in its emphasis on people’s ability to organize themselves for social action independently of structures suitable to managing life in capitalist society. It is not by gradually preparing an organization for a future struggle, but by creating new modes of action in response to immediate needs and goals that it has proved possible to break with the forms of thought and modes of behavior bred in us by present-day existence. These old texts are still worth reading because they struggled not to create a new political dogma or to celebrate particular experiences, now long in the past, but to explore the creative power workers can display when they transform their workplaces and living spaces into arenas for reshaping the world.

Paul Mattick, Jr.



**THE  
COUNCIL  
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READER**



Gerd Arntz, Unemployed 1931

# Workers' Control

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Paul Mattick. 1967

Included in *The New Left: A collection of essays* ed.  
Priscilla Long. Boston: Porter Sargent, 1969.

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According to socialist theory, the development of capitalism implies the polarisation of society into a small minority of capital owners and a large majority of wage-workers, and therewith the gradual disappearance of the proprietary middle class of independent craftsmen, farmers and small shop-keepers. This concentration of productive property and general wealth into always fewer hands appears as an incarnation of 'feudalism' in the garb of modern industrial society. Small ruling classes determine the life and death of all of society by owning and controlling the productive resources and therewith the governments. That their decisions are controlled, in turn, by impersonal market forces and the compulsive quest for capital does not alter the fact that these reactions to uncontrollable economic events are also their exclusive privilege.

Within the capital-labour relations which characterise the prevailing society, the producers have no direct control over production and the products it brings forth. At times, they may exert a kind of indirect control by way of wage struggles, which may alter the wage-profit ratio and therewith the course or tempo of the capital expansion process. Generally, it is the capitalist who determines the conditions of production. The workers have to agree in order to exist, for their only 'means of livelihood is the sale of their labour power.

Unless the worker accepts the exploitative conditions of capitalist production, he is 'free' only in the sense that he is free to starve. This was recognised long before there was a socialist movement. As early as 1767, Simon Linguet declared that wage-labour is merely a form of slave labour: In his view, it was even worse than slavery. "It is the impossibility of living by any other means that compels our farm labourers to till the soil whose fruits they will not eat, and our masons to construct buildings in which they will not live. It is want that drags them to those markets where they await masters who will do them the kindness of buying them. It is want that compels them to go down on their knees to the rich man in order to get from him permission to enrich him ... What effective gain has the suppression of slavery brought him? ... He is free, you say. Ah. That is his misfortune. The slave was precious to his master because of the money he had cost him. But the handicraftsman costs nothing to the rich voluptuary who employs him ... These men, it is said, have no master – they have one, and the most terrible, the most imperious of masters, that is *need*. It is this that reduces them to the most cruel dependence."<sup>1</sup> Two hundred years later this is essentially still the same. Although it is no longer outright misery which forces the workers in the advanced capitalist nations to submit to the rule of capital and to the wiles of capitalists, their lack of control over the means of production, their position as wage-workers, still marks them as a ruled class unable to determine its own destiny.

The goal of socialists was then and still is the abolition of the wage system, which implies the end of capitalism. In the second half of the last century a working class movement arose to bring about this

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1. *Théorie des lois civiles, ou Principes fondamentaux de la société*, pages 274, 464, 470.

transformation through the socialisation of the means of production. Profit-determined production was to be replaced by one satisfying the actual needs and ambitions of the associated producers. The market economy was to make room for a planned economy. Social existence and development would then no longer be determined by the uncontrollable fetishistic expansion and contraction of capital but by the collective conscious decisions of the producers in a classless society.

Being a product of bourgeois society, however, the socialist movement is bound to the vicissitudes of capitalist development. It will take on varying characteristics in accordance with the changing fortunes of the capitalist system. It will not grow, or it will practically disappear, at times and in places which are not conducive to the formation of proletarian class consciousness. Under conditions of capitalist prosperity it tends to transform itself from ~ revolutionary into a reformist movement. In times of social crisis it may be totally suppressed by the ruling classes.

All labour organisations are part of the general social structure and, save in a purely ideological sense, cannot be consistently anti-capitalistic. In order to attain social importance within the capitalist system they must be opportunistic, that is, take advantage of given social processes in order to serve their own but as yet limited ends. It does not seem possible to slowly assemble revolutionary forces in powerful organisations ready to act at favourable moments. Only organisations which do not disturb the prevailing basic social relationships grow to any importance. If they start out with a revolutionary ideology, their growth implies a subsequent discrepancy between their ideology and their functions. Opposed to the *status quo* but also organised within it, these organisations must finally succumb to the forces of capitalism by virtue of their own organisational successes.

At the end of the century, traditional labour organisations – socialist parties and trade unions – were no longer revolutionary movements. Only a small left-wing within these organisations retained its revolutionary ideology. In terms of doctrine, Lenin and Luxemburg saw the need to combat the reformist and opportunist evolutionism of the established labour organisations and demanded a return to revolutionary policies. While Lenin tried to accomplish this through the creation of a new type of revolutionary party, emphasising centrally-controlled organised activity and leadership, Rosa Luxemburg preferred an increase in proletarian self-determination generally, as well as within the socialist organisations, through the elimination of bureaucratic controls and the activation of the rank-and-file.

Because Marxism was the ideology of the dominant socialist parties, opposition to these organisations and their policies expressed itself also as an opposition to Marxian theory in its reformist and revisionist interpretations. Georges Sorel<sup>2</sup> and the syndicalists were not only convinced that the proletariat could emancipate itself without the guidance of the intelligentsia, but that it had to free itself from middle class elements that usually controlled political organisations. Syndicalism rejected parliamentarianism in favour of revolutionary trade union activity. In Sorel's view, a government of socialists would in no sense alter the social position of the workers. In order to be free, the workers would have to resort to actions and weapons exclusively their own. Capitalism, he thought, had already organised the whole proletariat in its industries. All that was left to do was to suppress the state and property. To accomplish this, the proletariat was not so much in need of so-called scientific insight into necessary social

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2. G. Sorel *Reflections on Violence*, 1906.



trends as of a kind of intuitive conviction that revolution and socialism were the inevitable outcome of their own continuous struggles. The strike was seen as the workers' revolutionary apprenticeship. The growing number of strikes, their extensions and increasing duration pointed towards a possible *General Strike*, that is, to the impending social revolution.

Syndicalism and such international offspring as the *Guild Socialists* in England and the *Industrial Workers of the World* in the United States were, to some extent, reactions to the increasing bureaucratisation of the socialist movement and to its class-collaborationist practices. Trade unions, too, were attacked for their centralistic structures and their emphasis upon specific trade interests at the expense of proletarian class needs. But all organisations, whether revolutionary or reformist, whether centralisers or federalists, tended to see in their own steady growth and everyday activities the major ingredient for social change. As regards Social Democracy it was the growing membership, the spreading party apparatus, the increasing number of votes in elections, and a larger participation in existing political institutions which were thought of as growing into the socialist society. As regards the *Industrial Workers of the World*, on the other hand, the growth of its own organisations into *One Big Union* was seen, at the same time, as "forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old."<sup>3</sup>

In the first twentieth century revolution, however, it was the unorganised mass of workers which determined the character of the revolution and brought into being its own, new form of organisation in the spontaneously arising workers' councils. The Russian councils, or soviets, of the 1905 Revolution, grew out

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3. *Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World.*

of a number of strikes and their needs for committees of action and representation to deal with the industries affected as well as with legal authorities. The strikes were spontaneous in the sense that they were not called by political organisations or trade unions, but were launched by unorganised workers who had no choice but to look upon their workplace as the springboard and centre of their organisational efforts. In the Russia of that time political organisations had as yet no real influence on the mass of workers and trade unions existed only in embryonic form. "The soviets," Trotsky wrote, "were the realisation of an objective need for an organisation which has authority without having tradition, and which can at once embrace hundreds of thousands of workers. An organisation, moreover, which can unify all the revolutionary tendencies within the proletariat, which possesses both initiative and self-control, and, which is the main thing, can be called into existence within 24 hours." ... [Whereas] "parties were organisations *within* the proletariat, the soviets was the organisation *of* the proletariat."<sup>4</sup>

In essence, of course, the 1905 Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, supported by the liberal middle class to break Czarist absolutism and to advance Russia via a Constituent Assembly towards the conditions that existed in the more developed capitalist nations. In so far as the striking workers thought in political terms, they largely shared the programme of the liberal bourgeoisie. And so did all existing socialist organisations which accepted the necessity of a bourgeois revolution as a precondition for the formation of a strong labour movement and a future proletarian revolution under more advanced conditions.

The soviet system of the Russian Revolution of

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4. *Russland in der Revolution*, Dresden, 1909, pp.82, 228.

1905 disappeared with the crushing of the revolution, only to return in greater force in the February Revolution of 1917. It was these soviets which inspired the formation of similar spontaneous organisations in the German Revolution of 1918, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the social upheavals in England, France, Italy and Hungary. With the council system a form of organisation arose which could lead and coordinate the self-activities of very broad masses for either limited ends or for revolutionary goals, and which could do so independently of, in opposition to, or in collaboration with, existing labour organisations. Most of all, the rise of the council system proved that spontaneous activities need not dissipate in formless mass-exertions but could issue into organisational structures of a more than temporary nature.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 invigorated left-wing oppositions in the socialist parties of the West, but as yet more with respect to the spontaneity of its mass strikes than the organisational form these actions assumed. But the reformist spell was broken; revolution was again seen as a real possibility. However, in the West it would not be a bourgeois-democratic but a pure working class revolution. But even so, the positive attitude toward the Russian experience was not as yet transformed into a rejection of the parliamentary methods of the reformist parties of the Second International.

## II

The prospect for a revival of revolutionary policies in the West proved at first illusory. Not only the 'revisionists' within the socialist movement for whom, in the words of their foremost spokesman, Eduard Bernstein, "the movement was everything and the goal nothing", but also so-called orthodox Marxists no longer believed in either the desirability or the necessity of

social revolution. While they were still sticking to the old goal – abolition of the wage system – this was now to be reached in piecemeal fashion through the legal means offered by the democratic institutions of bourgeois society. Eventually, with the mass of voters favouring a socialist government, socialism could be instituted by government decree. Meanwhile, trade union activity and social legislation would alleviate the lot of the workers and enable them to partake in the general social progress.

The miseries of *laissez faire* capitalism not only produced a socialist movement but also various attempts on the part of workers to ease their conditions by non-political means. Apart from trade unionism, a cooperative movement came into being as a medium of escape from wage-labour and as a vain opposition to the ruling principle of general competition. The precursors of this movement were the early communist communities in France, England and America, which derived their ideas from such utopian socialists as Owen and Fourier.

Producers' cooperatives were voluntary groupings for self-employment and self-government with respect to their own activities. Some of these cooperatives developed independently, others in conjunction with the working class movements. By pooling their resources, workers were able to establish their own workshops and produce without the intervention of capitalists. But their opportunities were from the very beginning circumscribed by the general conditions of capitalist society and its developmental tendencies, which granted them a mere marginal existence. Capitalist development implies the competitive concentration and centralisation of capital. The larger capital destroys the smaller. The cooperative workshops were restricted to special small-scale industries requiring little capital. Soon, the capitalist extension into all industries destroyed their competitive ability and drove them out of business.

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Consumers' cooperatives proved to be more successful and some of them absorbed producers' cooperatives as sources of supply. But consumers' cooperatives can hardly be considered as attempts at working class control, even where they were the creation of working class aspirations. At best, they may secure a measure of control in the disposal of wages, for labourers can be robbed twice – at the point of production and at the market place. The costs of commodity circulation are an unavoidable *faux frais* of capital production, dividing the capitalists into merchants and entrepreneurs. Since each tries for the profit maximum in its own sphere of operation, their economic interests are not identical. Entrepreneurs thus have no reason to object to consumers' cooperatives. Currently, they are themselves engaged in dissolving the division of productive and merchant capital by combining the functions of both in the single production and marketing corporation.

The cooperative movement was easily integrated into the capitalist system and, in fact, was to a large extent an element of capitalist development. Even in bourgeois economic theory it was considered an instrument of social conservatism by fostering the savings propensities of the lower layers of society, by increasing economic activities through credit unions, by improving agriculture through cooperative production and marketing organisations, and by shifting working class attention from the sphere of production to that of consumption. As a capitalistically-oriented institution the cooperative movement flourished, finally to become one form of capitalist enterprise among others, bent on the exploitation of the workers in its employ, and facing the latter as their opponents in strikes for higher wages and better working conditions. The general support of consumers' cooperatives by the official labour movement – in sharp distinction to an earlier scepticism and even

outright rejection – was merely an additional sign of the increasing ‘capitalisation’ of the reformist labour movement. The widespread network of consumers’ cooperatives in Russia, however, provided the Bolsheviks with a ready-made distributive system which was soon turned into an agency of the state.

The division of ‘collectivism’ into producers’ and consumers cooperatives reflected, in a sense, the opposition of the syndicalist to the socialist movement. Consumers’ cooperatives incorporated members of all classes and were seeking access to all markets. They were not opposed to centralisation on a national and even international scale. The market of producers’ cooperatives, however, was as limited as their production and they could not combine into larger units without losing the self-control which was the rationale for their existence.

It was the problem of workers’ control over their production and products which differentiated the syndicalists from the socialist movement. In so far as the problem still existed for the latter, it solved it for itself with the concept of nationalisation, which made the socialist state the guardian of society’s productive resources and the regulator of its economic life with respect to both production and distribution. Only at a later stage of development would this arrangement make room for a free association of socialised producers and the withering away of the state. The syndicalists feared, however, that the state with its centralised controls would merely perpetuate itself and prevent the working population’s self-determination.

The syndicalists envisioned a society in which each industry is managed by its own workers. All the syndicates together would form national federations which would not have the characteristics of government but would merely serve statistical and administrative

functions for the realisation of a truly collectivist production and distribution system. Syndicalism was predominant in France, Italy and Spain but was represented in all capitalist nations; in some with modifications as in the already noted *I.W.W.* and the *Guild Socialists*. Not only with respect to the final goal, but also in the everyday class struggle, syndicalists differed from parliamentary socialists and ordinary trade unions by their emphasis on direct actions and by a greater militancy.

Although the concern with final goals was premature, it affected nonetheless the actual behaviour of their propagators. The rapid bureaucratisation of the centralised socialist movement and trade unions deprived the workers in increasing measure of their self-initiative and subjected them to the control of a leadership which did not share their living and working conditions. Trade unions lost their early connection with the socialist movement and degenerated into business-unionism, solely interested in wage-bargaining and, where possible, in the formation of job monopolies. The syndicalist movement was bureaucratised to a far lesser extent, not only because it was the smaller of the two main streams of the labour movement, but also because the principle of industrial self-control affected the everyday class struggle as well.

To speak of workers' control within the framework of capitalist production can mean only control of their own organisations, for capitalism implies that the workers are deprived of all effective social control. But with the 'capitalisation' of their organisations, when they become the 'property' of a bureaucracy and the vehicle of its existence and reproduction, it follows that the only possible form of direct workers' control vanishes. It is true that even then workers fight for higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions, but these

struggles do not affect their lack of power within their own organisations. To call these activities a form of workers' control is a misnomer in any case, for these struggles are not concerned with the self-determination of the working class but with the improvement of conditions within the confines of capitalism. This is, of course, possible so long as it is possible to increase the productivity of labour at a rate faster than that by which the workers' living standards are raised.

The basic control over the conditions of work and the surplus-yields of production remain always in the hands of the capitalists. When workers succeed in reducing the hours of their working day, they will not succeed in cutting the quantity of surplus labour extracted by the capitalists. For there are two ways of extracting surplus-labour prolonging the working day and shortening the working time required to produce the wage-equivalent by way of technical and organisational innovations. Because capital must yield a definite rate of profit, capitalists will stop producing when this rate is threatened. The compulsion to accumulate capital controls the capitalist and forces him to control his workers to get that amount of surplus-labour necessary to consummate the accumulation process. He will try for the profit maximum and may only get the minimum for reasons beyond his control, one of which may be the resistance of the workers to the conditions of exploitation bound up with the profit maximum. But that is as far as working class exertions can reach within the capitalist system.

### III

The workers' loss of control over their own organisations was, of course, a consequence of their acquiescence in the capitalist system. Organised and unorganised workers alike accommodated themselves to



the market economy because it was able to ameliorate their conditions and promised further improvements in the course of its own development. Types of organisations effective in such a non-revolutionary situation were precisely reformist socialist parties and centrally-controlled business unions. The enlightened bourgeoisie, too, saw the latter as instruments of industrial peace by way of collective agreements. Capitalists no longer confronted the workers but their representatives, whose existence was based on the existence of the capital-labour market, that is, on the continued existence of capitalism. The workers' satisfaction with their organisations reflected their own loss of interest in social change. The socialist ideology was no longer supported by real working class aspirations. This state of affairs came dramatically to light in the chauvinism which gripped the working classes of all capitalist nations at the outbreak of the First World War.

Left-wing radicalism had been based on what was designated by their reformist adversaries as the 'politics of catastrophe'. The revolutionists expected not only deteriorating living standards for the labouring population but also economic crises so devastating as to call forth social convulsions which would, in the end, lead to revolution. They could not conceive of revolution short of its objective necessity. And in fact, no social revolution occurred except in times of social and economic catastrophe. The revolutions released by World War One were the result of catastrophic conditions in the weaker imperialist powers and they raised, for the first time, the question of workers' control and the actualisation of socialism as a real possibility.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was the result of spontaneous movements in protest to increasingly unbearable conditions in the course of the unsuccessful war. Strikes and demonstrations escalated into a general

uprising which found the support of some military units and led to the collapse of the Czarist government. The revolution was backed by a broad stratum of the bourgeoisie and it was from this group that the first provisional government was formed. Although the socialist parties and trade unions did not initiate the revolution, they played a greater part in it than had been the case in 1905. As in that year, so also in 1917, the soviets did not intend, at first, to replace the provisional government. But in the unfolding revolutionary process they encompassed increasingly greater responsibilities; practically, power was shared by the soviets and the government. The further radicalisation of the movement under deteriorating conditions and the vacillating policies of bourgeois and socialist parties soon gave the Bolsheviks a majority in the decisive soviets and led to the October *coup d'état* which ended the bourgeois-democratic phase of the revolution.

The growing strength of the Bolsheviks within the revolutionary movement was due to their own unconditional adaptation to the real goals of the rebelling masses, that is, the end of the war and the expropriation and distribution of the landed estates by the peasants. Already on his arrival in Russia in April, 1917, Lenin made clear that for him the existence of the soviets superseded the quest for a bourgeois-democratic regime. It was to be replaced by a republic of workers' and peasants' councils. Yet when Lenin demanded preparation for the *coup d'état*, he spoke of the exercise of state power not by the soviets but by the Bolsheviks. Since the majority of the soviet delegates were Bolsheviks, or supported them, he took it for granted that the government formed by the soviets would be a Bolshevik government. And this was the case, of course, even though some left Social-Revolutionaries and left Socialists were given positions in the new government. But to continue the Bolshevik domination

of the government, the workers and peasants would have to continue to elect Bolsheviks as their deputies in the soviets. For that there was no guarantee. Just as the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries, once in the majority, found themselves in a minority position, so things could change again for the Bolsheviks. To retain power indefinitely meant to secure for the Bolshevik Party the monopoly of government.

However, just as Lenin equated soviet power with the power of the Bolshevik Party, so he saw in the latter's government monopoly only the realisation of the rule of the soviets. After all, there was only the choice between a parliamentary bourgeois state and capitalism and a workers' and peasants' government which would prevent the return of bourgeois rule. Considering themselves the vanguard of the proletariat, and the latter the vanguard of the 'people's revolution', the Bolsheviks wished to do for the workers and peasants what they might fail to do for themselves. Unguarded, the soviets were quite capable of abdicating their power positions for the promises of the liberal bourgeoisie and their social-reformist allies. To secure the 'socialist' character of revolution demanded that the soviets remain Bolshevik soviets, even if this should require the suppression of all anti-Bolshevik forces within and outside the soviet system. In a short time, the soviet regime became the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party. The emasculated soviets were only formally retained to hide this fact.

Although the Bolsheviks won with the slogan, 'All power to the soviets', the Bolshevik government reduced its content to that of 'workers' control'. Proceeding at first rather cautiously with its socialisation programme, the workers were not expected to administer but merely to oversee the industrial enterprises that were still in the hands of the capitalists. The first decree on workers' control extended this control "over the production,

storing, buying and selling of raw materials and finished products as well as over the finances of the enterprises. The workers exercise this control through their elected organisations, such as factory and shop committees, soviet elders, etc. The office employees and the technical personnel are also to have representation in these committees ... The organs of workers' control have the right to supervise production ... Commercial secrets are abolished. The owners have to show to the organs of workers' control all their books and statements for the current year and for the past years."<sup>5</sup>

Capitalist production and workers' control are incompatible, however, and this makeshift affair, whereby the Bolsheviki hoped to retain the aid of the capitalist organisers of production and yet to some extent satisfy the yearnings of the workers to take possession of industry as the peasants had done of the land, could not last very long. "We did not decree socialism all at once throughout the whole of industry," Lenin explained a year after the decree on workers' control, "because socialism can take shape and become finally established only when the working class has learned to run the economy ... That is why we introduced workers' control, knowing that it was a contradictory and partial measure. But we consider it most important and valuable that the workers have themselves tackled the job, that from workers' controls, which in the principal industries was bound to be chaotic, amateurish and partial, we have passed to workers' administration of industry on a nationwide scale."<sup>6</sup>

But the change from 'control' to 'administration'

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5. J Bunyan and I.H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Stanford, 1934. p.308.

6. V. L. Lenin, *Questions of the Socialist Organisation of the Economy*, Moscow, 173

turned out to entail the abolition of both. To be sure, just as the emasculation of the soviets required some time, for it required the formation and consolidation of the Bolshevik state apparatus, so the workers' influence in factories and workshops was only gradually eliminated through methods such as shifting the controlling rights from the soviets to the trade unions, and then transforming the latter into agencies of the state controlling the workers instead. Economic collapse, civil war, peasant opposition to any socialisation of agriculture, industrial unrest and partial return to the market economy, led to various contradictory policies, from the 'militarization' of labour to its subordination to the revived free enterprises, in order to secure the Bolshevik government at all costs. The government's dictatorial policies confronted not only its capitalist and political enemies but the workers as well. The basic need was a greater production and because mere exhortation could not induce the workers to exploit themselves to the same or greater extent that they had suffered in the old regime, the Bolshevik state took on the functions of a new ruling class to reconstruct industry and to accumulate capital.

Lenin perceived the Russian Revolution as an uninterrupted process leading from the bourgeois to the socialist revolution. He feared that the bourgeoisie proper would rather accept a compromise with Czarism than risk a thorough-going democratic revolution. It was, then, up to the workers and poor peasants to lead the impending revolution, a point of view shared by other observers of the Russian scene, such as Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. In the context of World War One, Lenin approached the Russian Revolution from an international point of view, envisioning the possibility of its westward extension, which might provide the opportunity to destroy Russian bourgeois rule at the

very point of its inception. It was then essential to hang on to power; regardless of compromises and violation of principles which this might involve, until a Western revolution complemented the Russian Revolution and allowed for a form of international cooperation wherein Russia's objective unreadiness for socialism would be a less weighty factor. The isolation of the Russian Revolution eliminated this perspective. To remain in power under the actually ensuing conditions meant to accept the historical role of the bourgeoisie but with different social institutions and a different ideology.

Of course, to hang on to power was already necessary if only to save the Bolsheviks' own necks, for their overthrow would have meant their deaths. But aside from this, Lenin was convinced that the capitalisation of Russia under the auspices of the state was more 'progressive' and, therefore preferable to leaving her development to the liberal bourgeoisie. He was also convinced that his party could do the job. Russia, he once said, "was accustomed to being ruled by 150,000 landlords. Why can 240,000 Bolsheviks not take over the same task?" And so they did, by constructing a hierarchical authoritarian state and its extension into the economic sphere, insisting all the while that economic control by the state meant economic control by the proletariat. Just the same, the foundation of socialism, Lenin declared, "calls for absolute and strict *unity of will*, which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people... How can strict unity of will be assured? By thousands subordinating their wills to the will of one. Given ideal class-consciousness and discipline on the part of those taking part in the common work, this subordination would, be quite like the mild leadership of a conductor of an orchestra. It may assume the sharp form of a dictatorship, if ideal discipline and class-consciousness are lacking. But be

that as it may, *unquestioning subordination* to, a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry.”<sup>7</sup> If this statement is taken seriously, class-consciousness must have been totally lacking in Russia, for control of production and social life in general took on dictatorial forms exceeding anything experienced in capitalist nations and excluding any measure of workers’ control down to the present day.

All this does not alter the fact, however, that it was the soviets which overthrew both Czarism and the bourgeoisie. It is not inconceivable that under different internal and international conditions the soviets might have retained their power and prevented the rise of authoritarian state-capitalism. Not only in Russia, in Germany, too, the actual content of the revolution was not equal to its revolutionary form. But while in Russia it was mainly the general objective unreadiness for socialist transformation, in Germany it was the subjective unwillingness institute socialism by revolutionary means which largely accounted the failure of the council movement.

In Germany, opposition to the war expressed itself in industrial strikes, which, due to the patriotism of Social Democracy and the trade unions, had to be clandestinely organised at the workplace through committees of action that coordinated various enterprises. In 1918, workers’ and soldiers’ councils sprang up all over Germany and overthrew the government. The class-collaborationist labour organisations found themselves forced to recognise and enter this movement, if only dampen revolutionary aspirations. This was not difficult because workers’ and soldiers’ councils were composed not only of communists, but socialists, trade-

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7. *Ibid* p. 127.

unionists, non-politicals and even adherents of bourgeois parties. The slogan 'All power to the workers' councils' was therefore self-defeating as far as the revolutionists were concerned, unless, of course, the character and composition of the councils should come to change.

However, the great mass of the workers mistook the political for a social revolution. The ideology and organisational strength of Social Democracy had left its mark; the socialisation of production was seen as a governmental concern, not as the task of the working class itself. Though rebellious, the workers in the main were such only in a social democratic reformist sense. 'All power to the workers' councils implied the dictatorship of the proletariat, for it would leave the non-working layers of society without political representation. Democracy, however, was understood as general franchise. The mass of workers desired both workers' councils *and* the National Assembly. They got them both: the councils in a meaningless form as part of the Weimar Constitution – but with it also the counter-revolution, and, finally, the Nazi dictatorship.

It was not different in other nations – Italy, Hungary and Spain, for example, where workers gave expression to their revolutionary inclinations through the formation of workers' councils. It thus became obvious that workers' self-organisation is no guarantee against policies and actions contrary to proletarian class interests. In that case, however, they will be superseded by traditional or new forms of control of working class behaviour by the old or newly-established authorities. Unless spontaneous movements, issuing into organisational forms of proletarian self-determination, usurp control over society and therewith over their own lives, they are bound to disappear again into the anonymity of mere potentiality.



#### IV

All that has been said relates to the past and seems to be without." relevance to either the present or the near future. As far as the Western world is concerned, not even that feeble world-revolutionary wave released by World War One and the Russian Revolution was repeated during the course of World War Two. Instead, and after some initial difficulties, the Western bourgeoisie finds itself in full command over its society. It boasts of an economy of high employment, economic growth and social stability which excludes both the compulsion and the inclination for social change. Admittedly, this is an overall picture, still marred by some as-yet-unresolved problems, as evidenced by the prevalence of pauperised social groups in all capitalist nations. It is expected, however, that these blemishes will be eradicated in time.

It is not surprising then that the apparent stabilisation and further expansion of Western capitalism after World War Two led not only to the demise of genuine working class radicalism but also to the transformation of the reformist social-democratic ideology and practice into the ideology and practice of the mixed economy's welfare-state. This event is either celebrated or bewailed as the integration of labour and capital and the emergence of a new, crises-free socio-economic system, combining in itself the positive sides of both capitalism and socialism while shedding their negative aspects. This is often referred to as a post-capitalist system in which the capital-labour antagonism has lost its former relevance. There is still room for all kinds of changes within the system, but it is no longer thought to be susceptible to social revolution. History, as the history of class struggles, has seemingly come to an end.

What is surprising are the various attempts which are still being made to accommodate the idea of

socialism to this new State of affairs. It is expected that socialism in the traditional concept can still be reached despite the prevalence of conditions which make its appearance superfluous. Opposition to capitalism having lost its base in the exploitative material production relations, finds a new one in the moral and philosophical sphere concerned with the dignity of man and the character of his work. Poverty, it is said<sup>8</sup>, never was and cannot be an element of revolution. And even if it were, this would no longer be true because poverty has become a marginal issue, for, by-and-large, capitalism is now in a position to satisfy the consumption needs of the labouring population. While it may still be necessary to fight for immediate demands, such struggles no longer bring the entire order into radical question. In the fight for socialism more stress must be laid upon the qualitative rather than the quantitative needs of the workers. What is required is the progressive conquest of power by the workers through 'non-reformist reforms'.

Workers' control of production is seen as such a 'non-reformist reform' precisely because it cannot be established in capitalism. But if this is so, then the fight for workers' control is equivalent to the overthrow of the capitalist system and the question remains how to bring this about when there are no pressing needs to do so. There is also the question of the organisational means to be employed to this end. The integration of existing labour organisations into the capitalist structure has been possible because capitalism was able to provide the majority of the working class with improving living conditions, and if this trend were to continue there is no reason not to assume that the class struggle will cease being a determinant of social development. In that case –

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8. By André Gorz, for example, in his *Strategy for Labor*, Boston, 1964.

man being the product of his circumstances – the working class will not develop a revolutionary consciousness, will not be interested in risking its present relative well-being for the uncertainties of a proletarian revolution. It was not for nothing that Marx's theory of revolution based itself on the increasing misery of the working class, even though this misery was not to be measured solely by fluctuating wage-scale of the labour market.

Workers' control of production presupposes a social revolution cannot gradually be achieved through working class actions within capitalist system. Where it has been introduced as a measure of reform, it turned out to be an additional means of controlling the workers via their own organisations. The legal work councils in the wake of the German Revolution, for instance, were mere appendices of trade union and operated within their restricted activities. Although attempts were made to substitute councils for trade unions the latter were able, with the aid of the employers and the state, to assert their control over shop committees. This relationship did not change with the rebirth of the council system after World War Two, then implemented by a so-called co-determination law, which was to give labour a voice decision-making with regard to production and investments. But the spirit of all this labour legislation may be surmised from Article 49 of the German Works Constitution of 1952: "Within the framework of applicable collective agreements, employer and works council collaborate in good faith, working together with the trade union employer associations represented in the enterprise, for the good of the enterprise and of its employees and under consideration of the common welfare. Employer and works council must not do anything which might endanger the work and the peace of the enterprise. In particular, employer and works council must not carry out any measures of labour

struggle against each other. This does not affect the labour struggle parties entitled to conclude collective agreements.”<sup>9</sup>

Co-determination did not and does not affect the employer’s sole determination over his property, i.e. his enterprise and production. What it was meant to imply was the right of workers’ representatives make suggestions to management – in theory, even regarding the use of profits. But suggestions need not be accepted and, actually, there is no evidence that suggestions running against capitalist interests were heeded by management. To be meaningful, co-determination would have to be co-ownership, but that would be the end of the wage system. Co-determination itself merely allows for the usual activities carried by trade unions, such as wage agreements, plant regulations, and grievance procedures by which industrial peace is maintained.

What has been said about workers’ control in Germany, can be repeated, with some unimportant modifications, for any other capitalist nation which legalised shop stewards, works committees and similar forms of workers’ representation within the industrial enterprises. These measures do not point to an unfolding industrial democracy but are designed to safeguard existing production relations and reduce their immanent frictions. They are not a way toward but away from social change. But even social revolutions may not lead to workers’ control when workers fail to secure their hold over the means of production and relegate their power to governments as the sole organisers of the social transformation process. This was the case in Russia and, with some modifications, it became the model for the East European ‘socialist states’ which emerged as a

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9. Quoted in A. Sturmfels, *Workers’ Councils*, Cambridge, 1964, p.74.

consequence of World War Two. Yugoslavia, however, seems to be an exception, for there it was the government which offered the workers' councils managerial functions and a measure of control over their production.

Although the Yugoslav Communist government remains the ultimate source of all power, after its break with Russia it decided on a policy of economic decentralisation by a return to market relations and the consequent autonomy of individual enterprises under the control of workers' councils. The latter took on competitive entrepreneurial and managerial functions within the framework of a state-determined general developmental plan. Within definite limits set by the government, the councils and managing boards elected by them, make decisions regarding the regulation of work, production plans, wage schedules, sales and purchases, the budget, credit, investments and so forth. A rector, appointed by a mixed commission of workers' councils and local governments, presides over each enterprise, managing its everyday activities with respect to workers' discipline, hiring and firing, job assignments and the like. He has the right to veto decisions made by the workers' councils should they conflict with state regulations.

Government regulations of a rather complicated nature circumscribe the self-regulatory powers of the workers' councils. They are partly introduced by government decree and partly by local authorities in conjunction with the workers' councils. A system of taxation determines what part of the individual enterprise's income over which it may itself dispose and therewith its range of decision-making as regards investments and wages. Profits are siphoned off by government to cover its own expenses and to invest in government enterprises. The government determines the general rate of increase of personal incomes, but, while demanding adherence to a minimum wage, it

allows for incentive-wages and bonuses to increase the productivity of labour. The social security system diminishes the workers' gross income by more than half. Investments or disinvestments are determined by the profitability principle and are steered in the desired direction by price, interest and credit policies. In brief, in so far as possible under these conditions, overall control of the economy remains in the hands of the government despite the limited self-control on the part of the workers' councils. While the latter cannot affect the decisions of government, the government sets the conditions within which the councils operate.

What is far more important than the relationship between councils and government, however, is the objective impossibility of establishing genuine workers' control of production and distribution within the market economy. It comes up against the same dilemma which harassed the early cooperative movement, even though, in distinction to the latter, it cannot be destroyed by private capital competition if the government decides otherwise. "The workers forming a cooperative the field of production," wrote Rosa Luxemburg, "are faced with contradictory necessity of governing themselves with the utmost absolutism. They are obliged to take toward themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur – a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production cooperatives, which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers interests continue to predominate, end by dissolving."<sup>10</sup> Operating in a competitive market economy, the Yugoslav workers have to exploit themselves as if they were exploited by capitalists. While this may be more palatable, it does change the fact of their subordination to economic processes beyond their control. Profit production and

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10. R. Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*.

capital accumulation control behaviour and perpetuate the misery and insecurity bound up with it. Yugoslav wages are among the lowest in Europe; they can increase only as long as capital increases faster than wages. The measure of control granted the workers' councils promotes anti-social attitudes because fewer workers have to yield larger profits in order to raise the income of those employed. Workers are unemployed because their employ would not be profitable, i.e. yield a surplus above their own reproduction costs. They roam all over capitalist Europe in search for the work and payments denied them in their own 'market-socialism' integration of the national into the capitalist world market subjects working class not only to self-exploitation and to that of a new class, but to the exploitation of world capitalism by way of trade relations and foreign capital investments. To speak of workers' control under these conditions is sheer mockery.

While there cannot be socialism without workers' control, neither can there be real workers' control without socialism. To assert that gradual increase of workers' control in capitalism is an actual possibility merely plays into the hands of the widespread demagoguery of the ruling classes to hide their absolute class-rule by false social reforms dressed in terms such as co-management, participation or determination. Workers' control excludes class-collaboration; it cannot partake in but instead abolishes the system of capital production. Neither socialism nor workers' control has anywhere become a reality. State-capitalism and market-socialism, or the combination of both, still find the working class in the position of wage workers without effective control over their production and its distribution. Their social position does not differ from that of workers in the mixed or unmixed capitalist economy. Everywhere, the struggle for working class emancipation has still to begin

and will not end short of the socialisation of production and the abolition of classes through the elimination of wage labour.

It can hardly be expected, however, that a working class, satisfied with the social *status quo*, will engage in power struggles in preference to wage struggles for higher incomes within the prevailing system. Although improvements in proletarian living conditions in advanced capitalist nations are highly exaggerated, they have nevertheless been sufficient to extinguish working class radicalism. Even though the 'value' of labour power must always be smaller than the 'value' of the products it creates, the 'value' of labour-power may imply different living conditions. It may be expressed in a twelve- or a six-hour day, in good or in bad housing, in more or less consumption goods. At any particular time, however, the given wages and their buying power determine the conditions of the labouring population as well as their complaints and aspirations. Improved conditions become the customary conditions, and continued acquiescence of the workers requires the maintenance of these conditions. Should they deteriorate, it will arouse working class opposition in the same way that deterioration of less-fluent conditions did previously. It is then only on the assumption at prevailing living standards can be secured and perhaps improved at the social consensus may be maintained.

Though apparently supported by recent experiences, this assumption not warranted. But to assert its lack of validity on theoretical grounds<sup>11</sup> will not affect a social practice based on the illusion of its permanency. There are indications, however, that the capitalist crises mechanism is reasserting itself despite

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11. See: P. Mattick, *Marx and Keynes, The Limits of the Mixed Economy*.



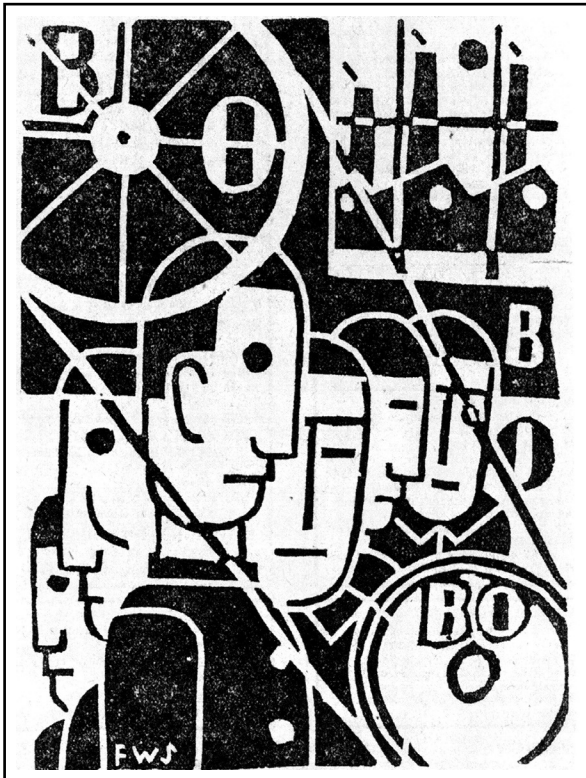
various modifications of the capitalist system. In view of America's persistent economic stagnation and the levelling-off of West European expansion, a new disillusionment has already set in. With the diminishing potency of government-induced production, the capitalist need to secure its profitability regardless of the ensuing social instability increases. The new economic innovations reveal themselves as being capable of postponing, but not of overcoming, capitalism's built-in crisis-mechanism. This being so, it is only reasonable to assume that when the hidden crisis becomes acute; when the pseudo-prosperity leads to real depression, the social consensus of recent history will make room for a resurgent revolutionary consciousness – the more so as the growing irrationality of the system becomes obvious even to social layers that still benefit by its existence. Apart from pre-revolutionary conditions existing in almost all under developed nations, and apart from the seemingly limited, yet unceasing wars, waged in different parts of the world, a general unrest underlies and undermines the apparent social tranquillity of the Western world. From time to time there is a breaking out into the open as in the recent upheavals in France. If this is possible under relatively stable condition it is certainly possible under general crisis conditions.

The integration of traditional labour organisations into the capitalist system is an asset to the latter only so long as it is able to underwrite the promised and actual benefits of class collaboration. When these organisations are forced by circumstances to become instruments of repression, they lose the confidence of the workers and therewith the value to the bourgeoisie. Even if not destroyed, they may be overruled by independent working class actions. There is not only the historic evidence that lack of working class organisations does not prevent organised revolution, as

in Russia, but also that the existence of a wet entrenched reformist labour movement can be challenged by new working class organisations, as in the Germany of 1918, and by the shop steward movement in England during and after the First World War. Even under totalitarian regimes, spontaneous movements may lead to working class actions that find expression in the formation of the workers' councils as in Poland and in the Hungary of 1956.

Reforms presuppose a reformable capitalism. So long as it has this character, the revolutionary nature of the working class exists only in latent form. It will even cease being conscious of its class position and identify its aspirations with those of the ruling classes. But when capitalism is forced by its own development to recreate the conditions which lead to the formation of class consciousness, it will also bring back the revolutionary demand for workers' control as a demand for socialism. It is true that all previous attempts in this direction have failed, and that new ones may fail again. Still, it is only through the experiences of self-determination, in whatever limited ways at first, that the working class will be enabled to develop toward its own emancipation.





Franz Seiwert, Betriebsorganisation 1922

# Revolutionary Marxism

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Paul Mattick 1935

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To Marxism, the determining contradiction in present-day society lies in the contradictory development of the social *forces* of production within the existing *relations* of production, or, otherwise expressed, between the increasingly socialized character of the productive process itself and the persisting property relations. In all forms of society, the general advance of humanity has been expressed in the development of the productive forces, i.e. of the means and methods of production, enabling ever greater amounts of use articles to be produced with an ever diminishing amount of direct human labor. This process is divisible into historical periods. In it, each stage simply mirrors the *attained* level of the continuously increasing forces of production and develops for them corresponding social relations. And as soon as a given set of social conditions no longer sufficed, without giving rise to great maladjustments in the social, economic and political spheres, to satisfy the demands of the new and growing forces of production, those conditions were overcome through revolutionary action.

All social development is based in the last instance on the process of interaction between social man and nature. The contradiction arising through

human labor between being and consciousness, nature and man, leads to further and further development, and change in nature, society, man and consciousness. Within this great contradiction evolve, in the process of development, narrower social contradictions, which in their turn propel the progressive social movement along the path of revolution.

Since the development of the productive forces has throughout the past been bound up with the rise and decline of classes, past history must necessarily be regarded as a history of class struggle. Thus the development of manufacture under feudalism had to lead, at a certain level, to the overcoming of feudalism and to the birth of capitalist society; a transition which took a revolutionary expression in *all* the social domains.

The statement of contradiction, the materialist dialectic, the philosophic theory of Marxism and at the same time the law of all real movement, seeks in all contradictions their unity - without, however, for that reason, confusing those contradictions - and sees in the spontaneous movement of contradictions their abolition, i.e. their resolution in a third form, which again produces and must overcome its contradiction. Since the Marxist analysis takes capital as its starting point, capital becomes the *thesis*, of which the proletariat is the *antithesis*. The dialectical law of the negation of the negation leads to the *synthesis*. This can only be the communist society, which knows neither capital nor proletariat, since it has taken up or resolved them both in their concrete forms. This is merely the falling off of a social husk, and, being a product of historical property relations, it is only in capitalism that this husk can possess concrete reality. History, like all reality, is dialectical, hence limitless. Each problem possesses no more than historical character. Marxism does not present itself as something *absolute*, but as the theory of the class struggle within capitalist

society.

Not only, from the standpoint of Marxism, is the contradiction between capital and labor the beginning as well as the end of present-day society, but the progressive development of that society is to be seen only in the growth and sharpening of that contradiction. Capital being the result of the exploitation of labor power, so with the growth of capital, that is, in the course of the human progress under way in this historical period, the exploitation of the workers must of necessity be more and more intensified. If the possibilities of the exploitation of labor power in the present system were unlimited, there would be no reason to expect an end of capitalist society. But with the growth of the proletariat, the class struggle also increases, since at a certain point of development the productive forces of the workers can no longer be applied capitalistically. At that point, the proletariat, of its own accord, develops into a revolutionary force, which strives for and brings about an overthrow of the existing social relations.

Marxism, which perceives in the existence of the proletariat the realization of the dialectical movement of society, bases its theoretical justification mainly on the laws of economic development in general, and of capitalism in particular. Capitalist relations of production are not solely determined by nature (land as a basis for labor) and human activity, but these natural conditions are also subordinate to the capitalistic social relations. The concerns of human beings are not regulated from the point of view of their needs as human beings, but from the point of view of capitalist needs for profits. The decisive factor in capitalist society is not the production of use values but of capital; the latter is the motive power of the productive machinery. This dependence of human welfare upon the private interests of the capitalists is made possible through the separation of the workers

from the means of production. The workers cannot live except through the sale of their labor power. The buyers of labor power, who are at the same time the owners of the means of production, buy this power only in order to further their private interests as capitalists, without regard to social consequences.

We have seen that in all forms of society, progressive development is illustrated in the continual growth and improvement of the means and methods of production, enabling the output of an ever greater quantity of products with ever less labor. In capitalism, this same process expresses itself in a more rapid growth of the capital invested in means of production as compared with the capital invested in labor power. That part of the capital which is invested in means of production we call constant capital, since as such it enables no changes of magnitude; and that portion which goes in the form of wages to the workers we call the variable capital, since it adds, *through labor itself*, new values to those already present. In this way it is shown that the development of the social forces of production under capitalism is expressed in a more rapid growth of the constant capital relatively to the variable.

Capital, and hence its *material* form, the means of production and labor power, can, however, as already stated, function capitalistically only so long as this may appear profitable to the owners of the means of production. Coming into action only as capital, they must reproduce themselves as capital, a thing which is possible, on the capitalistic basis, only by way of accumulation. The surplus value, from which are derived the funds for accumulation, the additional means of production and labor power as well as the capitalists' profit, is, however, nothing but unpaid labor. It is that part of the workers' products which is not consumed by them but was taken from them. Now since the surplus value is



derived exclusively from the variable part of capital, and if this variable part must continually diminish relatively to the advance of accumulation, then the surplus value must, with mathematical certainty, continually diminish *relatively to accumulation* even though it increases absolutely. This contradictory movement, by which with advancing accumulation the capitalistic rate of profit falls (the rate of profit is computed on the total capital, constant and variable) - a process denoted as the growth of the organic composition of capital - is, however, up to a certain point of capitalist development, not at all dangerous, since at a rather low stage of development the system is capable of accumulating faster than the rate of profit falls, or, in other words, to compensate for the fall of the profit rate by the growth of the actual profit mass. This possibility is, however, no less historical than all other matters.

Accumulation there must be, and the lower the rate of profit falls as a result of this accumulation, the greater must the accumulation be. When accumulation goes out, the crisis comes in; the solving of the crisis is possible only through further accumulation, and necessarily at a continually accelerated rate. At a rather high level of capitalist development, when the tempo inherent in accumulation requires the further advance of accumulation in such measure that the absolutely swollen mass of profit is too small in relation to those demands for further accumulation, then accumulation must of necessity come to a stop, and the boom turns to crisis. In other words, capitalist accumulation devours for its own purposes, by which all society is conditioned, an increasingly large part of the surplus value produced by the workers; and in spite of the growth of this surplus value, it must nevertheless, at a high point of development, prove insufficient to meet the demands of accumulation. This law of capitalist accumulation, the

primary cause of which is to be seen in the contradiction between exchange value and use value, between capital and labor, is confirmed as an actual law by all empirical factors involved. If accumulation comes to a standstill, by reason of the fact that there is not enough surplus value at hand for its continuance, then that part of capital which is destined for but is at the same time insufficient to meet the needs of accumulation, lies idle and seeks in vain for profitable possibilities of investment. We are faced with the paradoxical truth that a shortage of capital gives rise to a superfluity of capital lacking room for investment. There is no lack of purchasing power, yet, in the capitalist sense, no use can be made of this purchasing power, since from this point of view it is meaningless, because unprofitable.

If accumulation is not continued, the situation must of necessity give rise to a general tie-up of human activity. The commodities destined for further accumulation can find no buyers. They lie unused, and from the over-accumulation results the general over-production of commodities; a circumstance which expresses itself in the closing and paralyzing of enterprises in all spheres of social life and hence in an enormous increase of unemployment.

The crisis also brings with it certain tendencies working to overcome it. The organic composition of capital is lowered by capital being destroyed through bankruptcies and devaluation. Through the export of capital and intensified imperialistic ventures, new sources of additional surplus value are created. Through general rationalization of working methods, further technical innovations in the productive process, cheaper sources of raw materials, as well as through the pauperization of the workers and the expropriation of the middle classes, etc., the quantity of surplus value is adapted to meet the demands of further accumulation. All efforts during the

crisis serve to revive profitable capitalist operation on a lower price and value level. If this occurs, nothing stands in the way of a new upswing, which, however, after a certain time, as a result of renewed over-accumulation, necessarily turns off into a new crisis. These factors we call the counter-tendencies directed against the collapse of capitalism.

Like everything else, however, these counter-tendencies are of an historical nature. At a certain point of capitalist development, their effectiveness as factors in overcoming crises ceases. They become too weak in relation to the further demands of accumulation, or are already completely exhausted as a result of previous accumulation (for example, capitalist expansion meets its objective limits long before it completes its march over the globe). Furthermore, capitalist rationalization leads, as has been shown, to mis-rationalization, and the revolutionizing of technique, too, has its capitalistic limits. Neither can wages in the long run be kept below the workers' cost of reproducing themselves, nor can the middle-class elements be completely expropriated. Monopolization further lowers the possibility for capital expansion, and imperialistic ventures grow more and more dubious. But regardless of how or when the counter-tendencies are neutralized, it is clear to the Marxist that capitalism must of necessity reach a point where the past cycle of crises gives way to the permanent crisis which capitalism is powerless to overcome.

This permanent crisis, or the death crisis, of capitalism is a crisis no longer restricted by any counter-tendencies - a crisis in which the tendency toward collapse runs its course. But even here we are not presented with a single act, but with a process, a whole historical period. In such an economic condition, the relative pauperization of the proletariat, which goes with the whole of capitalist development, is bound to become absolute, general and

permanent. During the upgrade period of capitalism, wages rose, since the cost of reproducing the workers continually increased also, though in relation to what they produced, their portion was less and less. In the permanent crisis, their real living conditions are bound to grow worse, absolutely and uninterruptedly.

The condition of permanent crisis forms the objective basis of the *revolutionary* labor movement. The class struggle grows sharper and assumes more naked forms. On the other hand, the means of suppression employed by the ruling class are adapted to this new condition. While in the upgrade period of capitalism, "formal democracy" sufficed to permit the smooth operation of the social mechanism, in the permanent crisis capitalism has to take up with open dictatorship. In the place of "democracy" there arises, at a rather high stage of development, a political condition which today is called fascism. The fact that the ideological basis of fascism is formed by the impoverished middle class does not alter the fact that the fascist movement operates only in the interest of the now monopolized capital. Capitalist concentration, which goes on even in the permanent crisis, necessarily impoverishes also the middle strata of capitalists. The energies thus aroused within the middle class are engaged by monopoly capital for its own purposes. Parts of the petty bourgeoisie are granted concessions at the expense of the workers, though these concessions are only of temporary character.

By destroying the organizations and doing away with the limited "democratic" political liberties of the workers with the aid of the corrupted middle-class gunmen and the part of the workers under their ideological influence, capitalism thinks to secure its continued existence even during the permanent crisis. But even though, through terrorism, the workers can be politically atomized, their congregation in large masses

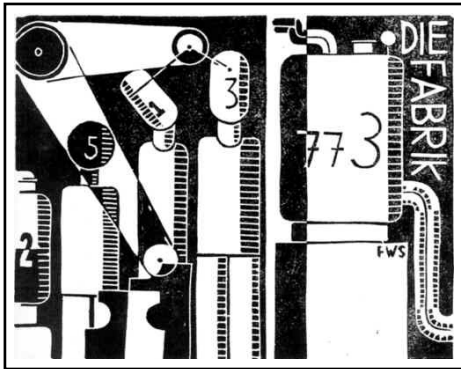
is still necessary for industrial production. With the destruction of the old form of the labor movement, new forms necessarily arise; and since these forms are deprived of other means of expression, they must express themselves on the job itself, whereby their strength is increased a thousand-fold. The workers-council movement, the organizational form of the revolution, thus arises naturally out of the very conditions which capitalism has created. The permanent terror is at the same time the political schooling of the workers. So that in the proletariat capitalism not only produces its own grave-diggers; it has also to demonstrate to the proletariat how they can fight successfully.

Even though the workers in great masses may never attain a revolutionary consciousness, in order to live they are forced to take up the fight against capital. And when they fight for their existence under the conditions of the permanent crisis, this fight, regardless of its ideological quality, is a fight which can only turn in the direction of overcoming the capitalist system. Until the successful revolutionary overthrow, the proletariat lives in barbarous, constantly worsening conditions, and the only possibility of getting away from that is communism; that is, the overcoming of capitalist relations of production, the abolition of private property in the means of production, which is identical with the abolition of wage labor.

Marxism is not only a theory which sprung from the existence of the proletariat and its position in society; Marxism is the actual class struggle between capital and labor, that is, a social condition in which the workers, whether they will or not, whether they are conscious of it or not, whether they know Marx or not, are unable to act otherwise than in accordance with Marxism, if they wish to maintain themselves and thereby at the same time to serve the general progress of

mankind. While Marx himself actualized the Hegelian dialectic, that is recognized the real, concrete movement as dialectical, Marxism can be actualized only by means of the fighting proletariat. A Marxist is not one who has mastered the Marxian theories; a Marxist is one who strives to actualize those theories. In a word: Marxism is not only a view of the world; Marxism is the living, fighting proletariat.





Franz Seiwert, Factory



# Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler

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Paul Mattick 1939

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In the fall of 1938, Karl Kautsky died in Amsterdam at the age of 84 years. He was considered the most important theoretician of the Marxist labour movement after the death of its founders, and it may well be said that he was its most representative member. In him were very clearly incorporated both the revolutionary and the reactionary aspects of that movement. But whereas Friedrich Engels could say at Marx's grave that his friend "was first of all a revolutionist," it would be difficult to say the same at the grave of his best-known pupil. "As a theoretician and politician, he will always remain an object of criticism," wrote Friedrich Adler in memory of Kautsky, "but his character lies open, his whole life he remained true to the highest majesty, his own conscience."<sup>1</sup>

Kautsky's conscience was formed during the rise of the German Social Democracy. He was born in Austria, the son of a stage painter of the Imperial Theatre in Vienna. As early as 1875, though not as yet a Marxist, he contributed to German and Austrian labour papers. He became a member of the German Social Democratic Party in 1880, and "only now," he said of

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1 *Der Sozialistische Kampf*. Paris, November 5, 1938, p.271.

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himself, “began my development towards a consistent methodical Marxism.”<sup>2</sup> He was inspired, like so many others, by Engels’ *Anti-Dühring* and was helped in his orientation by Eduard Bernstein, who was then the secretary to the ‘millionaire’ socialist Hoechberg. His first works were published with Hoechberg’s help and he found recognition in the labour movement through his editorship of a number of socialist publications. In 1883 he founded the magazine *Neue Zeit*, which under his direction became the most important theoretical organ of the German Social Democracy.

Kautsky’s literary and scientific work is impressive not only because of the scope of his interests but also because of its volume. Even a selected bibliography of his writings would fill many pages. In this work comes to light all that seemed and all that was of importance to the socialist movement during the last 60 years. It reveals Kautsky was first of all a teacher, and that, because he looked upon society from a schoolmaster’s perspective, he was well suited to his role as the leading spirit of a movement which aimed at educating workers and capitalists alike. Because he was an educator concerned with the ‘theoretical side’ of Marxism, he could appear more revolutionary that was consistent with the movement he served. He appeared an ‘orthodox’ Marxist who tried to safeguard the Marxian inheritance as a treasurer who desires to preserve the funds of his organisation. However, what was ‘revolutionary’ in Kautsky’s teaching appeared revolutionary only in contrast to the general pre-war capitalist ideology. In contrast to the revolutionary theories established by Marx and Engels, it was a reversion to more primitive forms of thinking and to

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2 K. Kautsky, *Aus der Frühzeit des Marxismus*. Prague, 1935, p.20.

a lesser apprehension of the implications of bourgeois society. Thus, though he guarded the treasure-chest of Marxism, he had not beheld all it contained.

In 1862, in a letter to Kugelmann, Marx expressed the hope that his non-popular works attempting to revolutionise economic science would in due time find adequate popularisation, a feat that should be easy after the scientific basis had been laid. "My life work became clear to me in 1883," wrote Kautsky; "it was to be designated to the propagandising and popularisation, and, as far as I am able to, the continuation of the scientific results of Marx's thinking and research."<sup>3</sup> However, not even he, the greatest populariser of Marx, has fulfilled Marx's hope; his simplifications turned out to be new mystifications unable to comprehend the true character of capitalist society. Nevertheless, even in their watered form, Marx's theories remained superior to all the social and economic bourgeois theories and Kautsky's writings gave strength and joy to hundreds of thousands of class conscious workers. He gave expression to their own thoughts and in a language nearer to them than that of the more independent thinker Marx. Though the latter demonstrated more than once his great gift for cogency and clarity, he was not schoolmaster enough to sacrifice to propaganda the enjoyment of his intellectual caprice.

When we said that Kautsky represented also what was 'reactionary' in the old labour movement, we are using that term in a highly specific sense. The reactionary elements in Kautsky and in the old labour movement were objectively conditioned, and only by a long period of exposure to an inimical reality was developed that subjective readiness to turn defenders of the capitalist society. In *Capital* Marx pointed out that "a rise in the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.

price of labour, as a consequence of accumulation of capital, only means, in fact, that the length and weight of the golden chain the wage-worker has already forged for himself, allow of a relaxation of the tension of it.”<sup>4</sup> The possibility, under conditions of a progressive capital formation, of improving labour conditions and of raising the price of labour transformed the workers’ struggle into a force for capitalist expansion. Like capitalist competition, the workers’ struggle served as an incentive for further capital accumulation; it accentuated capitalist ‘progress’. All gains of the workers were compensated for by an increasing exploitation, which in turn permitted a still more rapid capital expansion.

Even the class struggle of the workers could serve the needs not of the individual capitalists but of capital. The victories of the workers turned always against the victors. The more the workers gained, the richer capital became. The gap between wages and profits became wider with each increase of the ‘workers’ share’. The apparently increasing strength of labour was in reality the continuous weakening of its position in relation to that of capital. The ‘successes’ of the workers, hailed by Eduard Bernstein as a new era of capitalism, could, in this sphere of social action, end only in the eventual defeat of the working class, as soon as capital changed from expansion to stagnation. In the destruction of the old labour movement, the sight of which Kautsky was not spared, became manifest the thousands of defeats suffered during the upswing period of capitalism, and though these defeats were celebrated as victories of gradualism, they were in reality only the gradualism of the workers’ defeat in a field of action where the advantage is always with the bourgeoisie.

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4 *Capital. Vol I*, p.677 (Kerr ed.).

Nevertheless, Bernstein's revisionism, based on the acceptance of appearance for reality and suggested by bourgeois empiricism, though at first denounced by Kautsky, provided the basis for the latter's own success. For without the non-revolutionary practice of the old labour movement, whose theories were formed by Bernstein, Kautsky would not have found a movement and a material basis on which to rise as an important Marxian theoretician.

This objective situation, which, as we have seen, transformed the successes of the labour movement into just so many steps toward its destruction, created a non-revolutionary ideology which was more in harmony with the apparent reality, and which was later denounced as social-reformism, opportunism, social-chauvinism, and outright betrayal. However, this 'betrayal' did not very much bother those who were betrayed. Instead, the majority of the organised workers approved of the change of attitude in the socialist movement, since it conformed to their own aspirations developed in an ascending capitalism. The masses were as little revolutionary as their leaders, and both were satisfied with their *participation* in capitalist progress. Not only were they organising for a greater share of the social product, but also for a greater voice in the political sphere. They learned to think in terms of bourgeois democracy; they began to speak of themselves as consumers; they wanted to take part in all that was good of culture and civilisation. Franz Mehring's *History of the German Social Democracy* typically ends in a chapter on 'Art and the Proletariat'. Science for the workers, literature for the workers, schools for the workers, participation in all the institutions of capitalist society — this and nothing more was the real desire of the movement. Instead of demanding the end of capitalistic science, it asked for labour scientists; instead of abolishing capitalistic law,

it trained labour lawyers; in the increasing number of labour historians, poets, economists, journalists, doctors and dentists, as well as parliamentarians and trade-union bureaucrats, it saw the socialisation of society, which therewith became increasingly its own society. That which one can increasingly share in one will soon find defensible. Consciously and unconsciously the old labour movement saw in the capitalist expansion process its own road to greater welfare and recognition. The more capital flourished, the better were the working conditions. Satisfied with action within the framework of capitalism, the workers' organisations became concerned with capitalism's profitability. The competitive national capitalistic rivalries were only verbally opposed. Although the movement was at first striving only for a 'better fatherland', and was later willing to defend what had already been gained, it soon reached the point where it was ready to defend the fatherland 'as it is'.

The tolerance that Marx's 'followers' displayed towards the bourgeois society was not one-sided. The bourgeoisie itself had in its very struggle against the working class learned to 'understand the social question'. Its interpretation of social phenomena became increasingly more materialistic; and soon there was an overlapping of ideologies in both fields of thought, a condition increasing still further the 'harmony' based on the actual disharmony of class frictions within a rising capitalism. However, the 'Marxists' were more eager than the bourgeoisie to 'learn from the enemy'. The revisionist tendencies had developed long before the death of Engels. The latter, and Marx himself, had wavered and displayed moments in which they were carried away by the apparent success of their movement. But what with them was only a temporary modification of their essentially consistent thinking became 'belief' and 'science' for that movement which learned to see

progress in larger trade-union treasures and greater election votes.

After 1910 the German social democracy found itself divided into three essential groups. There were the reformists, openly favouring German imperialism; there was the 'left', distinguished by such names as Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Mehring and Pannekoek; and there was the 'centre', trying to follow traditional paths, that is, only in theory, as in practice the whole of the German social democracy could do only what was possible, i.e. what Bernstein wanted them to do. To oppose Bernstein could mean only to oppose the whole of the social democratic practice. The 'left' began to function as such only at the moment it began to attack social democracy as a part of capitalist society. The differences between the two opposing factions could not be solved ideationally; they were solved when the Noske terror murdered the Spartacus group in 1919.

With the outbreak of the war, the 'left' found itself in the capitalist prisons, and the 'right' on the General Staff of the Kaiser. The 'centre', led by Kautsky, simply dispensed with all problems of the socialist movement by declaring that neither the social democracy nor its International could function during periods of war, as both were essentially instruments of peace. "This position," Rosa Luxemburg wrote, "is the position of an eunuch. After Kautsky has supplemented the *Communist Manifesto* it now reads: Proletarians of all countries unite during peace times, during times of war, cut your throats."<sup>5</sup>

The war and its aftermath destroyed the legend of Kautsky's Marxist 'orthodoxy'. Even his most enthusiastic pupil, Lenin, had to turn away from the master. In October 1914 he had to admit that as far as

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5 *Die Internationale*. Spring 1915.

Kautsky was concerned, Rosa Luxemburg had been right. In a letter to Shlyapnikow<sup>6</sup>, he wrote, “She saw long ago that Kautsky, the servile theoretician, was cringing to the majority of the Party, to Opportunism. There is nothing in the world at present more harmful and dangerous for the ideological independence of the proletariat than this filthy, smug and disgusting hypocrisy of Kautsky. He wants to hush everything up and smear everything over and by sophistry and pseudo-learned rhetoric lull the awakened consciences of the workers.”

What distinguished Kautsky from the general run of intellectuals who flocked to the labour movement as soon as it became more respectable and who were only too eager to foster the trend of class collaboration, was a greater love for theory, a love which refused to compare theory with actuality, like the love of a mother who prevents her child from learning the ‘facts of life’ too early. Only as a theoretician could Kautsky remain a revolutionist; only too willingly he left the practical affairs of the movement to others. However, he fooled himself. In the role of a mere ‘theoretician’, he ceased to be a revolutionary theoretician, or rather he could not become a revolutionist. As soon as the scene for a real battle between capitalism and socialism after the war had been laid, his theories collapsed because they had already been divorced in practice from the movement they were supposed to represent.

Though Kautsky was opposed to the unnecessarily enthusiastic chauvinism of his party, though he hesitated to enjoy the war as Ebert, Scheidemann and Hindenburg did, though he was not in favour of an *unconditional* granting of war credits, nevertheless, up to his very end, he was forced to destroy with his own hands the legend of his Marxian orthodoxy that he had earned

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6 *The Letters of Lenin*. London 1937, p.342.



for himself in 30 years of writing. He who in 1902<sup>7</sup> had pronounced that we have entered a period of proletarian struggles for state power, declared such attempts to be sheer insanity when workers took him seriously. He who had fought so valiantly against the ministerialism of Millerand and Jaurès in France, championed 20 years later the coalition policy of the German social-democracy with the arguments of his former opponents. He who concerned himself as early as 1909 with 'The Way to Power', dreamed after the war of a capitalist 'ultra-imperialism' as a way to world peace, and spent the remainder of his life re-interpreting his past to justify his class collaboration ideology. "In the course of its class struggle," he wrote in his last work, "the proletariat becomes more and more the vanguard for the reconstruction of humanity, in which in always greater measure also non-proletarian layers of society become interested. This is no betrayal of the class struggle idea. I had this position already before there was bolshevism, as, for instance, in 1903 in my article on 'Class — Special and Common Interests' in the *Neue Zeit*, where I came to the conclusion that the proletarian class struggle does not recognise class solidarity but only the solidarity of mankind."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, it is not possible to regard Kautsky as a 'renegade'. Only a total misunderstanding of the theory and practice of the social democratic movement and of Kautsky's activity could lead to such a view. Kautsky aspired to being a good servant of Marxism; in fact, to please Engels and Marx seemed to be his life profession. He referred to the latter always in the typical social-democratic and philistine manner as the 'great master', the 'Olympian', the 'Thunder God', etc. He felt

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<sup>7</sup> *The Social Revolution*.

<sup>8</sup> K. Kautsky, *Sozialisten und Krieg*. Prague, 1937, p.673.

extremely honoured because Marx “did not receive him in the same cold way in which Goethe received his young colleague Heine.”<sup>9</sup> He must have sworn to himself not to disappoint Engels when the latter began to regard him and Bernstein as ‘trustworthy representatives of Marxian theory’, and during most of his life he was the most ardent defender of ‘the word’. He is most honest when he complains to Engels<sup>10</sup> “that nearly all the intellectuals in the party ... cry for colonies, for national thought, for a resurrection of the Teutonic antiquity, for confidence in the government, for having the power of ‘justice’ replace the class struggle, and express a decided aversion for the materialistic interpretation of history — Marxian dogma, as they call it.” He wanted to argue against them, to uphold against them what had been established by his idols. A good schoolmaster, he was also an excellent pupil.

Engels understood this early ‘degeneration’ of the movement only too well. In answering Kautsky’s complaints, he stated,<sup>11</sup> “that the development of capitalism proved itself to be stronger than the revolutionary counter-pressure. A new upsurge against capitalism would need a violent shock, such as the loss by England of its domination of the world market, or a sudden revolutionary opportunity in France.” But neither the one nor the other event occurred. The socialists no longer waited for revolution. Bernstein waited instead for Engels’ death, to avoid disappointing the man to whom he owed most — before proclaiming that “the goal meant nothing and the movement everything.” It is true that Engels himself had strengthened the forces of reformism during the latter part of his life. However,

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9 *Aus der Frühzeit des Marxismus*, p.50.

10 *Ibid.*, p.112.

11 *Ibid.*, p.155.

what in his case could be taken only as the weakening of the individual in his stand against the world, was taken by his epigones as the source of their strength. Time and again Marx and Engels returned to the uncompromising attitude of the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* as, for instance, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, which was delayed in its publication in order not to disturb the compromisers in the movement. Its publication was possible only after a struggle with the party bureaucracy, which circumstance led Engels to remark that, It is in fact a brilliant thought to have German socialist science present, after its emancipation from the Bismarckian socialist laws, its own socialist laws, formulated by the officials of the Social Democratic Party.<sup>12</sup>

Kautsky defended an already emasculated Marxism. The radical, revolutionary, anti-capitalist Marxism had been defeated by capitalist development. At the Congress of the Workers' International in 1872 in The Hague, Marx himself had declared: "Some day the workers must conquer political supremacy, in order to establish the new organisation of labour ... Of course, I must not be supposed to imply that the means to this end will be the same everywhere ... and we do not deny that there are certain countries, such as the United States and England in which the workers may hope to secure their ends by peaceful means." This statement allowed even the revisionists to declare themselves Marxists, and the only argument Kautsky could muster against them, as, for instance, during the Social Democratic Party congress in Stuttgart in 1898, was the denial that the democratisation and socialisation process claimed by the revisionists as in progress in England and America, also held good for Germany. He repeated Marx's position as regards the eventuality of a more peaceful

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12 *Ibid.*, p.273.

transformation of society in some countries, and added to this remark only that he, too, “wishes nothing else but to obtain socialism without a catastrophe.” However, he doubted such a possibility.

It is understandable that on the basis of such thinking it was only consistent for Kautsky to assume after the war that with the now possible more rapid development of democratic institutions in Germany and Russia, the more peaceful way to socialism could be realised also in these countries. The peaceful way seemed to him the surer way, as it would better serve that ‘solidarity of mankind’ that he wished to develop. The socialist intellectuals wished to return the decency with which the bourgeoisie had learned to treat them. After all, we are all gentlemen! The orderly petty-bourgeois life of the intelligentsia, secured by a powerful socialist movement, had led them to emphasise the ethical and cultural aspects of things. Kautsky hated the methods of bolshevism with no less intensity than did the white guardists, though in contrast to the latter, he was in full agreement with the goal of bolshevism. Behind the aspect of the proletarian revolution the leaders of the socialist movement correctly saw a chaos in which their own position would become no less jeopardised than that of the bourgeoisie proper. Their hatred of ‘disorder’ was a defence of their own material, social and intellectual position. Socialism was to be developed not illegally, but legally, for under such conditions, existing organisations and leaders would continue to dominate the movement. And their successful interruption of the impending proletarian revolution demonstrated that not only did the ‘gains’ of the workers in the economic sphere turn against the workers themselves, but that their ‘success’ in the political field also turned out to be weapons against their emancipation. The strongest bulwark against a radical solution of the social question was the social

democracy, in whose growth the workers had learned to measure their growing power.

Nothing shows the revolutionary character of Marx's theories more clearly than the difficulty to maintain them during non-revolutionary times. There was a grain of truth in Kautsky's statement that the socialist movement cannot function during times of war, as times of war temporarily create non-revolutionary situations. The revolutionist becomes isolated, and registers temporary defeat. He must wait till the situation changes, till the subjective readiness to participate in war is broken by the objective impossibility to serve this subjective readiness. A revolutionist cannot help standing 'outside the world' from time to time. To believe that a revolutionary practice, expressed in independent actions of the workers, is always possible means to fall victim to democratic illusions. But it is more difficult to stand 'outside this world', for no one can know when situations change, and no one wishes to be left out when changes do occur. Consistency exists only in theory. It cannot be said that Marx's theories were inconsistent; it can, however, be said, that Marx was not consistent, i.e. that he, too, had to pay deference to a changing reality and, in non-revolutionary times, in order to function at all, had to function in a non-revolutionary manner. His theories were limited to the essentials of the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, but his practice was continuous, dealing with problems 'as they came up', problems which could not always be solved with essential principles. Unwilling to retire during the upswing period of capitalism, Marxism could not escape functioning in a manner contrary to a theory resulting from the recognition of a real and always present revolutionary class struggle. The theory of the everpresent class struggle has no more justification than the bourgeois concept of progress. There is no automatism keeping

things rolling uphill; instead, there is combat with changing fortunes; there is the deathlock of the struggle and the utter defeat. Mere numbers of workers opposed to the powerful capitalist state at times when history still favours capitalism do not represent the giant on whose back the capitalist parasites rest, but rather the bull who has to move in the directions his nose-stick forces him to go. During the non-revolutionary period of the ascending capitalism, revolutionary Marxism could exist only as ideology, serving an entirely different practice. In this latter form it was again limited by actual occurrences. As a mere ideology it had to cease existing as soon as great social upheavals demanded a change from an indirect to a direct class collaboration ideology for capitalistic purposes.

Marx developed his theories during revolutionary times. The most advanced of the bourgeois revolutionists, he was the closest to the proletariat. The defeat of the bourgeoisie as revolutionists, their success within the counter-revolution, convinced Marx that the modern revolutionary class can be only the working class, and he developed the socioeconomic theory of their revolution. Like many of his contemporaries, he underestimated the strength and flexibility of capitalism, and expected too soon the end of bourgeois society. Two alternatives opened themselves to him: he could either stand outside the actual development, restricting himself to inapplicable radical thinking, or participate under the given conditions in the actual struggles, and reserve the revolutionary theories for 'better times'. This latter alternative was rationalised into the 'proper balance of theory and practice', and the defeat or success of proletarian activities became therewith the result of 'right' or 'wrong' tactics once more; the question of the proper organisation and of correct leadership. It was not so much Marx's earlier connection with the

bourgeois revolution that led to the further development of the Jacobinic aspect of the labour movement called by his name, but the non-revolutionary practice of this movement, because of the non-revolutionary times.

The Marxism of Kautsky, then, was a Marxism in the form of a mere ideology, and it was therewith fated to return in the course of time into idealistic channels. Kautsky's 'orthodoxy' was in truth the artificial preservation of ideas opposed to an actual practice, and was therewith forced into retreat, as reality is always stronger than ideology. A real Marxian 'orthodoxy' could be possible only with a return of real revolutionary situations, and then such 'orthodoxy' would concern itself not with 'the word', but with the principle of the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat applied to new and changed situations. The retreat of theory before practice can be followed with utmost clarity in Kautsky's writings.

The many books and articles written by Kautsky deal with almost all social problems, in addition to specific questions concerning the labour movement. However, his writings can be classified into Economy, History and Philosophy. In the field of political economy, not much can be said about his contribution. He was the populariser of the first volume of Marx's *Capital* and the editor of Marx's "Theories of Surplus Value", published during the years from 1904 to 1910. His popularisations of Marx's economic theories do not distinguish themselves from the generally accepted interpretation of economic phenomena in the socialist movement — the revisionists included. As a matter of fact, parts of his famous book "The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx" were written by Eduard Bernstein. In the heated discussion waged at the turn of the century concerning the meaning of Marx's theories in the second and third volume of *Capital*, Kautsky took very small part. For him the first volume

of *Capital* contained all that was of importance to the workers and their movement. It dealt with the process of production, the factory and exploitation, and contained all that was needed to support a workers' movement against capitalism. The other two volumes dealing in greater detail with capitalist tendencies towards crises and collapse did not correspond to immediate reality and found little interest not only by Kautsky but by all Marxian theoreticians of the upswing period of capitalism. In a review of the second volume of *Capital*, written in 1886, Kautsky expressed the opinion that this volume is of less interest to the workers, as it deals largely with the problem of the realisation of surplus value, which after all should be rather the concern of the capitalists. When Bernstein, in the course of his attack upon Marx's economic theories, rejected the latter's theory of collapse, Kautsky defended Marxism by simply denying that Marx ever had developed a special theory pointing to an objective end of capitalism, and that such a concept was merely an invention of Bernstein. The difficulties and contradictions of capitalism he searched for in the sphere of circulation. Consumption could not grow so rapidly as production and a permanent over-production would lead to the political necessity of introducing socialism. Against Tugan-Baranowsky's theory of an unhampered capitalist development proceeding from the fact that capital creates its own markets and can overcome developing disproportionalities, a theory which influenced the whole reformist movement, Kautsky<sup>13</sup> set his underconsumption theory to explain the unavoidability of capitalist crises, crises which helped to create the subjective conditions for a transformation from capitalism to socialism. However, 25 years later, he openly admitted that he had been wrong in his evaluation

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13 *Neue Zeit*, 1902, No. 5



of the economic possibilities of capitalism, as “from an economic viewpoint, capital is much livelier today than it was 50 years ago.”<sup>14</sup>

The theoretical unclarity and inconsistency that Kautsky<sup>15</sup> displayed on economic questions, were only climaxed by his acceptance of the once denounced views of Tugan-Baranowsky. They were only a reflection of his changing general attitude towards bourgeois thought and capitalist society. In his book “The Materialistic Conception of History,” which he himself declares to be the best and final product of his whole life’s work, dealing as it does in nearly 2000 pages with the development of nature, society and the state, he demonstrates not only his pedantic method of exposition and his far-reaching knowledge of theories and facts, but also his many misconceptions as regards Marxism and his final break with Marxian science. Here he openly declares “that at times revisions of Marxism are unavoidable.”<sup>16</sup> Here he now accepts all that during his whole life he had apparently struggled against. He is no longer solely interested in the interpretation of Marxism, but is ready to accept responsibility for his own thoughts, presenting his main work as his own conception of history, not totally removed but independent from Marx and Engels. His masters, he now contends, have restricted the

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14 K. Kautsky, *Die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*. Berlin, 1927. Vol. II, p.623.

15 The limitations of Kautsky’s economic theories and their transformations in the course of his activities are excellently described and criticised by Henryk Grossman in his book *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems* (Leipzig, 1929), to which the interested reader is referred.

16 K. Kautsky, *Die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*. Vol. II, p.630.

materialistic conception of history by neglecting too much the natural factors in history. He, however, starting not from Hegel but from Darwin, “will now extend the scope of historical materialism till it merges with biology.”<sup>17</sup> But his furthering of historical materialism turns out to be no more than a reversion to the crude naturalistic materialism of Marx’s forerunners, a return to the position of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, which Marx had overcome with his rejection of Feuerbach. On the basis of this naturalistic materialism, Kautsky, like the bourgeois philosophers before him, cannot help adopting an idealistic concept of social development, which, then, when it deals with the state, turns openly and completely into the old bourgeois conceptions of the history of mankind as the history of states. Ending in the bourgeois democratic state, Kautsky holds that “there is no room any longer for violent class conflict. Peacefully, by way of propaganda and the voting system can conflicts be ended, decisions be made.”<sup>18</sup>

Though we cannot possibly review in detail at this place this tremendous book of Kautsky,<sup>19</sup> we must say that it demonstrates throughout the doubtful character of Kautsky’s ‘Marxism’. His connection with the labour movement, seen retrospectively, was never more than his participation in some form of bourgeois social work. There can be no doubt that he never understood the real position of Marx and Engels, or at least never dreamed that theories could have an immediate connection with

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17 *Ibid.*, p.629.

18 *Ibid.*, p.431.

19 The reader is referred to Karl Korsch’s extensive criticism of Kautsky’s work, *Die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Kautsky*. Leipzig, 1929.

reality. This apparently serious Marxist student had actually never taken Marx seriously. Like many pious priests engaging in a practice contrary to their teaching, he might not even have been aware of the duality of his own thought and action. Undoubtedly he would have sincerely liked being in reality the bourgeois of whom Marx once said, he is “a capitalist solely in the interest of the proletariat.” But even such a change of affairs he would reject, unless it were attainable in the ‘peaceful’ bourgeois, democratic manner. Kautsky, “repudiates the Bolshevik melody that is unpleasant to his ear,” wrote Trotsky, “but does not seek another. The solution is simple: the old musician refuses altogether to play on the instrument of the revolution.”<sup>20</sup>

Recognising at the close of his life that the reforms of capitalism that he wished to achieve could not be realised by democratic, peaceful means, Kautsky turned against his own practical policy, and just as he was in former times the proponent of a Marxian ideology which, altogether divorced from reality, could serve only its opponents, he now became the proponent of bourgeois *laissez faire* ideology, just as much removed from the actual conditions of the developing fascistic capitalist society, and just as much serving this society as his Marxian ideology had served the democratic stage of capitalism. “People love today to speak disdainfully about the liberalistic economy,” he wrote in his last work; “however, the theories founded by Quesnay, Adam Smith and Ricardo are not at all obsolete. In their essentials Marx had accepted their theories and developed them further, and he has never denied that the liberal freedom of commodity production constituted the best basis for its development. Marx distinguishes himself from the Classicists therein, that when the latter saw in

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20 L. Trotsky, *Dictatorship vs. Democracy*.

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commodity production of private producers the only possible form of production, Marx saw the highest form of commodity production leading through its own development to conditions allowing for a still better form of production, social production, where society, identical with the whole of the working population, controls the means of production, producing no longer for profit but to satisfy needs. The socialist mode of production has its own rules, in many respects different from the laws of commodity production. However, as long as commodity production prevails, it will best function if those laws of motion discovered in the era of liberalism are respected.”<sup>21</sup>

These ideas are quite surprising in a man who had edited Marx’s “Theories of Surplus Value”, a work which proved exhaustively “that Marx at no time in his life countenanced the opinion that the new contents of his socialist and communist theory could be derived, as a mere logical consequence, from the utterly bourgeois theories of Quesnay, Smith and Ricardo.”<sup>22</sup> However, this position of Kautsky’s gives the necessary qualifications to our previous statement that he was an excellent pupil of Marx and Engels. He was such only to the extent that Marxism could be fitted into his own limited concepts of social development and of capitalist society. For Kautsky, the ‘socialist society’, or the logical consequence of capitalist development of commodity production, is in truth only a state-capitalist system. When once he mistook Marx’s value concept as a law of socialist economics if only applied consciously instead of being left to the ‘blind’

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21 *Sozialisten und Krieg*. p.665.

22 K. Korsch, *Karl Marx*. New York, 1938, p.92. See also: Engels’ Preface to the German edition of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1884; and to the second volume of *Capital*, 1895.

operations of the market, Engels pointed out to him<sup>23</sup> that for Marx, value is a strictly historical category; that neither before nor after capitalism did there exist or could there exist a value production which differed only in form from that of capitalism. And Kautsky accepted Engels' statement, as is manifested in his work "The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx" (1887), where he also saw value as a historical category. Later, however, in reaction to bourgeois criticism of socialist economic theory, he re-introduced in his book "The Proletarian Revolution and its Programme" (1922) the value concept, the market and money economy, commodity production, into his scheme of a socialist society. What was once historical became eternal; Engels had talked in vain. Kautsky had returned from where he had sprung, from the *petite-bourgeoisie*, who hate with equal force both monopoly control and socialism, and hope for a purely quantitative change of society, an enlarged reproduction of the *status quo*, a better and bigger capitalism, a better and more comprehensive democracy — as against a capitalism climaxing in fascism or changing into communism.

The maintenance of liberal commodity production and its political expression were preferred by Kautsky to the 'economics' of fascism because the former system determined his long grandeur and his short misery. Just as he had shielded bourgeois democracy with Marxian phraseology, so he now obscured the fascist reality with democratic phraseology. For now, by turning their thoughts backward instead of forward, he made his followers mentally incapacitated for revolutionary action. The man who shortly before his death was driven from Berlin to Vienna by marching fascism, and from Vienna to Prague, and from Prague to Amsterdam,

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23 *Aus der Frühzeit des Marxismus*, p. 145.

published in 1937 a book<sup>24</sup> which shows explicitly that once a 'Marxist' makes the step from a materialistic to an idealistic concept of social development, he is sure to arrive sooner or later at that borderline of thought where idealism turns into insanity. There is a report current in Germany that when Hindenburg was watching a Nazi demonstration of storm troops he turned to a General standing beside him saying, "I did not know we had taken so many Russian prisoners." Kautsky, too, in this his last book, is mentally still at 'Tannenberg'. His work is a faithful description of the different attitudes taken by socialists and their forerunners to the question of war since the beginning of the fifteenth century up to the present time. It shows, although not to Kautsky, how ridiculous Marxism can become when it associates the proletarian with the bourgeois needs and necessities.

Kautsky wrote his last book, as he said, "to determine which position should be taken by socialists and democrats in case a new war breaks out despite all our opposition to it."<sup>25</sup> However, he continued, "There is no direct answer to this question before the war is actually here and we are all able to see who caused the war and for what purpose it is fought." He advocates that "if war breaks out, socialists should try to maintain their unity, to bring their organisation safely through the war, so that they may reap the fruit wherever unpopular political regimes collapse. In 1914 this unity was lost and we still suffer from this calamity. But today things are much clearer than they were then; the opposition between democratic and anti-democratic states is much sharper; and it can be expected that if it comes to the new world war, all socialists will stand on the side of democracy." After the experiences of the last war and

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24 *Sozialisten und Krieg*.

25 *Ibid.*, p. VIII.

the history since then, there is no need to search for the black sheep that causes wars, nor is it a secret any longer why wars are fought. However, to pose such questions is not stupidity as one may believe. Behind this apparent naïveté lies the determination to serve capitalism in one form by fighting capitalism in another. It serves to prepare the workers for the coming war, in exchange for the right to organise in labour organisations, vote in elections, and assemble in formations which serve both capital and capitalistic labour organisations. It is the old policy of Kautsky, which demands concessions from the bourgeoisie in exchange for millions of dead workers in the coming capitalistic battles. In reality, just as the wars of capitalism, regardless of the political differences of the participating states and the various slogans used, can only be wars for capitalist profits and wars against the working class, so, too, the war excludes the possibility of choosing between conditional or unconditional participation in the war by the workers. Rather, the war, and even the period preceding the war, will be marked by a general and complete military dictatorship in fascist and anti-fascist countries alike. The war will wipe out the last distinction between the democratic and the anti-democratic nations. And workers will serve Hitler as they served the Kaiser; they will serve Roosevelt as they served Wilson; they will die for Stalin as they died for the Tsar.

Kautsky was not disturbed by the reality of fascism, since for him, democracy was the natural form of capitalism. The new situation was only a sickness, a temporary insanity, a thing actually foreign to capitalism. He really believed in a war for democracy, to allow capitalism to proceed in its logical course towards a real commonwealth. And his 1937 predictions incorporated sentences like the following: "The time has arrived where it is finally possible to do away with wars as a means

of solving political conflicts between the states.”<sup>26</sup> Or, “The policy of conquest of the Japanese in China, the Italians in Ethiopia, is a last echo of a passing time, the period of imperialism. More wars of such a character can hardly be expected.”<sup>27</sup> There are hundreds of similar sentences in Kautsky’s book, and it seems at times that his whole world must have consisted of no more than the four walls of his library, to which he neglected to add the newest volumes on recent history. Kautsky is convinced that even without a war fascism will be defeated, the rise of democracy recur, and the period return for a peaceful development towards socialism, like the period in the days before fascism. The essential weakness of fascism he illustrated with the remark that “the personal character of the dictatorships indicates already that it limits its own existence to the length of a human life.”<sup>28</sup> He believed that after fascism there would be the return to the ‘normal’ life on an increasingly socialistic abstract democracy to continue the reforms begun in the glorious time of the social democratic coalition policy. However, it is obvious now that the only capitalistic reform objectively possible today is the fascistic reform. And as a matter of fact, the larger part of the ‘socialisation programme’ of the social democracy, which it never dared to put into practice, has meanwhile been realised by fascism. Just as the demands of the German bourgeoisie were met not in 1848 but in the ensuing period of the counter-revolution, so, too, the reform programme of the social democracy, which it could not inaugurate during the time of its own reign, was put into practice by Hitler. Thus, to mention just a few facts, not the social democracy but Hitler fulfilled the long desire of the socialists, the Anschluss of Austria;

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26 *Ibid.*, p.265.

27 *Ibid.*, p.656.

28 *Ibid.*, p.646.



not social democracy but fascism established the wished — for state control of industry and banking; not social democracy but Hitler declared the first of May a legal holiday. A careful analysis of what the socialists actually wanted to do and never did, compared with actual policies since 1933, will reveal to any objective observer that Hitler realised no more than the programme of social democracy, but without the socialists. Like Hitler, the social democracy and Kautsky were opposed to both bolshevism and communism. Even a complete state-capitalist system as the Russian was rejected by both in favour of mere state control. And what is necessary in order to realise such a programme was not dared by the socialists but undertaken by the fascists. The anti-fascism of Kautsky illustrated no more than the fact that just as he once could not imagine that Marxist theory could be supplemented by a Marxist practice, he later could not see that a capitalist reform policy demanded a capitalist reform practice, which turned out to be the fascist practice. The life of Kautsky can teach the workers that in the struggle against fascistic capitalism is necessarily incorporated the struggle against bourgeois democracy, the struggle against Kautskyism. The life of Kautsky can, in all truth and without malicious intent, be summed up in the words: From Marx to Hitler.



Gerd Arntz, The Third Reich 1934

# The Struggle Against Fascism Begins with the Struggle Against Bolshevism

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Otto Rühle 1939

This article by Otto Rühle appeared in the American councilist journal *Living Marxism* (Vol. 4, No. 8, 1939)  
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Bratach Dubh editions.

It seems to be based on a much longer text, part of  
which was published in French as “Fascisme Brun,  
Fascisme Rouge” by Spartacus in 1975 (Série B—No  
63). This is part of a still longer text in German called  
“Weltkrieg—Weltfaschismus—Weltrevolution”.

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## I.

Russia must be placed first among the new totalitarian states. It was the first to adopt the new state principle. It went furthest in its application. It was the first to establish a constitutional dictatorship, together with the political and administrative terror system which goes with it. Adopting all the features of the total state, it thus became the model for those other countries which were forced to do away with the democratic state system and to change to dictatorial rule. Russia was the example

for fascism.

No accident is here involved, nor a bad joke of history. The duplication of systems here is not apparent but real. Everything points to the fact that we have to deal here with expressions and consequences of identical principles applied to different levels of historical and political development. Whether party “communists” like it or not, the fact remains that the state order and rule in Russia are indistinguishable from those in Italy and Germany. Essentially they are alike. One may speak of a red, black, or brown “soviet state”, as well as of red, black or brown fascism. Though certain ideological differences exist between these countries, ideology is never of primary importance. Ideologies, furthermore, are changeable and such changes do not necessarily reflect the character and the functions of the state apparatus. Furthermore, the fact that private property still exists in Germany and Italy is only a modification of secondary importance. The abolition of private property alone does not guarantee socialism. Private property within capitalism also can be abolished. What actually determines a socialist society is, besides the doing away with private property in the means of production, the control of the workers over the products of their labour and the end of the wage system. Both of these achievements are unfulfilled in Russia, as well as in Italy and Germany. Though some may assume that Russia is one step nearer to socialism than the other countries, it does not follow that its “soviet state” has helped the international proletariat come in any way nearer to its class struggle goals. On the contrary, because Russia calls itself a socialist state, it misleads and deludes the workers of the world. The thinking worker knows what fascism is and fights it, but as regards Russia, he is only too often inclined to accept the myth of its socialistic nature. This delusion hinders a complete and determined break with

fascism, because it hinders the principle struggle against the reasons, preconditions, and circumstances which in Russia, as in Germany and Italy, have led to an identical state and governmental system. Thus the Russian myth turns into an ideological weapon of counter-revolution.

It is not possible for men to serve two masters. Neither can a totalitarian state do such a thing. If fascism serves capitalistic and imperialistic interests, it cannot serve the needs of the workers. If, in spite of this, two apparently opposing classes favour the same state system, it is obvious that something must be wrong. One or the other class must be in error. No one should say here that the problem is one merely of form and therefore of no real significance, that, though the political forms are identical, their content may vary widely. This would be self-delusion. For the Marxist such things do not occur; for him form and content fit to each other and they cannot be divorced. Now, if the Soviet State serves as a model for fascism, it must contain structural and functional elements which are also common to fascism. To determine what they are we must go back to the "soviet system" as established by Leninism, which is the application of the principles of bolshevism to the Russian conditions. And if an identity between bolshevism and fascism can be established, then the proletariat cannot at the same time fight fascism and defend the Russian "soviet system". Instead, the struggle against fascism must begin with the struggle against bolshevism.

## II.

From the beginning bolshevism was for Lenin a purely Russian phenomenon. During the many years of his political activity, he never attempted to elevate the bolshevik system to forms of struggles in other countries. He was a social democrat who saw in Bebel and Kautsky the genial leaders of the working class, and he

ignored the left-wing of the German socialist movement struggling against these heroes of Lenin and against all the other opportunists. Ignoring them, he remained in consistent isolation surrounded by a small group of Russian emigrants, and he continued to stand under Kautsky's sway even when the German "left", under the leadership of Rosa Luxemburg, was already engaged in open struggle against Kautskyism.

Lenin was concerned only with Russia. His goal was the end of the Czarist feudal system and the conquest of the greatest amount of political influence for his social democratic party within the bourgeois society. However, it realized that it could stay in power and drive on the process of socialization only if it could unleash the world revolution of the workers. But its own activity in this respect was quite an unhappy one. By helping to drive the German workers back into the parties, trade unions, and parliament, and by the simultaneous destruction of the German council (soviet) movement, the Bolsheviks lent a hand, to the defeat of the awakening European revolution.

The Bolshevik Party, consisting of professional revolutionists on the one hand and large backward masses on the other, remained isolated. It could not develop a real soviet system within the years of civil war, intervention, economic decline, failing socialization experiments, and the improvised Red Army. Though the soviets, which were developed by the Mensheviks, did not fit into the bolshevistik scheme, it was with their help that the Bolsheviks came to power. With the stabilisation of power and the economic reconstruction process, the Bolshevik Party did not know how to coordinate the strange soviet system to their own decisions and activities. Nevertheless, socialism was also the desire of the Bolsheviks, and it needed the world proletariat for its realization.

Lenin thought it essential to win the workers of the world over to the bolshevik methods. It was disturbing that the workers of other countries, despite the great triumph of Bolshevism, showed little inclination to accept for themselves the bolshevik theory and practice, but tended rather in the direction of the council movement, that arose in a number of countries, and especially in Germany.

This council movement Lenin could use no longer in Russia. In other European countries it showed strong tendencies to oppose the bolshevik type of uprisings. Despite Moscow's tremendous propaganda in all countries, the so-called "ultra-lefts", as Lenin himself pointed out, agitated more successfully for revolution on the basis of the council movement, than did all the propagandists sent by the Bolshevik Party. The Communist Party, following Bolshevism, remained a small, hysterical, and noisy group consisting largely of the proletarianized shreds of the bourgeoisie, whereas the council movement gained in real proletarian strength and attracted the best elements of the working class. To cope with this situation, bolshevik propaganda had to be increased; the "ultra-left" had to be attacked; its influence had to be destroyed in favour of Bolshevism.

Since the soviet system had failed in Russia, how could the radical "competition" dare to attempt to prove to the world that what could not be accomplished by Bolshevism in Russia might very well be realized independently of Bolshevism in other places? Against this competition Lenin wrote his pamphlet "Radicalism, an Infantile Disease of Communism", dictated by fear of losing power and by indignation over the success of the heretics. At first this pamphlet appeared with the subheading, "Attempt at a popular exposition of the Marxian strategy and tactic", but later this too ambitious and silly declaration was removed. It was a

little too much. This aggressive, crude, and hateful papal bull was real material for any counter revolutionary. Of all programmatic declarations of Bolshevism it was the most revealing of its real character. It is Bolshevism unmasked. When in 1933 Hitler suppressed all socialist and communist literature in Germany, Lenin's pamphlet was allowed publication and distribution.

As regards the content of the pamphlet, we are not here concerned with what it says in relation to the Russian Revolution, the history of Bolshevism, the polemic between Bolshevism and other streams of the labour movement, or the circumstances allowing for the Bolshevik victory, but solely with the main points by which at the time of the discussion between Lenin and "ultra-leftism", were illustrated the decisive differences between the two opponents.

### III.

The Bolshevik Party, originally the Russian social democratic section of the Second International, was built not in Russia but during the emigration. After the London split in 1903, the Bolshevik wing of the Russian social democracy was no more than a small sect. The "masses" behind it existed only in the brain of its leader. However, this small advance guard was a strictly disciplined organization, always ready for militant struggles and continually purged to maintain its integrity. The party was considered the war academy of professional revolutionists. Its outstanding pedagogical requirements were unconditional leader authority, rigid centralism, iron discipline, conformity, militancy, and sacrifice of personality for party interests. What Lenin actually developed was an elite of intellectuals, a centre which, when thrown into the revolution would capture leadership and assume power. There is no use to try to determine logically and abstractly if this kind



of preparation for revolution is right or wrong. The problem has to be solved dialectically. Other questions also must be raised: What kind of a revolution was in preparation? What was the goal of the revolution?

Lenin's party worked within the belated bourgeois revolution in Russia to overthrow the feudal regime of Czarism. The more centralized the will of the leading party in such a revolution and the more single-minded, the more success would accompany the process of the formation of the bourgeois state and the more promising would be the position of the proletarian class within the framework of the new state. What, however, may be regarded as a happy solution of revolutionary problems in a bourgeois revolution cannot at the same time be pronounced as a solution for the proletarian revolution. The decisive structural difference between the bourgeois and the new socialist society excludes such an attitude.

According to Lenin's revolutionary method, the leaders appear as the head of the masses. Possessing the proper revolutionary schooling, they are able to understand situations and direct and command the fighting forces. They are professional revolutionists, the generals of the great civilian army. This distinction between head and body, intellectuals and masses, officers, and privates corresponds to the duality of class society, to the bourgeois social order. One class is educated to rule; the other to be ruled. Out of this old class formula resulted Lenin's party concept. His organisation is only a replica of bourgeois reality. His revolution is objectively determined by the forces that create a social order incorporating these class relations, regardless of the subjective goals accompanying this process.

Whoever wants to have a bourgeois order will find in the divorce of leader and masses, the advance guard and working class, the right strategical preparation for

revolution. The more intelligent, schooled, and superior is the leadership and the more disciplined and obedient are the masses, the more chances such a revolution will have to succeed. In aspiring to the bourgeois revolution in Russia, Lenin's party was most appropriate to his goal.

When, however, the Russian revolution changed its character, when its proletarian features came more to the fore, Lenin's tactical and strategical methods ceased to be of value. If he succeeded anyway it was not because of his advance guard, but because of the soviet movement which had not at all been incorporated in his revolutionary plans. And when Lenin, after the successful revolution which was made by the soviets, dispensed again with this movement, all that had been proletarian in the Russian Revolution was also dispensed with. The bourgeois character of the Revolution came to the fore again, finding its natural completion in Stalinism.

Despite his great concern with Marxian dialectics, Lenin was not able to see the social historical processes in a dialectical manner. His thinking remained mechanistic, following rigid rules. For him there was only one revolutionary party -- his own; only one revolution -- the Russian; only one method -- the bolshevik. And what had worked in Russia would work also in Germany, France, America, China and Australia. What was correct for the bourgeois revolution in Russia would be correct also for the proletarian world revolution. The monotonous application of a once discovered formula moved in an ego-centric circle undisturbed by time and circumstances, developmental degrees, cultural standards, ideas and men. In Lenin came to light with great clarity the rule of the machine age in politics; he was the "technician", the "inventor", of the revolution, the representative of the all-powerful will of the leader. All fundamental characteristics of fascism were in his doctrine, his strategy, his social "planning", and his

art with dealing with men. He could not see the deep revolutionary meaning of the rejection of traditional party policies by the left. He could not understand the real importance of the soviet movement for the socialist orientation of society. He never learned to know the prerequisites for the freeing of the workers. Authority, leadership, force, exerted on one side, and organization, cadres, subordination on the other side, — such was his line of reasoning. Discipline and dictatorship are the words which are most frequent in his writings. It is understandable, then, why he could not comprehend nor appreciate the ideas and actions of the “ultra-left”, which would not accept his strategy and which demanded what was most obvious and most necessary for the revolutionary struggle for socialism, namely that the workers once and for all take their fate in their own hands.

#### IV.

To take their destiny in their own hands — this key-word to all questions of socialism — was the real issue in all polemics between the ultra-lefts and the Bolsheviks. The disagreement on the party question was paralleled by the disagreement on trade unionism. The ultra-left was of the opinion that there was no longer a place for revolutionists in trade unions; that it was rather necessary for them to develop their own organizational forms within the factories, the common working places. However, thanks to their unearned authority, the Bolsheviks had been able even in the first weeks of the German revolution to drive the workers back into the capitalistic reactionary trade unions. To fight the ultra-lefts, to denounce them as stupid and as counter-revolutionary, Lenin in his pamphlet once more makes use of his mechanistic formulas. In his arguments against the position of the left he does not refer to German

trade unions but to the trade union experiences of the Bolsheviks in Russia. That in their early beginnings trade unions were of great importance for the proletarian class struggle is a generally accepted fact. The trade unions in Russia were young and they justified Lenin's enthusiasm. However, the situation was different in other parts of the world. Useful and progressive in their beginnings, the trade unions in the older capitalistic countries had turned into obstacles in the way of the liberation of the workers. They had turned into instruments of counter revolution, and the German left drew its conclusions from this changed situation.

Lenin himself could not help declaring that in the course of time there had developed a layer of a "strictly trade-unionist, imperialistic orientated, arrogant, vain, sterile, egotistical, petty-bourgeois, bribed, and demoralised aristocracy of labour". This guild of corruption, this gangster leadership, today rules the world trade union movement and lives on the back of the workers. It was of this trade union movement that the ultra-left was speaking when it demanded that the workers should desert it. Lenin, however, demagogically answered by pointing to the young trade union movement in Russia which did not as yet share the character of the long established unions in other countries. Employing a specific experience at a given period and under particular circumstance, he thought it possible to draw from it conclusions of world-wide application. The revolutionist, he argued, must always be where the masses are. But in reality where are the masses? In trade union offices? At membership meetings? At the secret meetings of the leadership with the capitalistic representatives? No, the masses are in the factories, in their working places; and there it is necessary to effect their co-operation and strengthen their solidarity. The factory organization, the council system, is the real organisation of the revolution,

which must replace all parties and trade unions.

In factory organizations there is no room for professional leadership, no divorce of leaders from followers, no caste distinction between intellectuals and the rank and file, no ground for egotism, competition, demoralization, corruption, sterility and philistinism. Here the workers must take their lot in their own hands.

But Lenin thought otherwise. He wanted to preserve the unions; to change them from within; to remove the social democratic officials and replace them with bolshevik officials; to replace a bad with a good bureaucracy. The bad one grows in a social democracy; the good one in Bolshevism.

Twenty years of experience meanwhile have demonstrated the idiocy of such a concept. Following Lenin's advice, the Communists have tried all and sundry methods to reform trade unions. The result was nil. The attempt to form their own trade unions was likewise nil. The competition between social democratic and bolshevik trade union work was a competition in corruption. The revolutionary energies of the workers were exhausted in this very process. Instead of concentrating upon the struggle against fascism, the workers were engaged in a senseless and resultless experimentation in the interest of diverse bureaucracies. The masses lost confidence in themselves and in "their" organizations. They felt themselves cheated and betrayed. The methods of fascism, to dictate each step of the workers, to hinder the awakening of self-initiative, to sabotage all beginnings of class-consciousness, to demoralise the masses through innumerable defeats and to make them impotent—all these methods had already been developed in the twenty years of work in the trade unions in accordance with bolshevik principles. The victory of fascism was such an easy one because the labour leaders in trade unions and parties had prepared for them the human material capable of

being fitted into the fascistic scheme of things.

## V.

On the question of parliamentarianism, too, Lenin appears in the role of the defender of a decayed political institution which had become a hindrance for further political development and a danger to the proletarian emancipation. The ultra-lefts fought parliamentarianism in all its forms. They refused to participate in elections and did not respect parliamentary decisions. Lenin, however, put much effort into parliamentary activities and attached much importance to them. The ultra-left declared parliamentarianism historically passé even as a tribune for agitation, and saw in it no more than a continuous source of political corruption for both parliamentarian and workers. It dulled the revolutionary awareness and consistency of the masses by creating illusions of legalistic reforms, and on critical occasions the parliament turned into a weapon of counter revolution. It had to be destroyed, or, where nothing else was possible, sabotaged. The parliamentary tradition, still playing a part in proletarian consciousness, was to be fought.

To achieve the opposite effect, Lenin operated with the trick of making a distinction between the historically and politically passé institutions. Certainly, he argued, parliamentarianism was historically obsolete, but this was not the case politically, and one would have to reckon with it. One would have to participate because it still played a part politically.

What an argument! Capitalism, too, is only historically and not politically obsolete. According to Lenin's logic, it is then not possible to fight capitalism in a revolutionary manner. Rather a compromise would have to be found. Opportunism, bargaining, political horse-trading, -- that would be the consequence of Lenin's tactic.

The monarchy, too, is only historically but not politically surpassed. According to Lenin, the workers would have no right to do away with it but would be obliged to find a compromise solution. The same story would be true as regards the church, also only historically but not politically antedated. Furthermore, the people belong in great masses to the church. As a revolutionist, Lenin pointed out, that one had to be where the masses are. Consistency would force him to say "Enter the Church; it is your revolutionary duty!" Finally, there is fascism. One day, too, fascism will be historically antedated but politically still in existence. What is then to be done? To accept the fact and to make a compromise with fascism. According to Lenin's reasoning, a pact between Stalin and Hitler would only illustrate that Stalin actually is the best disciple of Lenin. And it will not at all be surprising if in the near future the bolshevist agents will hail the pact between Moscow and Berlin as the only real revolutionary tactic.

Lenin's position on the question of parliamentarianism is only an additional illustration of his incapacity to understand the essential needs and characteristics of the proletarian revolution. His revolution is entirely bourgeois; it is a struggle for the majority, for governmental positions, for a hold upon the law machine. He actually thought it of importance to gain as many votes as possible at election campaigns, to have a strong bolshevik fraction in the parliaments, to help determine form and content of legislation, to take part in political rule. He did not notice at all that today parliamentarianism is a mere bluff, an empty make-believe, and that the real power of bourgeois society rests in entirely different places; that despite all possible parliamentary defeats the bourgeoisie would still have at hand sufficient means to assert its will and interest in non-parliamentary fields. Lenin did not see

the demoralising effects parliamentarism had upon the masses, he did not notice the poisoning of public morals through parliamentary corruption. Bribed, bought, and cowed, parliamentary politicians were fearful for their income. There was a time in prefascist Germany when the reactionists in parliament were able to pass any desired law merely by threatening to bring about the dissolution of parliament. There was nothing more terrible to the parliamentary politicians than such a threat which implied the end of their easy incomes. To avoid such an end, they would say yes to anything. And how is it today in Germany, in Russia, in Italy? The parliamentary helots are without opinions, without will, and are nothing more than willing servants of their fascist masters.

There can be no question that parliamentarianism is entirely degenerated and corrupt. But, why didn't the proletariat stop this deterioration of a political instrument which had once been used for their purposes? To end parliamentarism by one heroic revolutionary act would have been far more useful and educational for the proletarian consciousness than the miserable theatre in which parliamentarism has ended in the fascistic society. But such an attitude was entirely foreign to Lenin, as it is foreign to day to Stalin. Lenin was not concerned with the freedom of the workers from their mental and physical slavery; he was not bothered by the false consciousness of the masses and their human self-alienation. The whole problem to him was nothing more nor less than a problem of power. Like a bourgeois, he thought in terms of gains and losses, more or less, credit and debit; and all his business-like computations deal only with external things: membership figures, number of votes, seats in parliaments, control positions. His materialism is a bourgeois materialism, dealing with mechanisms, not with human beings. He is not really able to think in socio-historical terms. Parliament to him is parliament;



an abstract concept in a vacuum, holding equal meaning in all nations, at all times. Certainly he acknowledges that parliament passes through different stages, and he points this out in his discussions, but he does not use his own knowledge in his theory and practice. In his pro-parliamentarian polemics he hides behind the early capitalist parliaments in the ascending stage of capitalism, in order not to run out of arguments. And if he attacks the old parliaments, it is from the vantage point of the young and long outmoded. In short, he decides that politics is the art of the possible. However, politics for the workers is the art of revolution.

## VI.

It remains to deal with Lenin's position on the question of compromises. During the World War the German Social Democracy sold out to the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, much against its will, it inherited the German revolution. This was made possible to a large extent by the help of Russia, which did its share in killing off the German council movement. The power which had fallen into the lap of Social Democracy was used for nothing. The Social Democracy simply renewed its old class collaboration policy, satisfied with sharing power over the workers with the bourgeoisie in the reconstruction period of capitalism. The German radical workers countered this betrayal with this slogan, "No compromise with the counter revolution". Here was a concrete case, a specific situation, demanding a clear decision. Lenin, unable to recognize the real issues at stake, made from this concrete specific question a general problem. With the air of a general and the infallibility of a cardinal, he tried to persuade the ultra-lefts that compromises with political opponents under all conditions are a revolutionary duty. If today one reads those passages in Lenin's pamphlet dealing with

compromises, one is inclined to compare Lenin's remarks in 1920 with Stalin's present policy of compromises. There is not one deadly sin of bolshevik theory which did not become bolshevistic reality under Lenin.

According to Lenin, the ultra-lefts should have been willing to sign the Treaty of Versailles. However, the Communist Party, still in accordance with Lenin, made a compromise and protested against the Versailles Treaty in collaboration with the Hitlerites. The "National Bolshevism" propagandized in 1919 in Germany by the left-winger Laufenberg was in Lenin's opinion "an absurdity crying to heaven". But Radek and the Communist Party—again in accordance with Lenin's principle—concluded a compromise with German Nationalism, and protested against the occupation of the Ruhr basin and celebrated the national hero Schlageter. The League of Nations was, in Lenin's own words, "a band of capitalist robbers and bandits", whom the workers could only fight to the bitter end. However, Stalin—in accordance with Lenin's tactics—made a compromise with these very same bandits, and the USSR entered the League. The concept "folk" or "People" is in Lenin's opinion a criminal concession to the counter-revolutionary ideology of the petty bourgeoisie. This did not hinder the Leninists, Stalin and Dimitrov, from making a compromise with the petty bourgeoisie in order to launch the freakish "Peoples Front" movement. For Lenin, imperialism was the greatest enemy of the world proletariat, and against it all forces had to be mobilized. But Stalin, again in true Leninistic fashion, is quite busy with cooking up an alliance with Hitler's imperialism. Is it necessary to offer more examples? Historical experience teaches that all compromises between revolution and counter-revolution can serve only the latter. They lead only to the bankruptcy of the revolutionary movement. All policy of compromise is a policy of bankruptcy.

What began as a mere compromise with the German Social Democracy found its end in Hitler. What Lenin justified as a necessary compromise found its end in Stalin. In diagnosing revolutionary non-compromise as "An Infantile Disease of Communism", Lenin was suffering from the old age disease of opportunism, of pseudo-communism.

## VII.

If one looks with critical eyes at the picture of bolshevism provided by Lenin's pamphlet, the following main points may be recognized as characteristics of bolshevism:

1. Bolshevism is a nationalistic doctrine. Originally and essentially conceived to solve a national problem, it was later elevated to a theory and practice of international scope and to a general doctrine. Its nationalistic character comes to light also in its position on the struggle for national independence of suppressed nations.

2. Bolshevism is an authoritarian system. The peak of the social pyramid is the most important and determining point. Authority is realized in the all-powerful person. In the leader myth the bourgeois personality ideal celebrates its highest triumphs.

3. Organizationally, Bolshevism is highly centralistic. The central committee has responsibility for all initiative, leadership, instruction, commands. As in the bourgeois state, the leading members of the organization play the role of the bourgeoisie; the sole role of the workers is to obey orders.

4. Bolshevism represents a militant power policy. Exclusively interested in political power, it is no different from the forms of rule in the traditional bourgeois sense. Even in the organization proper there is no self-determination by the members. The army serves the

party as the great example of organization.

5. Bolshevism is dictatorship. Working with brute force and terroristic measures, it directs all its functions toward the suppression of all non-bolshevik institutions and opinions. Its "dictatorship of the proletariat" is the dictatorship of a bureaucracy or a single person.

6. Bolshevism is a mechanistic method. It aspires to the automatic co-ordination, the technically secured conformity, and the most efficient totalitarianism as a goal of social order. The centralistically "planned" economy consciously confuses technical-organizational problems with socio-economic questions.

7. The social structure of Bolshevism is of a bourgeois nature. It does not abolish the wage system and refuses proletarian self-determination over the products of labour. It remains therewith fundamentally within the class frame of the bourgeois social order. Capitalism is perpetuated.

8. Bolshevism is a revolutionary element only in the frame of the bourgeois revolution. Unable to realize the soviet system, it is thereby unable to transform essentially the structure of bourgeois society and its economy. It establishes not socialism but state capitalism.

9. Bolshevism is not a bridge leading eventually into the socialist society. Without the soviet system, without the total radical revolution of men and things, it cannot fulfil the most essential of all socialistic demands, which is to end the capitalist human-self-alienation. It represents the last stage of bourgeois society and not the first step towards a new society.

These nine points represent an unbridgeable opposition between bolshevism and socialism. They demonstrate with all necessary clarity the bourgeois character of the bolshevist movement and its close relationship to fascism. Nationalism, authoritarianism, centralism, leader dictatorship, power policies, terror-

rule, mechanistic dynamics, inability to socialize—all these essential characteristics of fascism were and are existing in bolshevism. Fascism is merely a copy of bolshevism. For this reason the struggle against the one must begin with the struggle against the other.



Franz Seiwert, Knowledge of the world drives us to change the world. 1924

# The Revolution Is Not A Party Affair

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Otto Rühle 1920

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## I

Parliamentarism appeared with the domination of the bourgeoisie. Political parties appeared with parliament.

In parliaments the bourgeois epoch found the historical arena of its first contentions with the crown and nobility. It organised itself politically and gave legislation a form corresponding to the needs of capitalism. But capitalism is not something homogeneous. The various strata and interest groups within the bourgeoisie each developed demands with differing natures. In order to bring these demands to a successful conclusion, the parties were created which sent their representatives and activists to the parliaments. Parliament became a forum, a place for all the struggles for economic and political power, at first for legislative power but then, within the framework of the parliamentary system, for governmental power. But the parliamentary struggles as struggles between parties, are only battles of words. Programmes, journalistic polemics, tracts, meeting reports, resolutions, parliamentary debates, decisions – nothing but words. Parliament degenerated into a talking shop (increasingly as time passed). But from the start parties were only mere machines for preparing for elections. It was no chance that they originally were called “electoral associations.”

The bourgeoisie, parliamentarism, and political parties mutually and reciprocally conditioned one another. Each is necessary for the others. None is conceivable without the others. They mark the political physiognomy of the bourgeois system, of the bourgeois-capitalist system.

## II

The revolution of 1848 was still-born. But the democratic state, the ideal of the bourgeois era was erected. The bourgeoisie, impotent and faint-hearted by nature provided no force and displayed no will to realise this ideal in the struggle. It knuckled under to the crown and the nobility, contenting itself with the right to exploit the masses economically and so reducing parliamentarism to a parody.

So resulted the need for the working class to send representatives to parliament. These then took the democratic demands out of the perfidious hands of the bourgeoisie. They carried out energetic propaganda for them. They tried to inscribe them in legislation. Social-Democracy adopted a minimum democratic programme to this end: a programme of immediate and practical demands adapted to the bourgeois period. Its parliamentary activity was dominated by this programme. It was also dominated by a concern to gain the advantages of a legalised field of manoeuvre both for the working class and its own political activity, through the construction and perfection of a liberal-bourgeois formal democracy.

When Wilhelm Liebknecht proposed a refusal to take up parliamentary seats, it was a matter of failing to recognise the historical situation. If Social-Democracy wanted to be effective as a political party, it would have to enter parliament. There was no other way to act and to develop politically.



When the syndicalists turned away from parliamentarism and preached anti-parliamentarism, this did honour to their appreciation of the growing emptiness and corruption of parliamentary practice. But in practice, they demanded something impossible of Social-Democracy: that it take a position contrary to the historical situation and renounce itself. It could not take up this view. As a political party it had to enter parliament.

### III

The KPD has also become a political party, a party in the historical sense, like the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Independent Social-Democrats (USPD).

The leaders have the first say. They speak, they promise, they seduce, they command. The masses, when they are there, find themselves faced with a *fait-accompli*. They have to form up in ranks and march in step. They have to believe, to be silent, and pay up. They have to receive their orders and carry them out. And they have to vote.

Their leaders want to enter parliament. They have to elect them. Then while the masses abide by silent obedience and devoted passivity, the leaders decide the policy in parliament.

The KPD has become a political party. It also wants to enter parliament. It lies when it tells the masses that it only wants to enter parliament in order to destroy it. It lies when it states that it does not want to carry out any positive work in parliament. It will not destroy parliament; it doesn't want to and it can't. It will do "positive work" in parliament, it is forced to, it wants to. This is its life.

The KPD has become a parliamentary party like any other; a party of compromise, opportunism,

criticism and verbal jousting, a party that has ceased to be revolutionary.

#### IV

Consider this:

It entered parliament. It recognised the trade unions. It bowed before the democratic constitution. It makes peace with the ruling powers. It places itself on the terrain of real force relations. It takes part in the work of national and capitalist reconstruction.

How is it different from the USPD? It criticises instead of repudiating. It acts as the opposition instead of making the revolution. It bargains instead of acting. It chatters away instead of struggling. That is why it had ceased to be a revolutionary organisation.

It has become a Social-Democratic party. Only a few nuances distinguish it from the Scheidemanns (SPD) and the Däumigs (USPD). This is how it has finished up.

#### V

The masses have one consolation – there is an opposition. But this opposition has not broken away from the counter-revolution. What could it do? What has it done? It has assembled and united a political organisation. Was this necessary?

From a revolutionary point of view the most decisive and active elements, the most mature elements have to form themselves into a phalanx of the revolution. They can only do this through a firm and solid foundation. They are the elite of the new revolutionary proletariat. By the firm character of their organisation they gain in strength and their judgment develops a greater profundity. They demonstrate themselves as the vanguard of the proletariat, as an active will in relation to hesitant and confused individuals. At decisive moments they form a magnetic centre of all activity. They are a

political organisation but not a political party, not a party in the traditional sense.

The title of the Communist Workers Party (KAPD) is the last external vestige – soon superfluous – of a tradition that can't be simply wiped away when the living mass ideology of yesterday no longer has any relevance. But this last vestige will also be removed.

The organisation of communists in the front line of the revolution must not be the usual sort of party, on pain of death, on pain of following the course of the KPD.

The epoch of the foundation of parties is over, because the epoch of political parties in general is over. The KPD is the last party. Its bankruptcy is the most shameful, its end is without dignity or glory. ... But what comes of the opposition? of the revolution?

## VI

The revolution is not a party affair. The three social-democratic parties (SPD, USPD, KPD) are so foolish as to consider the revolution as their own party affair and to proclaim the victory of the revolution as their party goal. The revolution is the political and economic affair of the totality of the proletarian class. Only the proletariat as a class can lead the revolution to victory. Everything else is superstition, demagoguery and political chicanery. The proletariat must be conceived of as a class and its activity for the revolutionary struggle unleashed on the broadest possible basis and in the most extensive framework.

This is why all proletarians ready for revolutionary combat must be got together at the workplace in revolutionary factory organisations, regardless of their political origins or the basis by which they are recruited. Such groups should be united in the framework of the General Workers' Union (AAU).

The AAU is not indiscriminate, it is not a hotch-potch nor a chance amalgam. It is a regroupment for all proletarian elements ready for revolutionary activity, who declare themselves for class struggle, the council system and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is the revolutionary army of the proletariat.

This General Workers' Union is taking root in the factories, building itself up in branches of industry from the base up federally at the base, and through revolutionary shop-stewards at the top. It exerts pressure from the base up, from the working masses. It is built according to their needs; it is the flesh and blood of the proletariat; the force that motivates it is the action of the masses; its soul is the burning breath of the revolution. It is not the creation of some leaders, it is not a subtly altered construction. It is neither a political party with parliamentary chatter and paid hacks, nor a trade union. It is the revolutionary proletariat.

## VII

So what will the KAPD do?

It will create revolutionary factory organisations. It will propagate the General Workers' Union. Factory by factory, industry by industry it will organise the revolutionary masses. They will be prepared for the onslaught, given the power for decisive combat, until the last resistance offered by capitalism as it collapses is overcome.

It will inspire the fighting masses with confidence in their own strength, the guarantee for victory in that confidence will free them ambitious and traitorous leaders.

From this General Workers' Union the communist movement will emerge, starting in the factories, then spreading itself over economic regions and finally over the entire country, i.e. a new communist

“party” which is no longer a party, but which is, for the time communist! The heart and head of the revolution!

## VIII

We shall show this process in a concrete way:

There are 200 men in a factory. Some of them belong to the AAU and agitate for it, at first without success. But during the first struggle the trade unions naturally give in and the old bonds are broken. Some 100 men have gone over to the AAU. Amongst them there are 20 communists, the others being from the USPD, syndicalists and unorganised. At the beginning the USPD inspires most confidence. Its politics dominate the tactics of the struggles carried out in the factory. However slowly but surely, the politics of the USPD are proved false, non-revolutionary. The confidence that the workers have in the USPD decreases. The politics of the communists are confirmed. The 20 communists become 50 then 100 and more. Soon the communist group politically dominates the whole of the factory, determining the tactics of the AAU, at the front of the revolutionary struggle. This is so both at the small scale and large scale. Communist politics take root from factory to factory, from economic region to economic region. They are realised, gaining command becoming both body and head, the guiding principle.

It is from such communist groups in the factories, from mass sections of communists in the economic regions that the new communist movement through the council system will come into being. As for “revolutionising” the trade unions or “restructuring” them. How long will that take? A few years? A few dozen years? Until 1926 perhaps. Anyway, the aim could not be to wipe out the clay giant of the trade unions with their 7 million members in order to reconstruct them in another form.

The aim is to seize hold of the commanding levers of industry for the process of social production and so to decisively carry the day in revolutionary combat, to seize hold of the lever that will let the air out of the capitalist system in entire industrial regions and branches.

It is here, in a mature situation, that the resolute action of a single organisation can completely surpass a general strike in effectiveness. It is here that the David of the factory can defeat the Goliath of the union bureaucracy.

## IX

The KPD has ceased to be the incarnation of the communist movement in Germany. Despite its noisy claims about Marx, Lenin and Radek it only forms the latest member of the counter-revolutionary united front. Soon it will present itself as the amiable companion of the SPD and USPD in the framework of a purely “socialist” workers’ government. Its assurance of being a “loyal” opposition to the murderous parties who have betrayed the workers is the first step. To renounce the revolutionary extermination of the Eberts and the Kautskys is already to tacitly ally oneself with them.

Ebert – Kautsky – Levi. The final stage of capitalism reaches its end, the last political relief of the German bourgeoisie the end.

The end also of parties, the politics of the parties, the deceit and treachery of the parties.

It is a new beginning for the communist movement the communist workers party, the revolutionary factory organisations regrouped in the General Workers’ Union, the revolutionary councils, the congress of revolutionary councils, the government of the revolutionary councils, the communist dictatorship of the councils.





Gerd Arntz, Crisis 1931



# The Passing of Marxian Orthodoxy: Bernstein- Kautsky-Luxemburg- Lenin

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Nothing reveals in such glaring colors the enormous contrast which have existed in the last thirty years between the *being* and *consciousness*, between the *ideology* and the *actuality* of the proletarian movement as does the final issue of that great dispute whose first passage at arms has come down in the annals of party history under the name of the "*Bernstein Debate*." Having to do with both the theory and the practice of the socialist movement, it erupted publicly for the first time in the German and international Social Democracy, now a generation ago, shortly after the death of Friedrich Engels. When at that time Edward Bernstein, who was already able to look back upon important achievements in the field of Marxism, expressed for the first time from his exile in London his "heretical" opinions (drawn mainly from study of the English labor movement) regarding *the real relation between theory and practice in the German and all-European socialist movement of the time*, his views and designs were for the moment and still for a long while thereafter, both among friends and foes, uniformly misinterpreted and misunderstood.

In the entire bourgeois press and specialized

literature his work "Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie" was greeted with hymns of joy and showered with paeans of praise. The leader of the then just founded National Socialist Party - the social-imperialist ideologist Friedrich Naumann - declared in his sheet, without circumlocution: "Bernstein is our farthest advanced post in the camp of the Social Democracy." And in broad circles of the liberal bourgeoisie there existed at the time the confident hope that this first fundamental "revisionist" of Marxism in the Marxist camp would formally also separate himself from the socialist movement and desert to the bourgeois reform movement.

These hopes of the bourgeoisie found their counterpart in a strong sentiment from the camp of the Social Democratic party and trade union movement of the time. However much the leaders of this movement were privately clear on the point that Bernstein's "revision" of the Marxist program of the Social Democracy was nothing more than the public blurting out of the development *which had long since been accomplished in practice* and through which the Social Democratic movement *had been transformed from a revolutionary class struggle movement into a political and social reform movement*, still they took good care not to give utterance to this inner knowledge toward the outside. Bernstein having ended his book with his advice to the party that it "might venture to appear that it is: a democratically socialist reform party," he was confidentially tapped on the shoulder (in a private letter published later) by that sly old demagog of the party executive committee, Ignaz Auer, with the friendly warning: "My dear Eddy, that is something which one does, but does not say." In their public utterances, all the practical and theoretical spokesmen of the German and of the international Social Democracy, the Bebels and Kautskys, Victor Adlers and

Plekhanovs, and by whatever name they are called, were opposed to the insolent blabber of the carefully guarded secret. At the party congress in Hanover in 1899, in a four-day debate opened by Bebel with a six-hour report, Bernstein was subjected to a regular trial. He barely managed to avoid formal exclusion from the party. For many years thereafter, Bernstein was the butt of attack before the members and the voters, in the press and party meetings, at the great official party and trade union congresses; notwithstanding the fact that Bernstein's revisionism had already been victorious in the trade unions and finally was no longer to be resisted in the party either, the *anti-capitalist revolutionary "class-struggle party"* continued to be played without hesitation, literally to the very last moment—that is, until just before the closing of the social peace pact of 1914, followed by the pact of partnership between capital and labor in 1918.

For this double-faced attitude toward the first serious attempt at a *theoretical formulation of the actual ends and means of the bourgeois labor policy which they actually practiced*, the practical and theoretical representatives of the policy pursued by the Social Democratic party executive and the affiliated trade-union apparatus had their good reasons. Just as today the representatives of the Communist Party apparatus in Russia and in all national sections of the Communist International, in order to veil the actual character of their policy, need the pious legend of the ever-advancing "*construction of socialism in the Soviet Union*" and of the "revolutionary" character (guaranteed if only by that very fact) of the whole policy and tactic, at any particular time, of all Communist party leadership in all countries, so at that time the crafty demagogues in the Social Democratic party executive and at the head of the trade-union apparatus needed, for the concealment of their actual tendencies, the pious legend that the movement which they were

conducting was obliged, to be sure, for the present time, to restrict itself to merely tinkering at the bourgeois state and the capitalist economic order by way of all sorts of reforms, but that “*in the final goal*” it was on the way to the social revolution, to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of the capitalist economic and social order.

But it was not only the demagogues of the Social Democratic party executive and their “theoretical” advocates who, through the pseudo-struggle which they waged at that time against Bernstein’s revisionism, lent aid to the danger of an advancing reformist and bourgeois degeneration of the socialist movement. Rather in the same direction with them there worked for a considerable time, unconsciously and against their will, also such radical revolutionary theoreticians as Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and Lenin in Russia, who according to their subjective design conducted a serious and uncompromising struggle against the tendency expressed by Bernstein. When at the present time, on the basis of the new experiences of the last three decades, we look back on those earlier directional struggles within the German and all-European labor movement, it is somewhat tragic to see how deeply even Luxemburg and Lenin were stuck in the illusion that “Bernsteinism” represented only a deviation from the basically revolutionary character of the then Social Democratic movement, and with what objectively inadequate formulas they too sought to conduct the struggle against the bourgeois degeneration of the socialist party and trade union policy.

Rosa Luxemburg closed her polemic against Bernstein, published in the year 1900 under the title “Sozialreform oder Revolution?” with the catastrophically false prophecy that “*Bernstein’s theory was the first, and at the same time the last attempt to give a theoretic base to*

*opportunism.*” She was of the opinion that opportunism, in Bernstein’s book in theory, and in Schippel’s position on the question of militarism in practice, “*had gone so far that nothing more remained for it to do.*” And although Bernstein had emphatically stated that he “almost completely accepted the present practice of the Social Democracy” and at the same time had devastatingly laid bare the entire practical insignificance of the then usual revolutionary phase of the “final goal” with his open acknowledgement: “*The final goal, of whatsoever nature, is nothing to me; the movement everything,*” still Rosa Luxemburg, in a remarkable *ideological bedazzlement*, did not direct her critical counterattack against the Social Democratic practice but against Bernstein’s theory, which was nothing more than a truthful expression of the actual character of that practice. The feature by which the Social Democratic movement was distinguished from the bourgeois reform policy, she saw not in practice but expressed in the “*final goal*” added on to this practice merely as ideology and very often only as a phrase. She declared passionately that “*the final goal of socialism constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism*, the only factor transforming the entire labor movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order.” This general “final goal” which according to the words of Rosa Luxemburg should be everything, and by which the Social Democratic movement of that time was distinguished from the bourgeois reform politics, revealed itself in subsequent actual history as in fact that *nothing* which Bernstein, the sober observer of reality, had already termed it.

For all those people whose eyes have not yet been opened by all the facts of the last fifteen years, a convincing confirmation of this historical state of

affairs is furnished by the express declarations on the matter which have come from the main participants themselves on the occasion of the various "Marxian" anniversary celebrations of recent times. Among these belongs, for example, that memorable banquet which was arranged in 1924 by the exemplars of Social Democratic Marxism, who were assembled in London for the sixtieth anniversary celebration of the first "International Working Men's Association" in honor of *the seventieth birthday of Kautsky*. Here the historical "dispute" between Kautsky's "revolutionary orthodox Marxism" and Bernstein's "revisionist" reformism found its harmonious close in those "words of friendship" (reported by "Vorwaerts") spoken by the seventy-five-year old Bernstein in honor of the seventy-year old Kautsky and in the symbolical embracing ceremony by which the words were followed: "When Bernstein had ended, and the two old men whose names have long since become honorable to a younger, the third generation, embraced each other and remained for several seconds clasped together—who on that occasion could avoid being moved, who could wish to avoid it?" And in the year 1930, the seventy-five-year old Kautsky writes in exactly the same sense in the Social Democratic "Kampf" of Vienna, in honor of the eightieth birthday of Bernstein: "In party-political matters we have been since 1880 Siamese twins. Even such persons can quarrel occasionally. We have attended to that now and then quite extensively. But even at such times it was impossible to speak of the one without thinking also of the other."

Subsequent testimonials of Bernstein and Kautsky illuminate quite dearly the tragic misunderstanding with which in the pre-war period those German left-radicals who, under the slogan "*revolutionary final goal against reformist daily practice*," sought to conduct the struggle against the practical and

m the last analysis also theoretical bourgeoisification of the Social Democratic labor movement, in reality merely supported and promoted this historical process of development carried out by Bernstein and Kautsky in their respective roles. With due allowances, the same may be said, however, of still another slogan by means of which in the same period the Russian Marxist Lenin, in his own country and on an international scale, sought to draw the dividing line between the bourgeois and the “revolutionary” labor policy. Just as Rosa Luxemburg in her subjective consciousness was the sharpest adversary of Bernsteinism, and in the first edition of “Reform or Revolution?” in the year 1900 still expressly demanded Bernstein’s exclusion from the Social Democratic party, so also was Lenin subjectively a deadly enemy of the “renegade” Bernstein, and of all the heretical deviations committed by him, in his “herostratically celebrated” book, from the pure and undefiled doctrine of the “revolutionary” Marxist program. But exactly like Luxemburg and the German left-radical Social Democrats, so also the Bolshevist Social Democrat Lenin made use, for this struggle against Social Democratic revisionism, of a wholly *ideological platform*, in that he sought the guarantee for the “revolutionary” character of the labor movement, not in its actual economic and social class content, but expressly only in the *leadership of this struggle by way of the revolutionary PARTY guided by a correct Marxist theory*.

### Notes

1. Translated by Edith C. Harvey under the title “Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation” and published in London (1909) by the Independent Labor Party.
2. “Reform or Revolution?” Three Arrows Press, 21 E. 17th Street, New York. 25 cents.



Gerd Arntz, Factory Inspection 1935



# Marxism and the Present Task of the Proletarian Class Struggle

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Karl Korsch 1938

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*Let the dead bury their dead.  
The proletarian revolution must  
at last arrive at its own content.*

Marx

Of Karl Marx may be said what Geoffroy St. Hilaire said of Darwin that it was his fate and his glory to have had only forerunners before him and only disciples after him. Of course, there stood at his side a congenial life-long friend and collaborator, Friedrich Engels. There were in the next generation the theoretical standard-bearers of the “revisionist” and the “orthodox” wings of the German Marxist party, Bernstein and Kautsky and, besides these pseudo-savants, such real scholars of Marxism as Antonio Labriola the Italian, Georges Sorel in France, and the Russian philosopher Plekhanov. There came at a later stage an apparently full restoration of the long forgotten revolutionary elements of the Marxian thought by Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and by Lenin in Russia.

During the same period Marxism was embraced by millions of workers throughout the world as a guide for their practical action. There was an imposing

succession of organizations, from the secret Communist League of 1848 and the Working Men's International Association of 1864 to the rise of powerful Social Democratic parties on a national scale in all important European countries and to an ultimate coordination of their scanty international activities in the so-called Second International of the pre-war period which after its collapse found its eventual resurrection in the shape of a militant *Communist party* on a world-wide scale.

Yet there was, during all this time, no corresponding internal growth of the Marxian theory itself beyond those powerful ideas which had been contained within the first scheme of the new revolutionary science as devised by Marx.

Very few Marxists up to the end of the nineteenth century did so much as find anything wrong with this state of affairs. Even when the first attacks of the so-called revolutionists brought about what a radical bourgeois socialist, the later first president of the Czechoslovak republic, Th. G. Mazaryk, then called a philosophical and scientific "crisis of Marxism," the Marxists regarded the condition existing within their own camp as a mere struggle between an "orthodox" Marxist faith and a deplorable "heresy." The ideological character of this wholesale identification of an established doctrine with the revolutionary struggle of the working class is further enhanced by the fact that the leading representatives of the Marxian orthodoxy of the time, including Kautsky in Germany and Lenin in Russia, persistently denied the very possibility that a true revolutionary consciousness could ever originate with the workers themselves. The revolutionary political aims, according to them, had to be introduced into the economic class struggle of the workers "*from without*" i.e. by the theoretical endeavors of radical bourgeois thinkers "equipped with all the culture of the age, such

as Lassalle, Marx, and Engels. Thus, the identity of a bourgeois-bred doctrine with all present and future truly revolutionary struggles of the proletarian class assumed the character of a veritable miracle. Even those most radical Marxists who came nearest to the recognition of a spontaneous development of the proletarian class struggle beyond the restricted aim pursued by the leading bureaucracies of the existing Social Democratic parties and trade unions, never dreamt of denying this pre-established harmony between the Marxist doctrine and the actual proletarian movement. As Rosa Luxemburg said in 1903, and the Bolshevik Rjazanov repeated in 1928, "every new and higher stage of the proletarian class struggle can borrow from the inexhaustible arsenal of the Marxist theory ever-new weapons as needed by that new stage of the emancipatory fight of the working class."

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the more general aspects of this peculiar theory of the Marxists concerning the origin and development of their own revolutionary doctrine, a theory which in the last analysis amounts to a denial of the possibility of an independent proletarian class culture. We refer to it in our present context only as one of the many contradictions to be swallowed by those who in striking contrast to the critical and materialistic principle of Marx dealt with "Marxism" as an essentially completed, and now unchangeable, doctrine.

A further difficulty of this quasi-religious attitude towards Marxism arises from the fact that the Marxian theory was never adopted as a whole by any socialist group or party. "Orthodox" Marxism was at no time more than a formal attitude by which the leading group of the German Social Democratic party in the pre-war period concealed from themselves the ever-continuing deterioration of their own formerly revolutionary

practice. It was only this difference of procedure which separated what distinguished “orthodox” form from an openly revisionistic form of adapting the traditional Marxist doctrine to the new “needs” of the workers’ movement arising from the changed conditions of the new historical period.

When amidst the storm and stress of the revolutionary struggle of 1917, in view of a “clearly maturing international proletarian revolution,” Lenin set himself the task to restate *the Marxian theory of the state and the tasks of the proletariat in the revolution*, he no longer contented himself with mere ideological defense of an assumedly existing orthodox interpretation of the Marxist theory. He started from the premise that revolutionary Marxism had been totally destroyed and abandoned both by the opportunist minority and by the outspoken social-chauvinist majority of all Marxist parties and trade unions of the late Second International. He openly announced that Marxism was dead and proclaimed an integral “*restoration*” of *revolutionary Marxism*.

There is no doubt that “revolutionary Marxism,” as restored by Lenin, has led the proletarian class to its first historical victory. This fact must be emphasized not only against the pseudo-Marxist detractors of the “barbarous” communism of the Bolsheviks—as against the “refined” and “cultured” socialism of the West. It must be emphasized also against the present beneficiaries of the revolutionary victory of the Russian workers, who have gradually passed from the revolutionary Marxism of the early years to a no longer communist but merely “socialist” and democratic creed called *Stalinism*. In the same way, on an international scale a mere “anti-fascist” coalition of the united fronts, people’s fronts, and national fronts was gradually substituted for the revolutionary class struggle waged by the proletariat against the whole

economic and political regime of the bourgeoisie of the democratic” as well as in the fascist, the “pro-Russian” as well as the anti-Russian, states.

In the face of these later developments of Lenin’s work, it is no longer possible to stick to the idea that the restored old revolutionary principles of Marxism, which during the war and the immediate post-war period had been advocated by Lenin and Trotsky, resulted in a genuine revival of the revolutionary proletarian movement which in the past had been associated with the name of Marx. For a limited period it seemed, indeed, that the true spirit of revolutionary Marxism had gone east. The striking contradictions soon appearing within the policy of the ruling revolutionary party in Soviet Russia, both on the economic and on the political fields, were considered as a mere outcome of the sad fact that the “international proletarian revolution” firmly expected by Lenin and Trotsky did not mature. Yet in the light of later facts there is no doubt that ultimately, Soviet Marxism as a revolutionary proletarian theory and practice has shared the fate of that “orthodox” Marxism of the West from which it had sprung and from which it had split only under the extraordinary conditions of the war and the ensuing revolutionary outbreak in Russia. When finally in 1933, by the unopposed victory of the counterrevolutionary “*national socialism*,” in the traditional center of revolutionary *international socialism*, it became manifest that “Marxism did not deliver the goods,” that judgment applied to the Eastern Communist as well as to the Western Social Democratic church of the Marxist faith, and the separate factions were at last united in a common defeat.

In order to make intelligible the true significance and the far reaching further implications of this most important lesson of the recent history of Marxism, we must trace back the duplex character of the “*revolutionary*

*dictatorship of the proletarian class*" which has become widely conspicuous by recent events both within present-day Stalinist Russia and on an international scale, to an original duplicity appearing in the different aspects of Marx's own achievements *as a proletarian theorist* and as a political leader in the revolutionary movement of his time. On the one hand, as early as 1843, he was in close contact with the most advanced manifestations of French socialism and communism. With Engels he founded the *Deutsche Arbeiterbildungsverein* in Brussels in 1847 and set about to found an international organization of proletarian correspondence committees. Soon afterwards, they both joined the first international organization of the militant proletariat, the *Bund der Kommunisten*, at whose request they wrote the famous "Manifesto" proclaiming the proletariat as "the only revolutionary class."

On the other hand, Marx as an editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* during the actual revolutionary outbreak of 1848 expressed mainly the most radical demands of the bourgeois democracy. He strove to maintain a united front between the bourgeois revolutionary movement in Germany and the more advanced forms in which a struggle for direct socialist aims was at that time already waged in the more developed industrial countries of the West. He wrote his most brilliant and powerful article in defense of the Paris proletariat after its crushing defeat in June, 1848. But he did not bring forward in his paper the specific claims of the German proletariat until a few weeks before its final suppression by the victorious counterrevolution of 1849. Even then, he stated the workers' case in a somewhat abstract manner by reproducing in the columns of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* the economic lectures dealing with *Wage Labor and Capital* which he had given two years before in the *Arbeiterbildungsverein* at Brussels.

Similarly, by his contributions in the 1850's and 60's to Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, to the *New American Cyclopaedia* edited by George Ripley and Charles Dana, to Chartist publications in England, and to German and Austrian newspapers, Marx revealed himself chiefly as a spokesman of the radical democratic policies which, he hoped, would ultimately lead to a war of the democratic West against reactionary tsarist Russia.

An explanation of this apparent dualism is to be found in the *Jacobinic pattern* of the revolutionary doctrine which Marx and Engels had adopted before the February Revolution of 1848 and to which they remained faithful, on the whole, even after the outcome of that revolution had finally wrecked their former enthusiastic hopes. Although they realized the necessity of adjusting tactics to changed historical conditions, their own theory of revolution, even in its latest and most advanced materialistic form, kept the peculiar character of the transitory period during which the proletarian class was still bound to proceed towards its own social emancipation by passing through the intermediate stage of a preponderantly political revolution.

It is true that the revolutionary political effects of the economic warfare of the trade unions and of the other forms of championing immediate and specific labor interests became increasingly important for Marx during his later years, as attested by his leading role in the organization and direction of the International Working Men's Association in the 60s and by his contributions to the programs and tactics of the various national parties in the 70s. But it is also true, and is clearly shown by the internecine battles waged within the International by the Marxists against the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin, that Marx and Engels never really abandoned their earlier views on the decisive importance of politics as the only conscious and fully developed form of

revolutionary class action. There is only a difference of languages between the cautious enrolment of “political action” as a subordinate means to the ultimate goal of the “economic emancipation of the working class” as contained in the Rules of the IWMA of 1864, and the open proclamation, in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, that “every class struggle is a political struggle” and that the “organization of the proletarians into a class” presupposes their “organization into a political party.” Thus, Marx, from the first to the last, defined his concept of class in ultimately political terms and, in fact though not in words, subordinated the multiple activities exerted by the masses in their daily class struggle to the activities exerted on their behalf by their political leaders.

This appears even more distinctly in those rare and extraordinary situations in which Marx and Engels during their later years again were called to deal with actual attempts at a European revolution. Witness Marx’s reaction to the revolutionary *Commune* of the Paris workers in 1871, Witness further Marx’s and Engels’ apparently inconsistent positive attitude toward the entirely idealistic attempts of the revolutionary *Narodnaja Volja* to enforce by terroristic action the outbreak of “a political and thus also a social revolution” under the backward conditions prevailing in the 70s and 80s in tsarist Russia. As shown in detail in an earlier article (*Living Marxism*, March 1938), Marx and Engels were not only prepared to regard the approaching revolutionary outbreak in Russia as a signal for a general European revolution of the Jacobin type in which (as Engels told Vera Sassulitch in 1883) “if the year 1789 once comes, the year 1793 will follow.” They actually hailed the Russian and all-European revolution as a workers revolution and the starting point of a Communistic development.

There is then no point in the objection raised



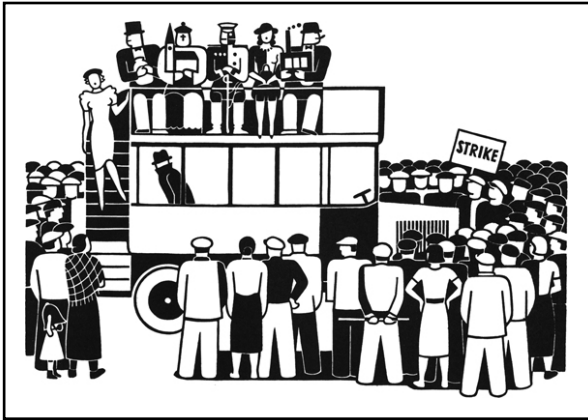
by the, Mensheviks and other schools of the traditional Western type of Marxist orthodoxy that the *Marxism of Lenin* was in fact only the return to an earlier form of the *Marxism of Marx* which later had been replaced by a *more mature and materialistic form*. It is quite true that the very similarity between the historical situation arising in Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century and the conditions prevailing in Germany, Austria, and elsewhere at the eve of the European revolution of 1848 explains the otherwise unexplainable fact that the latest phase of the revolutionary movement of our time could have been represented at all under the paradoxical form of an ideological return to the past. Nevertheless, as shown above revolutionary Marxism as “restored” by Lenin did conform, in its purely theoretical contents, much more with the true spirit of all historical phases of the Marxian doctrine than that Social Democratic Marxism of the preceding period which after all, in spite of its loudly professed “orthodoxy,” had never been more than a mutilated and travestied form of the Marxian theory, vulgarizing its real contents, and blunting its revolutionary edge. It is for this very reason that Lenin’s experiment in the “restoration” of revolutionary Marxism confirmed most convincingly the utter futility of any attempt to draw the theory of the revolutionary action of the working class not from its own contents but from any “myth.” It has shown, above all, the ideological perversity of the idea to supplant the existing deficiencies of the present action by an imaginary return to a mythicized past. While such awakening of a dead revolutionary ideology may possibly help for a certain time, as the Russian revolution has shown, to conceal from the makers of the revolutionary “October” the historical limitations of their heroic efforts, it is bound to result ultimately not in finding once more the spirit of that earlier revolutionary movement but only in making

its ghost walk again. It has resulted, in our time, in a new and “revolutionary Marxist” form of the suppression and exploitation of the proletarian class in Soviet Russia, and in an equally new and “revolutionary Marxist” form of crushing genuine revolutionary movements in Spain and all over the world.

All this shows clearly that Marxism today could only be “restored” in its original form by its transformation into a mere ideology serving an altogether different purpose and, indeed, a whole scale of changing political purposes. It serves, at this very moment as an ideological screen for the debunking of the hitherto predominant role of the ruling party itself and for the further enhancement of the quasi-fascist personal leadership of Stalin and of his all-adaptable agencies. At the same time, on the international scene, the so-called anti-fascist policy of the “Marxist” Comintern has come to play in the present struggles between the various alliances of capitalist powers exactly the same role as its opposite, the “anticommunist” and “anti-Marxist” international policy of the regimes of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese warlords.

It should be understood that the whole criticism raised above concerns *only the ideological endeavours* of the last fifty years to “preserve” or to “restore,” for immediate application, a thoroughly mythicized “revolutionary Marxist doctrine.” Nothing in this article is directed against the scientific results reached by Marx and Engels and a few of their followers on various fields of social research which in many ways hold good to this day. Above all, nothing in this article is directed against what may be called, in a very comprehensive sense, *the Marxist, that is, the independent revolutionary movement of the international working class*. There seems to be good reason, in the search for what is living or may be recalled to life in the present deathly standstill of the revolutionary workers’

movement, to “return” to that practical and not merely ideological broadmindedness by which *the first Marxist (at the same time Proudhonist, Blanquist, Bakuninist, trade-unionist, etc.) International Working Men’s Association* welcomed into its ranks all workers who subscribed to the principle of an independent proletarian class struggle. As enunciated in the first of its rules, drawn up by Marx, “*the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.*”



Gerd Arntz, Strike 1936

# The World Revolution

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Herman Gorter 1917 - 1918.

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## Foreword

Herman Gorter, the writer of this pamphlet, is a well known Dutch poet and social-revolutionary. He has long been a prominent figure in Socialist circles on the Continent, and quite recently has been made Professor of Moscow University. He well deserves the distinction that the Soviet Government has bestowed upon him. When so many Socialists lost themselves in opportunism and patriotism, he was one of the few whose vision was not blurred, and whose devotion to the cause of

Socialism was never in doubt. He was one of the very few whose judgment was always founded on knowledge and inspired by love. The light that he has held up so constantly and devotedly is now reflected in the spirit of the advance guard of the Dutch proletariat. And the light that Gorter has held up is the same light that was held up by the Dutch poetess, Henriette Roland-Holst, and by that brilliant writer on Socialism, Professor Pannekoek.

May these "neutrals" create among the workers of the world that atmosphere of confidence, the absence of which was one of the causes of the division of the world-proletariat into hostile camps—a division that made war possible—a war whose burden was, is, and unless they are united in revolution, will continue to be, thrown across the shoulders of the proletarians of all countries

With regard to the pamphlet itself, it is a continuation of the pamphlet "Imperialism, World War, and Social Democracy." The latter pamphlet, which has not yet appeared in English, proved the necessity of the unity of the world-proletariat in its struggle against world-Imperialism. This pamphlet shows that this struggle of the world-proletariat will be the proletarian revolution for Socialism. The first chapter, with the exception of a few sentences, was written in September, 1917. The last chapter was written in July, 1918.

The official Trade Union leaders in the Anglo-Saxon lands are becoming bolder in their Judas utterances, and more base than Judas with the gold.

They are bold because they know that the worker has not realised that he has been betrayed. And with the gold they have doubtless been helping to buy up the Joy Loans of a Capitalist State.

Their protests against Intervention in Russia have been putrid with hypocrisies.

Citizen armies—the new Capitalist Militarism—

are to be formed in all countries. In the British Empire, too, and yet who among these Labour leaders has taken action?

The Capitalists are about to recruit the middle classes, yet who of these Labour men has uttered a word of warning to these classes?

No, these Labour officials would delight to see Communism in England become a cult for suburbia, whilst they erected the most contemptible bureaucracy possible to imagine.

The war has taught Socialists many lessons.

After four and a half years the patriots who were clamorous for “no compromise” triumphed [sic] completely, with the result that the Ramsay Macdonalds could not tell where they were or how they stood.

So it will be with these compromisers, these confusionists. That abyss into which they tell us we are leading the world is their own inevitable death-trap. For it will be a good thing if this present civilisation crumbles away. The world-proletariat have it in them to create a better; but not to know what to do with an old and artificial civilisation, and not to have the moral and spiritual power to create a new one—is surely to be on the edge of an abyss.

In spite of these confusionists, real revolutionary Socialists have reason to be hopeful.

There is hope, because there is a body of workers in England, in Scotland, in Ireland, in America, in South Africa, in Australia—a body of workers whose thoughts are as clear as mid-day, and who will never allow their minds to be confused again. This body is growing in strength and numbers.

It has already entered the workshop as an “unofficial” movement.

These workers alone could assist Russia at the present moment. But they are a minority—a small

minority.

And every move they make is followed by persecution and imprisonment. One day, however, they will be assisted by a great force—the idea that saw the light of day in Russia will be once more triumphantly on the march.

Every British workman will then have to be at his post, and he will have to know and feel his awful responsibility. Until then—it might be said, the Russian Revolution has awakened in the British workman an interest not so much in Russia as in himself as a workman. This new knowledge is being accumulated and propagated. Intelligent action will follow on a main.

C. Malcolm.

## **Chapter 1: The Need for a World Revolution**

The world revolution approaches as a result of this first world-war.

Just as a terrific storm passing through an immense forest bends the trees on every side, so has the world-war bent the proletariat in all directions.

For years a misdirected propaganda had been carried on, aiming only at reform, and therefore not recognising the danger of Imperialism and of the approaching world-war. The world proletariat, deceived by their Governments, and betrayed by their leaders, were handed over to Imperialism and to the war.

But they will overcome all their differences and will once more in complete unity renew the struggle.

The war could only continue, and can only be carried on now, simply because the workers of the world are not United.

And the Russian Revolution, betrayed by the proletariat of Europe and America, and in the first instance by the German working class, shows clearly that



every revolution of the proletariat must ultimately fail if the international proletariat do not present a united front to world Imperialism.

The revolution draws near as a result of this first world war. The proletariat of Europe and America will rise against Imperialism, and after a long and bitter fight will bring it to an end. But Imperialism cannot be overthrown unless Capitalism is also overthrown.

The coming fight, the coming revolution, is also the social revolution, the revolution for Socialism. And the revolution of the European and American proletariat will finally establish Socialism throughout the whole world.

It is therefore not only a European and American revolution, but a world revolution that approaches.

It is the duty of all true revolutionaries to investigate the conditions of this revolution for Socialism, to prepare for it in advance, and to set up an international programme of our demands.

This will be done in the following pages.

The proletariat as a whole stands opposed to Imperialism. It stands against all the Imperialisms in the world.

There are no better or worse Imperialisms. The Imperialisms of the two great groups, Germany on the one hand, England and America on the other, are equally bad, and equally hateful, to the workers of the world.

This is the first thing that ought to be shown, for only when the workers realise that there is no choice between the two, that they are seriously threatened from both sides, and that there is no means of escape from the two frightful Imperialisms; only when the proletariat realise that, will they understand that a world revolution against world Imperialism is necessary for the workers of the world.

We will show in the first place the need of a

world revolution by showing the need of Imperialism to suppress and slaughter the proletariat, even after this war; and the similarity of these suppressions and murders by each and all Imperialisms.

Secondly, there is no way out of this suppression and slaughter, except by a world revolution. Thirdly, the practicability of a world-revolution and its programme. Fourthly, that the Russian Revolution is an example of the world revolution for the proletariat. In the 5th Chapter we shall review the whole.

The greatest opponents, the leaders, in the fight for world power—England and Germany—the only belligerents who had the might, which means the right, to carry on this struggle now stand face to face **On One Front**, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, with all their forces. The fight for world dominion has begun.

Russia, who had a bureaucratic and militaristic, but no strong Capitalist Imperialism, and who was therefore not ripe for this war, has dropped out. Only a few of the little States on both sides remain.

The United States of America have now entered the war, and it has now become in earnest a fight for the domination of the world.

If Germany wins she will rule Europe and a great part of Asia and Africa, and she will have made the first step towards world dominion. Should England and the United States win, then they will rule the world.

The United States realised this and therefore they entered the war. Like Rome and Carthage, Germany and England (with the United States) stand opposed. Rome and Carthage fought on the Mediterranean and its coasts: now the fight extends over every sea and ocean, and the lands between. And like the struggle of old, there is no hope of reconciliation; it must be a fight to a finish, till one side or the other is victorious.

This fight is for the domination of the world,

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and so long as people have this object in view they will use every means and make any sacrifice, even to the extent of sacrificing half the nation's young blood, in order to obtain it.

In the pamphlet, "Imperialism, the World War, and Social Democracy," I wrote that German Imperialism is as dangerous to the international proletariat as the English. I should now say, "as the English-American."

The question arises: Is that exactly true? Or is it simply a contention? Perhaps it is prompted by the wish to class all Imperialisms alike in order to make it more easy to secure the necessary unity of all the international proletariats.

Now let us examine this for a moment. Because if the Imperialism of one power be more dangerous to the international proletariat than the Imperialism of another, then the proletariat ought to desire the defeat of the first and oppose it with all its strength. Then could the welfare of the proletariat be ensured by the victory of one. Then would the revolution perhaps be almost impossible or unnecessary.

In order to ascertain clearly whether the victory of one Imperialism would bring greater disadvantage to the working class than other, we must picture to ourselves what would be the result of a complete victory of the one, and then of the other <sup>1</sup>.

If Germany is victorious that means that she can impose her own conditions. She will hold Belgium in her power; she will seize a still larger part of the coal-mining district of France; she will retain possession of Lithuania, Esthonia, Livonia, Courland, and Poland,

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1. In order to know how a thing operates we must examine it scientifically. We must do this here with both Imperialisms, and therefore must regard both as in possession of full power.

and perhaps Finland. She will make Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Rumania, and perhaps Greece, into dependencies of Austria. She will give Turkey territory up to the Persian Gulf. She will split Russia up into parts, making them German dependencies. She will rule the Balkans and Turkey; she will force France and Italy into an alliance with her; she will take back her Colonies, and some of the Colonies of the others.

Germany is then master from the coast of Flanders and Emden to the Persian Gulf; and through Siberia into northern and central Asia.

**Germany has reached the goal for which she planned and carried on the war.**

Germany, through her military, political and economic supremacy, and through the trade restrictions she can impose, thus acquires complete control over Scandinavia and Holland. Germany, then, rules Europe and a great part of Asia, up to the very gates of British India.

But although England and the United States have been defeated on the Continent of Europe, they are not destroyed. Their sea power is still unbroken.

Germany, in order to have world power, must have sea power, and in order to get that, must forthwith prepare for another war. Arbitration, disarmament, reduction of armaments, are impossible; neither Germany nor England, nor the United States, want it. That would kill world power and stop the exploitation and domination of the earth. That is not what they desire; they want to maintain Imperialism, and that can be done only by force.

Arbitration, disarmament: these watch-words are merely lies which they, supported by confederates such as, the Reformers and the pseudo-Marxists, betray the workers with and keep them quiet, and enable them to prosecute this and the following war.

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What, then, are the results of a German victory?

As soon as she has recovered in a measure from the effects of this war, Germany will immediately prepare with all her power for the next. To the numerous weapons invented during this war she will add others still more terrible. By her political and military supremacy she will force the same course on all her Allies: Turkey, Austria-Hungary, Poland, the Balkans, Scandinavia, Holland, Italy, France, and Russia. The German organisation of the gigantic trusts, banks, factories, railroads, and shipping, will be imposed on Europe from Holland to Constantinople.

The Prussian-German spirit, that bastard born of despotism and slavery, presses itself through and over all Europe and rules everywhere. And the people of Europe must obey unless they wish to be politically and economically extinguished. This is the German "League of Nations," the German "world-peace" that Germany wants and which through victory she will obtain.

The working class will then be oppressed and scattered by the weight of militarism, trusts, and enterprising companies, in every country in Europe. And at last the second World war will break out, and it will be still more terrible than the first: the world war for the control of Asia and Africa. And the members of the working class will be sent out once more to destroy each other.

These are the results of a victory for German Imperialism.

Now to the British-American. If Britain and America win and are in a position to dictate terms, Germany will have Alsace-Lorraine, Prussian Poland, and all her Colonies, taken from her, and perhaps also German territory up to the Rhine. Austria will be divided into many States. Poland will receive a part of Prussia and Galicia. The Balkans will come under British

direction. The territory of Turkey will be divided up.

**That the United States have made a condition that Austria, the Balkans and Turkey, must withdraw themselves from German influence; and that Arabia, Mesopotamia and Syria shall be “independent,” only goes to show how much the United States have made the policy of Britain their own policy.** For if these conditions are fulfilled, then the British world Empire, from the Cape through Cairo to India, will be established. To be sure for this Britain has promised her help to the United States in the East Asiatic and Pacific regions. Besides, Germany would be saddled with an enormous war debt, under the name of “indemnities” and “reparations,” which, in yearly payments, would continue for a great number of years. Her Fleet would be reduced to a number of small craft. Heligoland would become a British fortress. Through the loss of coal mines in Lorraine she would be considerably weakened. She would then stand absolutely powerless against England and America.

Russia will be in a like position if the Revolution is not able to withstand the pressure of the victorious Imperialism of the Entente. Weakened by internal troubles and counter-revolutions there is no saying what may happen. The United States would obtain great influence there.

France and Italy would receive a large slice of the booty. France especially would soon rapidly develop by means of her re-captured coal and iron mines. But these States are not powerful enough to “play the game” with England and America. There are only these two and Japan.

It can easily be seen what Japan is after. She makes large claims in China, Manchuria, Siberia, lower India, etc., and therefore her power must be broken. The colossal British Fleet (almost doubled during the war),

with the new Fleet of the United States, dominates all.

We state here in advance that these two Allies will remain together. Their Capitalistic interests have been welded together closely during the war, and it will certainly be to their advantage to remain together.

What is, then, the fate of the world? The United States and Britain will do everything to prevent any other State becoming as powerful as themselves. For this purpose they will divide Europe into a number of small States; **and in order to dominate and exploit them they will try to keep them weak.** They will capture the markets of the world while Germany and Russia are still weak.

Europe, France, Italy, and the small States will simply be their servants. It will be the same in Central and South America. It will be as if two Emperors rode in one carriage followed by a crowd of vassals.

In all political differences in Europe and America they will play off one State against another; just as England in the past (we are silent here concerning her many conquests and deeds of violence) prevented Russia, Turkey, the Balkans, Asia Minor, Egypt, Persia, India, and therefore the whole of the Near and Far East, attaining independence and power, by either putting one against the other, or by directly plundering them herself; so will England and the United States deal with Germany, Austria, Poland, Russia, Turkey and the Balkans. Similarly in America with Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, etc.

The United States and England will turn Central and Eastern Europe into a perfect hell. The provinces cut off from Germany, Poland the new States formed from Austria-Hungary, the new Russian States, the Balkan peoples and the Turks, will be continually at war with one another, and during this time England and the United States will rule the world. They will endeavour

to make Germany economically dependent on English-American capital. Russia will be flooded with it. They will establish everywhere branches of their trusts and banks; and where they do not succeed in doing so, will seek to destroy those in existence.

They will reduce Germany to such a condition of weakness as to compel her to act in conjunction with them in the interest of their profits. For they are masters of the sea and of the overseas markets.

Asia and Africa will be completely at their mercy, to rob and exploit as they choose; especially China, which is partly governed by themselves and partly by despots paid by them. Now, Germany in her fight against a superior Power, should at least be forced to develop and make powerful Austria, Turkey, the Balkans, Asia-Minor, and other States. England and America do not require to do so because they have a monopoly, and also because they are not threatened.

In Central Europe the principal Power has fallen—the only Power that could venture to go to war with England and America. She is politically, and in a great measure economically, broken, and the other States are too small and too weak to fight, and are helpless and torn by their own internal troubles. All are alike with the exception of England. Europe is powerless. The political wars of nations, a prime factor in the progress of Capitalism, are now eliminated. In Central and South America the same conditions prevail.

And the possibility of developing themselves or of obtaining independence in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt, Persia, India, China, etc., has disappeared for a long time to come.

A weak, broken Europe, a weak South America, Asia and Africa, a weak, broken world—that is the aim of American politics.

But the United States, England and Japan, do not



trust one another, and apart from them there are France and Italy, still great powers, and Russia and Germany still gathering strength and becoming themselves again.

There are always powerful coalitions to be feared, and people begin immediately to prepare for the new world war.

And this is the “League of Nations” and the “world peace” of the United States and England, for which President Wilson, Asquith and Lloyd George made so much propaganda; and in which Germany, as soon as she became democratized will also have a place! And for this purpose they want the self-determination of the peoples of Europe (but not of those of Asia nor of Africa)—the self-determination that those peoples make who are not strong but weak; and which merely serves to prevent strong Coalitions under Germany’s leadership, and enables them to rule Europe themselves <sup>2</sup>.

It is true, then, that the German spirit of naked brutality will not rule. German Imperialism has become powerless.

But into its place has stepped the powerful Anglo-American monopoly, by which a great part of the world has been brought to a standstill, and nearly the whole of it into subjection.

And the spirit of this Imperialistic monopoly is the rough brutality and corruption of American Capitalism, united with the refined brigandage of the English, which makes their victims powerless.

What a combination. Refined hypocrisy and false democracy!

And what will be the effect of this Imperialism on the proletariats of the world? The American-English banks, the American-English trusts, will rule the world. It will be very difficult for other countries to compete

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2. See the unnecessarily long footnote on page 203

with them. They will often be forced to submit.

The struggle of the proletariats will also be made difficult, almost impossible, against this monopoly.

And this American-English Capitalism will do as the English have always done—buy one part of the proletariat and pit it against the other. That part will be a well paid, well-organised, well developed proletariat. They will use these well-fed, well-clothed, well-housed, well-educated proletarians as bloodhounds and executioners of the remainder of the proletariat and of the weak nations. On these people they can always reckon in their fight against the poorer proletariat, whom they will always be able to stir up against the weaker nations.

A paid army such as this constitutes the greater danger to the international proletariat. It will raise an army of traitors in all countries. It will be able to do this, for it will have the monopoly since Germany's fall. And it will be able to oppress the "unskilled," the under-fed, the poorly-paid, the badly-housed, the miserably poor workers, as much as it likes; and the greatest number will belong to this category. Besides, the workers will be pressed into the army.

This, then, is the "world peace" of American-English Imperialism. And this is the world peace that a part of the bourgeoisie of the neutral countries so earnestly desired!

But under this Imperialism war will break out again. For Germany will gather strength again, Russia will again rise, and China will not suffer her self to remain in slavery. The world will not remain patient. It cannot suffer the absolute rule of American-English capital.

Capital itself is not international enough for that. Besides, the predatory countries are still too numerous and the noise of friction too audible. New coalitions will form themselves against England and America.

These two Powers may disagree, and the proletariats of the world will be thrown again into the blood bath and slaughtered whole-sale.

These, then, are the results of German and of Anglo-American Imperialism.

On the one side Germany all-powerful on the Continent of Europe with German militarism everywhere, and in a short time a still more frightful world war.

On the other side England and the United States all-powerful over the whole earth, with subjection or weakness and stagnation everywhere. And after a little time another bath of blood.

If this first world war does not come to a real decision, the struggle will soon be renewed and the two "Leagues of Nations" will engage in another massacre.

On both sides subjection and slaughter of the working people of the world.

**And in any case slaughter and oppression for the proletariats. That is the future.**

Worker, choose! Both sides decoy you with their League of Nations. Both say: "We are not Imperialistic; it is the others who are!" But, indeed, both threaten you with subjection and destruction.

If one should ask the workers which they would prefer—the despotism, the brutality, the carnage of German Imperialism; or the brutality of the American, united with the refined exploitation of English Imperialism, through which the blood bath always comes—the workers would reply: "We don't know: the results of both are alike frightful."

So it is.

The German and the Anglo-American Imperialisms are indeed alike terrible for the proletariat.

The German, English, and American, and **all** other proletariats on earth are threatened in the same

manner and in the same measure by German and English-American Imperialism.

But the workers can also unite. They can form a League in which one national proletariat will stand up for the other; a League like a Trade Union, or a Trust of workers, who will fight together against world Imperialism; for their interests are really the same.

Only the combined English, German and American proletariats, and therefore only the combined proletariats of the world, can destroy German and English-American Imperialism—can destroy Imperialism generally, world Imperialism.

Every national, and also the whole international, proletariat must fight energetically against **both**. The workers of all countries must have a united front. They will then be able to attack and destroy **both** at the same time.

They must establish an International to destroy both at the same time.

The two great Imperialisms are of the same stamp. And since the Imperialisms of all nations in the world are united with, or subject to, these two—Germany on one hand, England and America on the other—so it is true that for all the workers on earth, for the whole world proletariat, the Imperialism of both groups, and Imperialism in general, are alike terrible.

Therefore it is certain that the workers of the world will again be oppressed and destroyed by Imperialism. And because of more slaughter and more oppression by Imperialism (for no matter how the war ends it is certain that the proletariats of the world will be again oppressed and sacrificed), therefore a revolt of the workers of the world is necessary.

But international Imperialism cannot be overthrown unless international Capitalism is also overthrown.

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The Revolution, the social world revolution, against Capitalism is therefore necessary for the world proletariat.

We shall prove this in the first place.

All those who prefer one Imperialism to another stand in a false position.

They divide the international proletariat and make its victory over Imperialism impossible. They are all, whether social-patriots, pseudo-Marxists, or parties in neutral countries, playing the game of the German and English-American Imperialists, and of the international Capitalist classes, and Governments.

They stand on the side of these classes and Governments and assist Imperialism.

They divide and distinguish two groups of Imperialism—the English-American under the mask of democracy; German under the mask of absolutism—for the purpose of showing the proletariat that their own brand of Imperialism has not come to stay; or that it is only out to obtain peace, or that the enemy Imperialism is the only Imperialism, or to show that it is much worse than their own. This is done by Wilson, Bethmann-Holweg, von Kuhlman, Lloyd George, Poincare, Czernin, Asquith. This is the object of their speeches; by this deception alone are they able to declare war and continue it; by this alone can they support it; and these Socialists help them to do it.

But only by one united world proletariat can world Imperialism be defeated.

The position is really similar to the internal politics of the national ruling classes, who separate the workers by the watchwords, Liberal, Clerical, Conservative, Democrat, etc.—watchwords which, under Imperialism, are fast disappearing. They are now being divided into more gigantic masses, into world-masses—Imperialists and workers; into supporters of

the Workers' International, and supporters of this or that Imperialism.

German Imperialism, as the cruellest and most brutal run by an autocracy, takes the place of the Conservatives and Reactionaries.

English-American Imperialism, as more deceitful and more hypocritical, governed by a so-called democracy, takes the place of the Liberals.

In reality they are both alike.

The Great Imperialists—the Kaisers, the Kings, the Presidents, the Governors, of the English, American and German banks; the Ministers and Politicians—know well what they are about. They know that, through these divisions, and through these divisions alone (for the proletariat is already so powerful that were it united internationally it would destroy the Imperialism of all States, would destroy Imperialism itself), by Splitting the proletariat into two groups, will they be able to accomplish their aim. That aim is a great and lasting victory for Bank Capital, and the placing of the world under its control.

The proletariat as a whole must unite against Imperialism as a whole—against all Imperialisms. This can only be done if the proletariat realises that the German and English-American international Imperialisms are the same; if it is not to be as formerly, Liberal over Clerical; if one Imperialism is not to be looked upon as a “lesser evil” than the other, and set up over the other; if it is not to be an alliance with one, then there will not be a national, but an international reformism. In national politics, to set up Liberalism over Conservatism, or Conservatism over Clericalism, is national reformism. In international politics, to set up Democratic Imperialism over Absolutist Imperialism, is “international reformism.” It is a weakness of mind on the part of the proletariat to hope that one part of

Capitalism, the democratic part, is in a position to make “reforms” or settle questions that only Socialism is in a position to do.

Just as those who, in the nation placed Liberal over Clerical politics, prevent the national unity of the proletariat; so those who place English-American Imperialism over German prevent the unity of the international proletariat.

National and international reformism ought both to be strongly opposed and destroyed.

The main thing for the proletariat is a realisation of the fact that both Imperialisms are alike; that their aims and their effects are alike destructive; and, realising this, to unite for the destruction of both.

## **Chapter 2: No Other Way out for the World's Proletariat**

“The Imperialism of both groups is alike terrible for the proletariat.

It can only be destroyed by a united world proletariat.

The world revolution is therefore a necessity.”

This that we said in the first chapter should be sufficient. It should be sufficient that all Imperialisms, that the Imperialisms of both groups of all nations, are alike terrible for the proletariat, and that therefore the proletariat of all nations ought to unite to destroy Imperialism.

We should go on to prove that the destruction of Imperialism, the world revolution, is possible for the proletariat if the governments, the bourgeoisie, the social-patriots, and the pseudo-Marxists of all countries, the Majority and Minority in France and Italy, the Majority and the Independents of Germany, the Labour Party and the pacifist Socialists in England, and all the

great Socialist parties of the United States—in short, all Capitalists and all Socialists in the world, with the exception of the real revolutionaries, had not made it appear to the workers that between Socialism and Imperialism there was still another way out.

They had told the workers that after the war Imperialism and Imperialistic Capitalism would bring about disarmament, compulsory arbitration, a League of Nations, and a general peace. The Capitalists, the social-patriots, the pseudo-Marxists, the Labour Party and the pacifist Socialists in England, the Majority and the Independents in Germany, the Majority and the Minority in France and Italy, and the Socialists in the United States, said this in order to hold back the world proletariat from revolution.

It was represented to them that if Capitalism was able to stop the war, it would be able to develop peacefully, and the world revolution would not then be necessary.

Since these representations have a powerful counter-revolutionary significance, especially on account of the number and the power of those who make them, it is the duty of every revolutionary to prove again and again that they are false.

Before going on to show the practicability of a revolution we shall state what will happen.

In all Capitalistic States, in all Capitalistic nations, millions and millions of workers in their own countries and in the Colonies will produce quantities of new surplus wealth every year.

This mass of wealth will grow continually greater year by year, and will be added to the old capital.

There are still many countries in the world with great natural treasures and weak populations, from whom colossal profits can be extracted.

New capital seeks these fields of exploitation.



This is the cause of Imperialism.

All the countries of the earth already have masters.

The earth is already divided up.

The nations must fight to get the best places.

This is the cause of Imperialist wars.

There are three particular Capitalistic States whose mass of capital has grown so large that they quarrel with each other in every corner of the earth for profit.

These are England, Germany, and the United States.

The millions of workers in England, Germany, and the United States of America, have worked so hard for so many years with such unceasing energy that the Capitalists in these countries aim at the monopoly of world power.

These three gigantic nations now fight really for the domination of the world.

Do not say that this picture is overdrawn, that no one nation or group of nations will ever be able to succeed in dominating the world. For the nature of capital is such that it creates ever more surplus wealth, that it can produce unlimited quantities of surplus wealth if it can only obtain ever more workers, raw materials, and machines. Every powerful Capitalist State, every powerful Capitalist nation, feels, therefore, that if it had only more countries subject to it, the existence of capital gives to it the possibility of at last being able to conquer the world.

These three giants rise out of the struggle of all Capitalist nations.

And two of them, England—and by this name we mean the British World Empire, England with her Colonies and dominions—and the United States have combined, perhaps for a long time, perhaps for a

short time, perhaps for ever, in order to strive for the domination of the world.

And as in the economic struggle, the most powerful syndicates ultimately absorb the smaller companies, so also these three great powers unite all the lesser ones in two groups in order to carry on the world struggle<sup>3</sup>.

The development of Capitalism has reached its highest point. Only a few gladiators remain in the arena.

International Capitalism now approaches the struggle through which it will be brought to an end.

And just as the struggles of the small cities in the Middle Ages resulted in the formation of the little Medieval States; and just as the struggle between these little States resulted in the formation of great national States—so now there is being formed, as a result of the struggle between the great; national States, the two

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3. With the intention of making the problem of the world war and disarmament perfectly clear, we have tried to simplify the struggle by confining it to the three greatest nations. As a matter of fact, the struggle is much more complex: it embraces all the nations of the world; and on that account the settlement of the problem by peaceful means makes it still more impossible. In the pamphlet, "Imperialism, the World War and Social Democracy" (pages 119-142) we have made this perfectly clear. There also we have shown the economic causes that make a world peace and a League of Nations impossible. If in the future England and the United States should become separated that would not alter the fact that we are now subject to World-Imperialism. Each of these States would then try to obtain world domination; each would set about forming new groups and would arrange new alliances (for example, say with Germany or Japan). They would then do just as they are doing now.

groups, the great alliances, the two Leagues of Nations.

In and through the struggles of the medieval cities arose the power of the small burgher or citizen.

In and through the struggles of the national States arose the power of the great bourgeoisie. In and through the struggles of the groups of nations arose the power of the great Capitalists, of the monopolists of industry, of the banks and of the trusts.

And just as the burghers and the bourgeoisie arose through the struggles of the princes, the nobles and the Church, so also will arise now, out of the struggle of all the Capitalist nations, out of the struggles of the monopolist who wish to dominate all countries, another, a third power—the proletariat of the world.

And whilst the two greatest powers of the earth, the two groups of all the Capitalistic nations, and the monopolists of all lands struggle for the domination of the world, the world proletariat will rise up against them and become masters of the world.

Capitalism, having attained its highest point, blossomed into monopoly, and in its struggle for the monopoly of the earth it shall be destroyed by the proletariat.

In its perfect bloom, its last and greatest straining every muscle, developed to the highest pitch to struggle for the monopoly of world power, it is broken in the struggle for its existence, and out of the last blaze of its power a new world stands forth.

Capitalism began with private ownership.

The few Capitalists have grown through the possession of capital into a numerous and powerful class. This has developed into, the possession of all capital and its direction by a few.

And it dies in full bloom. The blossoms fall and the new world steps forth.

The workers at the end of the eighteenth

Century united to fight their employers. The Socialists in the middle of the nineteenth Century united in national parties to fight the national bourgeoisie. They now unite internationally to fight the international bourgeoisie.

And in this unity they will conquer.

Why do not the national Capitalists unite with each other? Why do not Germany, England and the United States unite? Why do they not work together for the exploitation of all the workers—and of all the world? For then their power would be much greater; they would not need to fight with one another, and they would be able to prevent the proletariat from fighting, perhaps, for the revolution.

The answer is, firstly: Their capitals are national and not international. The international capitals in comparison with the national capitals are only a very small part of capital.

And secondly: The national Capitalists have different interests and different aims.

What are their aims? What are the aims of the three great nations? As we have already said, Germany wants to subjugate Belgium, Poland, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the Balkans, Turkey, Asia Minor, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Persia, perhaps Siberia, and other parts of Asia, thus making the first step towards world domination. Established on the coasts of the Indian Ocean she is then ready for the second world war to capture India, the Pacific Ocean, and all the countries bordering it; then Africa, and the domination of the world.

England wants to spread her World Empire over Africa, through Asia to India.

The United States want to rule on the Pacific Ocean, in China, in the Indian Archipelago, in Polynesia, in Central and South America, and perhaps in the northern part of Asia. Then England and the United

States will rule almost the **whole world**.

And by what means can the three reach their goal, world domination?

As we have already said, Germany through the union of Europe under her leadership: the United States and the English World Empire through the breaking up of Europe.

And how will they obtain these means?

By fighting, by war.

Just imagine to yourselves, workers of Europe and America, workers of the world, whom they want to deceive and keep under Capitalism, and hold back from revolution with the hope that world peace, disarmament, and a League of Nations are possible—just imagine to yourselves that the war is ended. Imagine that the slaughter of humanity is over. Imagine in the first place that England and America have won. Then are Africa and Asia, Central and South America, and all the world markets, practically in their power; and the Continent of Europe is helpless.

Then imagine to yourselves that Germany has won. Then Germany has a part of Africa and stands before the gates of India, and probably also before those of China.

Then imagine to yourselves that neither of them has won. Then the situation is the same as before the war.

Place these three cases—the only three possibilities—clearly before your eyes, and ask yourself then: Will there be no more, wars after this one?

If England and the United States win, will a weakened and broken-up Europe suffer that? Will Germany not place herself at the head of Europe and try to rise again?

And now put the second case clearly before your eyes. Germany at the end of the war, after “peace has been signed, stands at the gates of India and China, and

within the gates stand the English and American powers.

What will happen? Think upon it, workers. Will England and the United States not try to drive Germany back?

Now place the third case before your eyes. The war ends without a decision. There is no victor and no vanquished. Then all remain as they were before the war—Germany encircled by England and her Allies, and continuing to arm and prepare for the world war. Will Germany now disarm, and will England and America refrain from pressing her?

Consider how these great powers jostle each other now. They stand on one another's borders. Remember that on the other side of their boundaries lie countries that offer splendid opportunities for Capitalist Exploitation at the highest possible profit. Remember that the two groups want the same lands—Africa and Asia, and now Russia. Remember that these countries are abundantly rich, and yet almost unexploited. Millions, nay, billions, there await the exploiter. Worker, remember the nature of capital. Its substance is spreading in ever greater quantities. Consider that through your labour and through that of all the peoples subject to, or allied with, the two groups, the power of capital continually increases. The two groups stand facing each other on the frontiers. Within their boundaries is the ever-growing mass of capital. And without lies the booty—Profit.

What do you think, then? Will there be another war?

You can give no other answer but yes.

So long as the Capitalists of Germany, England, and the United States have different aims and want to possess the same countries and to dominate the world; so long as they remain national and not international, there will be war.

The possibility of disarmament, of the League

of Nations, of general peace, has been refuted. Enough has been said for any discerning worker.

But since the blood-dripping Governments, the Capitalists, the Social Patriots, and the pseudo-Marxists, still seek by many arguments to betray and deceive the workers, we are obliged to attack and expose them.

The Governments and bourgeois parties of all countries, the Social Patriots and false radicals, the Majority and the Independent Socialists in Germany, the Majority and Minority in France, the Labour Party and the Pacifist Socialists in England, and all the great Socialist Parties in the United States who propagate the ideas of peace, disarmament, or the reduction of armaments, all those who made the war, or permitted it, all must show how these are possible and in what way they can be accomplished. They ought to show, not by hollow phrases, but by facts, what they think about the Peace arrangements.

Which parts of the earth ought England, Germany, or the United States, to receive?

Which parts should go to the little nations, or to France, Italy, Japan, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, etc.? They ought to show this on the map so that everybody can see that it is right and just, and that no new wars shall come out of the Treaty. They should show in what manner the territories should be divided, and how confidence can be established among the various nations, so that they may discontinue military preparations.

Workers, they are unable to do this. When asked to deal with concrete facts they refuse. Up to the present time nobody has been able to define boundaries on the map which would give satisfaction to every Power. Their talk is specious—empty words—hollow catch-phrases without significance. President Wilson, the sanguinary humanitarian of the United States, and all the Capitalist Governments, never cease to mouth the phrases, Justice!

Freedom! Right!

The Governments of the bourgeoisie, the reformists dripping with blood, say: "Establish a political Trust of Nations similar to the economic trusts formed by the Capitalists. This would obviate competition, and the nations would work together, but in different spheres. In this way England, Germany, and the United States, of America, would divide up the world and establish a Trust for their profit."

This comparison with Trusts is misleading. There is a most decided difference. One which has prevented States in ancient times from forming a Trust for the exploitation of the world.

The difference is this: The economic trust deals with dead things; with gold and merchandise. These it can easily rule nationally and internationally.

But States are living forms comprised of human beings, and everything that lives develops. Thus it would happen, even were a satisfactory division and regulation arrived at, that after a short time conditions would alter. The economic and capital power would change so that one of the masters would be more powerful than the others; or the subject nation would become strong enough to shake off the yoke and become masters themselves. Then we should have another war.

Human beings cannot be united in such a Trust or League. The nations of old, who aimed at world power, tried it and failed. It cannot be done now.

The hypocritical bourgeoisie and the German Government, who have murdered thousands, yes, tens of thousands, of sailors, give out the cry: "The Freedom of the Seas. Give us that and war will end." But in peace time the seas were free. The war has made no difference in that respect.

The gory Capitalists and Governments, who began the war on account of profit and trade competition,



say: "Free Trade—give us Free Trade, no preferential tariffs or taxes—then shall we have peace."

But how do they establish trade in primitive countries—in Central Africa? By Force, by Murder and War!

This war only decides who shall carry the weapons; who shall perpetrate the murders—Germany or England.

Business prospers best where the business people have political power. If these primitive countries are free to all alike, a struggle for political power must ensue sooner or later.

Trade, however, is no longer the principal object. This is now Capital Export; the making of new capital. It expresses itself in roads, harbours, factories and railways.

How does this Imperialism realise itself in Asia and Africa; how are the arrangements for Capitalist production brought about, with its consequent expropriation and proletarianising of the natives? By force! And war alone will decide which particular nation shall be the expropriator.

The tender pacifists and those Socialists who, by their pacifism hypnotised the workers and helped to cause the war, they also are dripping with blood. They say: "The costs of another world-war would be too great in money and men." But the millions for the conquest of Africa and Asia will bring their fruit in the shape of billions of interest.

Italy, Roumania, and the United States of America did not enter the war **before** they knew what it would cost.

Is not this demand for unity laughable so long as the interests and strength of the nations are so decidedly different; when so many weak nations can be quite easily destroyed? Is it not ridiculous?

If England and the United States of America believe they are able to seize everything, why should they ally themselves with Germany? If Germany wins, why should she not trust in the improvement of weapons of war to obtain more? If the British Empire and the United States of America possess within themselves almost inexhaustible sources of wealth, why should they unite with others and divide with them their profits, which may expand enormously?

So long as Germany believes she can shatter opposition by her military power, why should she share her power with others?

So long as there remain such extensive territories for Capitalism to conquer—as China, the Near East, Lower India, parts of Central Asia, and of Africa—so long as there remain so many weak nations to subject, just so long will States trust in their own power and worship the idol of their own Imperialism.

Should Germany conquer England or the United States of America, those States would inevitably revolt again. And if either of the former beat Germany, she, too, would never endure it, but would rise again.

It is obvious that the opposing national interests will prevent a League of Nations being anything but a sham. There will, indeed, be established “Leagues of Nations,” but they will be but alliances of special groups, and will have as their object the more vigorous exploitation of weaker nations and to carry on war against rivals.

The phrase-mongers, the Capitalist Governments, the false Socialists in all lands, all those who for the sake of their country betrayed the cause of peace—they say: “Establish an International Police Force from amongst the nations, which shall punish all aggressors; and a High Court of Arbitration which shall decide who is guilty.”

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This is the most absurd proposal of all, for there is no surer method of advancing competition in armaments than this.

The Capitalist State, like man, is sinful. It was born of ambition, and gain and lust. These are the original sins of Capitalism, to which it is predestined through the "fall" of private property.

Every State will be afraid to sin for fear of a united attack by the others. Because of this it must prepare a defence against all the others in order to attain its ambitions. It must develop an army and navy capable of combatting them all. They all know that "interests" will dominate their judgment, and they know also that it is possible for the decision to be in favour of an offender. They know that their interests may be on the side of an offender, and they would then defend him and oppose the League. With this eventuality before them they would prepare huge armies and navies. They will arm and fight as before, only including the "International Police" in their armoury of cant-phrases.

"Self-Determination for Nations" is another cry of these complacent humbugs. "If only every nation were independent or voluntarily united, then the prime cause of war will disappear."

But the Great War shows that the opposite is the case. Existing small nations like Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, etc., or possible nations like Poland, Esthonia, Courland, and Finland—all would still be bones of contention amongst the great Powers.

The Russian Revolution has surely made the right of Self-Determination one of the bases of the Revolution; they have made it one of their principles: but with this vital difference—they introduce Socialism at the same time. Without Self-Determination they could not have effected the Revolution. But they showed also that Self-Determination under Imperialism was impossible.

And if it be said that the Self-Determination promised by Germany is only an appearance, even so can it be said of England and America. It will separate the nations from one another and perpetuate their weakness. This sort of Independence can be even worse for a nation than subjection.

It will be shown in a most terrible way that Self-Determination can only follow and not precede Socialism.

Capitalism, and especially Imperialism, cannot settle the question of nationality. Either they must grant the small nations independence, in which case they become the envy of the large nations, or subject and annex them.

Germany follows the latter method in Europe. She wants the whole of Europe under her domination in order to light England.

England and the United States of America follow the first method. They want Europe to remain weak, with no great Power on the Continent, and whilst small nations are quarrelling amongst themselves, to build up a colonial system and world domination without hindrance.

Capitalism is here in a cleft-stick. It cannot grant independence to small nations without making them objects of war; it cannot unite them without subjecting them; and in either case it plants the seed of another world-war.

The Capitalist Governments and their underlings all say: "Disarmament by degrees." But how can they disarm whilst they continue to threaten one another?

How can Germany disarm when her enemies dominate the world and have made Europe powerless? It would be suicide—it would ruin Europe.

As we are of a different opinion to some of our comrades who belong to the Extreme Left, and as this question is closely related to the whole problem of the

liberation of the workers from Imperialism and war, we would like to go a little deeper into it.

Many Socialists propose as a means of bringing the war to an end the formula: "No Annexations and no indemnities." But these conditions cannot be put forward by the proletariat of the world; for their fulfilment would leave Capitalism exactly where it is, and could be followed only by new arming and new wars.

But even revolutionary demands, as demands, which the working class may put forward to upset the Government and simplify the revolution; even these are of no avail, for as soon as a Government gets into a tight corner it will adopt these demands itself (as Germany did in 1917), announce them as its own aims, and retort to the workers: "See, our demands are yours," and thereby break the revolution.

"No annexations and no indemnities" does not provide a way out.

That is the horror of the situation, and nothing shows more clearly the catastrophic nature of the crisis to which Imperialism has brought society.

Capitalist nations cannot arrive at any peace between themselves, neither during the war nor after.

They are compelled at all times to wade deeper in the blood-bath. The proletariat under Imperialism can only have Imperialistic peace or Imperialistic war; and every Imperialist war means a new and more dreadful Imperialism; and every Imperialistic peace means a new and more dreadful war.

There is only one way out of Imperialism, and war: the Revolution.

The Capitalist Governments, of England, France, and the United States of America, together with those pretended Socialists who threw away their power and gave themselves completely to the Military General Staffs; who made no real attempt to secure peace—**they**

are entirely responsible for the war; **they** are the servants of the General Staffs, and, like them, reek with blood. They talk "Democracy." If only we had democracy established in Germany and Austria-Hungary, the democracies of the world would make peace. But the plutocratic Republic of France is a "democracy," and world-dominating Britain is a "democracy," and America, land of trusts and monopolies, armed strike-breakers who organise legal murders of the workers' leaders, is also a "democracy." Have they done anything to prevent war? No! England, through her policy under Edward VII of encircling Germany, helped to bring it on. America joined in as soon as she discovered that it was a fight for world-domination. And will these democracies make peace if they win? If Germany and a stricken Europe threaten them with war, or if the Allies are beaten and Germany at the head of all the nations of Europe threatens them still further, will they make peace? No!

In the making of capital abroad, absolute Monarchies and democratic Republics are alike. In the greed of power, the lust of profit, all nations are alike.

Monarchies and democracies under Imperialism are hells, full of the same damnation: expansion over the world, the fight for world domination.

Monarchies, principalities, and democratic Parliaments, all are equally obedient servants of Imperialist Capitalism and financial interests. Both of these want war, and the institutions are tools in their hands. These two interests, through their representatives on the Governments and General Staffs, dictate to the Parliaments what must be done. The Parliaments and other institutions only possess power so long as they are obedient to the Capitalist forces.

This power will only be overthrown by the triumph of the peoples, and until the workers themselves obtain control, world peace is impossible.

The best example of the truth of this assertion is to be seen in President Wilson, the servant of the American trusts and monopolies, which, in order to secure world-power for themselves, are building armies and fleets powerful enough to secure victory in all future wars.

These are the principal solutions which the Governments, Social Patriots, and pseudo-Socialists propose to lead Capitalism out of Imperialism.

We have shown them to be false, that none of them stand a moment's investigation by a clear and searching eye. Theoretically, the investigation shows no way out of Imperialism for Capitalism. But the proletariat should not depend upon theory alone, but also on realities.

Already the earth trembles under new wars. Germany has Poland and Belgium and part of France in her power. She has broken up Russia, taken possession of the Ukraine, the Caucasus and Finland; annexed Livonia, Esthonia and Courland, and reduced Greater Russia to helplessness. She will do the same with the rest of Europe. This has been approved not only by the Monarchists of Germany, but by the Democrats and Social Democrats as well—at least by the Majority.

England and America will not suffer this. Is this world peace? Is this disarmament? This is an assurance, an absolute assurance, of a new war.

If America and England are victorious they will make all the nations of Europe independent. They have openly stated their intention to do so.

This means they will break Europe up into small pieces and allow internal jealousies full play; that they will create internal hells in Germany, Austria-Hungary, Poland, the Balkans, and Russia; and thus become undisputed masters of the world. That is the aim of their hypocritical Lloyd George and President

Wilson. All the Parties agree with them, not only the Conservatives, but also the Democrats and the Socialist Majorities. Europe will never suffer that. It will rise under the leadership of Germany and fight. Is this world peace? World arbitration and disarmament? No! It is an absolute assurance of a new world war—of a succession of world wars.

**Proletarians take heed!** Notice only the realities about you. Look at the war volcanoes blazing around you in Europe, Alsace-Lorraine, Poland, Russia, the Balkans, Asia, and also in Africa.

Imperialism remains, competition in armaments remains, war remains.

Workers! Remember that: the Governments and the Social Patriots said all these things before the war.

Remember, proletariat of the world, that they want to deceive you again, and that after this war they will make a new compromise, a new alliance with the bourgeoisie. Remember, workers, that the great social democratic Parties at their Congress in Copenhagen and Basle spoke about world peace and general disarmament. What good has it done? None; war has broken out again.

Remember, workers, proletariat of the world, that by these watchwords, world peace, disarmament, etc., have the bourgeoisie kept their power over you. Through these watchwords they held you back from revolution.

The bourgeoisie knew when you accepted these watch-words that you agreed to try peaceful means, and that you had given up the only real means—revolution against war. They also knew that they could make war without any danger of your rising in revolt, and, therefore, they have made this war. These watchwords enabled them to do so.

Workers, will you continue to be befooled by such catch-phrases? Will you be deceived again by the



Capitalists and their Governments, and their henchmen, the false Socialists?

The Czar of Russia and all the Governments held a Conference at the Hague, and said they wanted to found a Court of Arbitration. That was only to deceive you.

By these devices they have led you and kept you in the grip of war.

The Social Patriots have urged you to "fight for world peace and disarmament."

By this means they brought you into the war, and in July-August, 1914, held you back from revolution, because you were not prepared for revolution; you had placed your hopes in disarmament and world peace.

They have trapped you into the war by their watch-words. Will you accept them again and go to war?

That is impossible, for by so doing you will be causing a third war, and perhaps further wars.

It is the use of these watchwords which help to continue the war and increase the slaughter. They restrain you from revolution by promising disarmament, world peace, and a League of Nations when once peace is established, and they vote the war credits without opposition.

Trusting their promises you say: "Let us see it through, for surely the better thing will come." But your hopes are false, and, through these very hopes is the slaughter maintained and intensified.

During and after the war these watchwords will be more deceptive than formerly, for war has bred hatred deep into the hearts of the nations, drawn them further apart, made their interests more opposing and conflicting, and, as we have already shown, created fresh causes of war.

The mass of capital grows; need for expansion increases; the interest in new wars becomes more

powerful in all parts of the world. New world-wars are much more certain than before this one commenced.

Will you allow yourselves again to be deluded by their catch-phrases?

They have given you a false picture of the world peace. Just because of that came the world war, and what is worse, the war of the workers against one another. They gave a false picture of the League of Nations, and as a consequence have split the proletariat into national parties.

Will you allow yourselves to be deceived again? If you do, another war will come, more frightful than was this, with a fresh Splitting of the proletariat.

There was but one way out of this war, and there is but one way of saving us from it—the working class Revolution.

Workers, the Capitalists of the world have organised themselves into gigantic groups. In these groups they have concentrated their whole strength for the conquest of the world for the purpose of fighting each other for domination. In this struggle between the Powers, you, the workers, will be oppressed and scattered, killed and maimed, for many years to come. There is no way out for Capitalism from Imperialism.

The Capitalists, who can only survive by war, now organise in two groups to fight for the mastery of the world—they can find no way out, but stick fast in the mire.

Workers of the world, the way out of war and Imperialism does not lie through “Justice,” “Freedom of the Seas,” “Free Trade,” “Peace without Annexations or Indemnities,” “League of Nations,” “Compulsory Arbitration,” or “The Right of Self-Determination.” These are all lies and deceitful frauds used to bind you tighter to Imperialism and to strengthen it.

There is no Justice for you or yours in Capitalism.

There is only one Justice for you.

There is only one Freedom—the freedom of the proletariat.

There is only one Peace—that is Communism.

There is no Capitalist path from Imperialism, but there is a proletarian way; that is to overthrow Capitalism. You can do this if you, the workers, are united in one great World League; then you can destroy the Imperialisms of the entire world.

The Revolution—the World Revolution—that, and that only is the way out.

Imperialism cannot be overthrown except by the destruction of Capitalism.

This is no prophecy—it is only the plain, unvarnished truth—a truth verified in actuality by the Russian Revolution.

### **Chapter 3: The Feasibility of the Revolution**

Socialism emerges from the seas of blood and lies in which the world has been submerged by Capitalist Imperialism.

Out of the struggle between the Great Powers of the world comes the proletariat and pits its strength against Capitalism.

The proletariat will win in this fight, and will establish Communism, for Communism is the base of our existence, the foundation on which rested for many generations the existence of humanity.

The period of individualism, of private property, is as a moment compared with the centuries of Tribal Communism. Now, the old foundation of human existence is found again.

Communism, from which everything that is useful has developed, all our wealth, all that is noble in the hearts of men, will be set up again. Communism,

of which the great philosophers like Plato have dreamt; Communism which was the seed and aim of the early Christians; Communism which is described and depicted in the sacred pictures of all great religions; Communism, for which all the poor and oppressed classes have struggled throughout the period of private ownership up to our own times; Communism which was imagined by our Utopists; for which our comrades of all lands have given their lives; the Communism which our great leader, Karl Marx, foresaw, knew, and understood, the modern Communism based on scientific knowledge, of which he laid the foundation stone; this now comes forth in all its wonder and beauty.

And we “blessed ones” can see it and fight for it. Already it lives in one country—Russia, and like a golden flame spreads the light of revolution over all the world.

If the proletariat is united; if the proletariat of all lands unite, and fight all Imperialisms as one, nothing can withstand them.

If, on the other hand, they do not now unite, the golden flame will be extinguished and not re-kindled for many years.

It is now our task as theoreticians of the proletariat to examine with clear eyes, and to demonstrate the feasibility of, the world revolution.

If a god had ordained the destiny of mankind, and if he had prescribed the line of development, matters could not be better arranged by the victory of Socialism.

Capitalism itself has developed the necessary basis for the victory.

How different everything has turned out from what our great master, Marx, expected. Just as he had underestimated the power of Capitalism to expand into monopoly and Imperialism, so had he underestimated the mental, moral and material power that the workers would have to use in order to destroy Capitalism. Neither

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did he see the new causes of war.

He believed that Capitalism would break down through an economic crisis, and be displaced by the proletariat. Indeed, capital in its spread over the world does come up against political obstacles <sup>4</sup>, which it will only be able to overcome by curtailing its own power. This will bring frightful sufferings to the workers, and these will lead to the revolution—to the overthrow of Capitalism.

Everything is now at hand and in alphabetical order that is necessary for the revolution. There are many things here which make the revolution feasible. Men and means—material and spiritual power for its realisation, and the hunger need, the first and greatest—indeed, the one and only maker of revolution—are here.

Not in one country alone, but throughout the whole world has suffering come through the war. Hunger creates pain, revolt, and hate; pain on account of loss and destruction, revolt against the Capitalist class, and hate against Capitalism above all else.

The human and psychological factors that make for revolution are here, and they will develop the longer the war lasts.

The material means are here because Capitalism has centralised production, and the transport and distribution of goods.

Miracle upon miracle. The material productive powers introduced by Capitalism during the war are no longer the weapons with which Capitalism can defend a Capitalist State.

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4. Really through economic causes, through over-production of capital and the existence of rich countries with weak populations to which capital is exported, forcing colonial or imperial politics and so dragging them into war.

It is as though a god or wizard had touched them with a magic wand, and transformed them from Capitalist instruments into proletarian instruments for an entirely different state of society.

Capitalism, Imperialism, and the war have made the necessary material and psychological conditions for Socialism. They have done more—they have fleeced and robbed each other, and they now confront the proletariat weaker than ever before; they can no longer govern. They have placed weapons of war in the hands of the proletariat; weapons which can be used to destroy Capitalism. The proletariat is armed.

One after another countries are being annexed, oppressed, and robbed of their freedom. They can only obtain a return of this freedom through the triumph of the working class. These countries weaken Capitalism, and strengthen Socialism.

It has been shown during the war how quickly the foundations of society can be changed, and if the most reactionary power, Czardom, can be overthrown, that, more than anything else, is a great moral example.

That example—the Russian Revolution—stands before the workers now. It has produced the first great proletarian revolutionary leaders.

It is now our task to examine, separately and closely, these spiritual and material means in order that the international proletariat may see that the revolution is possible, and may thus hasten it.

In speaking about the feasibility of the revolution, we would remark that there is no difference between revolution during the war and after the war. So far as it is possible to judge by appearance, the revolution will come during the war; through defeat, through hunger, through the endless bloodshed from which there is no escape.

In all countries the revolutionary proletariat must rise against their own Governments, and demand

and enforce immediate peace. Secondly, they must have an international understanding, and to have this they must establish a new International.

If the representatives of the revolutionary workers in all countries could meet together, and call a general strike in the munition factories, and demand that the soldiers cease fighting<sup>5</sup> against the external enemy—then, indeed, the revolution would be an accomplished fact.

When we speak of the World Revolution, though we mean all countries in the world, we have England and Germany especially in mind, for there the material conditions are most ripe for Socialism. In other countries the revolution will break out and conquer; but it is certain if the revolution in England and Germany wins, the victory will be made easier for the rest of the world.

And, thirdly, it should be said here that we do not prophecy the duration of the revolution or its character; for it is possible that the fight which Socialism will have to wage against Capitalism, Militarism, and Imperialism, may last for years. It is also possible that Socialism may win speedily. The power of the contending classes is great, and the incentive strong; but as to the duration of the fight we will say nothing, simply calling the whole struggle the revolution. As to the method of the revolution there is nothing positive to say.

Karl Marx presumed it possible for the revolution to take place without force in England. Who does not heartily wish this could be so everywhere? Who would not hope that an end could be put to all strife and suffering without the spilling of a drop of blood? But in all countries, England included, the opposing classes

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5. This was done in 1917 by the Zimmerwaldians in Stockholm.

are armed, and a forcible revolution seems inevitable everywhere<sup>6</sup>.

We speak, then, of the revolution in a general sense, including peaceable and forcible methods, of long or short duration, during or after the war.

Now, as to the practicability of the revolution.

The Capitalist State, the better to conduct the war, was forced to take over the control of the world production and distribution—the coal mines, railways, agriculture, shipping, banks, etc.

It had the distribution of food supplies and raw materials in its hands.

This was so in both belligerent and neutral nations.

That which people declared to be impossible, and which the reformists repudiated—one great central control of wealth production and distribution in the Capitalist State—is realised. It is with us.

Stern necessity has enforced in three years of war what more than half-a-century of peace could not have accomplished—social control of labour.

Socialism rests on the social control of labour, of production, of distribution. Therefore the foundations for Socialism are laid. Capitalism in its highest development has laid the foundation for Socialism—the central control of world production and distribution.

The workers now find to their hands the means to establish and build up Socialism. In proof of this there stands clearly another fact. In all countries before the war there were innumerable small businesses, each working independently of the others; and many large establishments did likewise.

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6. However, if the English proletariat wished, and rose like one man in revolt, it would at least be possible to establish the Revolution without a long or bitter struggle.



During the war vast numbers of them, either voluntarily or by State compulsion, amalgamated in trusts and combines.

The proletariat must take control of these now centralised means of production. They must never allow industry, trade, agriculture, transport, and the banks, to again revert to the hands of Capitalist owners.

It must be said here that production and distribution are questions, of general economy, and they will remain so. But during the war they have been taken under the control of the State, although the instruments of production were not the property of the State, these still belonging to the private owners—the Capitalists.

The State in the hands of the Capitalists is used as a means of oppressing and exploiting the workers. If it directs production and distribution in any way, then it does so in the interests of Capitalists, and it is to them that the profits will go. Its function is to rob the worker.

This must be altered. The proletariat of the world, of England and Germany in particular, must see to it that private property and interests, whether vested in the State or individuals, are overthrown.

But how can this be done if the Capitalists are all-powerful in the State; are, in fact, the State itself?

There is no other way but to conquer political power and establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

You must destroy the power of the old State, and in its stead set up the new State-power of the workers. You must change the dictatorship of the Capitalist States into that of the proletariat.

That this is feasible we will show later on—but we must first recognise that the necessary material is here.

Having demonstrated that the material conditions are here, we have now to show that the proletariat must seize political power, on personal,

human, and psychological grounds.

During this war Capitalism has destroyed much of its productive machinery. Millions of workers have been killed, many more helplessly crippled, and widows and orphans now form a large proportion of the population in all countries.

Scarcely any goods are being produced. There is a shortage of raw material. Machinery stands idle or has become useless. All industry is diverted to war purposes. The means of transport are in a wretched state; whole fleets of ships lie at the bottom of the sea. Fields are untilled or badly cultivated, and are producing much less than formerly. The supply of cattle is decreasing. The production of the necessaries of life dwindles. Indeed, we are faced with a world famine. Small business men are ruined by the million, and farmers have lost everything. Nations are burdened with enormous debts, the interest on which exceeds in some cases the total pre-war incomes.

The State can repudiate these debts; but that would ruin the Capitalists. It can endeavour to pay them; but then they must bleed the peoples dry. In either case the workers have a very poor outlook.

An economic and a financial crisis are approaching together. General poverty will then come upon the whole world.

The demobilised soldiers will be confronted with unemployment. When there is no raw material, or factories have been destroyed by war, where are they to get work?

An economic war will inevitably follow the war of the military forces; but in no case will the raw materials be available for industry, and high prices must be the order of the day.

These terrible conditions will affect not only the working classes, but also the small tradesmen and farmers. And along with these conditions we shall have

the new Imperialism, the preparations for the new war, whose horrid spectre I have already described.

The psychological and spiritual conditions favouring revolution are not less than the palpable or material.

People say, however, that the general poverty, misery, and scarcity of raw material, machinery, and capital, will be an obstacle, not an aid, to Socialism.

They evidently think that Socialism can only be established out of riches and abundance. This is a very misleading argument, for out of this disorder, poverty, and destruction, the Capitalist has to reconstruct and make secure again his position. Capital and Labour are confronted with the same material; and with so many elements advantageous to revolution, and with the workers' thoughts always turning in this direction, the greater possibility is on the side of Labour. If the destruction is no obstacle to Capitalism, then it can be no obstacle to Socialism.

This question, then, presents itself: Who is best able to establish a new society? The answer is that the proletariat can much better and more speedily establish Socialism than can the Capitalists reconstruct the Capitalist system.

How will Capitalism go to work in its task? How will it deal with the difficulties? It has a new economic system to set up. That means that it will simply revert to the old one and create anew surplus wealth. It has to produce more surplus wealth than ever in order to balance and exceed its unproductive expenditure. At the same time it will have huge armies to maintain, millions of unemployed to support, a host of crippled and wounded from the war, together with widows and orphans. It will have, in addition, an enormous debt to pay, and the cost of new preparations for war to meet.

The founding of a new economy; the restoration

of the old one; the making of new gains greater than their losses; helping the crippled in the war; interest on National Debt to pay; new armaments and military establishments to maintain—all this Capitalism has to face. And this is an impossible feat for Capitalism. Why so? Because capital helps capital and must save it. Because it cannot take from itself the millions required for reconstruction, and thus expropriate itself. Because production is for the few, not for the many. Because it is not the duty of all men to produce.

It cannot divest itself of its capital and wealth in order to help the poor and workless. It cannot annul or repudiate its debt or refuse to pay the interest. It cannot tax itself to the extent now necessary. It cannot prevent preparations for war, and thus liberate the productive forces for useful work.

It cannot even stop luxury and permit the labour thus absorbed to be diverted to useful channels.

It cannot in this great crisis set its productive forces going in a sufficiently active manner—just because it is itself. It cannot establish itself on a new foundation—because it is itself.

It follows from all this that Capitalism is in a quagmire from which it cannot extricate itself. It shows that the destruction of its productive forces in the war has brought it to a crisis out of which only a revolution can come, and out of which crisis only a revolution can erect the necessary productive power.

It is quite clear that Imperialism has put a shackle around productive power from which it cannot free itself. Only the revolution can do this.

Certainly Capitalism will struggle to survive. It will attempt to gather from the ruins of war the materials for building anew the Capitalist edifice.

It will be aided in its endeavours by the Reformists, the Social Patriots, the false Marxists. An old

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form of society does not go under without a struggle.

By what method will it try to save itself?

Certainly by a method not pleasant: for the proletariat—the traditional, old-established way—by the vigorous exploitation, oppression, and enslavement of the proletariat; by the extraction of abundant surplus wealth from their labour.

Men like Scheidemann, Legien, Henderson, Vandervelde, Thomas, Turati, Kautsky, will aid in this.

For Capitalism there is only one way—the way of increased exploitation.

The new surplus wealth can have only one source—the already over-burdened workers. They will be urged, indeed forced, to toil harder than ever before<sup>7</sup>. They will be inadequately paid; the soldiers who remain in the armies will be also underpaid, and the unemployed will starve. All will be heavily burdened with taxation.

By what means can the Capitalists enforce their will on the workers? By the State.

The State will compel the workers, small tradesmen, the crippled, widows and orphans, to live in misery and poverty.

The State will maintain armed forces for the purpose of keeping the workers in subjection—paying one section of workers to browbeat the others.

It will regulate production in the interests of Capitalism.

It will retain conscription.

It will take industry under its protection—making the proletariat State workers, industrial soldiers. It will turn them into slaves of the companies, syndicates and trusts. The State will be a house of correction. State Socialism will be introduced in the interests of Capitalism,

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7. For example, through the Taylor system and other speeding-up methods camouflaged as “welfare” systems.

in which State Capitalism will be all-powerful, and the workers reduced to complete slavery<sup>8</sup>.

The State will become the most relentless of exploiters; the strike will be made impossible.

The Army will be used to enforce all this.

The same Army mobilised in 1914 to fight for Imperialism and Capitalism, now leavened with an introduction of aristocratic and Capitalist elements, will be used to keep the workers in subjection after the war.

During every economic or political strike this Army will be used, and the cannon and rifles, machine guns, aeroplanes and bombs, manufactured by the workers, will be turned on them in order to subdue them.

In short, the leaders of Capitalism will use the State and the Army to save Capitalism, and to obtain for themselves an ever-increasing surplus wealth, to be obtained only by the most frightful forms of oppression.

But all these horrors will compel the dispossessed and subject classes, the workers, unemployed, demobilised soldiers, etc., to rebel.

Since Capitalism has no other means of defence but the State, then the fight will be against the State, this being the embodiment of Capitalism itself. The fight against Imperialism will have developed into a fight against Capitalism itself—a fight for the Social Revolution.

Can the proletariat accomplish what Capitalism will fail to do—build order out of chaos, give food and comfort to millions of workers? Can it at one and the same time save humanity?

Most assuredly it can.

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8. By State Socialism we understand a system of society in which the State operates many businesses for the Capitalists, and protects the Capitalists by laws and regulations against the workers.

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It can do this because many of the obstacles confronting Capitalism will not be before the proletariat.

Certainly it will be a hard task to build a new order from such waste and ruin. It will be like taking over a bankrupt business. Yet the proletariat will do it better and more quickly than the bourgeoisie, because it will not require to haggle or negotiate to please Capitalism.

In the first place, all the wealth and means of production to hand can be used for the benefit of all.

It would first assume control of industry, trade, transport, banks and agriculture. These would be controlled and regulated by a centralised authority a development much advanced by Capitalism itself. A vast amount of unnecessary labour would thereby be saved and labour itself would be more equitably apportioned and unemployment thus avoided.

Kaisers, Kings, bankers, industrial magnates, junkers, landlords, etc.—all on whose personal account special groups of labour were ordered will disappear, and the labour directed to productive channels.

The proletariat will not require to maintain an economic war. It will be able to arrange, internationally, trade, transport, and exchange, in a manner never possible to Capitalism. Labour will be organised and centralised internationally.

The proletariat will have no interest to pay, as it will repudiate all national debts.

The proletariat will establish instead of State Capitalism, which only benefits the monopolists, real Socialism, which is for the benefit of all. Owing to the fact that production and distribution will be regulated by the proletariat, only really necessary goods will be produced; and the duty of labour, which will be imposed upon all the able-bodied, will result in a far greater production of all things needful.

The proletariat will thus be able to establish a

new Society better and more speedily than is possible by the Capitalists.

We will not enumerate here the many other circumstances which will enable the proletariat to achieve success.

The following, however, will come by degrees:— Education; the harmonising and unification of productive labour; the application of the highest technical knowledge to transport, industry, and agriculture. These are a few of the most important and necessary in the meantime.

We can now see that the material and physical conditions, the spiritual needs and the material means; the possibility and feasibility of the overthrow of Capitalism are here.

The greatest, incentive, the most encouraging fact for the proletariat, is the knowledge that the whole future is for the workers; that the workers alone can reconstruct society.

In order to confiscate the wealth and means of production, it will be necessary for the workers to capture political power.

But people will say that the Russian Revolution has partly failed; Germany has crushed it in many parts, and that it is in danger of being entirely suppressed. Will not the World Revolution also be suppressed?

The answer to that is: The conditions of the Western European Revolution, especially in England and Germany, are entirely unlike, and cannot be compared with, those of the Russian Revolution.

In the first place the industrial workers in Russia were very few in numbers compared with the whole population. Russia is not a manufacturing country, but an agricultural one.

The Revolution could only be won by the Bolsheviks with the aid of the poor peasantry. This difficulty was the greater for the Revolutionists, because



they were at the same time attacked from without.

England and Germany have a preponderance of industrial workers. The Russian Revolution serves as an example to Western Europe. It is a symbol, a teacher, a forerunner. It has shown the way. It has drawn up a programme that the proletariat of Western Europe must adopt as their own.

In the second place, we might say that the Revolutions in the Ukraine and Finland were only partly destroyed because the Western European workers did not rise. If they had risen, then the Socialist Soviet would still be standing there victorious<sup>9</sup>.

But the Western workers will revolt during or after the war, and with the help of the Russian proletariat will achieve complete victory. But it may be objected that real revolutionaries amongst the Western proletariat are very few in number, and therefore will not be able to win. Again, let us turn to Russia. The Maximalists there during the war and before the Revolution were in a minority. Famine conditions converted them into a majority. The same causes will operate to bring" about the same result in other countries.

It may be said that though the proletariat are more numerous in Western Europe than any other single class, yet they do not exceed in numbers all the other classes put together. In Germany the number of industrial workers is estimated at 15 millions. In England their number, in proportion to the population, is much greater. To this must be added the farm labourers, who will throw in their lot with the revolutionary proletariat, as we shall show. Their organisations, both political and industrial, are powerful. In England they number have

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9. In the fourth chapter we will deal more extensively with the difference between the Russian and the Western European Revolutions.

millions. In Germany between three millions and four millions are organised. In other countries like conditions prevail. In all of them a large number of the population will act with and support the revolutionaries in the coming struggle. They need only to be exposed to the rays of the sun of revolution to have their latent strength quickened and made manifest in all its grandeur.

The fight is now between "big business" and the proletariat. The issue is, who shall receive the surplus wealth, the Capitalists or the workers? Either the Capitalists will continue to appropriate it by the oppression of State Socialism, or the proletariat will take it by setting up real Socialism.

How the struggle will end depends largely upon what attitude is taken by the middle class, especially the lower middle class; which in England and Germany is the most numerous.

The Capitalists will be forced to tax themselves. But the debts and requirements of the States are so great that in order to provide for these, and maintain and increase their power, they will be compelled to oppress all other classes, including the middle class. In addition to exploiting the working class, they will lay the heaviest possible burdens upon the middle class, shopkeepers and farmers. They will keep down the salaries of their officials and employees. All this, combined with famine, scarcity of raw materials, and of work, and high prices will drive the middle class to the side of the workers.

That part of surplus wealth that went to the middle class was always small. After the war and under Imperialism it will be smaller still. To this class, or at least to the lower portion of it, a Socialist society offers more than the Capitalist State. Real Socialism would be better for them than State Socialism.

The patient, persistent propaganda of the last thirty years has done its work. Millions in Western

Europe now know what Socialism means. They will realise ere long that now is the time to decide. There is only one choice possible: Imperialistic Capitalism or Socialism. The question to be decided is: Which shall be dictator of the world—Capital or Labour, Imperialism or Socialism?

The terrible plight into which Imperialism has brought the world has made possible the international unity of the workers, and the adhesion to their ranks of the lower middle classes.

And so there rises before us the possibility of almost immediately realising Socialism. Shall the workers conquer the world? Shall they unite humanity in one great whole? Shall the human race be freed once and for all from the shackles of Capitalism and Imperialism? It depends upon the workers themselves—upon whether they are sufficiently brave, sufficiently educated, and sufficiently united.

There is one danger to be guarded against—the danger of disunity. The Imperialists of the victorious belligerent group will unite with those of the defeated nations, and with the reformists and social-patriots, against the proletariat. There will thus be formed one front: on one side the Capitalist classes, reformists and chauvinists; on the other the revolutionaries. If a national proletariat prefers one Imperialism to another; if it allows itself to be bribed by its national rulers, or to be deceived by treacherous Labour leaders; if it accepts the State Socialism of its national Capitalists; if the international proletariat remains divided, one section betraying and deserting the others; if one part after another is allowed to be smashed by international Imperialism—then the success of the Revolution will be impossible, and we shall have to endure a new era of Capitalism, Imperialism, and Militarism.

But even if defeated at the first attempt,

international unity, even if it takes years to accomplish, must be established. It should, in any case, be the result of this first world war.

In the beginning of the great struggle for Socialism, the proletariat of each country will, of course, fight against its own national Capitalism; but as the struggle progresses, the necessary international unity will be established. There will be set up an International like a Trade Union or a federation of Trade Unions, in which the members will be pledged to support and defend one another. As in a Trade Union when a member acts as a blackleg, or as in a federation when one of the affiliated bodies fails to strike in sympathy with the others, so in the new International, when the proletariat of a nation does not play its part in the emancipation of humanity, it will be considered a national scab.

We shall now endeavour to sketch the programme which such an International should endeavour to carry out.

### **International Programme of the Revolutionaries.**

1. Political power to be in the hands of the proletariat.

2. Legislation by the proletariat.

3. A minimum standard of living for all workers.

All workers to be equal.

4. Control and regulation of all production and distribution by the proletariat.

5. Work to be obligatory on all.

6. Repudiation of National Debts.

7. Confiscation of war profits.

8. Taxes to be levied only on capital and income: that on the former to be increased till it becomes expropriation.

9. Confiscation of banks.

10. Confiscation of large businesses.

11. Confiscation of the land.
12. Judicial power to be wielded by the proletariat.
13. Abolition of all tolls and tariffs.
14. Present military systems to be abolished and the proletariat to be armed.

**Explanation of Programme.**

The first item gives the proletariat the means to destroy the old Capitalist State by destroying its instruments of power—bureaucracy, police, and army.

The second gives it the power to lay the foundations of, and build up, the new society. These means and powers must be given only to the proletariat, because it is the only class that is capable of realising Socialism. But, of course, it may allow other sections of the population to share in these privileges, if it considers them true to the Revolution.

The third assures to the workers a sound basis of existence through the equitable allocation of food, housing, etc. This must also be guaranteed to the small shopkeepers, poor farmers, disabled soldiers and sailors, widows and orphans, and all who have not sufficient means of subsistence. In short, help immediately, and complete liberation in the future, should be promised to all who are oppressed.

The fourth point, together with the fifth—work for all—is the only means whereby a Socialist society can be constructed from the ruins of the old one.

Clauses 6 to 9 provide the means for carrying out the third, and so consolidating the foundations of the new order.

It will be understood, of course, that in taxing capital and income, a minimum will be fixed, below which no tax will be imposed.

The tenth point—confiscation of large businesses,—covers iron and steel works, coal mines, foreign trade, railways, shipping, etc.

It is not contrary to the fourth point; for in that it is control and regulation of all production that is insisted upon. The confiscation of small businesses cannot be carried out right away on account of their great number.

So far as agriculture is concerned, the land will be confiscated and the principle of common ownership established; but in the case of the smaller holders this can only be done by degrees. At first only the large agricultural concerns ought to be taken over and worked by the community itself, or co-operatively by the small farmers and the labourers.

The line dividing great and small concerns would be different in different countries, provinces, and businesses. There will be, in each case, different means and methods of confiscation.

The wealthy landowner and the rich farmer can be dealt with by taxation. The moderately wealthy farmer will be hit sufficiently by the confiscation of the land banks. The community, and not a landlord, will receive rent from the farmer.

There is nothing in these proposals that cannot be carried out. On the other hand, if mooted and not carried into execution, they would drive the farming class into counter-revolution. By these measures, in conjunction with the third point of the programme, the small farmers and farm labourers can be won over to the Revolution, and the middle class farmers can be induced to become, if not friends, at least not enemies.

The agricultural question is one of great difficulty. The measures indicated above, coupled with the development of productive power, provide the only possible settlement.

The twelfth point—the vesting of judicial authority in the proletariat—gives to that class alone the power in the Socialist Republic by which it can defend the new society from attack.

The last paragraph but one—the abolition of all tolls and tariffs—has for its object the removal of one of the greatest causes of enmity between peoples, and of one of the most serious obstacles to the international regulation of production and distribution.

The last demand is the crowning part of the programme. It overthrows Capitalistic militarism, and puts an end to Capitalistic wars. The second part of it—the arming of the proletariat—puts into the hands of the workers the means whereby they can defend the Revolution from enemies both within and without, and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is absolutely necessary that revolutionary international Social Democrats should get their programme ready as soon as possible—in fact, at once! If the revolution does not take place in the principal countries at the same time and with the same intention; if a succession of unorganised revolts takes place—failure will be the inevitable result, and the revolution will be smothered in blood.

The example of the Russian Maximalists shows us clearly the advantages a clear-cut and well-defined programme gives when it is ready and published beforehand. It shows also what happens when the people of other nations do not revolt at the same time and with the same programme.

The programme should be a revolutionary one, but should contain only those demands which the Revolution can make possible of fulfilment. It ought to be as simple as possible, so that every worker may understand what the Revolution aims at. It should be of such a nature that all Socialists can endorse it. Therefore it should not contain any legislative details which might cause conflict between nations with different lines of development.

Lastly, it is essential that it should unite only

**real revolutionaries.** It should, by its provisions, debar all who are not prepared to fight for the Revolution.

The programme outlined above would ensure all that.

There is still one other remark to make which is of the greatest importance to the workers. They would do well to remember that after the war the strike—even the general strike—cannot win them everything; because there will be shortage of capital, shortage of raw material and of machinery, and little demand for labour.

As soon as the workers are disarmed, the ruling classes will begin to bind and gag them. This, coupled with unemployment and hunger, and the sufferings that follow in their train, may goad the people into revolt. In such an event the ruling classes will have, under arms and ready for action, troops selected from the anti-revolutionary sections of the population, and the proletariat will be dragooned into submission.

If, on the other hand, the proletariat, before demobilisation takes place, puts forward these proposals or a similar general programme, the ruling caste, fearing the power of the workers and the other classes which would support them, will give way, and their demands will be conceded without bloodshed.

Therefore we insist on the necessity for getting the programme ready immediately. The one sketched above is offered merely as an example. It would be well if the revolutionaries of all countries would set about the work at once.

The necessity and the possibility of the Revolution in West Europe—which is a condition of the World Revolution—can be clearly seen. A proletariat strong in its organisations and great in its numbers is here. A society ripe for Socialism, which has already taken its first step into State Socialism, is here. And the



way to the new society, now at last visible to the workers, lies through a revolutionary programme.

Has the proletariat the physical and moral strength to overthrow Capitalism in all countries and to conquer Imperialism?

It will have the power when it is united.

Will the workers be able to achieve unity?

In order that they may benefit by the example of the Russian proletariat in its struggle for unity and victory, we shall deal in the next chapter with the Russian Revolution.

## **Chapter 4: The Example of the Russian Revolution**

The Russian Revolution is, for the European and American workers, who have it still before them, a splendid and clear example. This example is itself the result of the development of Imperialism, from which the West European workers can learn how they have to act, how they can attain unity and win the victory.

We will deal with the Russian Revolution in order that the proletariat may see how far it can follow the same path, and where it must take its own course<sup>10</sup>.

The Russian industrial proletariat is very small in proportion to the whole population of the gigantic Empire.

The great mass of the Russian population are peasants, and among these a very great number are small farmers or farm labourers. The poor peasantry form the

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10. The Russian Revolution is the first revolution to be undertaken by Marxists, and in accordance with the Marxian theory. The teachings of the Anarchist, the syndicalist, the Reformist, and the pseudo-Marxist (e.g., Kautsky), were proved in the Revolution to be useless.

majority of the peasant population.

The old Czarism was supported by the great land-owners, a powerful body in Russia, and also by the capital of the big industries, which was, however, a weak prop when one considers the extent of the Empire. Czarism found it could not bear the burden of the great war; and when it became apparent that the industries and transport were not equal to the task they were called upon to perform and famine ensued, it was overthrown by the combined efforts of the upper and lower bourgeoisie, the middle class peasants, the poor peasants, and the proletariat. These classes then attempted, with Russia as a bourgeois republic, to carry on the war.

The peasants' party, the Social-Revolutionists, the reformists and the social-patriots (Mensheviks), all worked hand in hand.

The small party of real revolutionaries (the Bolsheviks) opposed them. It was led by the man who had always stood firm for revolution—the revolution for Socialism and against any momentary success; and has thereby proved himself to be the ablest politician the world-proletariat has had since Marx. This man was Lenin.

As the Russian proletariat is the advance guard of the world-proletariat, so Lenin is the champion of this advance guard.

Only later generations who will know all his wor[ds?] and deeds, and who will be free from passion and prejudice will be able to compare him with his contemporaries, and pass true judgment upon him. But I am convinced that he surpasses all other leaders of the proletariat, and that he alone deserves to be placed side by side with Marx. Marx surpasses him in theoretical knowledge and dialectical acuteness, he towers above Marx by his deeds.

His tactics, before, during, and after the

Revolution are far beyond anything that the proletariat had previously accomplished in the sphere of politics.

And we are drawn towards him as we were towards Marx. And the mind and the soul of the man inspire us with affection. His simplicity, his sincerity, his courage, the truth of his very being—these are the causes of our affection. He is the leader of the Russian Revolution. May he be the leader of the World Revolution!

The Bolsheviks said that the workers of Russia should not start the bourgeois revolution with the bourgeoisie, the landed proprietors and the rich farmers, but should begin a proletarian revolution with the help of the poor peasants.

They drew up a programme for the social revolution of which the chief points were: All power to the worker, the land for the poor peasants, and peace.

The Capitalists, the landed proprietors, the rich peasants, and the reformists, carried on the war till Russia was again nearing the abyss. None of the demands of the workers and poor peasants was conceded.

Then the poor peasantry and the whole of the proletariat drifted away from the reformists and social-patriots and became united under the Bolshevik banner. The Bolsheviks were able to overthrow the Government and seize political power. And they used this power to lay the foundation for Socialism.

The same thing will have to be done by the Western European and American workers.

They must either immediately overthrow their Capitalistic Government, whether it be monarchy or democracy; they must first deal with the bourgeois Government and then with the Government made up of elements taken from bourgeoisie and social-patriotic and reformist groups.

The Russian revolutionaries—the workers and

the small farmers—captured political power. And they took that over solely for their own ends.

They gave the right to vote and the right to be elected only to proletarians and poor peasants.

They divided Russia into districts, whose Workers' Councils (Soviets) elected the District Workers' Councils. These District Workers' Councils elected the Central Council [of?] the Empire, and the congress of the Councils elected the Executive Committee.

All members of the Local, District, and Central Councils, and also all officials and employees, are elected for a short period only, and are always liable to be called to account for their actions <sup>11</sup>.

As in general all officials have a low salary, and as all the Councils have to meet regularly and often, there will be formed a flexible body as the first Socialist Government in the world.

The light of the new world radiates from these Councils.

The working class of the world has found in these Workers' Councils its organisation and its centralisation, its form and its expression, for the revolution and for the socialist society.

What Marx had foretold—that the working class could not simply take over the Government machinery of the Capitalistic State, but that it must find its own forms—actually [unreadable word] come to pass. The organisation and the centralisation, the form and the expression of the proletarian revolution, the foundation of the socialist society, are here.

The Russian revolutionaries in these institutions have given an example to the workers of the world.

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11. This is to prevent the formation of a new bureaucracy, or a new independent power, being raised above the workers.

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With this example before its eyes the world-proletariat can now make the world revolution.

The world-proletariat must erect Workers' Councils—councils of the locality, of the provinces or districts, of the empires or nations, as a means to the revolution, and as, the new form of its society. These Councils alone shall have power.

Workers' Councils of the nations, of the peoples, in place of Capitalistic Governments: that is the form of the revolution and of the new society which the workers must everywhere create.

The Russian revolutionaries gave power only to the workers, and to the poor peasants who are on a par with the workers.

They gave the land to the poor peasants.

They made peace whilst Capitalists and Capitalism slaughtered humanity and destroyed the earth.

They took over all the great industries, the banks, and the means of transport.

They repudiated the National Debt.

They confiscated all property.

They introduced compulsory labour.

For the first time since modern Capitalism came into being, the worker, the producer of capital, became its owner. The working class came into possession of its products: the means of production. The whole capital came into the hands of those who produced it, and who were its sole legitimate owners. It left the hands of those who expropriated it, and went back into the hands of the real owners, the people who created it.

The Russian revolutionaries introduced a uniform standard of education with free instruction for everyone. They threw open to everyone all the higher educational institutions.

They introduced control of the factories and

workshops by the workers.

They brought the industries under the control of the community of workers.

They began to exploit the great industries as communal industries.

They allowed cooperative societies of poor peasants to exploit the large estates.

They made a start with systematic barter, a systematic transport, and a systematic production.

They began to make the whole social progress of production into a great systematic entity. They did the same with distribution.

Throughout the whole of Russia, communistic industries are now springing up.

All banking institutions are in the possession of the Soviets.

A number of industrial and transport undertakings are in the possession of, and are controlled by, the Socialist community.

A number of agricultural industries are run for the Socialist community through Socialist and Communist peasants, among whom the land has been apportioned.

A beginning has been made with Socialist exchange and Socialist trade. In short, the Socialist society has been founded.

And is it possible that what the Russian workers can do and have done, can not be done by the English and German workers?

The latter will be able to do it much better.

They will be better able to take over the banks, and the means of production and distribution.

They will be better able to establish the Socialist society. And then will follow suit the proletariat of all Europe and North America—of the whole world. In their case the great industries are far more powerful

and more numerous. Besides, they have the organisation which will enable them to take over the means of life.

They have the power, the experience.

They have the intellectual strength.

They have a net of unions, in all branches of industry, over the whole land.

The Workers' Unions in Russia rejoice over the beginning of Socialism, over Socialist work, which is not done for private Capitalism and masters, but for the community and for equals.

The intellectuals, who in the beginning with the possessing classes resorted to sabotage, have now in great numbers taken up Socialist work.

Socialist labour conditions are developing. Of course it is with difficulty, but they are developing.

And with and through these conditions the Socialist mind, the Socialist spirit, has come. The Communist character has appeared. Through Socialist work the Communist emotion is engendered: Communist joy, Communist desire, Communist happiness, the Communist heart.

There is no longer any doubt that in a short time the spiritual expression, the new and higher knowledge, and the new and higher art, will burst forth out of this bud, out of this first beginning of the Commune.

Contrary to expectations a Socialist society was born from the blood of the Russian workers, and it now stands before us like a beautiful flower.

Through the struggles of the Russian workers and poor peasants there appears for the proletariat, and indeed for all exploited people, the dawn of a new era.

The Bolsheviks are holding aloft a torch which illuminates the whole of nature and society. They give to the world-proletariat, in advance, in their own methods and deeds, a picture of those that must be adopted and emulated in order to attain success.

The unexpected has happened. In the infinite riches of nature and society there lay something whose existence was undreamt of. Neither England nor Germany made the beginning in Socialism. That honour belongs to Russia. Through a remarkable combination of circumstances and conditions the opportunity came to set up Communism; and there it stands to-day.

Communist society should soon spread over the whole of Russia. In the hands of the workers it should soon grow to perfection. If not, then Socialism is only possible internationally.

The Bolsheviks realise that, and have therefore done everything in their power to set in motion the proletariat of all other lands in the direction of Socialism. They know that their own revolution runs the greatest danger of being defeated; and still the revolution in Europe and North America hangs fire. The different economic and political conditions in those parts of the world delay the advent of the world revolution.

But that does not prevent the Bolsheviks from carrying on their glorious work. They realise that the triumph of the revolution in Russia would act as a guiding star to the proletariat of the world. They realise that it is necessary to set an example to the workers of other countries. They are determined to hold fast to Socialism in spite of all opposition. The workers of the world would be compelled to recognise that Socialism had come out of the great war that had apparently destroyed it.

When Germany made peace with the Bolsheviks it was a peace in appearance only. In reality it was intended to destroy them. Just as the Bolsheviks expected, the Germans stole the Ukraine, the granary of Russia where the Soviets were in power. They took Poland, Lithuania, Livonia, Esthonia, Finland, and the Caucasus, and made preparations to annex other parts of Russia.

The Bolsheviks submitted to this in order to save



the Socialist society. They withdrew into the interior of the country, and did all they could to develop and extend the new form of society. They knew that only in this way could they keep in touch with, and remain united to, the German and English-American proletariat. Their sacrifice of a part of their country so that they might continue the struggle against Imperialism and maintain their solidarity with the workers of other lands, was the first example of international unity amongst the workers.

History does not furnish a greater or more sublime act than this—great in its comprehensiveness, sublime in its meaning, for the workers and for the whole of humanity.

The arrival of Socialism has been proclaimed by a herald worthy of its name.

There is no reason why the revolution could not have succeeded, or why the Socialist society could not have been gradually built up, if there had been no intervention by other nations, although the establishment of Socialism in a country that is mainly agricultural is contrary to orthodox Socialist Science. The orthodox view is that only in a highly-developed industrial country is it possible to achieve Socialism. But the developments of nature and of society are not all comprehended by science. They are always bringing to light something new. In Russia there were exceptional classes and class conditions. There was a fairly numerous, very revolutionary proletariat, a large number of whom are, like the peasants, in great poverty. These classes were stronger than all the others. There was a degenerate class of bureaucrats and landowners, and a weak Capitalist class. Why, then, could not the first two classes together establish a Socialist society? Why could they not Socialise by degrees, banks, industry, trade, etc.? They had the power. They were armed. Under these conditions who could prevent them?

They would encounter, of course, great opposition from the possessing classes, the richer farmers, the nobles, the Capitalists, and a part of the middle class—even from some of the poor peasants themselves who still cling to individualist ideas. But these difficulties are not insurmountable.

Time and patience only are required.

The attempt will, at all events, be made.

In order to give them a fair chance of success it is necessary that no outside power should attack them, and rob them of their food, and assist and strengthen the counter-revolution.

Workers of the world! It was, is, and will be, impossible to maintain Socialism in any country if it is attacked by all other countries. It must be set up in several—in all of the advanced countries, at least—at the same time.

That is the first lesson we are taught by the Russian Revolution.

Now the great drama proceeds. Germany tears the body of Russia to pieces, and by cutting off the Ukraine causes hunger and scarcity. Prices rise. The speculation in foodstuffs assumes gigantic dimensions. Some of the farmers, dissatisfied with the prices for their produce fixed by the community, desert the workers. Hunger and want bring the work of reform to a standstill—especially the division of the land and the communisation of agriculture. Some of the farmers and the Social Revolutionaries break away from the Bolsheviks and try to persuade Russia to re-enter the war against Germany that has caused so much misery, and by that means overthrow the Revolution. At the same time England, France, Japan, and the United States force their way into Russia and endeavour to seize large slices of territory in Siberia and on the Murman coast. They supply the counter-revolutionaries with arms and money,

and assist them in any other way they can. On all sides enemies of the Revolution raise their heads, but they have no chance of winning except by foreign assistance.

Attacked on all sides by the minions of Capitalism, the kernel of the Socialist Brotherhood struggles for existence—endeavouring to develop, or at least to live, and awaits the European Revolution. But, as already stated, the American, the world revolution, is not coming to its assistance; and meanwhile the Russian Revolution itself stands in the greatest danger. The world revolution will come, but later, owing to different historical, economic and political conditions that exist in other parts of the world.

We shall now indicate what these conditions are, so that the proletariat may see why the world revolution can come only after the Russian Revolution.

The first great difference between the Russian and West European Revolutions is this. The Russian revolutionaries could only carry through the Revolution with the help of the peasants. The peasants themselves were revolutionary. Without their help the workers could have done but little, even with the most reckless courage. In Russia there were a great number of large estates. These belonged to the Royal Family, the State, the nobles, and the Church. These estates could be divided. The peasant wanted the land. The revolutionary workers wanted them to have it. The peasants therefore joined forces with the workers.

Herein lies the great difference between Russia and Western Europe. In the West, even in, England and Germany, there are not many propertiless farmers or peasants; and except in a few countries and districts there are not many large estates. On the contrary, in many European countries—Germany, France, Scandinavia, Holland, Belgium—middle-sized and small estates are the general rule. The workers in Western

Europe must make the Revolution without the peasants, or in comparison with Russia, with only a small number. There the proletariat had strong support; here they stand alone. That is the first reason why the Revolution here will come later.

The second reason is: The Government and the bureaucracy were weak; in Europe, and especially in England and Germany, they are very strong. In Russia the organisation of Capitalism was very defective; here (especially again in England and Germany) Capitalism is splendidly organised. In Russia the opponents of the revolutionaries were weak; those of the West European revolutionaries are strong. The Russian proletariat stood with a strong auxiliary behind them and a weak Capitalism in front. In the West the proletariat stand alone in opposition to a powerful Capitalism.

The workers in Western Europe are, in comparison with the rest of the population, more numerous than in Russia, but not so numerous as workers and peasants combined.

In the West the workers have a firm foundation on which to build Socialism. Firstly, the banking system, the principal branches of industry, transport and trade, were, even before the war, ripe for socialisation. Secondly, Imperialism has during the war centralised production and distribution. This organisation is technically powerful and can be taken over by the proletariat as a basis on which to rear the Socialist society. In Russia these organisations either do not exist or are very imperfect.

In Russia society was technically unripe for Socialism before the war, and its organisation has been greatly weakened during the period of the war. In Western Europe society was ripe for the change before the war; and during the war its organisation and centralisation have been greatly strengthened.

In Russia a small proletariat, helped by a great

revolutionary peasantry, stand before the task of building up a new society with limited economic means at their disposal. The proletariat of Western Europe stand before their task alone, but they are powerful and well organised, and possess great economic resources.

The Russian proletariat, small in numbers but assisted by the peasantry, struggle with slender means against weak opponents. The workers of Western Europe great in numbers, but quite alone, fight with great resources against powerful opponents. The organisation of the Western workers has been thrown into confusion during the war through the separation of its members. The organisation of capital, and especially of the Governments, has been greatly strengthened in the same period. Through these causes the Revolution will come later, and will be more difficult in Western Europe than in Russia. It will be entirely different from the Russian Revolution.

The peasants of the West are not revolutionary as those of Russia are. This is true of the great majority of the small farmers and of the shopkeepers as well.

Although the proletarians stand alone now, if they adopt the right tactics they will not stand alone when the crisis comes. Because the material foundations of Socialism are here they can reckon on the help of others in the Revolution. With the right tactics and the right programme they will attract millions of adherents. A real proletarian programme aiming at the establishment of complete Socialism will make adherents and allies of all the lower working classes, the small business people, the lesser Government officials and employees, and the small farmers.

Although these classes are not revolutionary of themselves they will certainly ally themselves with the proletariat, for they have been hard hit by the war and oppressed by Imperialism. The small Capitalists

have long been hesitating between the Capitalist and Socialist parties. Up to the present the greater number of them have adhered to the Capitalist parties. But as a result of the war they can be won over to Socialism if the right policy is pursued. The proletariat will then have a majority.

The war has pressed so heavily upon these classes that if they can only be made to realise that their only choice is between Imperialism and Socialism, they will choose the latter. When the alternative is presented to them of being despoiled by Capitalist Imperialism through high prices, taxes and war, or being saved by Socialism, they will plump for Socialism.

Let the proletariat say to all the working classes: Imperialism and war destroy you. We assure you an existence whether you have work to do or not. You shall not lack the necessaries of life.

Let them say to the small Capitalists and Government minor officials and employees: Imperialism breaks you by its wars, its taxes, low wages, hunger and poverty. Socialism, which will take all wealth and all big businesses and put them in the hands of the community; which will centralise production and distribution over the whole world—offers to you low taxes, and later no taxes at all. It assures you regular work and an honourable position. It gives you, in common with all other citizens, peace, happiness, and comfort.

To the small shopkeepers let them say: Remain in your places. You shall have wares to sell. We have all the large businesses in our hands. We will supply you with wares and raw material. By degrees your businesses will become part of our system, and you will ultimately, like all other citizens, be employed in the production or distribution of goods for the community.

To the small farmers and to a part of the well-to-do farmers let the proletariat say: Imperialism and

Capitalism break you through war, taxes, and high rents. They take away your sons. They deprive you of your cattle. They will continue to do after the war. The Socialist society, on the other hand, will allow you to carry on your work in peace. It will relieve you, wholly or partly, from taxes. It will free you from your landlords, and in many other ways reduce your burdens. As for the large estates, it will apportion them amongst you to be worked on a Communistic basis for the benefit of the whole community. As so on as the development of productive forces makes it feasible, it will convert all your businesses into a co-operative Communist concern, in which all workers will be equally great and powerful in, a free society of workers.

And finally, to all these classes let the proletariat say: We can do all this if you help us. In that event we shall have in our hands control of all the great industries of wealth production and distribution. We shall have all the capital and all the riches of society at our command.

There can be no doubt that those classes who are so much oppressed by Imperialism will accept this offer. The increasing pressure to which they are being subjected will make them range themselves on the side of the proletariat. In England, if it is set about in the right way, it can quite easily be done.

Here is seen again the great difference between Russia and Western Europe. In the former the proletariat could not make such an offer, because Russia was weak in productive forces and poor in capital. In the latter there are enormous masses of capital and gigantic productive power, and a complete organisation of both. With such conditions it is easy to supplant Imperialistic Capitalism with its inevitable results, death and destruction, by Socialism, and in consequence, comfort, equality, and peace. The intelligent members of the "lower" classes, who have no direct interest in Capitalism, will be won

over to the side of the revolutionaries.

We may well take a lesson in this matter from the Bolsheviks. How did they obtain the help of the peasants? They put forward a programme which demanded "All power to the workers," "the land for the peasants," and "Peace."

No other party had a like programme. The Social-Revolutionaries (in their first phase) and the Mensheviks (the reformers) betrayed the people and the peasants by alliances with the landowners and Capitalists.

If the Western proletariat make any compromise with the Capitalists, or ally themselves with them in any way, they will receive no support from the shopkeepers, Government officials or employees. These people are too intelligent not to see that in that case the proletariat would be powerless to free them from Imperialism.

There is no middle course. The toilers must do as they did in Russia—demand all power to the workers, confiscate all wealth and industries, concentrate production and distribution in their own hands. They must, in short, establish Socialism.

The Russian Revolution teaches us another lesson. The Bolsheviks won not only by the help of the poor peasants, but also, in the first instance by the absolute unity of all the working class. If they had not had that unity they could not have induced the other classes to join them.

The working classes in Western Europe are threatened with a great danger—a danger which has grown greater during the last twenty-five years. It comes from the reformists and social-patriots. Just as they held the proletariat back from revolution, and effected an alliance with the bourgeoisie and brought them into the war, so they will endeavour with the help of the bourgeoisie to bring the proletariat of the world into State Socialism.



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The Capitalists, in order to escape the danger of bankruptcy through disorganisation of production and National Debts, will be forced after the war to nationalise many undertakings, or to put them under State control. They will then take away the right to strike, reduce wages, increase the working hours, and speed up work to the highest possible pitch. In short, the workers will be State slaves.

The programme of the German, English, Italian, and French reformists, shows quite clearly that they will assist the Capitalists to do this. Their assistance will be given on condition that one part of the workers—the members of the great Trade Unions—get advantages over, and preferences greater than, the others—such as higher wages, better conditions of labour, etc.

The Capitalists would willingly buy at this price the social-patriots and a part of the proletariat.

In England the danger is threatened by the Labour Party and the Trade Unions; in Germany by the Majority and the Independents, the Trade Unions and the Social-Democrats; in France by the Majority and Centre Parties and the workers' syndicates; and in America by the Trade Unions. Everywhere the danger appears.

If this plot succeeds, the division of the workers will be effected. Some will go over to Imperialism; others will declare for the Revolution. Then will the Revolution be lost, for the working class will be powerless. It will be impotent in itself, and will receive no support from other sections of the population—shopkeepers, small farmers, etc. It will be at the mercy of Imperialism.

Only when the proletariat is absolutely united, and no section of it agrees to State Socialism, will it have the power to win.

We repeat again, the perfect unity of the proletariat is the second lesson of the Russian Revolution.

There is still another lesson the Russian example affords to the Western proletariat. The Russian workers are partly defeated already because the German, English, and American proletariat did not make a revolution at the same time.

The Russian revolutionaries are in constant danger of defeat. If they are finally crushed we know the reason why.

Attacked by all the powers of Capitalism, by all the forces of the world, the Russian proletariat will hold fast to the Revolution to the last, and dying will give another and greater example to the proletariat of the world.

Holding fast to the World Revolution, suffering for it, dying for it: this is internationalism, indeed. This solidarity of the workers of Russia with the workers of the world: this is the last and greatest lesson the Russian Revolution teaches to the world proletariat.

In the middle of the Capitalist orgy of blood appeared the unity of the proletariat. In the midst of the world war appeared the kernel of a new humanity.

The Russian Revolution, through its decision, its foresight and its courage, through its form of organisation (the Soviets) and through its deeds (through its deeds more than anything else), its overthrow of Czardom and Capitalism; the confiscation of capital, the initiation of the organisation of Socialism, its union of the poor peasants with the other workers, its fidelity to international unity—is a splendid example to Western Europe, to America, and the whole world.

There can be no doubt that the workers of the world, with this brilliant example before them, will begin at once to unite.

The struggle to establish Socialism all over the world will then begin in earnest.

## Chapter 5: Summing up

### I.

The World Revolution is necessary.

The Imperialisms of all nations are alike inimical to the workers.

Therefore the international proletariat must unite and destroy World Imperialism.

But Imperialism cannot be destroyed unless Capitalism is destroyed.

Therefore the Revolution for the destruction of Capitalism and the establishment of Socialism is necessary now.

### II.

There is no way out of Imperialism for Capitalism.

There is no salvation for the proletariat through Imperialism.

Imperialist Capitalism has divided the nations of the world into two groups to fight for the mastery of the earth.

Three powerful nations—Germany, England, and the United States—have the leadership of these two groups.

There is no hope of a peaceful settlement of this struggle, for all three nations, and all the countries allied with them, want world power for one of themselves, or for the group to which they belong.

There is no means of deciding the issue but war.

The bourgeoisie, the reformists, and the social-patriots seek a settlement, but their solutions have no real value, and serve only to blind the workers and keep them in subjection. A Court of Compulsory Arbitration, a League of Nations, Disarmament, the Right of Self-Determination for all nationalities, Democracy—neither

these nor any of the other petty little proposals put forward by these groups can extricate Capitalism from the contradictions into which it has fallen. From the mass of surplus wealth which it heaps up; from the desire for expansion which is the result of this accumulation; from the conquest of foreign markets which it must make; from the wars that must result; from the self-destruction that will follow from that warfare: from these there is no escape for Capitalism.

The proletariat will not be able to bear the strain of the struggle. They will be forced to revolt in order to escape from the slaughter and oppression.

And they can only escape Imperialism by destroying Capitalism.

Their revolt, then, is the necessary Revolution against World Capitalism, the Social-Revolution of the World-Proletariat, the World Revolution.

### III.

This Revolution is possible and feasible.

It is so from the following reasons:—

Capitalism is ripe for Socialism.

The war has laid the foundations for Socialism.

Capitalism itself must go over to Socialism—  
State Socialism, of course.

The proletariat is moving in the same direction with natural evolution.

The material and moral results of the war are so disastrous for the proletariat that it must come to revolution.

The destruction of productive power, the pain, the hate, the hunger, the never-ending slaughter, will drive the proletariat to revolution during or after the war.

The proletariat is so strong in its organisation that it is quite able to carry through the Revolution.

The following programme could, we think, be

accepted by the international proletariat.

Political power to be in the hands of the proletariat.

Legislation by the proletariat.

The guarantee of a decent standard of living to all workers. All workers to be equal.

Control and regulation of all production and distribution by the proletariat.

Compulsory work for all.

Repudiation of the National Debts.

Confiscation of war profits.

Only capital and income to be taxed: the tax on the former rising till it amounts to confiscation.

Confiscation of banks.

Confiscation of all large businesses.

Confiscation of the land.

Judicial rights to be vested in the proletariat.

Abolition of all tolls and tariffs.

Abolition of present military systems. Arming of the proletariat.

On this programme the international proletariat can unite and win.

On this programme it would win.

#### IV.

The workers of the world have a brilliant example to guide them. That example is the Russian Revolution. It has shown that only two things are necessary for success: unity of the workers, national and international; and simultaneous revolt.

If the workers of a country are not united they will be defeated by the international bourgeoisie.

If the proletariat does not go in for the complete overthrow of the Capitalist system it cannot free itself nor any other exploited class, and will not get the support from those others it would otherwise receive.

But the Russian Revolution has done something more.

It has discovered the form by which the proletariat can achieve victory: Workers' Councils (Soviets). These it has set up in every village and every province in the country.

These Councils have all economic and political power.

The Workers' Councils, which will destroy Capitalism and establish Socialism; which will expropriate Capitalism and transfer all power and wealth to Socialism; which will build up Socialism politically and economically: these Councils are the form and expression of the New Society, of the New Humanity.

At present they embrace only the struggling, the victorious proletariat; but in the coming time they will comprise the entire human race.

The Councils of Labour—of Labour and nothing but Labour—will, in the days to come, be the highest and holiest corporation of humanity.

Unity of the national proletariat; unity of the international proletariat; the uniting and organising of the proletariat into Workers' Councils—these are the three great things the Russian Revolution has taught the workers of the world.

If the West European, the North American, the world-proletariat, were united; if they would establish the new International; if they would all revolt at the same time; if they would organise themselves in Workers' Councils and take over all economic and political power—then would the World Revolution be accomplished.

Already we see in the not distant future the New International, the great Workers' Council of all the nations of the earth.

Already we see the International Workers' Council, the forerunner of the new, free, Communist

Humanity.

THE END.

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## Note

2. This problem is a most serious one, and it is fraught with great danger. The national proletariat who are led by the Reformists trust the Liberals and Democrats, and the international proletariat trust the Imperialism of the Great citizen democracies.

And so long as this trust continues, so long as the French, English, American, Belgian, etc., workers believe that the English-American Imperialism is one whit better than the German; so long will there be no unity of the proletariats, no new International, and no enthusiastic fight by the world proletariat for the world revolution.

Therefore another word or two about this.

Wilson's aim: the independence and self-determination of all European nations and a League of Nations, is impossible. For the interests of all those nations are different; and there are some strong ones and some weak ones among them. This must, under Capitalism (divided into national Capitalisms as it still is) lead to dictation and oppression.

It cannot be otherwise.

It is extremely hypocritical on the part of England and America, after destroying the power of Germany, to grant independence to all European nations. For the interests of England and America make it necessary that no single Power on the Continent shall grow strong. Therefore this independence is only an appearance. It is merely a means to gain their end, and that is to make the European nations political and economic vassals of both Anglo-Saxon nations.

The truth is this: there can be no independence under Imperialism. Should Germany win there would be set up a League of Nations in which the nations would not be independent, but simply subjects of Germany. Should the Allies win they would set up a League of Nations in which all would be weak except England and America; and their weakness would force them to submit to these two.

The aim of both Imperialisms is the same: the subjection of the nations, command of the world, world-power, world-domination.

Germany murders independence openly and cruelly; England and America allow it to exist in appearance, but kill it in reality.

The difference is only apparent, not real.

The difference between German and Anglo-American Imperialism is the same as that between Conservatism and Liberalism, between Absolutism and Republicanism, between Aristocracy and Democracy.

There is only one difference between the Imperialism of a reactionary absolutist autocracy and the Imperialism of Liberal republican democracy, and that is in appearance; in reality they are alike.

Real independence cannot be attained under Capitalism, whether it be an autocracy or a democracy. Capitalism and Imperialism tend inevitably to the subjection of the nations.

The reason is that the monopolistic banking interests in Germany, England, and the United States, are all-powerful, and rule the whole world. It is characteristic that, in regard to this matter, Capitalism is in a blind alley.

This question, as so many others, can only be solved by Socialism.







Gerd Arntz, Lunch in front of the factory 1927

# Lenin's *Infantile Disorder...* and the Third International

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Franz Pfemert

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## Introduction

In April 1920, when Lenin was putting the finishing touches to his *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, he was as yet unaware of the founding of the KAPD, which would reinforce his determination to liquidate a political tendency which seemed to him to be a denial of reality. In order not to lose touch with the masses, one must go wherever they are to be found. This is the axis around which all of the arguments in Lenin's book revolve, making the book a theory of manipulation: we shall take advantage of the discord in the enemy's ranks, we shall unmask the leaders of the Labour Party before the eyes of their membership by making proposals which they cannot fulfill, we shall use the space provided to us by bourgeois democracy against that democracy...

The KAPD, through the pen of Gorter, who published his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* in July, still attempted to open up a dialogue. Gorter stressed the point that, unlike the situation in Russia, in the countries of the old bourgeoisie with deeply-rooted democratic traditions, no method could transform the parliaments into weapons, and one did not need to unmask a social

democracy and a handful of trade unions which, rather than carrying out “betrayals”, fulfilled a precise function.

The *Open Letter* was an attempt to prove to the Bolsheviks that they were mistaken in their efforts to get the communists to imitate them everywhere. Gorter argued as if the KAPD had a clearer awareness of the real interests of the International and the Russian State than Lenin, Trotsky or Zinoviev. Until the middle and even until the end of 1920, the German Left Communists did not consider themselves to actually constitute an opposition to the Bolsheviks; to the contrary, it was the Spartacist leadership which seemed to them to be unfaithful to the principles they felt they held in common with the Bolsheviks. Pfempfert argues from a noticeably different position since, like Rühle, he rejects any positive role for a party. He does, however, just like Gorter but even more explicitly, argue as if a revolutionary situation was in the process of maturing and as if all that was needed was an adequate slogan to be launched by a resolute minority at the right place: the factory, “the reproductive cell of the new society”.

Political stabilization, which was being ever more distinctly established after 1920, deprived the “self-initiative” advocated by Gorter and Pfempfert of its practical scope. To cite just one example, contrary to the hopes of the supporters of an electoral boycott, abstention was of little account. In this confused and turbulent period, the masses were far from demonstrating their loathing for the ballot box, especially on the occasion of the elections to the Constituent Assembly which would decide upon the political regime to succeed the Empire (January 26, 1919). They voted in droves: two-and-a-half times more voters than in 1912, two-thirds of them entering the voting booth for the first time.

Gorter’s *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* was left without any public refutation. It would be ten years

before its first French edition saw the light of day, published by the Groups of Communist Workers (among whose members was André Prudhommeaux), and thirty-nine more years before the second French edition was published.

*Gilles Dauvé*  
*Denis Authier*

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## I

The Third International should be the association of the revolutionary proletariat of all countries in the fight against the dictatorship of capitalism, against the bourgeois State, for the power of toiling humanity, for communism. Having originated in a country where the workers have already, by great efforts, conquered this power, has helped the Third International to win the sympathies of the world proletariat. Enthusiasm for this new worldwide association of the exploited goes hand-in-hand with enthusiasm for Soviet Russia and for the incomparable heroic combat of the Russian proletariat. But the new structure of the Third International has as of yet had neither the time nor the opportunity to achieve moral results as an organization.

The Third International can and will be a moral force if it represents the expression of the will of the world's revolutionary proletariat, and then it will be indestructible and irreplaceable as the International of the fighting proletarian class. But the Third International would be an impossibility and a vacuous phrase should it want to be the propaganda instrument of one or more parties.

If the Third International were really the association of the world's revolutionary proletariat, the latter would then have the feeling of belonging to it, regardless of formal membership. But if the Third International presents itself as the instrument of the

central power of a particular country, then it will bear within itself the seed of death and *it will be an obstacle to the world revolution.*

The revolution is an affair of the proletariat as a *class*; the social revolution is not a *party* matter.

We must be yet more precise:

Soviet Russia will perish without the help of *all* revolutionary combatants. All the workers who are really class-conscious (and the syndicalists, for example, are also unconditionally part of this category!) are ready to actively come to its aid. The Third International would act in a criminal and counterrevolutionary manner if, in the interests of a party, it were to do anything which could douse the sacred fire of fraternal solidarity which smolders in the hearts of all proletarians for Soviet Russia (and not yet for the Third International as a separate organization!).

Is this so hard to understand? Is it folly, comrade Lenin, for us to shout at you: it is not we who need the Third International at this time, but the Third International which needs *us*?

## II

Lenin thinks that is indeed folly. In his work, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, which he has just launched against the revolutionary proletariat, Lenin thinks that the Third International must abide by the statutes of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) and that the revolutionary proletariat of all countries must submit to the authority of the "Third International" and, therefore, to the tactics of the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks should determine what arms the fighting proletariat of the rest of the world should use. And only those proletarians who unconditionally obey will be chosen to belong to this world association. In the Principles of the Second Congress of the Third

International, Lenin has formulated this postulate in a yet clearer way: not only has he given general instructions, but all of the details of *tactics*, of *organization*, and he has even prescribed the *name* which should be assumed by the parties in all countries. And the finishing touch:

“All the decisions of the congresses of the Communist International, as well as of its Executive Committee, are binding on all parties affiliated with the Communist International.”

Even if this is methodical, it is still madness!

In a country as small as Germany, we have repeated experience, most recently in March of 1920, of the fact that a tactic which leads to victory, for example, in the Ruhr, was impossible elsewhere; that the general strike of the industrial workers in central Germany was a joke for the Vogtland, where the proletariat has been condemned to unemployment since November 1918. And should Moscow be the supreme general staff for us and for all the other countries?

What draws us towards the Third International is the shared goal of the world revolution: the dictatorship of the proletariat, communism. The Third International must stand alongside the fighting proletarians of all countries, instructing them concerning the various situations and types of revolutionary civil war. The combatants would be asses instead of combatants were they to want to have nothing to do with the task of examining the weapons used by the comrades fighting here and elsewhere. But they would be sheep were they to fail to stop dragging themselves down roads which they had long since recognized to be impractical for them and which they consequently abandoned.

Lenin's attack against us is, in its tendency and in its details, simply monstrous. His text is superficial. It does not conform to the facts. It is unjust. Only in its phraseology does it display any hardness. Of the rigor

of the thinker Lenin, which was ordinarily manifested in his polemics most of all, not a trace is to be found.

What does Lenin want? He wants to tell the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) and the revolutionary proletariat of all the other countries, that they are imbeciles, idiots, and, worse yet, that they are not docilely knuckling under to the wisdom of the *bonzes*, since they are not allowing themselves to be led in an extremely centralized way by Moscow (through its intermediaries, Radek and Levi). When Germany's revolutionary vanguard rejected participation in bourgeois parliaments, when this vanguard began to demolish the reactionary trade union institutions, when it turned its back on the political parties of leaders, in accordance with the watchword, *the emancipation of the workers can only be the task of the workers themselves*, then this vanguard was composed of imbeciles, then it committed "leftist infantilisms", then it necessarily had to be denied the right to join the Third International (this was the result of Lenin's pamphlet)! Only when the workers of the KAPD return, like repentant sinners, to the Spartacus League, the sole bringer of salvation, will they be allowed to join the Third International. So, this is how it stands: Back to parliamentarism! Enter Legien's trade unions! Join the KPD, that party of leaders in its death throes! This is what Lenin is shouting at the conscious German proletariat!

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1. He is undoubtedly speaking of the antiparliamentary opposition in the SPD, especially in Berlin, which, however, did not become organized until 1889-1892 around the group called "The Youth". Analogous tendencies arose during the same era in Denmark, Switzerland, England (William Morris) and Holland (D. Nieuwenhuis). It was also at that time that the "Marxism"/"Anarchism" split was consummated.



As I said above: a monstrous book! I must also call attention to the futility of the arguments which Lenin dusts off from the 1880s to persuade the German leftists that he knows how to employ quotation marks against them.<sup>1</sup> All his explanations concerning centralism and parliamentarism are on the level of the USPD. And what Lenin writes in favor of working in the trade unions is so amazingly opportunist that the trade union *bonzes* have set themselves no more urgent task than to reproduce and distribute this section of Lenin's work as a leaflet!

The polemic which Lenin directs at the KAPD is scandalously superficial and inexcusably inept. In one passage, for example, he says:

“In the first place, contrary to the opinion of such outstanding political leaders as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the German ‘Leftists’, as we know, considered parliamentarism to be ‘politically obsolete’ even in January 1919. It is clear that the ‘Leftists’ were mistaken. This fact alone utterly destroys, at a single stroke, the proposition that parliamentarism is ‘politically obsolete’.”

This is what the logician Lenin writes! In what way, please tell me, is it “clear” that we were mistaken? Perhaps in the fact that, in the national Constituent Assembly, Levi and Zetkin did not sit next to Crispien's people?<sup>2</sup> Perhaps in the fact that this communist duo is now seated in the Reichstag? How can Lenin, so thoughtlessly and without offering even the shadow of proof, write that our “error” is clear and then add the

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2. Clara Zetkin (1857-1933), member of the SPD Left, later a Spartacist, supported Levi.

Crispien (1875-1946), left the SPD to join the USPD right wing. Attended the Second Congress of the Communist International, but was opposed to joining it and later returned to the SPD.

assertion that “this alone destroys the proposition,” etc.? Monstrous! Also monstrous is the way Lenin responds in the affirmative to the question, “Must we participate in bourgeois parliaments?”:

“Criticism—the keenest, most ruthless and uncompromising criticism—must be directed, not against parliamentarism or parliamentary activities, but against those leaders who are unable—and still more against those who are *unwilling*—to utilize parliamentary elections and the parliamentary tribune in a revolutionary, communist manner.”

It is Lenin who writes this! Lenin suddenly wants “to utilize democracy”, a method with which he had settled accounts by referring to it as “the demand of renegades” (in *The State and Revolution*, in *The Renegade Kautsky...*, and in *Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship*)!

The revolutionary proletariat of Germany has distanced itself from the “venal and corrupt parliamentarism of bourgeois society”, that “system of illusion and deceit”. This proletariat has fully acknowledged the battle cry: “All power to the councils!” It has come to understand that it cannot “utilize” the bourgeois parliament. It has recognized the trade unions as institutions which necessarily lead to a *community of labor* between exploiters and exploited, and for that reason alone sabotage the class struggle, and it is of little import whether their members should criticize this or that. The revolutionary proletariat of Germany has had to atone for its submission to leaders with hecatombs of workers corpses. The infamous Central Committee of the Spartacus League has destroyed that illusion. The proletariat has *definitely* had enough of all that!

And now Lenin comes along and tries to make us forget the bitter lessons of the German revolution as well as the lessons he has himself taught? Is he trying to

make us forget that Marx taught that it is not individuals who are responsible? And that it is *parliamentarism* which must be fought and *not the individual parliamentarians!*

Several months have passed since “communists” first took their seats in the Reichstag. Read the minutes of the parliamentary sessions, now that Levi-Zetkin “have utilized” this tribune “in a revolutionary, communist manner” (actually, no more than meaningless journalistic verbiage)! You have read the minutes, comrade Lenin. Where is your “keenest, most ruthless and uncompromising criticism”? Are you satisfied with them? ...

It is easy to prove: the KAPD has most effectively utilized the “electoral struggle” in the sense of carrying out revolutionary agitation, and it has been able to utilize it more effectively than the parliamentary communists precisely because it has no “candidates” running after electoral victory. The KAPD has unmasked the parliamentary scam and has brought the ideas of the councils to the remotest villages. But the vote-hunters have confirmed, during the few months of their activity in parliament, that we were right to be anti-parliamentary. Comrade Lenin, has the idea never occurred to you, a Leninist idea, that in a country with 40 years of social democracy’s parliamentary foolishness behind it (that party also wanted, in the beginning, to “utilize” that tribune solely for propaganda!), it is a totally reactionary act to enter parliament? Do you not understand that in a country characterized by parliamentary cretinism, parliamentarism *can only be stigmatized by means of the boycott?* There is no stigmatization more violent, none which penetrates more deeply into the consciousness of the workers! A parliament unmasked by a boycott carried out by proletarians would never be able to deceive and trick the proletarians. But a correct “programmatic” speech, which Clara Zetkin delivers with the approval

of the bourgeois and social democratic newspapers, and from which the press takes what seems suitable, such a speech engenders respect in the bourgeois parliament! Had the bosses of the USPD not gone to the Constituent Assembly, the consciousness of the German proletarians would be much more developed today.

### III

Lenin favors “the strictest centralization” and “iron discipline”. He wants the Third International to endorse his views and to eject all those who, like the KAPD, are critically opposed to omnipotent leadership.

Lenin wants military-style authority to prevail in the parties of every country.

The instructions of the First Congress of the Third International had a somewhat different flavor! In those instructions, directed against the Independents whose fighting spirit was uncertain, it recommended:

“... separate the revolutionary elements from the ‘Center’, something which can only be achieved by means of resolute and merciless criticism of the ‘Center’s’ leaders.”

They also said:

“It is in addition necessary to form an alliance with those elements of the revolutionary workers movement who, although not previously members of the socialist party, now stand completely on the terrain of the proletarian dictatorship in its soviet form, that is, first of all with the syndicalist elements of the workers movement.”

But now a different tactic prevails. Instead, the slogan is: Down with the syndicalists! Down with the “idiots” who do not submit to the *bonzes*! The Executive Committee is in command, and its orders are the law.

Lenin thought he could quote Karl Liebknecht against the “Leftists”. I shall quote Karl Liebknecht

*against Lenin:*

“The vicious circle in which the big centralized organizations operate, provided with functionaries who collect their salaries and who are quite well-paid considering their social background, consists not only in the fact that these organizations are creating, in this professional bureaucracy, a social layer directly hostile to the revolutionary interests of the proletariat, but also in the fact that they confer power upon a leader, who easily becomes a tyrant and is chosen from among those who have a violent interest in opposing the revolutionary politics of the proletariat, while the independence, the will, the initiative and the moral and intellectual autonomous action of the masses are repressed or completely eliminated. The paid parliamentarians also belong to this bureaucracy.”

“There is but one remedy, on the organizational plane, for this evil: suppression of the paid bureaucracy or else its exclusion from all decision-making, and the limitation of its activity to technical administrative work. Prohibition of the re-election of all functionaries after a certain term of office, which shall be established in accordance with the availability of proletarians who have in the meantime become experts in technical administration; the possibility of revoking their mandates at any time; limitation of the purview of the various offices; decentralization; the consultation of all members in regard to important questions (veto or referendum). In the election of functionaries the greatest importance should attach to the proofs they offer concerning their determination and readiness in revolutionary action, of their revolutionary fighting spirit, of their spirit of boundless sacrifice in the active commitment of their existence. The education of the masses and of each individual in intellectual and moral autonomy, in their capacity to question authority, in their own resolute self-

initiative, in the unrestrained readiness and capacity for action, in general constitute the only basis to guarantee the development of a workers movement equal to its historical tasks, and also comprise the essential conditions for extirpating the dangers of bureaucracy.”

“Every form of organization which obstructs the education in an international revolutionary spirit, the autonomous capacity for action and the initiative of the revolutionary masses must be rejected... No obstacle to free initiative. The educational task most urgently needed in Germany, a country of blind, passive, mass obedience, is to favor this initiative among the masses; and this problem must be resolved even at the risk of being exposed to the danger that, momentarily, all ‘discipline’ and all the ‘solid organizations’ might all go down the drain (!). The individual must be given a margin of freedom much larger than he has been attributed with until the present by tradition in Germany. No importance at all must be conceded to the profession of faith in words. All the dispersed radical elements will fuse into a determined whole in accordance with the immanent laws of internationalism if intransigence is practiced towards all opportunists and tolerance is practiced towards all the efforts made on behalf of a revolutionary fighting spirit in the process of fermentation.”

#### IV

I know that Lenin has not become a “renegade” or a social democrat, although *Left-Wing Communism...* has a purely social democratic effect (the German leaders were saying almost exactly the same things in 1878). How, then, can the publication of this text against the world revolution be explained?

The monarchists have the custom, in order to excuse the stupidities (or the crimes) of their monarchs, of always alleging that their majesties were

“misinformed”. Revolutionaries *cannot* (they do not have the right to) make such an excuse. We are well aware, of course, that Karl Radek and the Spartacus League, in order to divert Lenin’s attention from the causes of their political failure, have *purposefully* told him lies about the situation and the revolutionary proletariat in Germany. The insolent letter directed by Karl Radek at the members of the KAPD shows just how things have been presented to comrade Lenin. But this by no means excuses Lenin! In any event, such exculpation is useless: the fact remains that Lenin, with his stupid pamphlet, has complicated the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat in Germany, although he has not abolished that struggle.

It is true that Lenin has been shamelessly lied to about the affairs of the Spartacus League and the KAPD, but he should have nonetheless said that it is a serious error to identify the German situation with the Russian situation. Lenin was perfectly capable, despite Radek, of seeing the difference between the German trade unions, which have *always* led a counterrevolutionary existence, and the Russian trade unions. Lenin knew perfectly well that the Russian revolutionaries did not have to fight against parliamentary cretinism because parliament had neither a tradition nor any credit among the Russian proletariat. Lenin knew (or should have known) that in Germany the leaders of the party and the trade unions *necessarily brought on* the 4th of August 1914 by “utilizing” parliament! That the authoritarian and militaristic character of the party, accompanied by blind obedience, has stifled the revolutionary forces in the German workers movement for decades. Lenin should have considered all of these things before undertaking his battle against the “Leftists”. Had he done so, a sense of responsibility would have prevented Lenin from writing this unforgivable pamphlet.

## V

To convince the world proletariat that *Left-Wing Communism...* indicates the right road to the revolution for *every* country, Lenin presents the road which the Bolsheviks followed and which led to their victory, because it was (and is) the *right* road.

Here as well, Lenin finds himself in a completely untenable position. When he cites the victory of the Bolsheviks as proof that his party had worked “correctly” during the fifteen years of its existence, he is hallucinating! *The victory of the Bolsheviks in November 1917 was not due solely to the revolutionary strength of the party! The Bolsheviks took power and achieved victory thanks to the bourgeois-pacifist slogan of “Peace”!* Only this slogan defeated the national-Mensheviks, and allowed the Bolsheviks to win over the army to their side!

Thus, it is not their victory in and of itself which can convince us that the Bolsheviks worked “correctly” in the sense of maintaining the firmness of their principles. It is instead the fact that they know how to defend this victory now, after almost three years!

But—and this is a question posed by the “Leftists”—have the Bolsheviks always run their party dictatorship in the way that Lenin demands, in *Left-Wing Communism...*, that the revolutionary proletariat of Germany should run their party? Or has the situation of the Bolsheviks been such that they did not need to abide by Lenin’s “condition”, who demands that the revolutionary party “be able to *mix with*, to *fraternize with* and, if it so desires, to a certain extent to *unite with* the *broadest masses* of the workers, primarily with the proletarian masses, but *also* with the *non-proletarian masses*” (*Left-Wing Communism...*).

Until now, the Bolsheviks have been capable of putting into practice, and have only succeeded in putting into practice, one thing: the strict military discipline of



the party, the “iron” dictatorship of party centralism. Have they been able to “mix with, fraternize with, and, if [they] so [desire], to a certain extent to unite with” the “broadest masses” of which Lenin speaks?

## VI

The tactics employed by the Russian comrades are their business. We protested, and had to treat Mr. Kautsky as a counterrevolutionary, when he allowed himself to slander the tactics of the Bolsheviks. We must defer to the Russian comrades in the matter of their choice of weapons. But we do know one thing: *in Germany, a party dictatorship is impossible*; in Germany, only a *class* dictatorship, the dictatorship of the revolutionary workers councils, *is capable* of victory (and it will be victorious!), and (what is most important) will be able to *defend* its victory.

I could now write, following Lenin's recipe in *Left-Wing Communism...*, that this “is clear”, and then change the subject. But we do not need to evade the question.

The German proletariat is organized in different political parties which are parties of leaders with distinctly authoritarian characteristics. The reactionary trade unions, controlled by the trade union bureaucracy due to the strictly centralized nature of their structures, are in favor of “democracy” and the recovery of the capitalist world, without which they could not exist. A *party* dictatorship in this Germany means: workers against workers (the Noske<sup>3</sup> era began with the party dictatorship of the SPD!). A KPD-Spartacus League

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3. Noske (1868-1946), SPD Minister of War in December 1918, organized collaboration between the socialists and the Freikorps. Architect and symbol of the ensuing bloody repression.

party dictatorship (and Lenin proposes no other kind!) would have to be imposed *against* the *workers* of the USPD, the *workers* of the SPD, the trade unions, the syndicalists, and the Factory Organizations, as well as against the bourgeoisie. Karl Liebknecht *never* aspired to such a *party* dictatorship with the Spartacus League, as the whole corpus of his revolutionary work demonstrates (and as is shown in the passages I quoted above).

It is incontestable that all the workers (including the workers at the beck and call of Legien and Scheidemann!<sup>4</sup>) must be supporters of the new communist order, providing their internal divisions do not render the repression of the bourgeoisie impossible. Are we to await the last judgment, when all the proletarians, or even only a few million of them, are members of the KPD (which is today composed of no more than a handful of employees and a small number of people of good faith)? Perhaps the Third International will be the inducement that will oblige the revolutionary workers to enter the KPD (as Karl Radek and Mr. Levi have imagined)? Can the egoism of its leaders remain ignorant of the fact that, at this very moment, the *majority* of the industrial workers and the rural proletariat is *mature* and ready to be won over to a *class* dictatorship?

We need a slogan for summoning the German proletariat to *unite*. We possess it: "All power to the workers councils!". We need a place for recruitment where all the class-conscious workers can meet without the interference of party *bonzes*. We have such a place: *it is the workplace*. The workplace, the reproductive cell of the new community, is also the base for recruitment. For

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4. Legien (1865-1939), government socialist, Minister in November 1918, Chancellor of the Republic in 1919, one of the architects, together with Noske and Ebert, of the anti-Spartacist repression.

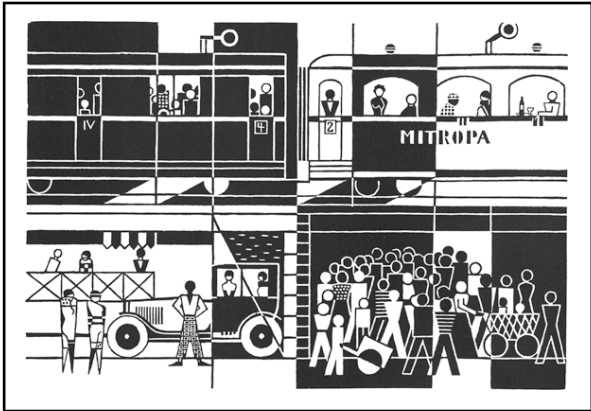
the victorious realization of the proletarian revolution in Germany, we do not need *bonzes*, but conscious proletarians. Those who currently call themselves syndicalists or independents, share with us the goal of destroying the capitalist State and realizing the communist human community and therefore they are part of us, and we shall “mix with, fraternize with and unite with” them in the revolutionary Factory Organizations!

The Communist Workers Party is not, therefore, a party in the bad sense of the word, because it is not an end in itself! It makes propaganda for the dictatorship in its sense of the word, because this dictatorship *is not an end in itself!* It makes propaganda for the dictatorship of the proletariat, for communism. It trains its combatants in the Factory Organizations, where all the forces that will abolish capitalism, establish the power of the councils and permit the construction of the new communist economy are concentrated. The Factory Organizations are brought together in the *Union*. The Factory Organizations will know how to guarantee the rule of the proletariat as a *class* against all the manipulations of the party bosses, against all traitors. *Only the power of the class* provides a broad and firm foundation (as capitalism proves!).

The Communist Workers Party of Germany has had to endure Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism...*, Radek's maledictions, and the calumnies of the Spartacus League and all the parties of leaders, because it is fighting for the class rule of the proletariat, because it shares Karl Liebknecht's views concerning centralism. The KAPD will quite well survive *Left-Wing Communism...* and everything else. And, whether or not Karl Radek understands this, and whether or not Lenin writes a pamphlet against us (and against himself): the proletarian revolution in Germany will take different paths than in Russia. When Lenin treats us as “imbeciles” it is not us but he himself who is the target, since in this matter

it is we who are the *Leninists*. We know this for a fact: even if national or international congresses prescribe the most detailed itineraries for the world revolution, it will nevertheless follow the course imposed by history! Even if the Second Congress of the Third International pronounces a judgment condemning the KAPD in favor of a party of leaders, the revolutionary communists of Germany will know how to easily deal with this and will not whine about it like the *bonzes* of the USPD. We are part of the Third International, because the Third International is not Moscow, it is not Lenin, it is not Radek, it is the world proletariat fighting for its liberation!





Gerd Arntz, Mitropa 1925

# World Revolution and Communist Tactics

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Anton Pannekoek

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Theory itself becomes a material force  
once it takes a hold on the masses. Theory  
is capable of taking a hold on the masses...  
once it becomes radical. *Marx*

## I

The transformation of capitalism into communism is brought about by two forces, one material and the other mental, the latter having its origins in the former. The material development of the economy generates consciousness, and this activates the will to revolution. Marxist science, arising as a function of the general tendencies of capitalist development, forms first the theory of the socialist party and subsequently that of the communist party, and it endows the revolutionary movement with a profound and vigorous intellectual

unity. While this theory is gradually penetrating one section of the proletariat, the masses' own experiences are bound to foster practical recognition that capitalism is no longer viable to an increasing extent. World war and rapid economic collapse now make revolution objectively necessary before the masses have grasped communism intellectually: and this contradiction is at the root of the contradictions, hesitations and setbacks which make the revolution a long and painful process. Nevertheless, theory itself now gains new momentum and rapidly takes a hold on the masses; but both these processes are inevitably held up by the practical problems which have suddenly risen up so massively.

As far as Western Europe is concerned, the development of the revolution is mainly determined by two forces: the collapse of the capitalist economy and the example of Soviet Russia. The reasons why the proletariat was able to achieve victory so quickly and with such relative ease in Russia – the weakness of the bourgeoisie, the alliance with the peasantry, the fact that the revolution took place during the war – need not be elaborated here. The example of a state in which working people are the rulers, where they have abolished capitalism and are engaged in building communism, could not but make a great impression upon the proletariat of the entire world. Of course, this example would not in itself have been sufficient to spur the workers in other countries on to proletarian revolution. The human mind is most strongly influenced by the effects of its own material environment; so that if indigenous capitalism had retained all its old strength, the news from far-away Russia would have made little impression. 'Full of respectful admiration, but in a timid, petty-bourgeois way, without the courage to save themselves, Russia and humanity as a whole by taking action' this was how the masses struck Rutgers<sup>1</sup> upon his return to Western



Europe from Russia. When the war came to an end, everyone here hoped for a rapid upturn in the economy, and a lying press depicted Russia as a place of chaos and barbarism; and so the masses bided their time. But since then, the opposite has come about: chaos has spread in the traditional home of civilisation, while the new order in Russia is showing increasing strength. Now the masses are stirring here as well.

Economic collapse is the most powerful spur to revolution. Germany and Austria are already completely shattered and pauperised economically, Italy and France are in inexorable decline. England has suffered so badly that it is doubtful whether its government's vigorous attempts at reconstruction can avert collapse, and in America the first threatening signs of crisis are appearing. And in each country, more or less in this same order, unrest is growing in the masses; they are struggling against impoverishment in great strike-movements which hit the economy even harder; these struggles are gradually developing into a conscious revolutionary struggle, and, without being communists by conviction, the masses are more and more following the path which communism shows them, for practical necessity is driving them in that direction.

With the growth of this necessity and mood, carried by them, so to speak, the communist vanguard has been developing in these countries; this vanguard

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1. The tribunist S. J. Rutgers attended the First Congress of the Comintern and returned to Amsterdam in late 1919 to establish the Western European Auxiliary Bureau of the Third International there. He may well have been the author of the left orientated article on parliamentary and trade-union tactics in the sole issue of the Bureau's *Bulletin*, which resulted in its funds being abruptly frozen by Moscow. [Translator's note.]

recognises the goals clearly and regroups itself in the Third International. The distinguishing feature of this developing process of revolution is a sharp separation of communism from socialism, in both ideological and organisational terms. This separation is most marked in the countries of Central Europe precipitated into economic crisis by the Treaty of Versailles, where a social-democratic regime was necessary to save the bourgeois state. The crisis is so profound and irremediable there that the mass of radical social-democratic workers, the USP, are pressing for affiliation to Moscow, although they still largely hold to the old social-democratic methods, traditions, slogans and leaders. In Italy, the entire social-democratic party has joined the Third International; a militant revolutionary mood among the masses, who are engaged in constant small-scale warfare against government and bourgeoisie, permits us to overlook the theoretical mixture of socialist, syndicalist and communist perspectives. In France, communist groups have only recently detached themselves from the social-democratic party and the trade-union movement, and are now moving towards the formation of a communist party. In England, the profound effect of the war upon the old, familiar conditions has generated a communist movement, as yet consisting of several groups and parties of different origins and new organisational formations. In America, two communist parties have detached themselves from the Social-Democratic Party, while the latter has also aligned itself with Moscow.

Soviet Russia's unexpected resilience to the onslaughts of reaction has both compelled the Entente to negotiate and also made a new and powerful impression upon the labour parties of the West. The Second International is breaking up; a general movement of the centre groups towards Moscow has set in under the impulsion of the growing revolutionary mood of

the masses. These groups have adopted the new name of communists without their former perspectives having greatly altered, and they are transferring the conceptions and methods of the old social democrats into the new international. As a sign that these countries have now become more ripe for revolution, a phenomenon precisely opposite to the original one is now appearing: with their entry into the Third International or declaration in favour of its principles, as in the case of the USP mentioned above, the sharp distinction between communists and social democrats is once again fading. Whatever attempts are made to keep such parties formally outside the Third International in an effort to conserve some firmness of principle, they nevertheless insinuate themselves into the leadership of each country's revolutionary movement, maintaining their influence over the militant masses by paying lip-service to the new slogans. This is how every ruling stratum behaves: rather than allow itself to be cut off from the masses, it becomes 'revolutionary' itself, in order to deflate the revolution as far as possible by its influence. And many communists tend to see only the increased strength thus accruing to us, and not also the increase in vulnerability.

With the appearance of communism and the Russian example, the proletarian revolution seemed to have gained a simple, straightforward form. In reality, however, the various difficulties now being encountered are revealing the forces which make it an extremely complex and arduous process.

## II

Issues and the solutions to them, programmes and tactics, do not spring from abstract principles, but are only determined by experience, by the real practice of life. The communists' conceptions of their goal and of how it is to be attained must be elaborated on the basis

of previous revolutionary practice, as they always have been. The Russian revolution and the course which the German revolution has taken up to this point represent all the evidence so far available to us as to the motive forces, conditions and forms of the proletarian revolution.

The Russian revolution brought the proletariat political control in so astonishingly rapid an upturn that it took Western European observers completely by surprise at the time, and although the reasons for it are clearly identifiable, it has come to seem more and more astonishing in view of the difficulties that we are now experiencing in Western Europe. Its initial effect was inevitably that in the first flush of enthusiasm, the difficulties facing the revolution in Western Europe were underestimated. Before the eyes of the world proletariat, the Russian revolution unveiled the principles of the new order in all the radiance and purity of their power – the dictatorship of the proletariat, the soviet system as a new mode of democracy, the reorganisation of industry, agriculture and education. In many respects, it gave a picture of the nature and content of the proletarian revolution so simple, clear and comprehensive, so idyllic one might almost say, that nothing could seem easier than to follow this example. However, the German revolution has shown that this was not so simple, and the forces which came to the fore in Germany are by and large at work throughout the rest of Europe.

When German imperialism collapsed in November 1918, the working class was completely unprepared for the seizure of power. Shattered in mind and spirit by the four years of war and still caught up in social-democratic traditions, it was unable to achieve clear recognition of its task within the first few weeks, when governmental authority had lapsed; the intensive but brief period of communist propaganda could not compensate for this lack. The German bourgeoisie

had learnt more from the Russian example than the proletariat; decking itself out in red in order to lull the workers' vigilance, it immediately began to rebuild the organs of its power. The workers' councils voluntarily surrendered their power to the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party and the democratic parliament. The workers still bearing arms as soldiers disarmed not the bourgeoisie, but themselves; the most active workers' groups were crushed by newly formed white guards, and the bourgeoisie was formed into armed civil militias. With the connivance of the trade-union leaderships, the now defenceless workers were little by little robbed of all the improvements in working conditions won in the course of the revolution. The way to communism was thus blocked with barbed-wire entanglements to secure the survival of capitalism, to enable it to sink ever deeper into chaos, that is.

These experiences gained in the course of the German revolution cannot, of course, be automatically applied to the other countries of Western Europe; the development of the revolution will follow still other courses there. Power will not suddenly fall into the hands of the unprepared masses as a result of politico-military collapse; the proletariat will have to fight hard for it, and will thus have attained a higher degree of maturity when it is won. What happened at fever-pace in Germany after the November revolution is already taking place more quietly in other countries: the bourgeoisie is drawing the consequences of the Russian revolution, making military preparations for civil war and at the same time organising the political deception of the proletariat by means of social democracy. But in spite of these differences, the German revolution shows certain general characteristics and offers certain lessons of general significance. It has made it apparent that the revolution in Western Europe *will* be a slow, arduous process and revealed *what forces*

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*are responsible for this.* The slow tempo of revolutionary development in Western Europe, although only relative, has given rise to a clash of conflicting tactical currents. In times of rapid revolutionary development, tactical differences are quickly overcome in action, or else do not become conscious; intensive principled agitation clarifies people's minds, and at the same time the masses flood in and political action overturns old conceptions. When a period of external stagnation sets in, however; when the masses let anything pass without protest and revolutionary slogans no longer seem able to catch the imagination; when difficulties mount up and the adversary seems to rise up more colossal with each engagement; when the Communist Party remains weak and experiences only defeats – then perspectives diverge, new courses of action and new tactical methods are sought. There then emerge two main tendencies, which can be recognised in every country, for all the local variations. The one current seeks to revolutionise and clarify people's minds by word and deed, and to this end tries to pose the new principles in the sharpest possible contrast to the old, received conceptions. The other current attempts to draw the masses still on the sidelines into practical activity, and therefore emphasises points of agreement rather than points of difference in an attempt to avoid as far as is possible anything that might deter them. The first strives for a clear, sharp separation among the masses, the second for unity; the first current may be termed the radical tendency, the second the opportunist one. Given the current situation in Western Europe, with the revolution encountering powerful obstacles on the one hand and the Soviet Union's staunch resistance to the Entente governments' efforts to overthrow it making a powerful impression upon the masses on the other, we can expect a greater influx into the Third International of workers' groups until now undecided; and as a result,

opportunism will doubtless become a powerful force in the Communist International.

Opportunism does not necessarily mean a pliant, conciliatory attitude and vocabulary, nor radicalism a more acerbic manner; on the contrary, lack of clear, principled tactics is all too often concealed in rabidly strident language; and indeed, in revolutionary situations, it is characteristic of opportunism to suddenly set all its hopes on the great revolutionary deed. Its essence lies in always considering the immediate questions, not what lies in the future, and to fix on the superficial aspects of phenomena rather than seeing the determinant deeper bases. When the forces are not immediately adequate for the attainment of a certain goal, it tends to make for that goal by another way, by roundabout means, rather than strengthen those forces. For its goal is immediate success, and to that it sacrifices the conditions for lasting success in the future. It seeks justification in the fact that by forming alliances with other 'progressive' groups and by making concessions to outdated conceptions, it is often possible to gain power or at least split the enemy, the coalition of capitalist classes, and thus bring about conditions more favourable for the struggle. But power in such cases always turns out to be an illusion, personal power exercised by individual leaders and not the power of the proletarian class; this contradiction brings nothing but confusion, corruption and conflict in its wake. Conquest of governmental power not based upon a working class fully prepared to exercise its hegemony would be lost again, or else have to make so many concessions to reactionary forces that it would be inwardly spent. A split in the ranks of the class hostile to us – the much vaunted slogan of reformism – would not affect the unity of the inwardly united bourgeoisie, but would deceive, confuse and weaken the proletariat. Of course it can happen that the communist vanguard of the

proletariat is obliged to take over political power before the normal conditions are met; but only what the masses thereby gain in terms of clarity, insight, solidarity and autonomy has lasting value as the foundation of further development towards communism.

The history of the Second International is full of examples of this policy of opportunism, and they are beginning to appear in the Third. It used to consist in seeking the assistance of non-socialist workers' groups or other classes to attain the goal of socialism. This led to tactics becoming corrupted, and finally to collapse. The situation of the Third International is now fundamentally different; for that period of quiet capitalist development is over when social democracy in the best sense of the word could do nothing more than prepare for a future revolutionary epoch by fighting confusion with principled policies. Capitalism is now collapsing; the world cannot wait until our propaganda has won a majority to lucid communist insight; the masses must intervene, and as rapidly as possible, if they themselves and the world are to be saved from catastrophe. What can a small party, however principled, do when what is needed are the masses? Is not opportunism, with its efforts to gather the broadest masses quickly, dictated by necessity?

A revolution can no more be made by a big mass party or coalition of different parties than by a small radical party. It breaks out spontaneously among the masses; action instigated by a party can sometimes trigger it off (a rare occurrence), but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychological factors deep in the unconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics. The function of a revolutionary party lies in propagating clear understanding in advance, so that throughout the masses there will be elements who know what must be done and who are capable of judging



the situation for themselves. And in the course of revolution the party has to raise the programme, slogans and directives which the spontaneously acting masses recognise as correct because they find that they express their own aims in their most adequate form and hence achieve greater clarity of purpose; it is thus that the party comes to lead the struggle. So long as the masses remain inactive, this may appear to be an unrewarding tactic; but clarity of principle has an implicit effect on many who at first hold back, and revolution reveals its active power of giving a definite direction to the struggle. If, on the other hand, it has been attempted to assemble a large party by watering down principles, forming alliances and making concessions, then this enables confused elements to gain influence in times of revolution without the masses being able to see through their inadequacy. Conformity to traditional perspectives is an attempt to gain power without the revolution in ideas that is the precondition of doing so; its effect is therefore to hold back the course of revolution. It is also doomed to failure, for only the most radical thinking can take a hold on the masses once they engage in revolution, while moderation only satisfies them so long as the revolution has yet to be made. A revolution simultaneously involves a profound upheaval in the masses' thinking; it creates the conditions for this, and is itself conditioned by it; leadership in the revolution thus falls to the Communist Party by virtue of the world-transforming power of its unambiguous principles.

In contrast with the strong, sharp emphasis on the new principles – soviet system and dictatorship – which distinguish communism from social democracy, opportunism in the Third International relies as far as possible upon the forms of struggle taken over from the Second International. After the Russian revolution had replaced parliamentary activity with the soviet system

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and built up the trade-union movement on the basis of the factory, the first impulse in Western Europe was to follow this example. The Communist Party of Germany boycotted the elections for the National Assembly and campaigned for immediate or gradual organisational separation from the trade unions. When the revolution slackened and stagnated in 1919, however, the Central Committee of the KPD introduced a different tactic which amounted to opting for parliamentarianism and supporting the old trade-union confederations against the industrial unions. The main argument behind this is that the Communist Party must not lose the leadership of the masses, who still think entirely in parliamentary terms, who are best reached through electoral campaigns and parliamentary speeches, and who, by entering the trade unions en masse, have increased their membership to seven million. The same thinking is to be seen in England in the attitude of the BSP: they do not want to break with the Labour Party, although it belongs to the Second International, for fear of losing contact with the mass of trade-unionists. These arguments are most sharply formulated and marshalled by our friend Karl Radek, whose *Development of the World Revolution and the Tasks of the Communist Party*, written in prison in Berlin, may be regarded as the programmatic statement of communist opportunism.<sup>2</sup> Here it is argued that the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will be a long

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2. Pannekoek is here confusing the titles of two texts written by Radek while in prison: *The Development of the German Revolution and the Tasks of the Communist Party*, written before the Heidelberg congress, and *The Development of the World Revolution and the Tactics of the Communist Parties in the Struggle for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, written after it. The latter is meant. [Translator's note.]

drawn-out process, in which communism should use every means of propaganda, in which parliamentary activity and the trade-union movement will remain the principal weapons of the proletariat, with the gradual introduction of workers' control as a new objective.

An examination of the foundations, conditions and difficulties of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will show how far this is correct.

### III

It has repeatedly been emphasised that the revolution will take a long time in Western Europe because the bourgeoisie is so much more powerful here than in Russia. Let us analyse the basis of this power. Does it lie in their numbers? The proletarian masses are much more numerous. Does it lie in the bourgeoisie's mastery over the whole of economic life? This certainly used to be an important power-factor; but their hegemony is fading, and in Central Europe the economy is completely bankrupt. Does it lie in their control of the state, with all its means of coercion? Certainly, it has always used the latter to hold the proletariat down, which is why the conquest of state power was the proletariat's first objective. But in November 1918, state power slipped from the nerveless grasp of the bourgeoisie in Germany and Austria, the coercive apparatus of the state was completely paralysed, the masses were in control; and the bourgeoisie was nevertheless able to build this state power up again and once more subjugate the workers. This proves that the bourgeoisie possessed another hidden source of power which had remained intact and which permitted it to re-establish its hegemony when everything seemed shattered. This hidden power is the bourgeoisie's ideological hold over the proletariat. Because the proletarian masses were still completely governed by a bourgeois mentality, they restored the

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hegemony of the bourgeoisie with their own hands after it had collapsed.<sup>3</sup>

The German experience brings us face to face with the major problem of the revolution in Western Europe. In these countries, the old bourgeois mode of production and the centuries-old civilisation which has developed with it have completely impressed themselves upon the thoughts and feelings of the popular masses. Hence, the mentality and inner character of the masses here is quite different from that in the countries of the East, who have not experienced the rule of bourgeois culture; and this is what distinguishes the different courses that the revolution has taken in the East and the West. In England, France, Holland, Italy, Germany and Scandinavia, there has been a powerful burgher class based on petty-bourgeois and primitive capitalist production since the Middle Ages; as feudalism declined, there also grew up in the countryside an equally powerful independent peasant class, in which the individual was also master in his own small business. Bourgeois sensibilities developed into a solid national culture on this foundation, particularly in the maritime countries of England and France, which took the lead in capitalist development. In the nineteenth century, the subjection of the whole economy to capital and the inclusion of the most outlying farms into the capitalist world-trade system enhanced and refined this national culture, and the psychological propaganda of press, school and church drummed it firmly into the heads of the masses, both those whom capital proletarianised and attracted into the cities and those it left on the land. This is true not only of the homelands of capitalism, but also, albeit

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3. The following paragraph is quoted up to 'village communism' by Gorter in his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*. [Translator's note.]

in different forms, of America and Australia, where Europeans founded new states, and of the countries of Central Europe, Germany, Austria, Italy, which had until then stagnated, but where the new surge of capitalist development was able to connect with an old, backward, small-peasant economy and a petty-bourgeois culture. But when capitalism pressed into the countries of Eastern Europe, it encountered very different material conditions and traditions. Here, in Russia, Poland, Hungary, even in Germany east of the Elbe, there was no strong bourgeois class which had long dominated the life of the spirit; the latter was determined by primitive agricultural conditions, with large-scale landed property, patriarchal feudalism and village communism. Here, therefore, the masses related to communism in a more primitive, simple, open way, as receptive as blank paper. Western European social democrats often expressed derisive astonishment that the 'ignorant' Russians could claim to be the vanguard of the new world of labour. Referring to these social democrats, an English delegate at the communist conference in Amsterdam<sup>4</sup> pointed up the difference quite correctly: the Russians may be more ignorant, but the English workers are stuffed so full of prejudices that it is harder to propagate communism among them. These 'prejudices' are only the superficial, external aspect of the bourgeois mentality which saturates the majority of the proletariat of England, Western Europe and America.

The entire content of this mentality is so many-sided and complex in its opposition to the proletarian, communist worldview that it can scarcely be summarised in a few sentences. Its primary characteristic is individualism, which has its origins in earlier petty-

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4. The conference in question was convened to set up the Auxiliary Bureau. [Translator's note.]

bourgeois and peasant forms of labour and only gradually gives way to the new proletarian sense of community and of the necessity of accepting discipline – this characteristic is probably most pronounced in the bourgeoisie and proletariat of the Anglo-Saxon countries. The individual's perspective is limited to his work-place, instead of embracing society as a whole; so absolute does the principle of the division of labour seem, that politics itself, the government of the whole of society, is seen not as everybody's business, but as the monopoly of a ruling stratum, the specialised province of particular experts, the politicians. With its centuries of material and intellectual commerce, its literature and art, bourgeois culture has embedded itself in the proletarian masses, and generates a feeling of national solidarity, anchored deeper in the unconscious than external indifference or superficial internationalism suggest; this can potentially express itself in national class solidarity, and greatly hinders international action.

Bourgeois culture exists in the proletariat primarily as a traditional cast of thought. The masses caught up in it think in ideological instead of real terms: bourgeois thought has always been ideological. But this ideology and tradition are not integrated; the mental reflexes left over from the innumerable class struggles of former centuries have survived as political and religious systems of thought which separate the old bourgeois world, and hence the proletarians born of it, into groups, churches, sects, parties, divided according to their ideological perspectives. The bourgeois past thus also survives in the proletariat as an organisational tradition that stands in the way of the class unity necessary for the creation of the new world; in these archaic organisations the workers make up the followers and adherents of a bourgeois vanguard. It is the intelligentsia which supplies the leaders in these ideological struggles. The

intelligentsia – priests, teachers, literati, journalists, artists, politicians – form a numerous class, the function of which is to foster, develop and propagate bourgeois culture; it passes this on to the masses, and acts as mediator between the hegemony of capital and the interests of the masses. The hegemony of capital is rooted in this group's intellectual leadership of the masses. For even though the oppressed masses have often rebelled against capital and its agencies, they have only done so under the leadership of the intelligentsia; and the firm solidarity and discipline won in this common struggle subsequently proves to be the strongest support of the system once these leaders openly go over to the side of capitalism. Thus, the Christian ideology of the declining petty bourgeois strata, which had become a living force as an expression of their struggle against the modern capitalist state, often proved its worth subsequently as a reactionary system that bolstered up the state, as with Catholicism in Germany after the Kulturkampf.<sup>5</sup> Despite the value of its theoretical contribution, much the same is true of the role played by social democracy in destroying and extinguishing old ideologies in the rising work-force, as history demanded it should do: it made the proletarian masses mentally dependent upon political and other leaders, who, as specialists, the masses left to manage all the important matters of a general nature affecting the class, instead of themselves taking them in hand. The firm solidarity and discipline which developed

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5. The first trade-union organisations in the late 1860s in the Ruhr were the work of Catholic priests. In the late seventies, however, Bismarck dropped his campaign against Catholicism and its political representative, the Zentrum (the forerunner of the CDU), for the sake of a united front against the Social-Democratic Party. [Translator's note.]

in the often acute class struggles of half a century did not bury capitalism, for it represented the power of leadership and organisation over the masses; and in August 1914 and November 1918 these made the masses helpless tools of the bourgeoisie, of imperialism and of reaction. The ideological power of the bourgeois past over the proletariat means that in many of the countries of Western Europe, in Germany and Holland, for example, it is divided into ideologically opposed groups which stand in the way of class unity. Social democracy originally sought to realise this class unity, but partly due to its opportunist tactics, which substituted purely political policies for class politics, it was unsuccessful in this: it merely increased the number of groups by one.

In times of crisis when the masses are driven to desperation and to action, the hegemony of bourgeois ideology over the masses cannot prevent the power of this tradition temporarily flagging, as in Germany in November 1918. But then the ideology comes to the fore again, and turns temporary victory into defeat. The concrete forces which in our view make up the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions can be seen at work in the case of Germany: in reverence for abstract slogans like 'democracy'; in the power of old habits of thought and programme-points, such as the realisation of socialism through parliamentary leaders and a socialist government; in the lack of proletarian self-confidence evidenced by the effect upon the masses of the barrage of filthy lies published about Russia; in the masses' lack of faith in their own power; but above all, in their trust in the party, in the organisation and in the leaders who for decades had incarnated their struggle, their revolutionary goals, their idealism. The tremendous mental, moral and material power of the organisations, these enormous machines painstakingly created by the masses themselves with years of effort, which incarnated



the tradition of the forms of struggle belonging to a period in which the labour movement was a limb of ascendant capital, now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies once more flaring up in the masses.

This example will not remain unique. The contradiction between the rapid economic collapse of capitalism and the immaturity of spirit represented by the power of bourgeois tradition over the proletariat – a contradiction which has not come about by accident, in that the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit required for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism – can only be resolved by the process of revolutionary development, in which spontaneous uprisings and seizures of power alternate with setbacks. It makes it very improbable that the revolution will take a course in which the proletariat for a long time storms the fortress of capital in vain, using both the old and new means of struggle, until it eventually conquers it once and for all; and the tactics of a long drawn-out and carefully engineered siege posed in Radek's schema thus fall through. The tactical problem is not how to win power as quickly as possible if such power will be merely illusory – this is only too easy an option for the communists – but how the basis of lasting class power is to be developed in the proletariat. No 'resolute minority' can resolve the problems which can only be resolved by the action of the class as a whole; and if the populace allows such a seizure of power to take place over its head with apparent indifference, it is not, for all that, a genuinely passive mass, but is capable, in so far as it has not been won over to communism, of rounding upon the revolution at any moment as the active follower of reaction. And a 'coalition with the gallows on hand' would do no more than disguise an untenable party dictatorship of this kind.<sup>6</sup> When a tremendous uprising of the proletariat destroys the

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bankrupt rule of the bourgeoisie, and the Communist Party, the clearest vanguard of the proletariat, takes over political control, it has only one task – to eradicate the sources of weakness in the proletariat by all possible means and to strengthen it so that it will be fully equal to the revolutionary struggles that the future holds in store. This means raising the masses themselves to the highest pitch of activity, whipping up their initiative, increasing their self-confidence, so that they themselves will be able to recognise the tasks thrust upon them, for it is only thus that the latter can be successfully carried out. This makes it necessary to break the domination of traditional organisational forms and of the old leaders, and in no circumstances to join them in a coalition government; to develop the new forms, to consolidate the material power of the masses; only in this way will it be possible to reorganise both production and defence against the external assaults of capitalism, and this is the precondition of preventing counter-revolution.

Such power as the bourgeoisie still possesses in this period resides in the proletariat's lack of autonomy and independence of spirit. The process of revolutionary development consists in the proletariat emancipating itself from this dependence, from the traditions of the

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6. This expression had been used to justify the collaboration with the socialists in the Commune of Hungary which the former Hungarian Communist Party leaders controlling *Kommunismus* blamed for its collapse in August 1919. In '*Left Wing*' *Communism* Lenin urges the British Communists to campaign for the Labour Party where they have no candidate of their own; they will thus 'support Henderson as the rope supports a hanged man', and the impending establishment of a government of Hendersons will hasten the latter's political demise. (Peking edition, pp.90-91.) [Translator's note.]

past – and this is only possible through its own experience of struggle. Where capitalism is already an institution of long standing and the workers have thus already been struggling against it for several generations, the proletariat has in every period had to build up methods, forms and aids to struggle corresponding to the contemporary stage of capitalist development, and these have soon ceased to be seen as the temporary expedients that they are, and instead idolised as lasting, absolute, perfect forms; they have thus subsequently become fetters upon development which had to be broken. Whereas the class is caught up in constant upheaval and rapid development, the leaders remain at a particular stage, as the spokesmen of a particular phase, and their tremendous influence can hold back the movement; forms of action become dogmas, and organisations are raised to the status of ends in themselves, making it all the more difficult to reorientate and readapt to the changed conditions of struggle. This still applies; every stage of the development of the class struggle must overcome the traditions of previous stages if it is to be capable of recognising its own tasks clearly and carrying them out effectively – except that development is now proceeding at a far faster pace. The revolution thus develops through the process of internal struggle. It is within the proletariat itself that the resistances develop which it must overcome; and in overcoming them, the proletariat overcomes its own limitations and matures towards communism.

#### IV

Parliamentary activity and the trade-union movement were the two principal forms of struggle in the time of the Second International.

The congresses of the first International Working-Men's Association laid the basis of this tactic by

taking issue with primitive conceptions belonging to the pre-capitalist, petty-bourgeois period and, in accordance with Marx's social theory, defining the character of the proletarian class struggle as a continuous struggle by the proletariat against capitalism for the means of subsistence, a struggle which would lead to the conquest of political power. When the period of bourgeois revolutions and armed uprisings had come to a close, this political struggle could only be carried on within the framework of the old or newly created national states, and trade-union struggle was often subject to even tighter restrictions. The First International was therefore bound to break up; and the struggle for the new tactics, which it was itself unable to practise, burst it apart; meanwhile, the tradition of the old conceptions and methods of struggle remained alive amongst the anarchists. The new tactics were bequeathed by the International to those who would have to put them into practice, the trade unions and Social-Democratic Parties which were springing up on every hand. When the Second International arose as a loose federation of the latter, it did in fact still have to combat tradition in the form of anarchism; but the legacy of the First International already formed its undisputed tactical base. Today, every communist knows why these methods of struggle were necessary and productive at that time: when the working class is developing within ascendant capitalism, it is not yet capable of creating organs which would enable it to control and order society, nor can it even conceive the necessity of doing so. It must first orientate itself mentally and learn to understand capitalism and its class rule. The vanguard of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party, must reveal the nature of the system through its propaganda and show the masses their goals by raising class demands. It was therefore necessary for its spokesmen to enter the parliaments, the centres

of bourgeois rule, in order to raise their voices on the tribunes and take part in conflicts between the political parties.

Matters change when the struggle of the proletariat enters a revolutionary phase. We are not here concerned with the question of why the parliamentary system is inadequate as a system of government for the masses and why it must give way to the soviet system, but with the utilisation of parliament as a means of struggle by the proletariat.<sup>7</sup> As such, parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. People used to believe that leaders could obtain important reforms for the workers in parliament; and the illusion even arose that parliamentarians could carry out the transformation to socialism by acts of parliament. Now that parliamentarianism has grown more modest in its claims, one hears the argument that deputies in parliament could make an important contribution to communist propaganda.<sup>8</sup> But this always means that the main emphasis falls on the leaders, and it is taken for granted that specialists will determine policy – even if this is done under the democratic veil of debates and resolutions by congresses; the history

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7. The remainder of this paragraph and the two following are quoted by Gorter in the *Open Letter*. [Translator's note.]

8. It was recently argued in Germany that communists must go into parliament to convince the workers that parliamentary struggle is useless – but you don't take a wrong turning to show other people that it is wrong, you go the right way from the outset!

of social democracy is a series of unsuccessful attempts to induce the members themselves to determine policy. This is all inevitable while the proletariat is carrying on a parliamentary struggle, while the masses have yet to create organs of self-action, while the revolution has still to be made, that is; and as soon as the masses start to intervene, act and take decisions on their own behalf, the disadvantages of parliamentary struggle become overwhelming.

As we argued above, the tactical problem is how we are to eradicate the traditional bourgeois mentality which paralyses the strength of the proletarian masses; everything which lends new power to the received conceptions is harmful. The most tenacious and intractable element in this mentality is dependence upon leaders, whom the masses leave to determine general questions and to manage their class affairs. *Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution.* Fine speeches may be made in parliament exhorting the proletariat to revolutionary action; it is not in such words that the latter has its origins, however, but in the hard necessity of there being no other alternative.

Revolution also demands something more than the massive assault that topples a government and which, as we know, cannot be summoned up by leaders, but can only spring from the profound impulse of the masses. Revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action – and this is only possible if first the vanguard, then a greater and greater number take matters in hand themselves, know their own responsibilities, investigate, agitate, wrestle, strive, reflect, assess, seize chances and act upon them. But all this is difficult and laborious; thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through

others acting on its behalf leading agitation from a high platform, taking decisions, giving signals for action, making laws – the old habits of thought and the old weaknesses will make it hesitate and remain passive.

While on the one hand parliamentarianism has the counterrevolutionary effect of strengthening the leaders' dominance over the masses, on the other it has a tendency to corrupt these leaders themselves. When personal statesmanship has to compensate for what is lacking in the active power of the masses, petty diplomacy develops; whatever intentions the party may have started out with, it has to try and gain a legal base, a position of parliamentary power; and so finally the relationship between means and ends is reversed, and it is no longer parliament that serves as a means towards communism, but communism that stands as an advertising slogan for parliamentary politics. In the process, however, the communist party itself takes on a different character. Instead of a vanguard grouping the entire class behind it for the purpose of revolutionary action, it becomes a parliamentary party with the same legal status as the others, joining in their quarrels, a new edition of the old social democracy under new radical slogans. Whereas there can be no essential antagonism, no internal conflict between the revolutionary working class and the communist party, since the party incarnates a form of synthesis between the proletariat's most lucid class-consciousness and its growing unity, parliamentary activity shatters this unity and creates the possibility of such a conflict: instead of unifying the class, communism becomes a new party with its own party chiefs, a party which falls in with the others and thus perpetuates the political division of the class. All these tendencies will doubtless be cut short once again by the development of the economy in a revolutionary sense; but even the first beginnings of this process can only harm the

revolutionary movement by inhibiting the development of lucid class-consciousness; and when the economic situation temporarily favours counter-revolution, this policy will pave the way for a diversion of the revolution on to the terrain of reaction.

What is great and truly communist about the Russian revolution is above all the fact that it has awoken the masses' own activity and ignited the spiritual and physical energy in them to build and sustain a new society. Rousing the masses to this consciousness of their own power is something which cannot be achieved all at once, but only in stages; one stage on this way to independence is the rejection of parliamentarianism. When, in December 1918, the newly formed Communist Party of Germany resolved to boycott the National Assembly, this decision did not proceed from any immature illusion of quick, easy victory, but from the proletariat's need to emancipate itself from its psychological dependence upon parliamentary representatives – a necessary reaction against the tradition of social democracy – because the way to self-activity could now be seen to lie in building up the council system. However, one half of those united at that time, those who have stayed in the KPD, readopted parliamentarianism with the ebb of the revolution: with what consequences it remains to be seen, but which have in part been demonstrated already. In other countries too, opinion is divided among the communists, and many groups want to refrain from parliamentary activity even before the outbreak of revolution. The international dispute over the use of parliament as a method of struggle will thus clearly be one of the main tactical issues within the Third International over the next few years.

At any rate, everyone is agreed that parliamentary activity only forms a subsidiary feature of our tactics. The Second International was able to develop up to the



point where it had brought out and laid bare the essence of the new tactics: that the proletariat can only conquer imperialism with the weapons of mass action. The Second International itself was no longer able to employ these; it was bound to collapse when the world war put the revolutionary class struggle on to an international plane. The legacy of the earlier internationals was the natural foundation of the new international: mass action by the proletariat to the point of general strike and civil war forms the common tactical platform of the communists. In parliamentary activity the proletariat is divided into nations, and a genuinely international intervention is not possible; in mass action against international capital national divisions fall away, and every movement, to whatever countries it extends or is limited, is part of a single world struggle.

## V

Just as parliamentary activity incarnates the leaders' psychological hold over the working masses, so the *trade-union movement* incarnates their material authority. Under capitalism, the trade unions form the natural organisations for the regroupment of the proletariat; and Marx emphasised their significance as such from the first. In developed capitalism, and even more in the epoch of imperialism, the trade unions have become enormous confederations which manifest the same developmental tendencies as the bourgeois state in an earlier period. There has grown up within them a class of officials, a bureaucracy, which controls all the organisation's resources – funds, press, the appointment of officials; often they have even more far-reaching powers, so that they have changed from being the servants of the collectivity to become its masters, and have identified themselves with the organisation. And the trade unions also resemble the state and its

bureaucracy in that, democratic forms notwithstanding, the will of the members is unable to prevail against the bureaucracy; every revolt breaks on the carefully constructed apparatus of orders of business and statutes before it can shake the hierarchy. It is only after years of stubborn persistence that an opposition can sometimes register a limited success, and usually this only amounts to a change in personnel. In the last few years, before and since the war, this situation has therefore often given rise to rebellions by the membership in England, Germany and America; they have struck on their own initiative, against the will of the leadership or the decisions of the union itself. That this should seem natural and be taken as such is an expression of the fact that the organisation is not simply a collective organ of the members, but as it were something alien to them; that the workers do not control their union, but that it stands over them as an external force against which they can rebel, although they themselves are the source of its strength – once again like the state itself. If the revolt dies down, the old order is established once again; it knows how to assert itself in spite of the hatred and impotent bitterness of the masses, for it relies upon these masses' indifference and their lack of clear insight and united, persistent purpose, and is sustained by the inner necessity of trade-union organisation as the only means of finding strength in numbers against capital.

It was by combating capital, combating its tendencies to absolute impoverisation, setting limits to the latter and thus making the existence of the working class possible, that the trade-union movement fulfilled its role in capitalism, and this made it a limb of capitalist society itself. But once the proletariat ceases to be a member of capitalist society and, with the advent of revolution, becomes its destroyer, the trade union enters into conflict with the proletariat.

It becomes legal, an open supporter of the state and recognised by the latter, it makes 'expansion of the economy before the revolution' its slogan, in other words, the maintenance of capitalism. In Germany today millions of proletarians, until now intimidated by the terrorism of the ruling class, are streaming into the unions out of a mixture of timidity and incipient militancy. The resemblance of the trade-union confederations, which now embrace almost the entire working class, to the state structure is becoming even closer. The trade-union officials collaborate with the state bureaucracy not only in using their power to hold down the working class on behalf of capital, but also in the fact that their 'policy' increasingly amounts to deceiving the masses by demagogic means and securing their consent to the bargains that the unions have made with the capitalists. And even the methods employed vary according to the conditions: rough and brutal in Germany, where the trade-union leaders have landed the workers with piece-work and longer working hours by means of coercion and cunning deception, subtle and refined in England, where the trade-union mandarins, like the government, give the appearance of allowing themselves to be reluctantly pushed on by the workers, while in reality they are sabotaging the latter's demands.

Marx' and Lenin's insistence that the way in which the state is organised precludes its use as an instrument of proletarian revolution, notwithstanding its democratic forms, must therefore also apply to the trade-union organisations. Their counterrevolutionary potential cannot be destroyed or diminished by a change of personnel, by the substitution of radical or 'revolutionary' leaders for reactionary ones. It is the form of the organisation that renders the masses all but impotent and prevents them making the trade union an organ of their will. The revolution can only

be successful by destroying this organisation, that is to say so completely revolutionising its organisational structure that it becomes something completely different. The soviet system, constructed from within, is not only capable of uprooting and abolishing the state bureaucracy, but the trade-union bureaucracy as well; it will form not only the new political organs to replace parliament, but also the basis of the new trade unions. The idea that a particular organisational form is revolutionary has been held up to scorn in the party disputes in Germany on the grounds that what counts is the revolutionary mentality of the members. But if the most important element of the revolution consists in the masses taking their own affairs – the management of society and production – in hand themselves, then any form of organisation which does not permit control and direction by the masses themselves is counterrevolutionary and harmful; and it should therefore be replaced by another form that is revolutionary in that it enables the workers themselves to determine everything actively. This is not to say that this form is to be set up within a still passive work-force in readiness for the revolutionary feeling of the workers to function within it in time to come: this new form of organisation can itself only be set up in the process of revolution, by workers making a revolutionary intervention. But recognition of the role played by the current form of organisation determines the attitude which the communists have to take with regard to the attempts already being made to weaken or burst this form.

Efforts to keep the bureaucratic apparatus as small as possible and to look to the activity of the masses for effectiveness have been particularly marked in the syndicalist movement, and even more so in the 'industrial' union movement. This is why so many communists have spoken out for support of these organisations against

the central confederations. So long as capitalism remains intact, however, these new formations cannot take on any comprehensive role – the importance of the American IWW derives from particular circumstances, namely the existence of a numerous, unskilled proletariat largely of foreign extraction outside the old confederations. The Shop Committees movement and Shop Stewards movement in England are much closer to the soviet system, in that they are mass organs formed in opposition to the bureaucracy in the course of struggle. The ‘unions’ in Germany are even more deliberately modelled on the idea of the soviet, but the stagnation of the revolution has left them weak. Every new formation of this type that weakens the central confederations and their inner cohesion removes an impediment to revolution and weakens the counterrevolutionary potential of the trade-union bureaucracy. The notion of keeping all oppositional and revolutionary forces together within the confederations in order for them eventually to take these organisations over as a majority and revolutionise them is certainly tempting. But in the first place, this is a vain hope, as fanciful as the related notion of taking over the Social-Democratic party, because the bureaucracy already knows how to deal with an opposition before it becomes too dangerous. And secondly, revolution does not proceed according to a smooth programme, but elemental outbreaks on the part of passionately active groups always play a particular role within it as a force driving it forward. If the communists were to defend the central confederations against such initiatives out of opportunistic considerations of temporary gain, they would reinforce the inhibitions which will later be their most formidable obstacle.

The formation by the workers of the soviets, their own organs of power and action, in itself signifies the disintegration and dissolution of the state. As a much

more recent form of organisation and one created by the proletariat itself, the trade union will survive much longer, because it has its roots in a much more living tradition of personal experience, and once it has shaken off state-democratic illusions, will therefore claim a place in the conceptual world of the proletariat. But since the trade unions have emerged from the proletariat itself, as products of its own creative activity, it is in this field that we shall see the most new formations as continual attempts to adapt to new conditions; following the process of revolution, new forms of struggle and organisation will be built on the model of the soviets in a process of constant transformation and development.

## VI

The conception that revolution in Western Europe will take the form of an orderly siege of the fortress of capital which the proletariat, organised by the Communist Party into a disciplined army and using time-proven weapons, will repeatedly assault until the enemy surrenders is a neo-reformist perspective that certainly does not correspond to the conditions of struggle in the old capitalist countries. Here there may occur revolutions and conquests of power that quickly turn into defeat; the bourgeoisie will be able to reassert its domination, but this will result in even greater dislocation of the economy; transitional forms may arise which, because of their inadequacy, only prolong the chaos. Certain conditions must be fulfilled in any society for the social process of production and collective existence to be possible, and these relations acquire the firm hold of spontaneous habits and moral norms – sense of duty, industriousness, discipline: in the first instance, the process of revolution consists in a loosening of these old relations. Their decay is a necessary by-product of the dissolution of capitalism, while the new bonds

corresponding to the communist reorganisation of work and society, the development of which we have witnessed in Russia, have yet to grow sufficiently strong. Thus, a transitional period of social and political chaos becomes inevitable. Where the proletariat is able to seize power rapidly and keep a firm hold upon it, as in Russia, the transitional period can be short and can be brought rapidly to a close by positive construction. But in Western Europe, the process of destruction will be much more drawn out. In Germany we see the working class split into groups in which this process has reached different stages, and which therefore cannot yet achieve unity in action. The symptoms of recent revolutionary movements indicate that the entire nation, and indeed, Central Europe as a whole, is dissolving, that the popular masses are fragmenting into separate strata and regions, with each acting on its own account: here the masses manage to arm themselves and more or less gain political power; elsewhere they paralyse the power of the bourgeoisie in strike movements; in a third place they shut themselves off as a peasant republic, and somewhere else they support white guards, or perhaps toss aside the remnants of feudalism in primitive agrarian revolts – the destruction must obviously be thorough-going before we can begin to think of the real construction of communism. It cannot be the task of the Communist Party to act the schoolmaster in this upheaval and make vain attempts to truss it in a straitjacket of traditional forms; its task is to support the forces of the proletarian movement everywhere, to connect the spontaneous actions together, to give them a broad idea of how they are related to one another, and thereby prepare the unification of the disparate actions and thus put itself at the head of the movement as a whole.

The first phase of the dissolution of capitalism is to be seen in those countries of the Entente where its

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hegemony is as yet unshaken; in an irresistible decline in production and in the value of their currencies, an increase in the frequency of strikes and a strong aversion to work among the proletariat. The second phase, the period of counter-revolution, i.e. the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie in the epoch of revolution, means complete economic collapse; we can study this best in Germany and the remainder of Central Europe. If a communist system had arisen immediately after the political revolution, organised reconstruction could have begun in spite of the Versailles and St Germain peace treaties, in spite of the poverty and the exhaustion. But the Ebert-Noske regime no more thought of organised reconstruction than did Renner and Bauer;<sup>9</sup> they gave the bourgeoisie a free hand, and saw their duty as consisting solely in the suppression of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, or rather each individual bourgeois, acted in a characteristically bourgeois manner; each of them thought only of making as much profit as possible and of rescuing for his personal use whatever could be saved from the cataclysm. It is true that there was talk in newspapers and manifestoes of the need to rebuild economic life by organised effort, but this was simply for the workers' consumption, fine phrases to conceal the fact that despite their exhaustion, they were under rigorous compulsion to work in the most intensive conditions possible. In reality, of course, not a single bourgeois concerned himself one jot with the general national interest, but only with his personal gain. At first, trade became the principal means of self-enrichment, as it used to be in the old days; the depreciation of the

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9. Karl Renner was the leader of the revisionist wing of the Austrian Social Democratic Party; Otto Bauer was Austrian Foreign Secretary from November 1918 to July 1919. [Translator's note.]



currency provided the opportunity to export everything that was needed for economic expansion or even for the mere survival of the masses – raw materials, food, finished products, means of production, and after that, factories themselves and property. Racketeering reigned everywhere among the bourgeois strata, supported by unbridled corruption on the part of officialdom. And so all their former possessions and everything that was not to be surrendered as war reparations was packed off abroad by the ‘leaders of production’. Likewise in the domain of production, the private pursuit of profit intervened to wreck economic life by its total indifference towards the common welfare. In order to force piecework and longer working hours upon proletarians or to get rid of rebellious elements among them, they were locked out and the factories set at a standstill, regardless of the stagnation caused throughout the rest of the industry as a consequence. On top of that came the incompetence of the bureaucratic management in the state enterprises, which degenerated into utter vacillation when the powerful hand of the government was missing. Restriction of production, the most primitive method of raising prices and one which competition would render impossible in a healthy capitalist economy, became respectable once more. In the stock-market reports capitalism seems to be flourishing again, but the high dividends are consuming the last remaining property and are themselves being frittered away on luxuries. What we have witnessed in Germany over the last year is not something out of the ordinary, but the functioning of the general class character of the bourgeoisie. Their only aim is, and always has been, personal profit, which in normal capitalism sustains production, but which brings about the total destruction of the economy as capitalism degenerates. And things will go the same way in other countries; once production has been dislocated beyond a

certain point and the currency has depreciated sharply, then the complete collapse of the economy will result if the pursuit of private profit by the bourgeoisie is given free reign – and this is what the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie amounts to, whatever non-communist party it may hide behind.

The difficulties of the reconstruction facing the proletariat of Western Europe in these circumstances are far greater than they were in Russia – the subsequent destruction of industrial productive forces by Kolchak and Denikin is a pale shadow by comparison. Reconstruction cannot wait for a new political order to be set up, it must be begun in the very process of revolution by the proletariat taking over the organisation of production and abolishing the bourgeoisie's control over the material essentials of life wherever the proletariat gains power. Works councils can serve to keep an eye on the use of goods in the factories; but it is clear that this cannot prevent all the anti-social racketeering of the bourgeoisie. To do so, the most resolute utilisation of armed political power is necessary. Where the profiteers recklessly squander the national wealth without heed for the common good, where armed reaction blindly murders and destroys, the proletariat must intervene and fight with no half-measures in order to protect the common good and the life of the people.

The difficulties of reorganising a society that has been completely destroyed are so great that they appear insuperable before the event, and this makes it impossible to set up a programme for reconstruction in advance. But they must be overcome, and the proletariat will overcome them by the infinite self-sacrifice and commitment, the boundless power of soul and spirit and the tremendous psychological and moral energies which the revolution is able to awaken in its weakened and tortured frame.

At this point, a few problems may be touched

on in passing. The question of technical cadres in industry will only give temporary difficulties: although their thinking is bourgeois through and through and they are deeply hostile to proletarian rule, they will nevertheless conform in the end. Getting commerce and industry moving will above all be a question of supplying raw materials; and this question coincides with that of food-stuffs. The question of food-supplies is central to the revolution in Western Europe, since the highly industrialised population cannot get by even under capitalism without imports from abroad. For the revolution, however, the question of food-supplies is intimately bound up with the whole agrarian question, and the principles of communist regulation of agriculture must influence measures taken to deal with hunger even during the revolution. Junker estates and large-scale landed property are ripe for expropriation and collective exploitation; the small farmers will be freed from all capitalist oppression and encouraged to adopt methods of intensive cultivation through support and assistance of every kind from the state and co-operative arrangements; medium-scale farmers – who own half the land in Western and South-Western Germany, for example – have a strongly individualistic and hence anti-communist mentality, but their economic position is as yet unassailable: they cannot therefore be expropriated, and will have to be integrated into the sphere of the economic process as a whole through the exchange of products and the development of productivity, for it is only with communism that maximum productivity can be developed in agriculture and the individual enterprise introduced by capitalism transcended. It follows that the workers will see in the landowners a hostile class and in the rural workers and small farmers allies in the revolution, while they have no cause for making enemies of the middle farming strata, even though the

latter may be of a hostile disposition towards them. This means that during the first period of chaos preceding the establishment of a system of exchanging products, requisitions must be carried out only as an emergency measure among these strata, as an absolutely unavoidable balancing operation between famine in the towns and in the country. The struggle against hunger will have to be dealt with primarily by imports from abroad. Soviet Russia, with her rich stocks of foodstuffs and raw materials, will thus save and provide for the revolution in Western Europe. The Western European working class thus has the highest and most personal interest in the defence and support of Soviet Russia.

The reconstruction of the economy, inordinately difficult as it will be, is not the main problem for the Communist Party. When the proletarian masses develop their intellectual and moral potential to the full, they will resolve it themselves. The prime duty of the Communist Party is to arouse and foster this potential. It must eradicate all the received ideas which leave the proletariat timid and unsure of itself, set itself against everything that breeds illusions among the workers about easier courses and restrains them from the most radical measures, energetically oppose all the tendencies which stop short at half-measures or compromises. And there are still many such tendencies.

## VII

The transition from capitalism to communism will not proceed according to a simple schema of conquering political power, introducing the council system and then abolishing private commerce, even though this represents the broad outline of development. That would only be possible if one could undertake reconstruction in some sort of void. But out of capitalism there have grown forms of production and organisation which have firm

roots in the consciousness of the masses, and which can themselves only be overthrown in a process of political and economic revolution. We have already mentioned the agrarian forms of production, which will have to follow a particular course of development. There have grown up in the working class under capitalism forms of organisation, different in detail from country to country, which represent a powerful force, which cannot immediately be abolished and which will thus play an important role in the course of the revolution.

This applies in the first instance to political parties. The role of social democracy in the present crisis of capitalism is sufficiently well known, but in Central Europe it has practically played itself out. Even its most radical sections, such as the USP in Germany, exercise a harmful influence, not only by splitting the proletariat, but above all by confusing the masses and restraining them from action with their social-democratic notions of political leaders directing the fate of the people by their deeds and dealings. And if the Communist Party constitutes itself into a parliamentary party which, instead of attempting to assert the dictatorship of the class, attempts to establish that of the party – that is to say the party leadership – then it too may become a hindrance to development. The attitude of the Communist Party of Germany during the revolutionary March movement, when it announced that the proletariat was not yet ripe for dictatorship and that it would therefore encounter any ‘genuinely socialist government’ that might be formed as a ‘loyal opposition’, in other words restrain the proletariat from waging the fiercest revolutionary struggle against such a government, was itself criticised from many quarters.<sup>10</sup>

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10. See, for example, the penetrating criticisms of Comrade Koloszvary in the Viennese weekly *Kommunismus*.

A government of socialist party leaders may arise in the course of the revolution as a transitional form; this will be expressing a temporary balance between the revolutionary and bourgeois forces, and it will tend to freeze and perpetuate the temporary balance between the destruction of the old and the development of the new. It would be something like a more radical version of the Ebert-Haase-Dittmann regime;<sup>11</sup> and its basis shows what can be expected of it: a seeming balance of hostile classes, but under the preponderance of the bourgeoisie, a mixture of parliamentary democracy and a kind of council system for the workers, socialisation subject to the veto of the Entente powers' imperialism with the profits of capital being maintained, futile attempts to prevent classes clashing violently. It is always the workers who take a beating in such circumstances. Not only can a regime of this sort achieve nothing in terms of reconstruction, it does not even attempt to do so, since its only aim is to halt the revolution in mid-course. Since it attempts both to prevent the further disintegration of capitalism and also the development of the full political power of the proletariat, its effects are directly counter-revolutionary. Communists have no choice but to fight such regimes in the most uncompromising manner.

Just as in Germany the Social-Democratic

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11. The absence of obvious and intimidating methods of coercion in the hands of the bourgeoisie in England also inspires the pacifist illusion that violent revolution is not necessary there and that peaceful construction from below, as in the Guild movement and the Shop Committees, will take care of everything. It is certainly true that the most potent weapon of the English bourgeoisie has until now been subtle deception rather than armed force; but if put to it, this world-dominating class will not fail to summon up terrible means to enforce its rule.

Party was formerly the leading organisation of the proletariat, so in England the trade-union movement, in the course of almost a century of history, has put down the deepest roots in the working class. Here it has long been the ideal of the younger radical trade-union leaders – Robert Smillie is a typical example – for the working class to govern society by means of the trade-union organisation. Even the revolutionary syndicalists and the spokesmen of the IWW in America, although affiliated to the Third International, imagine the future rule of the proletariat primarily along these lines. Radical trade-unionists see the soviet system not as the purest form of proletarian dictatorship, but rather as a regime of politicians and intellectuals built up on a base of working-class organisations. They see the trade union movement, on the other hand, as the natural organisation of the proletariat, created by the proletariat, which governs itself within it and which will go on to govern the whole of the work-process. Once the old ideal of ‘industrial democracy’ has been realised and the trade union is master in the factory, its collective organ, the trade-union congress, will take over the function of guiding and managing the economy as a whole. It will then be the real ‘parliament of labour’ and replace the old bourgeois parliament of parties. These circles often shrink from a one-sided and ‘unfair’ class dictatorship as an infringement of democracy, however; labour is to rule, but others are not to be without rights. Therefore, in addition to the labour parliament, which governs work, the basis of life, a second house could be elected by universal suffrage to represent the whole nation and exercise its influence on public and cultural matters and questions of general political concern.

This conception of government by the trade unions should not be confused with ‘labourism’, the politics of the ‘Labour Party’, which is currently led by

trade-unionists. This latter stands for the penetration of the bourgeois parliament of today by the trade unions, who will build a 'workers' party' on the same footing as other parties with the objective of becoming the party of government in their place. This party is completely bourgeois, and there is little to choose between Henderson and Ebert. It will give the English bourgeoisie the opportunity to continue its old policies on a broader basis as soon as the threat of pressure from below makes this necessary, and hence weaken and confuse the workers by taking their leaders into the government. A government of the workers' party, something which seemed imminent a year ago when the masses were in so revolutionary a mood, but which the leaders themselves have put back into the distant future by holding the radical current down, would, like the Ebert regime in Germany, have been nothing but government on behalf of the bourgeoisie. But it remains to be seen whether the far-sighted, subtle English bourgeoisie does not trust itself to stultify and suppress the masses more effectively than these working-class bureaucrats.

A genuine trade-union government as conceived by the radicals is as unlike this workers' party politics, this 'labourism', as revolution is unlike reform. Only a real revolution in political relationships – whether violent or in keeping with the old English models – could bring it about; and in the eyes of the broad masses, it would represent the conquest of power by the proletariat. But it is nevertheless quite different from the goal of communism. It is based on the limited ideology which develops in trade-union struggles, where one does not confront world capital as a whole in all its interwoven forms – finance capital, bank capital, agricultural capital, colonial capital – but only its industrial form. It is based on marxist economics, now being eagerly studied in the English working class, which show production to be



a mechanism of exploitation, but without the deeper marxist social theory, historical materialism. It recognises that work constitutes the basis of the world and thus wants labour to rule the world; but it does not see that all the abstract spheres of political and intellectual life are determined by the mode of production, and it is therefore disposed to leave them to the bourgeois intelligentsia, provided that the latter recognises the primacy of labour. Such a workers' regime would in reality be a government of the trade-union bureaucracy complemented by the radical section of the old state bureaucracy, which it would leave in charge of the specialist fields of culture, politics and suchlike on the grounds of their special competence in these matters. It is obvious that its economic programme will not coincide with communist expropriation, but will only go so far as the expropriation of big capital, while the 'honest' profits of the smaller entrepreneur, hitherto fleeced and kept in subjection by this big capital, will be spared. It is even open to doubt whether they will take up the standpoint of complete freedom for India, an integral element of the communist programme, on the colonial question, this life-nerve of the ruling class of England.

It cannot be predicted in what manner, to what degree and with what purity a political form of this kind will be realised. The English bourgeoisie has always understood the art of using well-timed concessions to check movement towards revolutionary objectives; how far it is able to continue this tactic in the future will depend primarily on the depth of the economic crisis. If trade-union discipline is eroded from below by uncontrollable industrial revolts and communism simultaneously gains a hold on the masses, then the radical and reformist trade-unionists will agree on a common line; if the struggle goes sharply against the old reformist politics of the leaders, the radical trade-unionists and the communists

will go hand in hand.

These tendencies are not confined to England. The trade unions are the most powerful workers' organisations in every country; as soon as a political clash topples the old state power, it will inevitably fall into the hands of the best organised and most influential force on hand. In Germany in November 1918, the trade-union executives formed the counter-revolutionary guard behind Ebert; and in the recent March crisis, they entered the political arena in an attempt to gain direct influence upon the composition of the government. The only purpose of this support for the Ebert regime was to deceive the proletariat the more subtly with the fraud of a 'government under the control of the workers' organisations'. But it shows that the same tendency exists here as in England. And even if the Legiens and Bauers<sup>12</sup> are too tainted by counter-revolution, new radical trade-unionists from the USP tendency will take their place just as last year the Independents under Dissmann won the leadership of the great metalworkers' federation. If a revolutionary movement overthrows the Ebert regime, this tightly organised force of seven million will doubtless be ready to seize power, in conjunction with the C P or in opposition to it.

A 'government of the working class' along these lines by the trade unions cannot be stable; although it may be able to hold its own for a long time during a slow process of economic decline, in an acute revolutionary crisis it will only be able to survive as a tottering transitional phenomenon. Its programme, as we have outlined above, cannot be radical. But a current which will sanction

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12. Ebert, Haase and Dittmann were members of the Council of People's Commissioners given supreme authority by the November revolution. [Translator's note.]

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such measures not, like communism, as a temporary transitional form at most to be deliberately utilised for the purpose of building up a communist organisation, but as a definitive programme, must necessarily come into conflict with and antagonism towards the masses. Firstly, because it does not render bourgeois elements completely powerless, but grants them a certain position of power in the bureaucracy and perhaps in parliament, from which they can continue to wage the class struggle. The bourgeoisie will endeavour to consolidate these positions of strength, while the proletariat, because it cannot annihilate the hostile class under these conditions, must attempt to establish a straightforward soviet system as the organ of its dictatorship; in this battle between two mighty opponents, economic reconstruction will be impossible.<sup>13</sup> And secondly, because a government of trade-union leaders of this kind cannot resolve the problems which society is posing; for the latter can only be resolved through the proletarian masses' own initiative and activity, fuelled by the self-sacrificing and unbounded enthusiasm which only communism, with all its perspectives of total freedom and supreme intellectual and moral elevation, can command. A current which seeks to abolish material poverty and exploitation, but deliberately confines itself to this goal, which leaves the bourgeois superstructure intact and at the same time holds back from revolutionising the mental outlook and ideology of the proletariat, cannot release these great energies in the masses; and so it will be incapable of

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13. Karl Legien was President of the General Commission of Trade Unions from 1890 and of its successor, the ADGB (Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund), from its formation in 1919; Gustav Bauer, another trade-union leader, became Minister of Labour in 1919 and subsequently Chancellor. [Translator's note.]

resolving the material problems of initiating economic expansion and ending the chaos.

The trade-union regime will attempt to consolidate and stabilise the prevailing level of the revolutionary process, just like the 'genuinely socialist' regime – except that it will do so at a much more developed stage, when the primacy of the bourgeoisie has been destroyed and a certain balance of class power has arisen with the proletariat predominant; when the entire profit of capital can no longer be saved, but only its less repellent petty-capitalist form; when it is no longer bourgeois but socialist expansion that is being attempted, albeit with insufficient resources. It thus signifies the last stand of the bourgeois class: when the bourgeoisie can no longer withstand the assault of the masses on the Scheidemann-Henderson-Renaudel line, it falls back to its last line of defence, the Smillie-Dissmann-Merrheim line.<sup>14</sup> When it is no longer able to deceive the proletariat by having 'workers' in a bourgeois or socialist regime, it can only attempt to keep the proletariat from its ultimate radical goals by a 'government of workers' organisations' and thus in part retain its privileged position. Such a government is counterrevolutionary in nature, in so far as it seeks to arrest the necessary development of the revolution towards the total destruction of the bourgeois world and prevent total communism from attaining its greatest and clearest objectives. The struggle of the communists may at present often run parallel with that of the radical trade-unionists; but it would be dangerous tactics not to clearly identify the differences of principle and objective when this happens. And these considerations also bear upon the attitude of the communists towards the trade-union

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14. Respectively socialist and trade union leaders. [Translator's note.]

confederations of today; everything which consolidates their unity and strength consolidates the force which will one day put itself in the way of the onward march of the revolution.

When communism conducts a strong and principled struggle against this transitional political form, it represents the living revolutionary tendencies in the proletariat. The same revolutionary action on the part of the proletariat which prepares the way for the rule of a worker-bureaucracy by smashing the apparatus of bourgeois power simultaneously drives the masses on to form their own organs, the councils, which immediately undermine the basis of the bureaucratic trade unions' machinery. The development of the soviet system is at the same time the struggle of the proletariat to replace the incomplete form of its dictatorship by complete dictatorship. But with the intensive labour which all the never-ending attempts to 'reorganise' the economy will demand, a leadership bureaucracy will be able to retain great power for a long time, and the masses' capacity to get rid of it will only develop slowly. These various forms and phases of the process of development do not, moreover, follow on in the abstract, logical succession in which we have set them down as degrees of maturation: they all occur at the same time, become entangled and coexist in a chaos of tendencies that complement each other, combat each other and dissolve each other, and it is through this struggle that the general development of the revolution proceeds. As Marx himself put it:

Proletarian revolutions constantly criticise themselves, continually interrupt themselves in the course of their own development, come back to the seemingly complete in order to start it all over again, treat the inadequacies of their own first attempts with cruelly radical contempt, seem only to throw their adversaries down to enable them to draw new strength

from the earth and rise up again to face them all the more gigantic.

The resistances which issue from the proletariat itself as expressions of weakness must be overcome in order for it to develop its full strength; and this process of development is generated by conflict, it proceeds from crisis to crisis, driven on by struggle. In the beginning was the deed, but it was only the beginning. It demands an instant of united purpose to overthrow a ruling class, but only the lasting unity conferred by clear insight can keep a firm grasp upon victory. Otherwise there comes the reverse which is not a return to the old rulers, but a new hegemony in a new form, with new personnel and new illusions. Each new phase of the revolution brings a new layer of as yet unused leaders to the surface as the representatives of particular forms of organisation, and the overthrow of each of these in turn represents a higher stage in the proletariat's self-emancipation. The strength of the proletariat is not merely the raw power of the single violent act which throws the enemy down, but also the strength of mind which breaks the old mental dependence and thus succeeds in keeping a tight hold on what has been seized by storm. The growth of this strength in the ebb and flow of revolution is the growth of proletarian freedom.

### VIII

In Western Europe, capitalism is in a state of progressive collapse; yet in Russia, despite the terrible difficulties, production is being built up under a new order. The hegemony of communism does not mean that production is completely based on a communist order – this latter is only possible after a relatively lengthy process of development – but that the working class is consciously developing the system of production towards communism.<sup>15</sup> This development cannot at any

point go beyond what the prevailing technical and social foundations permit, and therefore it inevitably manifests transitional forms in which vestiges of the old bourgeois world appear. According to what we have heard of the situation in Russia here in Western Europe, such vestiges do indeed exist there.

Russia is an enormous peasant land; industry there has not developed to the unnatural extent of a 'workshop' of the world as it has in Western Europe, making export and expansion a question of life and death, but just sufficiently for the formation of a working class able to take over the government of society as a developed class. Agriculture is the occupation of the popular masses, and modern, large-scale farms are in a minority, although they play a valuable role in the development of communism. It is the small units that make up the majority: not the wretched, exploited little properties of Western Europe, but farms which secure the welfare of the peasants and which the soviet regime is seeking to integrate more and more closely into the system as a whole by means of material assistance in the form of extra equipment and tools and by intensive cultural and specialist education. It is nevertheless natural that this form of enterprise generates a certain spirit of individualism alien to communism, which, among the 'rich peasants', has become a hostile, resolutely anti-communist frame of mind. The Entente

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15. This conception of the gradual transformation of the mode of production stands in sharp contrast to the social-democratic conception, which seeks to abolish capitalism and exploitation gradually by a slow process of reform. The direct abolition of all profit on capital and of all exploitation by the victorious proletariat is the precondition of the mode of production being able to move towards communism.

has doubtless speculated on this in its proposals to trade with co-operatives, intending to initiate a bourgeois counter-movement by drawing these strata into bourgeois pursuit of profit. But because fear of feudal reaction binds them to the present regime as their major interest, such efforts must come to nothing, and when Western European imperialism collapses this danger will disappear completely.

Industry is predominantly a centrally organised, exploitation-free system of production; it is the heart of the new order, and the leadership of the state is based on the industrial proletariat. But even this system of production is in a transitional phase; the technical and administrative cadres in the factories and in the state apparatus exercise greater authority than is commensurate with developed communism. The need to increase production quickly and the even more urgent need to create an efficient army to fend off the attacks of reaction made it imperative to make good the lack of reliable leaders in the shortest possible time; the threat of famine and the assaults of the enemy did not permit all resources to be directed towards a more gradual raising of the general level of competence and to the development of all as the basis of a collective communist system. Thus a new bureaucracy inevitably arose from the new leaders and functionaries, absorbing the old bureaucracy into itself. This is at times regarded with some anxiety as a peril to the new order, and it can only be removed by a broad development of the masses. Although the latter is being undertaken with the utmost energy, only the communist surplus by which man ceases to be the slave of his labour will form a lasting foundation for it. Only surplus creates the material conditions for freedom and equality; so long as the struggle against nature and against the forces of capital remains intense, an inordinate degree of specialisation will remain



necessary.

It is worth noting that although our analysis predicts that development in Western Europe will take a different direction from that of Russia insofar as we can foresee the course which it will follow as the revolution progresses, both manifest the same politico-economic structure: industry run according to communist principles with workers' councils forming the element of self-management under the technical direction and political hegemony of a worker-bureaucracy, while agriculture retains an individualistic, petty-bourgeois character in the dominant small and medium-scale sectors. But this coincidence is not so extraordinary for all that, in that this kind of social structure is determined not by previous political history, but by basic technico-economic conditions – the level of development attained by industrial and agricultural technology and the formation of the proletarian masses – which are in both cases the same.<sup>16</sup> But despite this coincidence, there is a great difference in significance and goal. In Western Europe this politico-economic structure forms a transitional stage at which the bourgeoisie is ultimately able to arrest its decline, whereas in Russia the attempt is consciously being made to pursue development further in a communist direction. In Western Europe, it forms a phase in the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in Russia a phase in the new economic expansion. With the same external forms, Western Europe is on the downward path of a declining culture, Russia on the rising movement of a new culture.

While the Russian revolution was still young

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16. A prominent example of this kind of convergent development is to be found in the social structure at the end of ancient times and the beginning of the Middle Ages; cf. Engels, *Origins of the Family*, Ch. 8.

and weak and was looking to an imminent outbreak of revolution in Europe to save it, a different conception of its significance reigned. Russia, it was then maintained, was only an outpost of the revolution where favourable circumstances had enabled the proletariat to seize power so early; but this proletariat was weak and unformed and almost swallowed up in the infinite masses of the peasantry. The proletariat of economically backward Russia could only make temporary advances; as soon as the great masses of the fully-fledged Western European proletariat came to power in the most developed industrial countries, with all their technical and organisational experience and their ancient wealth of culture, then we should see communism flourish to an extent that would make the Russian contribution, welcome as it was, seem weak and inadequate by comparison. The heart and strength of the new communist world lay where capitalism had reached the height of its power, in England, in Germany, in America, and laid the basis for the new mode of production.

This conception takes no account of the difficulties facing the revolution in Western Europe. Where the proletariat only slowly gains firm control and the bourgeoisie is upon occasion able to win back power in part or in whole, nothing can come of economic reconstruction. Capitalist expansion is impossible; every time the bourgeoisie obtains a free hand, it creates new chaos and destroys the bases which could have served for the construction of communist production. Again and again it prevents the consolidation of the new proletarian order by bloody reaction and destruction. This occurred even in Russia: the destruction of industrial installations and mines in the Urals and the Donetz basin by Kolchak and Denikin, as well as the need to deploy the best workers and the greater part of the productive forces against them, was a serious blow to the economy and

damaged and delayed communist expansion – and even though the initiation of trade relations with America and the West may considerably favour a new upturn, the greatest, most self-sacrificing effort will be needed on the part of the masses in Russia to achieve complete recovery from this damage. But – and herein lies the difference – the soviet republic has remained intact in Russia as an organised centre of communist power which has already developed tremendous internal stability. In Western Europe there will be just as much destruction and murder, here too the best forces of the proletariat will be wiped out in the course of the struggle, but here we lack an already consolidated, organised soviet state that could serve as a source of strength. The classes are wearing each other out in a devastating civil war, and so long as construction comes to nothing, chaos and misery will continue to rule. This will be the lot of countries where the proletariat does not immediately recognise its task with clear insight and united purpose, that is to say where bourgeois traditions weaken and split the workers, dim their eyes and subdue their hearts. It will take decades to overcome the infectious, paralysing influence of bourgeois culture upon the proletariat in the old capitalist countries. And meanwhile, production lies in ruins and the country degenerates into an economic desert.

At the same time as Western Europe, stagnating economically, painfully struggles with its bourgeois past, in the East, in Russia, the economy is flourishing under a communist order. What used to distinguish the developed capitalist countries from the backward East was the tremendous sophistication of their material and mental means of production – a dense network of railways, factories, ships, and a dense, technically skilled population. But during the collapse of capitalism, in the long civil war, in the period of stagnation when too

little is being produced, this heritage is being dissipated, used up or destroyed. The indestructible forces of production, science, technical capabilities, are not tied to these countries; their bearers will find a new homeland in Russia, where trade will also provide a sanctuary for part of Europe's material and technical riches. Soviet Russia's trade agreement with Western Europe and America will, if taken seriously and operated with a will, tend to accentuate this contradiction, because it furthers the economic expansion of Russia while delaying collapse in Western Europe, thus giving capitalism a breathing space and paralysing the revolutionary potential of the masses – for how long and to what extent remains to be seen. Politically, this will be expressed in an apparent stabilisation of a bourgeois regime or one of the other types discussed above and in a simultaneous rise to power of opportunist tendencies within communism; by recognising the old methods of struggle and engaging in parliamentary activity and loyal opposition within the old trade unions, the communist parties in Western Europe will acquire a legal status, like social-democracy before them, and in the face of this, the radical, revolutionary current will see itself forced into a minority. However, it is entirely improbable that capitalism will enjoy a real new flowering; the private interests of the capitalists trading with Russia will not defer to the economy as a whole, and for the sake of profit they will ship off essential basic elements of production to Russia; nor can the proletariat again be brought into a state of dependence. Thus the crisis will drag on; lasting improvement is impossible and will continually be arrested; the process of revolution and civil war will be delayed and drawn out, the complete rule of communism and the beginning of new growth put off into the distant future. Meanwhile, in the East, the economy will develop untrammelled in a powerful upsurge, and new paths will be opened up on the basis

of the most advanced natural science – which the West is incapable of exploiting – together with the new social science, humanity's newly won control over its own social forces. And these forces, increased a hundredfold by the new energies flowing from freedom and equality, will make Russia the centre of the new communist world order.

This will not be the first time in world history that the centre of the civilised world has shifted in the transition to a new mode of production or one of its phases. In antiquity, it moved from the Middle East to Southern Europe, in the Middle Ages, from Southern to Western Europe; with the rise of colonial and merchant capital, first Spain, then Holland and England became the leading nation, and with the rise of industry England. The cause of these shifts can in fact be embraced in a general historical principle: where the earlier economic form reached its highest development, the material and mental forces, the politico-juridical institutions which secured its existence and which were necessary for its full development, were so strongly constructed that they offered almost insuperable resistance to the development of new forms. Thus, the institution of slavery inhibited the development of feudalism at the twilight of antiquity; thus, the guild laws applying in the great wealthy cities of medieval times meant that later capitalist manufacturing could only develop in other centres hitherto insignificant; thus in the late eighteenth century, the political order of French absolutism which had fostered industry under Colbert obstructed the introduction of the large-scale industry that made England a manufacturing nation. There even exists a corresponding law in organic nature, a corollary to Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' known as the law of the 'survival of the unfitted': when a species of animal has become specialised and differentiated into a wealth of forms all perfectly adapted to particular

conditions of life in that period – like the Saurians in the Secondary Era – it becomes incapable of evolving into a new species; all the various options for adaptation and development have been lost and cannot be retrieved. The development of a new species proceeds from primitive forms which, because they have remained undifferentiated, have retained all their potential for development, and the old species which is incapable of further adaptation dies out. The phenomenon whereby leadership in economic, political and cultural development continually shifts from one people or nation to another in the course of human history – explained away by bourgeois science with the fantasy of a nation or race having ‘exhausted its life force’ – is a particular incidence of this organic rule.

We now see why it is that the primacy of Western Europe and America – which the bourgeoisie is pleased to attribute to the intellectual and moral superiority of their race – will evaporate, and where we can foresee it shifting to. New countries, where the masses are not poisoned by the fug of a bourgeois ideology, where the beginnings of industrial development have raised the mind from its former slumber and a communist sense of solidarity has awoken, where the raw materials are available to use the most advanced technology inherited from capitalism for a renewal of the traditional forms of production, where oppression elicits the development of the qualities fostered by struggle, but where no over-powerful bourgeoisie can obstruct this process of regeneration – it is such countries that will be the centres of the new communist world. Russia, itself half a continent when taken in conjunction with Siberia, already stands first in line. But these conditions are also present to a greater or lesser extent in other countries of the East, in India, in China. Although there may be other sources of immaturity, these Asian countries must not be overlooked in considering the communist world

revolution.

This world revolution is not seen in its full universal significance if considered only from the Western European perspective. Russia not only forms the eastern part of Europe, it is much more the western part of Asia, and not only in a geographical, but also in a politico-economic sense. The old Russia had little in common with Europe: it was the westernmost of those politico-economic structures which Marx termed 'oriental despotic powers', and which included all the great empires of ancient and modern Asia. Based on the village communism of a largely homogeneous peasantry, there evolved within these an absolute rule by princes and the nobility, which also drew support from relatively small-scale but nevertheless important trade in craft goods. Into this mode of production, which, despite superficial changes of ruler, had gone on reproducing itself in the same way for thousands of years, Western European capital penetrated from all sides, dissolving, fermenting, undermining, exploiting, impoverishing; by trade, by direct subjection and plunder, by exploitation of natural riches, by the construction of railways and factories, by state loans to the princes, by the export of food and raw materials – all of which is encompassed in the term 'colonial policy'. Whereas India, with its enormous riches, was conquered early, plundered and then proletarianised and industrialised, it was only later, through modern colonial policy, that other countries fell prey to developed capital. Although on the surface Russia had played the role of a great European power since 1700, it too became a colony of European capital; due to direct military contact with Europe it went earlier and more precipitately the way that Persia and China were subsequently to go. Before the last world war 70 per cent of the iron industry, the greater part of the railways, 90 per cent of platinum production and

75 per cent of the naphtha industry were in the hands of European capitalists, and through the enormous national debts of tsarism, the latter also exploited the Russian peasantry past the point of starvation. While the working class in Russia worked under the same conditions as those of Western Europe, with the result that a body of revolutionary marxist views developed, Russia's entire economic situation nevertheless made it the westernmost of the Asiatic empires.

The Russian revolution is the beginning of the great revolt by Asia against the Western European capital concentrated in England. As a rule, we in Western Europe only consider the effects which it has here, where the advanced theoretical development of the Russian revolutionaries has made them the teachers of the proletariat as it reaches towards communism. But its workings in the East are more important still; and Asian questions therefore influence the policies of the soviet republic almost more than European questions. The call for freedom and for the self-determination of all peoples and for struggle against European capital throughout Asia is going out from Moscow, where delegations from Asiatic tribes are arriving one after another.<sup>17</sup> The threads

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17. This is the basis of the stand taken by Lenin in 1916 at the time of Zimmerwald against Radek, who was representing the view of Western European communists. The latter insisted that the slogan of the right of all peoples to self-determination, which the social patriots had taken up along with Wilson, was merely a deception, since this right can only ever be an appearance and illusion under imperialism, and that we should therefore oppose this slogan. Lenin saw in this standpoint the tendency of Western European socialists to reject the Asiatic peoples' wars of national liberation, thus avoiding radical struggle against the colonial policies of their governments.



lead from the soviet republic of Turan to India and the Moslem countries; in Southern China the revolutionaries have sought to follow the example of government by soviets; the pan-Islamic movement developing in the Middle East under the leadership of Turkey is trying to connect with Russia. This is where the significance of the world struggle between Russia and England as the exponents of two social systems lies; and this struggle cannot therefore end in real peace, despite temporary pauses, for the process of ferment in Asia is continuing. English politicians who look a little further ahead than the petty-bourgeois demagogue Lloyd George clearly see the danger here threatening English domination of the world, and with it the whole of capitalism; they rightly say that Russia is more dangerous than Germany ever was. But they cannot act forcefully, for the beginnings of revolutionary development in the English proletariat do not permit any regime other than one of bourgeois demagoguery.

The interests of Asia are in essence the interests of the human race. Eight hundred million people live in Russia, China and India, in the Sibero-Russian plain and the fertile valleys of the Ganges and the Yangtse Kiang, more than half the population of the earth and almost three times as many as in the part of Europe under capitalist domination. And the seeds of revolution have appeared everywhere, besides Russia; on the one hand, powerful strike-movements flaring up where industrial proletarians are huddled together, as in Bombay and Hankow; on the other, nationalist movements under the leadership of the rising national intelligentsia. As far as can be judged from the reticent English press, the world war was a powerful stimulus to national movements, but then suppressed them forcefully, while industry is in such an upsurge that gold is flowing in torrents from America to East Asia. When the wave of economic crisis hits these

countries – it seems to have overtaken Japan already – new struggles can be expected. The question may be raised as to whether purely nationalist movements seeking a national capitalist order in Asia should be supported, since they will be hostile to their own proletarian liberation movements; but development will clearly not take this course. It is true that until now the rising intelligentsia has orientated itself in terms of European nationalism and, as the ideologues of the developing indigenous bourgeoisie, advocated a national bourgeois government on Western lines; but this idea is paling with the decline of Europe, and they will doubtless come strongly under the intellectual sway of Russian bolshevism and find in it the means to fuse with the proletarian strike-movements and uprisings. Thus, the national liberation movements of Asia will perhaps adopt a communist world view and a communist programme on the firm material ground of the workers' and peasants' class struggle against the barbaric oppression of world capital sooner than external appearances might lead us to believe.

The fact that these peoples are predominantly agrarian need be no more of an obstacle than it was in Russia: communist communities will not consist of tightly-packed huddles of factory towns, for the capitalist division between industrial and agricultural nations will cease to exist; agriculture will have to take up a great deal of space within them. The predominant agricultural character will nevertheless render the revolution more difficult, since the mental disposition is less favourable under such conditions. Doubtless a prolonged period of intellectual and political upheaval will also be necessary in these countries. The difficulties here are different from those in Europe, less of an active than of a passive nature: they lie less in the strength of the resistance than in the slow pace at which activity is awakening, not in overcoming internal chaos, but in developing the unity

to drive out the foreign exploiter. We will not go into the particulars of these difficulties here – the religious and national fragmentation of India, the petty-bourgeois character of China. However the political and economic forms continue to develop, the central problem which must first be overcome is to destroy the hegemony of European and American capital.

The hard struggle for the annihilation of capitalism is the common task which the workers of Western Europe and the USA have to accomplish hand-in-hand with the vast populations of Asia. We are at present only at the beginning of this process. When the German revolution takes a decisive turn and connects with Russia, when revolutionary mass struggles break out in England and America, when revolt flares up in India, when communism pushes its frontiers forward to the Rhine and the Indian Ocean, then the world revolution will enter into its next mighty phase. With its vassals in the League of Nations and its American and Japanese allies, the world-ruling English bourgeoisie, assaulted from within and without, its world power threatened by colonial rebellions and wars of liberation, paralysed internally by strikes and civil war, will have to exert all its strength and raise mercenary armies against both enemies. When the English working class, backed up by the rest of the European proletariat, attacks its bourgeoisie, it will fight doubly for communism, clearing the way for communism in England and helping to free Asia. And conversely, it will be able to count on the support of the main communist forces when armed hirelings of the bourgeoisie seek to drown its struggle in blood – for Western Europe and the islands off its coast are only a peninsula projecting from the great Russo-Asian complex of lands. The common struggle against capital will unite the proletarian masses of the whole world. And when finally, at the end of the arduous

struggle, the European workers, deeply exhausted, stand in the clear morning light of freedom, they will greet the liberated peoples of Asia in the East and shake hands in Moscow, the capital of the new humanity.

### **Afterword**

The above theses were written in April and sent off to Russia to be available for consideration by the executive committee and the congress in making their tactical decisions. The situation has meanwhile altered, in that the executive committee in Moscow and the leading comrades in Russia have come down completely on the side of opportunism, with the result that this tendency prevailed at the Second Congress of the Communist International.

The policy in question first made its appearance in Germany, when Radek, using all the ideological and material influence that he and the KPD leadership could muster, attempted to impose his tactics of parliamentarianism and support for the central confederations upon the German communists, thereby splitting and weakening the communist movement. Since Radek was made secretary of the executive committee this policy has become that of the entire executive committee. The previously unsuccessful efforts to secure the affiliation of the German Independents to Moscow have been redoubled, while the anti-parliamentarian communists of the KAPD, who, it can hardly be denied, by rights belong to the CI, have received frosty treatment: they had opposed the Third International on every issue of importance, it was maintained, and could only be admitted upon special conditions. The Amsterdam Auxiliary Bureau, which had accepted them and treated them as equals, was closed down. Lenin told the English communists that they should not only participate in parliamentary elections, but even join the Labour Party,

a political organisation consisting largely of reactionary trade-union leaders and a member of the Second International. All these stands manifest the desire of the leading Russian comrades to establish contact with the big workers' organisations of Western Europe that have yet to turn communist. While radical communists seek to further the revolutionary development of the working masses by means of rigorous, principled struggle against all bourgeois, social-patriotic and vacillating tendencies and their representatives, the leadership of the International is attempting to gain the adherence of the latter to Moscow in droves without their having first to cast off their old perspectives.

The antagonistic stance which the Bolsheviki, whose deeds made them exponents of radical tactics in the past, have taken up towards the radical communists of Western Europe comes out clearly in Lenin's recently-published pamphlet *'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. Its significance lies not in its content, but in the person of the author, for the arguments are scarcely original and have for the most part already been used by others. What is new is that it is Lenin who is now taking them up. The point is therefore not to combat them – their fallacy resides mainly in the equation of the conditions, parties, organisations and parliamentary practice of Western Europe with their Russian counterparts – and oppose other arguments to them, but to grasp the fact of their appearance in this conjuncture as the product of specific policies.

The basis of these policies can readily be identified in the needs of the Soviet republic. The reactionary insurgents Kolchak and Denikin have destroyed the foundations of the Russian iron industry, and the war effort has forestalled a powerful upsurge in production. Russia urgently needs machines, locomotives and tools for economic reconstruction, and only the undamaged

industry of the capitalist countries can provide these. It therefore needs peaceful trade with the rest of the world, and in particular with the nations of the Entente; they in their turn need raw materials and foodstuffs from Russia to stave off the collapse of capitalism. The sluggish pace of revolutionary development in Western Europe thus compels the Soviet republic to seek a *modus vivendi* with the capitalist world, to surrender a portion of its natural wealth as the price of doing so, and to renounce direct support for revolution in other countries. In itself there can be no objection to an arrangement of this kind, which both parties recognise to be necessary; but it would hardly be surprising if the sense of constraint and the initiation of a policy of compromise with the bourgeois world were to foster a mental disposition towards more moderate perspectives. The Third International, as the association of communist parties preparing proletarian revolution in every country, is not formally bound by the policies of the Russian government, and it is supposed to pursue its own tasks completely independent of the latter. In practice, however, this separation does not exist; just as the CP is the backbone of the Soviet republic, the executive committee is intimately connected with the Praesidium of the Soviet republic through the persons of its members, thus forming an instrument whereby this Praesidium intervenes in the politics of Western Europe. We can now see why the tactics of the Third International, laid down by Congress to apply homogeneously to all capitalist countries and to be directed from the centre, are determined not only by the needs of communist agitation in those countries, but also by the political needs of Soviet Russia.

Now, it is true that England and Russia, the hostile world powers respectively representing capital and labour, both need peaceful trade in order to build up their economies. However, it is not only immediate

economic needs which determine their policies, but also the deeper economic antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the question of the future, expressed in the fact that powerful capitalist groups, rightly hostile to the Soviet republic, are attempting to prevent any compromise as a matter of principle. The Soviet government knows that it cannot rely upon the insight of Lloyd George and England's need for peace; they had to bow to the insuperable might of the Red Army on the one hand and to the pressure which English workers and soldiers were exerting upon their government on the other. The Soviet government knows that the menace of the Entente proletariat is one of the most important of its weapons in paralysing the imperialist governments and compelling them to negotiate. It must therefore render this weapon as powerful as possible. What this requires is not a radical communist party preparing a root-and-branch revolution for the future, but a great organised proletarian force which will take the part of Russia and oblige its own government to pay it heed. The Soviet government needs the masses now, even if they are not fully communist. If it can gain them for itself, their adhesion to Moscow will be a sign to world capital that wars of annihilation against Russia are no longer possible, and that there is therefore no alternative to peace and trade relations.

Moscow must therefore press for communist tactics in Western Europe which do not conflict sharply with the traditional perspectives and methods of the big labour organisations, the influence of which is decisive. Similarly, efforts had to be made to replace the Ebert regime in Germany with one oriented towards the East, since it had shown itself to be a tool of the Entente against Russia; and as the CP was itself too weak, only the Independents could serve this purpose. A revolution in Germany would enormously strengthen

the position of Soviet Russia vis-à-vis the Entente. The development of such a revolution, however, might ultimately be highly incommodious as far as the policy of peace and compromise with the Entente was concerned, for a radical proletarian revolution would tear up the Versailles Treaty and renew the war – the Hamburg communists wanted to make active preparations for this war in advance. Russia would then itself be drawn into this war, and even though it would be strengthened externally in the process, economic reconstruction and the abolition of poverty would be still further delayed. These consequences could be avoided if the German revolution could be kept within bounds such that although the strength of the workers' governments allied against Entente capital was greatly increased, the latter was not put in the position of having to go to war. This would demand not the radical tactics of the KAPD, but government by the Independents, KPD and trade unions in the form of a council organisation on the Russian model.

This policy does have perspectives beyond merely securing a more favourable position for the current negotiations with the Entente: its goal is world revolution. It is nevertheless apparent that a particular conception of world revolution must be implicit in the particular character of these politics. The revolution which is now advancing across the world and which will shortly overtake Central Europe and then Western Europe is driven on by the economic collapse of capitalism; if capital is unable to bring about an upturn in production, the masses will be obliged to turn to revolution as the only alternative to going under without a struggle. But although compelled to turn to revolution, the masses are by and large still in a state of mental servitude to the old perspectives, the old organisations and leaders, and it is the latter who will obtain power



in the first instance. A distinction must therefore be made between the external revolution which destroys the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and renders capitalism impossible, and the communist revolution, a longer process which revolutionises the masses internally and in which the working class, emancipating itself from all its bonds, takes the construction of communism firmly in hand. It is the task of communism to identify the forces and tendencies which will halt the revolution half-way, to show the masses the way forward, and by the bitterest struggle for the most distant goals, for total power, against these tendencies, to awaken in the proletariat the capacity to impel the revolution onward. This it can only do by even now taking up the struggle against the inhibiting leadership tendencies and the power of its leaders. Opportunism seeks to ally itself with the leaders and share in a new hegemony; believing it can sway them on to the path of communism, it will be compromised by them. By declaring this to be the official tactics of communism, the Third International is setting the seal of 'communist revolution' on the seizure of power by the old organisations and their leaders, consolidating the hegemony of these leaders and obstructing the further progress of the revolution.

From the point of view of safeguarding Soviet Russia there can be no objection to this conception of the goal of world revolution. If a political system similar to that of Russia existed in the other countries of Europe – control by a workers' bureaucracy based on a council system – the power of world imperialism would be broken and contained, at least in Europe. Economic build-up towards communism could then go ahead without fear of reactionary wars of intervention in a Russia surrounded by friendly workers' republics. It is therefore comprehensible that what we regard as a temporary, inadequate, transitional form to be combated

with all our might is for Moscow the achievement of proletarian revolution, the goal of communist policy.

This leads us to the critical considerations to be raised against these policies from the point of view of communism. They relate firstly to its reciprocal ideological effect upon Russia itself. If the stratum in power in Russia fraternises with the workers' bureaucracy of Western Europe and adopts the attitudes of the latter, corrupted as it is by its position, its antagonism towards the masses and its adaptation to the bourgeois world, then the momentum which must carry Russia further on the path of communism is liable to be dissipated; if it bases itself upon the land-owning peasantry over and against the workers, a diversion of development towards bourgeois agrarian forms could not be ruled out, and this would lead to stagnation in the world revolution. There is the further consideration that the political system which arose in Russia as an expedient transitional form towards the realisation of communism – and which could only ossify into a bureaucracy under particular conditions – would from the outset represent a reactionary impediment to revolution in Western Europe. We have already pointed out that a 'workers' government' of this kind would not be able to unleash the forces of communist reconstruction; and since after this revolution the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois masses, together with the peasantry, would, unlike the case of Russia after the October revolution, still represent a tremendous force, the failure of reconstruction would only too easily bring reaction back into the saddle, and the proletarian masses would have to renew their exertions to abolish the system.

It is even a matter of doubt whether this policy of attenuated world revolution can achieve its aim, rather than reinforce the bourgeoisie like any other politics of opportunism. It is not the way forward for

the most radical opposition to form a prior alliance with the moderates with a view to sharing power, instead of driving the revolution on by uncompromising struggle; it so weakens the overall fighting strength of the masses that the overthrow of the prevailing system is delayed and made harder.

The real forces of revolution lie elsewhere than in the tactics of parties and the policies of governments. For all the negotiations, there can be no real peace between the world of imperialism and that of communism: while Krassin was negotiating in London, the Red Armies were smashing the might of Poland and reaching the frontiers of Germany and Hungary. This has brought the war to Central Europe; and the class contradictions which have reached an intolerable level here, the total internal economic collapse which renders revolution inevitable, the misery of the masses, the fury of armed reaction, will all make civil war flare up in these countries. But when the masses are set in motion here, their revolution will not allow itself to be channelled within the limits prescribed for it by the opportunistic politics of clever leaders; it must be more radical and more profound than in Russia, because the resistance to be overcome is much greater. The decisions of the Moscow congress are of less moment than the wild, chaotic, elemental forces which will surge up from the hearts of three ravaged peoples and lend new impetus to the world revolution.



Gerd Arntz, Utopia? 1969

# The Theory of the Collapse of Capitalism

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Anton Pannekoek

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The idea that capitalism was in a final, its mortal, crisis dominated the first years after the Russian revolution. When the revolutionary workers' movement in Western Europe abated, the Third International gave up this theory, but it was maintained by the opposition movement, the KAPD, which adopted the theory of the mortal crisis of capitalism as the distinguishing feature between the revolutionary and reformist points of view. The question of the necessity and the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism, and the way in which this is to be understood, is the most important of all questions for the working class and its understanding and tactics. Rosa Luxemburg had already dealt with it in 1912 in her book *The Accumulation of Capital*, where she came to the conclusion that in a pure, closed capitalist system the surplus value needed for accumulation could not be realised and that therefore the constant expansion of capitalism through the trade with non-capitalist countries was necessary. This means that capitalism would collapse, that it would not be able to continue to exist any longer as an economic system, when this expansion was no longer possible. It is this theory, which was challenged as soon as the book was published from

different sides, which the KAPD has often referred to. A quite different theory was developed in 1929 by Henryk Grossmann in his work *Das Akkumulations und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des Kapitalistischen Systems* (The Law of Accumulation and Collapse of the Capitalist System). Grossman here deduces that capitalism must collapse for purely economic reasons in the sense that, independently of human intervention, revolutions, etc., it would be impossible for it to continue to exist as an economic system. The severe and lasting crisis which began in 1930 has certainly prepared people's minds for such a theory of mortal crisis. The recently published manifesto of the *United Workers of America* makes Grossman's theory the theoretical basis for a new direction for the workers' movement. It is therefore necessary to examine it critically. But to do this a preliminary explanation of Marx's position on this question and the past discussions connected with it cannot be avoided.

### **Marx and Rosa Luxemburg**

In the second part of *Capital* Marx dealt with the general conditions of capitalist production as a whole. In the abstract case of pure capitalist production all production is carried on for the market, all products are bought and sold as commodities. The value of the means of production is passed on to the product and a new value is added by labour. This new value is broken down into two parts: the value of the labour power, which is paid as wages and used by the workers to buy means of subsistence, and the remainder, the surplus value, which goes to the capitalist. Where the surplus value is used for means of subsistence and luxury goods then there is simple reproduction; where a part of it is accumulated as new capital there is reproduction on an extended scale.

For the capitalists to find on the market the means of production they need and for the workers to

likewise find the means of subsistence they need, a given proportion must exist between the various branches of production. A mathematician would easily express this in algebraic formulae. Marx gives instead numerical examples to express these proportions, making up cases with selected figures, to serve as illustrations. He distinguishes two spheres, two main departments of production: the means of production department (I) and the means of consumption department (II). In each of these departments a given value of the means of production used is transferred to the product without undergoing any change (constant capital,  $c$ ); a given part of the newly added value is used to pay for labour-power (variable capital,  $v$ ), the other part being the surplus value ( $s$ ). If it is assumed for the numerical example that the constant capital is four times greater than the variable capital (a figure which rises with technical progress) and that the surplus value is equal to the variable capital (this ratio is determined by the rate of exploitation), then, in the case of simple reproduction, the following figures satisfy these conditions:

I	$4000c + 1000v + 1000s =$	6000 (product)
II	$2000c + 500v + 500s =$	3000 (product)

Each of these lines satisfies the conditions. Since  $v+s$ , which are used as means of consumption, are together equal to a half of  $c$ , the value of the means of production, Department II must produce a value equal to a half the value produced in Department I. Then the exact proportion is found: the means of production produced (6000) are just the amount needed for the next turnover period: 4000 $c$  for Department I and 2000 $c$  for Department II; and the means of subsistence produced

in Department II (3000) are exactly what must be supplied for the workers (1000+500) and the capitalists (1000+500).

To illustrate in a similar way the case of capital accumulation the part of surplus value going to accumulation must be indicated; this part is added to the capital in the following year (for reasons of simplicity a production period of a year is assumed each time) so that a larger capital is then employed in each department. We will assume in our example that half the surplus value is accumulated (and so used for new *c* and new *v*) and that the other half is consumed (consumption, *k*). The calculation of the proportion between Department I and Department II becomes a little more complicated but can of course still be found. It turns out that, on the assumptions given, this proportion is 11 : 4, as is shown in the following figures:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{I } 4400c + 1100v + 1100s & (= 550k + 550acc (= 440c + 110v)) \\ & = 6600 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{II } 1600c + 400v + 400s & (= 200k + 200acc (= 160c + 40v)) \\ & = 2400 \end{aligned}$$

The capitalists need 4400+1600 for the renewal and 440+160 for the extension of their means of production, and in fact they find 6600 means of production on the market. The capitalists need 550+200 for their consumption, the original workers need 1100+400 and the newly engaged workers 110+40 as means of subsistence; which together is equal to the 2400 in fact produced as means of subsistence. In the following year all the figures are increased by 10 per cent:

$$\text{I } 4840c + 1210v + 1210s (= 605k + 484c + 121v) = 7260$$

$$\text{II } 1760c + 440v + 440s (= 220k + 176c + 44v) = 2640$$



Production can thus continue increasing each year in the same proportion. This is of course a grossly oversimplified example. It could be made more complicated, and thus nearer to reality, if it is assumed that there are different compositions of capital (the ratio  $c:v$ ) in the two departments, or different rates of accumulation or if the ratio  $c:v$  is made to grow gradually, so changing the proportion between Department I and Department II each year. In all these cases the calculation becomes more complicated, but it can always be done, since an unknown figure — the proportion of Department I to Department II — can always be calculated to satisfy the condition that demand and supply coincide.

Examples of this can be found in the literature. In the real world, of course, complete equilibrium over a period is never found; commodities are sold for money and money is only used later to buy something else so that hoards are formed which act as a buffer and a reserve. And commodities remain unsold; and there is trade with non-capitalist areas. But the essential, important point is seen clearly from these reproduction schemes: for production to expand and steadily progress given proportions must exist between the productive sectors; in practice these proportions are approximately realised; they depend on the following factors: the organic composition of capital, the rate of exploitation, and the proportion of surplus value which is accumulated.

Marx did not have the chance to provide a carefully prepared presentation of these examples (see Engels' introduction to the second volume of *Capital*). This is no doubt why Rosa Luxemburg believed that she had discovered an omission here, a problem which Marx had overlooked and so left unsolved and whose solution she had worked out in her book *The Accumulation of Capital* (1912). The problem which seemed to have been left open was who was to buy from each other more and

more means of production and means of subsistence this would be a pointless circular movement from which nothing would result. The solution would lie in the appearance of buyers situated outside capitalism, foreign overseas markets whose conquest would therefore be a vital question for capitalism. This would be the economic basis of imperialism.

But from what we have said before it is clear that Rosa Luxemburg has herself made a mistake here. In the schema used as the example it can be clearly seen that all the products are sold within capitalism itself. Not only the part of the value transmitted (4400+1600) but also the 440+160 which contain the surplus value accumulated are brought, in the physical form of means of production, by the capitalists who wish to start the following year with in total 6600 means of production. In the same way, the 110+40 from surplus value is in fact bought by the additional workers. Nor is it pointless: to produce, to sell products to each other, to consume, to produce more is the whole essence of capitalism and so of men's life in this mode of production. There is no unsolved problem here which Marx overlooked.

### **Rosa Luxemburg and Otto Bauer**

Soon after Rosa Luxemburg's book was published it was criticised from different sides. Thus Otto Bauer wrote a criticism in an article in the *Neue Zeit* (7-14 March 1913). As in all the other criticisms Bauer showed that production and sales do correspond. But his criticism had the special feature that it linked accumulation to population growth. Otto Bauer first assumes a socialist society in which the population grows each year by five per cent; the production of means of subsistence must therefore grow in the same proportion and the means of production must increase, because of technical progress, at a faster rate. The same has to happen under capitalism

but here this expansion does not take place through planned regulation, but through the accumulation of capital. Otto Bauer provides as a numerical example a schema which satisfies these conditions in the simplest way: an annual growth of variable capital of five per cent and of constant capital of ten per cent and a rate of exploitation of 100 per cent ( $s = v$ ). These conditions themselves determine the share of surplus value which is consumed and the share which must be accumulated in order to produce the posited growth of capital. No difficult calculations are needed to draw up a schema which produces the exact growth from year to year:

$$\text{Year 1 } 200,000c + 100,000v + 100,000s (= 20,000c + 5,000v \\ + 75,000k)$$

$$\text{Year 2 } 220,000c + 105,000v + 105,000s (= 22,000c + 5,250v \\ + 77,750k)$$

$$\text{Year 3 } 242,000c + 110,250v + 110,250s (= 24,200c + 5,512v \\ + 80,538k)$$

Bauer continues his schema for four years and also calculates the separate figures for Departments I and II. This was sufficient for the purpose of showing that no problem in Rosa Luxemburg's sense existed. But the character of this criticism was itself bound to call forth criticism. Its basic idea is well brought out by Bauer's introduction of population growth in a socialist society. Capitalism thereby appears as an unplanned socialism, as a wild and kicking foal that has not yet been broken in and which only needs to be tamed by the hands of the socialist trainer. Accumulation here serves only to enlarge production as required by population growth, just as capitalism has the general function of providing mankind with means of subsistence; but, because of the lack of planning, both these functions are carried out badly and erratically, sometimes providing too much, sometimes too little, and causing catastrophes. A gentle

growth of population of 5 per cent a year might well suit a socialist society in which all mankind was neatly lined up. But for capitalism, as it is and was, this is an inappropriate example. Capitalism's whole history has been a rush forward, a violent expansion far beyond the limits of population growth. The driving force has been the urge to accumulation; the greatest possible amount of surplus value has been invested as new capital and, to set it in motion, more and more sections of the population have been drawn into the process. There was even, and there still is, a large surplus of workers who remain outside or half outside as a reserve, kept ready to serve the need to set in motion the accumulated capital, being drawn in or rejected as required by this need. This essential and basic feature of capitalism was completely ignored in Bauer's analysis.

It was obvious that Rosa Luxemburg would take this as the target for her anti-critique. In answer to the proof that there was no problem of omission in Marx's schemas, she could bring forward nothing much else than the scoffing declaration that everything can be made to work beautifully in artificial examples. But making population growth the regulator of accumulation was so contrary to the spirit of Marxian teaching that the sub-title of her anti-critique "What the Epigones have done to Marxian Theory" was this time quite suitable. It was not a question here (as it was in Rosa Luxemburg's own case) of a simple scientific mistake; Bauer's mistake reflected the practical political point of view of the Social Democrats of that time. They felt themselves to be the future statesmen who would take over from the current ruling politicians and carry through the organisation of production; they therefore did not see capitalism as the complete opposite to the proletarian dictatorship to be established by revolution, but rather as a mode of producing means of subsistence that could be improved

and had not yet been brought under control.

### **Grossman's reproduction schema**

Henryk Grossman linked his reproduction schema to that set out by Otto Bauer. He noticed that it is not possible to continue it indefinitely without it in time coming up against contradictions. This is very easy to see. Otto Bauer assumes a constant capital of 200,000 which grows each year by 10 per cent and a variable capital of 100,000 which grows each year by 5 per cent, with the rate of surplus value being assumed to be 100 per cent, i.e., the surplus value each year is equal to the variable capital. In accordance with the laws of mathematics, a sum which increases each year by 10 per cent doubles itself after 7 years, quadruples itself after 14 years, increases ten times after 23 years and a hundred times after 46 years. Thus the variable capital and the surplus value which in the first year were each equal to half the constant capital are after 46 years only equal to a twentieth of a constant capital which has grown enormously over the same period. The surplus value is therefore far from enough to ensure the 10 per cent annual growth of constant capital.

This does not result just from the rates of growth of 10 and 5 percent chosen by Bauer. For in fact under capitalism surplus value increases less rapidly than capital. It is a well-known fact that, because of this, the rate of profit must continually fall with the development of capitalism. Marx devoted many chapters to this fall in the rate of profit. If the rate of profit falls to 5 per cent the capital can no longer be increased by 10 per cent, for the increase in capital out of accumulated surplus value is necessarily smaller than the surplus value itself. The rate of accumulation evidently thus has the rate of profit as its higher limit (see Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, p. 236, where it is stated that "the rate of accumulation

falls with the rate of profit"). The use of a fixed figure — 10 per cent — which was acceptable for a period of a few years as in Bauer, becomes unacceptable when the reproduction schema are continued over a long period.

Yet Grossman, unconcerned, continues Bauer's schema year by year and believes that he is thereby reproducing real capitalism. He then finds the following figures for constant and variable capital, surplus value, the necessary accumulation and the amount remaining for the consumption of the capitalists (the figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand):

	c	v	s	accumulation	k
Commencement	200	100	100	$20 + 5 = 25$	75
After 20 years	1222	253	253	$122 + 13 = 135$	118
After 30 years	3170	412	412	$317 + 21 = 338$	74
After 34 years	4641	500	500	$464 + 25 = 489$	11
After 35 years	5106	525	525	$510 + 26 = 536$	-11

After 21 years the share of surplus value remaining for consumption begins to diminish; in the 34th it almost disappears and in the 35th it is even negative; the Shylock of constant capital pitilessly demands its pound of flesh, it wants to grow at 10 per cent, while the poor capitalists go hungry and keep nothing for their own consumption.

“From the 35th year therefore accumulation — on the basis of the existing technical progress — cannot keep up with the pace of population growth. Accumulation would be too small and — which would have to grow each year” (Grossmann, p. 126).

In such circumstances the capitalists do not think of continuing production. Or if they do, they don't do so; for, in view of the deficit of 11 in capital accumulation they would have to reduce production. (In fact they would have had to have done so before in view of their consumption expenses). A part of the workers therefore become unemployed; then a part of the capital becomes unused and the surplus value produced decreases; the mass of surplus value falls and a still greater deficit appears in accumulation, with a still greater increase in unemployment. This, then, is the economic collapse of capitalism. Capitalism becomes economically impossible. Thus does Grossmann solve the problem which he had set on page 79:

“How, in what way, can accumulation lead to the collapse of capitalism?”

Here we find presented what in the older Marxist literature was always treated as a stupid misunderstanding of opponents, for which the name ‘the big crash’ was current. Without there being a revolutionary class to overcome and dispossess the bourgeoisie, the end of capitalism comes for purely economic reasons; the machine no longer works, it clogs up, production has become impossible. In Grossmann's words:

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“...with the progress of capital accumulation the whole mechanism, despite periodic interruptions, necessarily approaches nearer and nearer to its end... The tendency to collapse then wins the upper hand and makes itself felt absolutely as ‘the final crisis’” (p. 140).

and, in a later passage:

“...from our analysis it is clear that, although on our assumptions objectively necessary and although the moment when it will occur can be precisely calculated, the collapse of capitalism need not therefore result automatically by itself at the awaited moment and therefore need not be waited for purely passively” (p. 601).

In this passage, where it might be thought for a moment that it is going to be a question of the active role of the proletariat as agent of the revolution, Grossmann has in mind only changes in wages and working time which upset the numerical assumptions and the results of the calculation. It is in this sense that he continues:

“It thus appears that the idea of a necessary collapse for objective reasons is not at all in contradiction to the class struggle; that, on the contrary, the collapse, despite its objectively given necessity, can be widely influenced by the living forces of classes in struggle and leaves a certain margin of play for the active intervention of classes. It is for this precise reason that in Marx the whole analysis of the process of reproduction leads to the class struggle” (p.602).

The “it is for this precise reason” is rich, as if the class struggle meant for Marx only the struggle over wage claims and hours of work.

Let us consider a little closer the basis of this collapse. On what is the necessary growth of constant capital by 10 per cent each time based? In the quotation given above it was stated that technical progress (the rate of population growth being given) prescribes a given



annual growth of constant capital. So it could then be said, without the detour of the production schema: when the rate of profit becomes less than the rate of growth demanded by technical progress then capitalism must break down. Leaving aside the fact that this has nothing to do with Marx, what is this growth of capital demanded by technology? Technical improvements are introduced, in the context of mutual competition, in order to obtain an extra profit (relative surplus value); the introduction of technical improvements is however limited by the financial resources available. And everybody knows that dozens of inventions and technical improvements are not introduced and are often deliberately suppressed by the entrepreneurs so as not to devalue the existing technical apparatus. The necessity of technical progress does not act as an external force; it works through men, and for them necessity is not valid beyond possibility.

But let us admit that this is correct and that, as a result of technical progress, constant capital has to have a varying proportion, as in the schema: in the 30th year 3170:412, in the 34th year 4641:500, in the 35th year 5106:525, and in the 36th, 5616:551. In the 35th year the surplus value is only 525,000 and is not enough for 510,000 to be added to constant capital and 26,000 to variable capital. Grossmann lets the constant capital grow by 510,000 and retains only 15,000 as the increase in variable capital — 11,000 too little! He says of this:

“11,509 workers (out of 551,000) remain unemployed; the reserve army begins to form. And because the whole of the working population does not enter the process of production, the whole amount of extra constant capital (510,563) is not needed for the purchase of means of production. If a population of 551,584 uses a constant capital of 5,616,200, then a population of 540,075 would use a constant capital of only 5,499,015. There, therefore, remains an . capital of

117,185 without an investment outlet. Thus the schema shows a perfect example of the situation Marx had in mind when he gave the corresponding part of the third volume of – the title ‘Excess Capital and Excess Population’ (p. 116)”.

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Grossmann has clearly not noticed that these 11,000 become unemployed only because, in a complete arbitrary fashion and without giving any reason, he makes the variable capital bear the whole deficit, while letting the constant capital calmly grow by 10 percent as if nothing was wrong; but when he realises that there are no workers for all these machines, or more correctly that there is no money to pay their wages, he prefers not to install them and so has to let the capital lie unused. It is only through this mistake that he arrives at a “perfect example” of a phenomenon which appears during ordinary capitalist crises. In fact the entrepreneurs can only expand their production to the extent that their capital is enough for both machinery and wages combined. If the total surplus value is too small, this will be divided, in accordance with the assumed technical constraint, proportionately between the elements of capital; the calculation shows that of the 525,319 surplus value, 500,409 must be added to constant capital and 24,910 to variable capital in order to arrive at the correct proportion corresponding to technical progress. Not 11,000 but 1,326 workers are set free and there is no question of excess capital. If the schemes is continued in this correct way, instead of a catastrophic eruption there is an extremely slow increase in the number of workers laid off.

But how can someone attribute this alleged collapse to Marx and produce, chapter after chapter, dozens of quotations from Marx? All these quotations in fact relate to economic crises, to the alternating cycle of prosperity and depression. While the schema has to

serve to show a predetermined final economic collapse after 35 years, we read two pages further on of “the Marxian theory of the economic cycle expounded here” (p. 123).

Grossmann is only able to give the impression that he is presenting a theory of Marx’s by continually scattering in this way throughout his own statements comments which Marx made on periodic crises. But nothing at all is to be found in Marx about a final collapse in line with Grossmann’s schema. It is true that Grossmann quotes a couple of passages which do not deal with crises. Thus he writes on page 263:

“It appears that ‘capitalist production meets in the development of its productive forces a barrier...’ (Marx, -, Vol. III, p. 237)”.

But if we open Volume III of - at page 237 we read there:

“But the main thing about their [i.e., Ricardo and other economists] horror of the falling rate of profit is the feeling that capitalist production meets in the development of its productive forces a barrier... “

which is something quite different. And on page 79 Grossmann gives this quotation from Marx as proof that even the word “collapse” comes from Marx:

“This process would soon bring about the collapse of capitalist production if it were not for counteracting tendencies, which have continuous decentralising effect alongside the centripetal one (-, Vol. II, p. 241)”.

As Grossmann correctly emphasises, these counteracting tendencies refer to “soon” so that - them the process only takes place more slowly. But was Marx talking here of a purely economic collapse? Let us read the passage which precedes in Marx:

“It is this same severance of the conditions of production, on the one hand, from the producers, on the other, that forms the conception of capital. It begins

with primitive accumulation, appears as a permanent process in the accumulation and concentration of capital, and expresses itself finally as centralisation of existing capitals in a few hands and a deprivation of many of their capital (to which expropriation is now changed)".

It is clear that the collapse which thus results is, as so often in Marx, the ending of capitalism by socialism. So there is nothing in the quotations from Marx: a final economic catastrophe can be as little read from them as it can be concluded from the reproduction schema. But can the schema serve to analyse and explain periodic crises? Grossmann seeks to join the two together: "The Marxian theory of collapse is at the same time a theory of crises" — so reads the beginning of Chapter 8 (p. 137). But as proof he only provides a diagram (p. 141) in which a steeply rising 'accumulation line' is divided after 35 years; but here a crisis occurs every 5 or 7 years when in the schema everything is going smoothly. If a more rapid collapse is desired it would be obtained if the annual rate of growth of constant capital was not 10 per cent but much greater. In the ascendant period of the economic cycle there is in fact a much more rapid growth of capital; the volume of production increases by leaps and bounds; but this growth has nothing at all to do with technical progress. Indeed, in these periods variable capital too increases rapidly by leaps. But why there must be a collapse after 5 or 7 years remains obscure. In other words, the real causes which produce the rapid rise and then the collapse of economic activity are of a quite different nature from what is set out in Grossmann's reproduction schema.

Marx speaks of over-accumulation precipitating a crisis, of there being too much accumulated surplus value which is not invested and which depresses profits. But Grossmann's collapse comes about through there being too little accumulated surplus value.

The simultaneous surplus of unused capital and unemployed workers is a typical feature of crises; Grossmann's schema leads to a lack of sufficient capital, which he can only transform into a surplus by committing the mistake mentioned above. So Grossmann's schema cannot demonstrate a final collapse, nor does it correspond to the real phenomena of collapse, crises.

It can also be added that his schema, in conformity with its origin, suffers from the same defect as Bauer's: the real, impetuous pushing forward of capitalism over the world which brings more and more peoples under its domination is here represented by a calm and regular population growth of 5 per cent a year, as if capitalism was confined in a closed national economy.

### **Grossman versus Marx**

Grossmann prides himself for having for the first time correctly reconstructed Marx's theory in the face of the distortions of the Social Democrats.

“One of these new additions to knowledge”

(he proudly says at the beginning of the introduction),

“is the theory of collapse, set out below, which represents the portal column of Marx's system of economic thought”.

We have seen how little what Grossmann considers to be a theory of collapse has to do with Marx. Nevertheless, on his own personal interpretation, he could well believe himself to be in agreement with Marx. But there are other points where this does not hold. Because he sees his schema as a correct representation of capitalist development, Grossman deduces from it in various places explanations which, as he himself had partly noticed, contradict the views developed in *Capital*.

This is so, first of all, for the industrial reserve army. According to Grossmann's schema, from the 35th

year a certain number of workers become unemployed and a reserve army forms.

“The formation of the reserve army, viz., the laying off of workers, which we are discussing, must be rigorously distinguished from the laying off of workers due to machines. The elimination of workers by machines which Marx describes in the empirical part of the first volume of *Capital* (Chapter 13) is a technical fact . . . (pp. 128-9) . . . but the laying off of workers, the formation of the reserve army, which Marx speaks of in the chapter on the accumulation of capital (Chapter 23) is not caused — as has been completely ignored until now in the literature — by the technical fact of the introduction of machines, but by the *lack of investment opportunities*..(p. 130)”.

This amounts basically to saying: if the sparrows fly away, it is not because of the gunshot but because of their timidity. The workers are eliminated by machines; the expansion of production allows them in part to find work again; in this coming and going some of them are passed by or remain outside. Must the fact that they have not yet been re-engaged be regarded as the cause of their unemployment? If Chapter 23 of *Capital* Vol. I is read, it is always elimination by machines that is treated as the cause of the reserve army, which is partially reabsorbed or released anew and reproduces itself as overpopulation, according to the economic situation. Grossmann worries himself for several pages over the proof that it is the economic relation *c:v* that operates here, and not the technical relation means of production:labour power; in fact the two are identical. But this formation of the reserve army, which according to Marx occurs everywhere and always from the commencement of capitalism, and in which workers are replaced by machines, is not identical to the alleged formation of the reserve army according to Grossmann,

which starts as a consequence of accumulation after 34 years of technical progress.

It is the same with the export of capital. In long explanations all the Marxist writers — Varga, Bukharin, Nachimson, Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Rosa Luxemburg — are one after the other demolished because they all state the view that the export of capital takes place for a higher profit. As Varga says:

“It is not because it is absolutely impossible to accumulate capital at home that capital is exported... but because there exists the prospect of a higher profit abroad” (quoted by Grossmann, p. 498).

Grossmann attacks this view as incorrect and un-Marxist:

“It is not the higher profit abroad, but the lack of investment opportunities at home that is the ultimate reason for the export of capital” (p. 561).

He then introduces numerous quotations from Marx about overaccumulation and refers to his schema, in which after 35 years the growing mass of capital can no longer be employed at home and so must be exported.

Let us recall that according to the schema, however, there was too little capital in existence for the existing population and that his capital surplus was only an error of calculation. Further, in all the quotations from Marx, Grossmann has forgotten to cite the one where Marx himself speaks of the export of capital:

“If capital is sent abroad, this is not done because it absolutely could not be applied at home, but because it can be employed at a higher rate of profit in a foreign country” (Vol. III, p. 251).

The fall in the rate of profit is one of the most important parts of Marx’s theory of capital; he was the first to state and prove that this tendency to fall, which expresses itself periodically in crises, was the embodiment of the transitory nature of capitalism. With

Grossmann it is another phenomenon which comes to the fore: after the 35th year workers are laid off en masse and capital is at the same time created in excess. As a result the deficit of surplus value in the following year is more serious, so that yet more labour and capital are left idle; with the fall in the number of workers, the mass of surplus value produced decreases and capitalism sinks still deeper into catastrophe. Has not Grossmann seen the contradiction here with Marx? Indeed he has. Thus, after some introductory remarks, he sets to work in the chapter entitled “The Causes of the Misunderstanding of the Marxian Theory of Accumulation and Collapse”:

“The time is not ripe for a reconstruction of the Marxian theory of collapse (p. 195). The fact that the third chapter of Volume III is, as Engels says in the preface, presented, “as a series of uncompleted mathematical calculations” must be given as an external reason for the misunderstanding”.

Engels was helped in his editing by his friend, the mathematician Samuel Moore:

“But Moore was not an economist...The mode of origin of this part of the work therefore makes it probable even in advance that many opportunities for misunderstanding and error exist here and that these errors could then easily have been carried over also into the chapter dealing with the tendency of the rate of profit to fall...”

(NB: these chapters had already been written by Marx!)

“The probability of error becomes almost certain when we consider that it is a question here of a *single* word which, unfortunately, completely distorts the whole sense of the analysis: the inevitable end of capitalism is attributed to the relative fall in the rate instead of in the mass of profit. Engels or Moore had certainly made a slip of the pen (p. 195)”.



So this is what the reconstruction of Marx's theory looks like! Another quotation is given in a note which says:

“In the words in brackets, Engels or Marx himself made a slip of the pen; it should read correctly and at the same time a mass of profit which falls in relative value”. [Translator's note: Grossmann refers to the passage on p. 214 of Vol. III which reads: “Hence, the same laws produce for the social capital a growing absolute mass of profit, and a falling rate of profit”].

So now it is Marx himself who makes mistakes. And here it concerns a passage where the sense, as given in the text of *Capital*, is unambiguously clear. Marx's whole analysis, which ends with the passage Grossmann finds necessary to change, is a continuation of a passage where Marx explains:

“...the mass of the surplus value produced by it, and therefore the absolute mass of the profit produced by it, *can*, consequently, increase, and increase progressively, in spite of the progressive drop in the rate of profit. And this not only *can* be so. Aside from temporary fluctuations it *must* be so, on the basis of capitalist production” (Vol. III, p. 213).

Marx then sets out the reasons why the mass of profit must increase and says once again:

“As the process of production and accumulation advances therefore, the mass of available and appropriated surplus labour, and hence the absolute mass of profit appropriated by the social capital *must* grow” (Vol. III, p. 214).

Thus the exact opposite to the onset of the collapse invented by Grossmann. In the following pages this is repeated yet more often; the whole of Chapter 13 consists of a presentation of

“the law that a fall in the rate of profit due to the development of productiveness is accompanied by an

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increase in the mass of profit..." (Vol. III, p. 221).

So there can remain not the slightest doubt that Marx wanted to say precisely what was printed there and that he had not made a slip of the pen. And when Grossmann writes:

"The collapse cannot therefore result from the fall in the rate of profit. How could a percentage proportion, such as the rate of profit, a pure number, bring about the collapse of a real economic system!" (p. 196).

he thereby shows yet again that he has understood nothing of Marx and that his collapse is in complete contradiction with Marx.

Here is the point at which he could have convinced himself of the instability of his construction. But if he had allowed himself to be taught by Marx here, then his whole theory would have fallen and his book would not have been written.

The fairest way of describing Grossmann's book is as a patchwork of quotations from Marx, incorrectly applied and stuck together by means of a fabricated theory. Each time a proof is required, a quotation from Marx, which does not deal with the point in question, is introduced, and it is the correctness of Marx's words which is supposed to give the reader the impression that the theory is correct.

### **Historical materialism**

The question which in the end merits attention is how can an economist who believes he is correctly reconstructing Marx's views, and who further states with naive self-assurance that he is the first to give a correct interpretation of them, be so completely mistaken and find himself in complete contradiction with Marx. The reason lies in the lack of a historical materialist understanding. For you will not understand Marxian economics at all unless you have made the historical

materialist way of thinking your own.

For Marx the development of human society, and so also the economic development of capitalism, is determined by a firm necessity like a law of nature. But this development is at the same time the work of men who play their role in it and where each person determines his own acts with consciousness and purpose — though not with a consciousness of the social whole. To the bourgeois way of seeing things, there is a contradiction here; either what happens depends on human free choice or, if it is governed by fixed laws, then these act as an external, mechanical constraint on men. For Marx all social necessity is accomplished by men; this means that a man's thinking, wanting and acting — although appearing as a free choice in his consciousness — are completely determined by the action of the environment; it is only through the totality of these human acts, determined mainly by social forces, that conformity to laws is achieved in social development.

The social forces which determine development are thus not only purely economic acts, but also the general-political acts determined by them, which provide production with the necessary norms of right. Conformity to law does not reside solely in the action of competition which fixes prices and profits and concentrates capital, but also in the establishment of free competition, of free production by bourgeois revolutions; not only in the movement of wages, in the expansion and contraction of production in prosperity and crisis, in the closing of factories and the laying off of workers, but also in the revolt, the struggle of the workers, the conquest by them of power over society and production in order to establish new norms of right. Economics, as the totality of men working and striving to satisfy their subsistence needs, and politics (in its widest sense), as the action and struggle of these men as classes to

satisfy these needs, form a single unified domain of law-governed development. The accumulation of capital, crises, pauperisation, the proletarian revolution, the seizure of power by the working class form together, acting like a natural law, an indivisible unity, the collapse of capitalism.

The bourgeois way of thinking, which does not understand that this is a unity, has always played a great role not only outside but also within the workers' movement. In the old radical Social Democracy the fatalist view was current, understandable in view of the historical circumstances, that the revolution would one day come as a natural necessity and that in the meantime the workers should not try anything dangerous. Reformism questioned the need for a 'violent' revolution and believed that the intelligence of statesmen and leaders would tame capitalism by reform and organisation. Others believed that the proletariat had to be educated to revolutionary virtue by moral preaching. The consciousness was always lacking that this virtue only found its natural necessity through economic forces, and that the revolution only found its natural necessity through the mental forces of men. Other views have now appeared. On the one hand capitalism has proved itself strong and unassailable against all reformism, all the skills of leaders, all attempts at revolution; all these have appeared ridiculous in the face of its immense strength. But, on the other hand, terrible crises at the same time reveal its internal weakness. Whoever now takes up Marx and studies him is deeply impressed by the irresistible, law-governed nature of the collapse and welcomes these ideas with enthusiasm.

But if his basic way of thinking is bourgeois he cannot conceive this necessity other than as an external force acting on men. Capitalism is for him a mechanical system in which men participate as economic persons,

capitalists, buyers, sellers, wage-workers, etc., but otherwise must submit in a purely passive way to what this mechanism imposes on them in view of its internal structure.

This mechanistic conception can also be recognised in Grossmann's statements on wages when he violently attacks Rosa Luxemburg —

“Everywhere one comes across an incredible, barbarous mutilation of the Marxian theory of wages” (p. 585).

— precisely where she quite correctly treats the value of labour-power as a quantity that can be expanded on the basis of the standard of living attained. For Grossmann the value of labour-power is “not an elastic, but a fixed quantity” (p. 586). Acts of human choice such as the workers' struggles can have no influence on it; the only way in which wages can rise is through a higher intensity of labour obliging the replacement of the greater quantity of labour-power expended.

Here it is the same mechanistic view: the mechanism determines economic quantities while struggling and acting men stand outside this relation. Grossmann appeals again to Marx for this, where the latter writes of the value of labour-power:

“Nevertheless, in a given country, at a given period, the average quantity of the means of subsistence necessary for the labourer is practically known” (*Capital*. Vol. I, p. 171);

but Grossmann has unfortunately once again overlooked that in Marx this passage is immediately preceded by:

“In contradiction therefore to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and moral element”.

Starting from his bourgeois way of thinking Grossmann states in his criticism of various Social

Democratic views:

“We see: the collapse of capitalism is either denied or based, in a voluntarist way, on extra-economic, political factors. The economic proof of the necessity of the collapse of capitalism has never been produced” (pp. 58-59).

And he cites with approval an opinion of Tugan-Baranovsky that, in order to prove the necessity for the transformation of capitalism into its opposite, a rigid proof of the impossibility for capitalism to continue existing must first be produced. Tugan himself denies this impossibility and wishes to give socialism an ethical basis. But that Grossmann chooses to call as witness this Russian liberal economist who, as is known, was always completely alien to Marxism, shows to what degree their basic way of thinking is related, despite their opposed practical points of view (see also Grossmann, p. 108). The Marxian view that the collapse of capitalism will be the act of the working class and thus a political act (in the widest sense of this word: general social, which is inseparable from the take-over of economic power) Grossmann can only understand as ‘voluntarist’, i.e., that it is something that is, governed by men’s choice, by free will.

The collapse of capitalism in Marx does depend on the act of will of the working class; but this will is not a free choice, but is itself determined by economic development. The contradictions of the capitalist economy, which repeatedly emerge in unemployment, crises, wars, class struggles, repeatedly determine the will to revolution of the proletariat. Socialism comes not because capitalism collapses economically and men, workers and others, are forced by necessity to create a new organisation, but because capitalism, as it lives and grows, becomes more and more unbearable for the workers and repeatedly pushes them to struggle until

the will and strength to overthrow the domination of capitalism and establish a new organisation grows in them, and then capitalism collapses. The working class is not pushed to act because the unbearableness of capitalism is demonstrated to them from the outside, but because they feel it generated within them. Marx's theory, as economics, shows how the above phenomena irresistibly reappear with greater and greater force and, as historical materialism, how they necessarily give rise to the revolutionary will and the revolutionary act.

### **The new workers' movement**

It is understandable that Grossmann's book should have been given some attention by the spokesmen of the new workers' movement since he attacks the same enemy as them. The new workers' movement has to attack Social Democracy and the Party Communism of the Third International, two branches of the same tree, because they accommodate the working class to capitalism. Grossmann attacks the theoreticians of these currents for having distorted and falsified Marx's teachings, and insists on the necessary collapse of capitalism. His conclusions sound similar to ours, but their sense and essence are completely different. We also are of the opinion that the Social Democratic theorists, good theoretical experts that they often were nevertheless distorted Marx's doctrine; but their mistake was historical, the theoretical precipitate of an early period of the struggle of the proletariat. Grossmann's mistake is that of a bourgeois economist who has never had practical experience of the struggle of the proletariat and who is consequently not in a position to understand the essence of Marxism.

An example of how his conclusions apparently agree with the views of the new workers' movement, but are in essence completely opposed, is to be found in his

theory of wages. According to his schema, after 35 years, with the collapse, a rapidly climbing unemployment appears. As a result wages sink well below the value of labour-power, without an effective resistance being possible.

“Here the objective limit of trade union action is given” (p. 599). However familiar this sounds, the basis is quite different. The powerlessness of trade union action, which has been evident for a long time, should not be attributed to an economic collapse, but to a shift in the balance of social power. Everyone knows how the increased power of the employers’ combines of concentrated big capital has made the working class relatively powerless. To which is now added the effects of a severe crisis which depresses wages, as happened in every previous crisis.

The purely economic collapse of capitalism which Grossmann constructs does not involve a complete passivity by the proletariat. For, when the collapse takes place the working class must precisely prepare itself to re-establish production on a new basis.

“Thus evolution pushes towards the development and exacerbation of the internal oppositions between capital and labour until the solution which can come only from the struggle between the two classes is brought about” (p. 599).

This final struggle is linked also with the wages struggle because (as was already mentioned above) the catastrophe can be postponed by depressing wages or hastened by raising them. But it is the economic catastrophe that is for Grossmann the really essential factor, the new order being forcibly imposed on men. Certainly, the workers, as the mass of the population, are to supply the preponderant force of the revolution, just as in the bourgeois revolutions of the past where they formed the mass force for action; but, as in hunger revolts



in general, this is independent of their revolutionary maturity, of their capacity to take power over society and to hold it. This means that a revolutionary group, a party with socialist aims, would have to appear as a new governing power in place of the old in order to introduce some kind of planned economy.

The theory of the economic catastrophe is thus ready-made for intellectuals who recognise the untenable character of capitalism and who want a planned economy to be built by capable economists and leaders. And it must be expected that many other such theories will come from these quarters or meet with approval there. The theory of the necessary collapse will also be able to exercise a certain attraction over revolutionary workers. They see the overwhelming majority of the proletarian masses still attached to the old organisations, the old leaders, the old methods, blind to the task which the new development imposes on them, passive and immobile, with no signs of revolutionary energy. The few revolutionaries who understand the new development might well wish on the stupefied masses a good economic catastrophe so that they finally come out of the slumber and enter into action. The theory according to which capitalism has today entered its final crisis also provides a decisive, and simple, refutation of reformism and all Party programmes which give priority to parliamentary work and trade union action — a demonstration of the necessity of revolutionary tactics which is so convenient that it must be greeted sympathetically by revolutionary groups. But the struggle is never so simple or convenient, not even the theoretical struggle for reasons and proofs.

Reformism was a false tactic, which weakened the working class, not only in crises but also in prosperity. Parliamentarism and the trade union tactic did not have to await the present crisis to prove a failure; this has been shown for the last hundred years. It is not due to the

economic collapse of capitalism but to the enormous development of its strength, to its expansion over all the Earth, to its exacerbation of political oppositions, to the violent reinforcement of its inner strength, that the proletariat must take mass action, summoning up the strength of the whole class. It is this shift in the relations of power that is the basis for the new direction for the workers' movement.

The workers' movement has not to expect a final catastrophe, but many catastrophes, political — like wars, and economic — like the crises which repeatedly break out, sometimes regularly, sometimes irregularly, but which on the whole, with the growing size of capitalism, become more and more devastating. So the illusions and tendencies to tranquillity of the proletariat will repeatedly collapse, and sharp and deep class struggles will break out. It appears to be a contradiction that the present crisis, deeper and more devastating than any previous one, has not shown signs of the awakening of the proletarian revolution. But the removal of old illusions is its first great task: on the other hand, the illusion of making capitalism bearable by means of reforms obtained through Social Democratic parliamentary politics and trade union action and, on the other, the illusion that capitalism can be overthrown in assault under the leadership of a revolution-bringing Communist Party. The working class itself, as a whole, must conduct the struggle, but, while the bourgeoisie is already building up its power more and more solidly, the working class has yet to make itself familiar with the new forms of struggle. Severe struggles are bound to take place. And should the present crisis abate, new crises and new struggles will arise. In these struggles the working class will develop its strength to struggle, will discover its aims, will train itself, will make itself independent and learn to take into its hands its own destiny, viz.,

social production itself. In this process the destruction of capitalism is achieved. The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the collapse of capitalism.

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# Further Reading

*Council communism - an introduction* - libcom.org

*Council communism: reading guide* - libcom.org

*Five Theses on the Class Struggle* - by Anton Pannekoek

*Theses on Bolshevism* - Rudolf Sprenger

*Anti-Bolshevik communism* – Paul Mattick Sr.

*The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900–68)* -  
Philippe Bourrinet

*Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth  
Centuries* - Maximilien Rubel, John Crump

*Théorie Communiste*

*International Council Correspondence*

*When insurrections die* - Gilles Dauvé

*The Frankfurt School and Council Communism* - Felix  
Baum

*Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils* - Serge Bricianer

*Marxism, Anarchism and the Situationists' Theory of  
Revolution* - Julian Eagles

*Art as a weapon: Franz Seiwert and the Cologne progressives*  
- Martyn Everett

*Marxism and Council Communism: The Foundation for  
Revolutionary Theory for Modern Society* - Peter Rachleff

## Other Radical Reprints

1. *Catechism of a Revolutionist* - Sergey Nechayev
2. *Society of the Spectacle* - Guy Debord
3. *The Right To Be Lazy* - Paul Lafargue
4. *Manifestoes of Surrealism* - Andre Breton
5. *Art and Religion* - Max Stirner
6. *Unfixing Authority* - Mikhail Bakunin
7. *Anarchy and the Sex Question* - Emma Goldman
8. *The Feminist Manifesto* - He-Yin Zhen
9. *Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics* - Anton Pannekoek
10. *The Revolutionary Catechism* - Mikhail Bakunin
11. *The Revolt of the Unique* - Renzo Novatore
12. *What Was The USSR?* - The Aufheben Collective
13. *The Human Species and The Earth's Crust* - Amadeo Bordiga
14. *Dialogue With Stalin* - Amadeo Bordiga
15. *The Right To Be Greedy* - For Ourselves!
16. *A World Without Money: Communism* - Friends of 4M wrkrs
17. *The Holy Family* - Marx & Engels
18. *Paris: May 1968* - Maurice Brinton
19. *What is Communism?* - Paul Mattick
20. *Theories of Surplus Value Vol 1* - Marx
21. *Theories of Surplus Value Vol 2* - Marx
22. *Theories of Surplus Value Vol 3* - Marx
23. *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* - I.I. Rubin
24. *Capital and Community* - Jacques Camatte
25. *Results of the Direct Production Process* - Marx
26. *Mao's Quotations*
27. *Principles of Communism* - Friedrich Engels
28. *The Ego and Its Own* - Max Stirner

## Other Radical Reprints

- 29. *Lessons of the Counterrevolutions* - Bordiga
- 30. *Fundamentals For a Marxist Orientation* - Bordiga
- 31. *Reform and Revolution* - Paul Mattick
- 32. *The Joy of Revolution* - Ken Knabb
- 33. *Marx and Keynes* - Paul Mattick
- 34. *The World's First Anarchist Manifesto* - Bellegarrigue
- 35. *The Proletarian's Pocketbook*
- 36. *The Rise of Conspiracy Theories* - Aufheben
- 37. *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* - Carlos Marighella
- 38. *History and Class Consciousness* - Georg Lukacs
- 39. *Dialogue With The Dead (& Stalin)* - Amadeo Bordiga
- 40. *What is Communist Anarchism?* - Alexander Berkman
- 41. *The ABC of Communism* - Bukharin & Preobrazensky

## Coming Soon

- Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks*
- The He-Yin Zhen Reader*
- The Max Stirner Reader*
- The Nestor Makhno Reader*
- The Lucy Parson Reader*
- Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* - Marx
- Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* - Marx
- The Poverty of Philosophy* - Marx
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