

democratic of parliaments is unable to create a people's government, and ends up as a government of parliamentarians. Periodically, parliamentarians must win the trust of the people; they gather votes with eloquent speeches and promise-crammed programs; then they are the masters once again. Then, after they escape the direct influence of the masses and face pressure only from their peers, they do as they like throughout the parliamentary session. But only in appearance are they all-powerful; the ministry depends upon bureaucrats. In all the democratic republics of the world, the alleged separation between the legislative and the executive branches is the means of ruling the masses, while giving them the impression that the masses themselves are exercising power, and is therefore the means for ensuring the domination of capital. In France, America, Switzerland, and elsewhere, in spite of all the talk of democracy, the masses are dominated and exploited by capital. And, despite universal suffrage, the masses are reduced to impotence, from which they cannot escape...."

Meanwhile, World War I ended, and changes that leftists were hoping to see in Germany remained at an embryonic stage. A network of workers and soldiers councils suddenly covered the country, but the old order remained intact under the appearance of sharing power.

Shortly before the end of the war, the German Admiralty's decision to force a final battle with the English Navy met with a collective refusal: the crews of the third squadron mutinied, raised anchor and sailed for the Baltic; on November 3, 1918, they sailed into Kiel harbor, flying the red flag, disembarked and, after a bloody encounter with a detachment of midshipmen, took over the town. Soon the soldiers made common cause with the rebels, and the following day, both in the ships riding at anchor and in the barracks, committees of delegates were elected. In a general assembly, the latter adopted a 14-point program demanding the liberation of political prisoners, a halt to disciplinary prosecutions, the restoration of freedom of the press and assembly, and the right to take "any necessary measure for the protection of private possessions."²⁰ On November 5, the local sections of the socialist parties (Majority Socialists and Independents) and of the trade union cartel merged to form a workers council.²¹

In response, the commandant of Kiel sought the intervention of the imperial government, which requested that Majority Party leaders send a delegation led by Gustav Noske. During an assembly of the soldiers

20. Cf. Kurt Zeisler, in *Revolutionäre Ereignisse und Probleme... 1917-1918* (East Berlin, 1957), pp. 185-212.

21. Walter Tormin, *Zwischen Rätediktatur und sozialer Demokratie* (Düsseldorf, 1954), p. 58. Note the charts showing the spread of the movement.

committees, Noske, with the support of the trade union officers, had himself elected president of the central council, whose membership was determined by Noske or by his cohorts (the more resolute sailors had already left town). Since the military governor of the big war port had been removed, Noske took his place. As a result of a deal made with the Independents, a representative of that group succeeded him on November 7, as president of the local council. "At Kiel," Johann Knief wrote to a friend, "there is a workers and soldiers council, with the socialist traitor Noske at its head! The sailors are full of enthusiasm. But are they social revolutionaries?"²²

Enthusiasm? Certainly. The sailors took to the trains by squads, occupied stations, and, after some clashes, swarmed out to encourage the formation of workers and soldiers councils. But this enthusiasm was due less to precise political convictions than to the sailors' fear of ruthless repression if they remained in Kiel. They were warmly greeted in Hamburg and in Bremen, where an assembly held at the trade union headquarters resulted in the establishment of a 180-member workers' council. Leftist delegates were rare; the majority of the leftists were still fighting or were in prison, far away.

In a constantly volatile atmosphere, huge demonstrations occurred in the large cities. The proclamation of the republic, a major aim of the demonstrators, was realized on November 9, when Social Democratic "people's commissars" of both wings of the party took power. As a rule, the Majority Party and the trade unions ratified hastily formed slates of candidates in local assemblies. Often slates were produced after hurried telephone calls to party leaders in Berlin or nearby towns. In some instances, where Independents were strong or had political leverage, a slate was laboriously drawn up and later "elected" at a public meeting. Sometimes the slate contained leftists, more frequently leaders of the liberal bourgeoisie. The new political administrative organs corresponded to those of Kiel in their genesis and program: "to guarantee order;" to end blatant injustices; to restore democratic life.

To a considerable extent, the civil authorities kept control of public affairs (notably, of finances). Military authorities themselves ordered the establishment of councils²³ whose pressing task, especially in the rationing zone, was to calm the conquered army. Later, in large, rear-guard towns, councils were generally manipulated by their noncommissioned officers into respecting the status quo.²⁴ The rank and file were simply concerned about

22. J. Knief, *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis* (Berlin, 1922), pp. 94-95.

23. Cf. the appeal of Hindenburg in *Dokumente und Materialien...*, II:1, p. 356.

24. Especially when the leftists were exerting a palpable influence within the local grand council, for example at Hamburg. Cf. Heinrich Laufenberg, *Die hamburgische Revolution*

getting back to their homes.

The traditional organization saw its new power affirmed both on the political level, due to the active cooperation between the "people's commissars" and the German High command, and on the economic level after the agreement of November 15 between large industrialists and trade unions, which provided for collective conventions, procedures for parity arbitration, industrial committees, and other units, opening up an immense field of bureaucratic activities to trade unions linked with Social Democracy. Within this framework, the "power" of the councils represented a kind of counter-fire, prudently continued by the authorities, including major socialist and trade union figures. As Knief observed toward the end of 1918, the workers and soldiers councils, far from "devoting themselves to revolutionary activities, were entirely taken up with political controversies."²⁵

Nevertheless, obvious powerlessness did not prevent the new form from continuing to exist. Leftists called for a change in its function, initially at the local level, to include effective social administration. In factories and workshops, employers' authority remained intact. Often at the street level things were different: mass demonstrations were frequent; strikes broke out, greatly scandalizing the new masters ("socialism means hard work," said Ebert, president of the Council of People's Commissars); officers were molested when they went out in uniform. Faced with this agitation, often organized by the young communists, who were gaining support, the counter-revolution gathered its forces: the socialists painted a black picture of the Russian Bolsheviks and their German comrades and created a national guard recruited among the mass of ex-officers and reactionary students. Casualties began to occur, and arms appeared among the crowd of demonstrators.

The revolutionary tendency arose from the idea of the self-education of the masses through action. Its *leitmotiv*—the Faustian cry of "*Anfang war die Tat*" ("in the beginning was the deed")—contained the whole of its political philosophy, the basic principle of the proletariat as a revolutionary class. The old divisions among splinter groups, while continuing, became much less distinct. The Spartakus League, transformed by a massive influx of young militants who wanted to act personally and directly, not to issue orders, gradually moved away from traditional viewpoints. The organ of the Bremen socialists declared its sympathy with the League, provided it would break with the Independents, and added: "Unity of revolutionary action is the

(Hamburg, 1919).

25. Peter Unruh (J. Knief), *Von Zusammenbruch der Imperialismus...* (Berlin, undated, probably Jan. 1919), pp. 24-25.

fundamental condition for the development of the revolution. This unity cannot be achieved in the present situation by a central body. On the contrary, it must be sought in the moral unity of groups enjoying complete organizational autonomy. The methods of the Spartakus group (as they are beginning to sense)... the launching of actions submitted to the sole leadership of a Berlin *Kraft-Zentrale*,²⁶ have had their day."²⁷

Street actions enabled the splinter groups to develop visibility, publicize their ideas, and gain the active sympathy of some of the young workers and declassé (unemployed, deserters and others). But this growing influence stopped at the factory gates, for inside the factories, employers and their agents were allied with trade union delegates in seeking to curb every "ringleader" as quickly as possible. Communist marches would file past factories, but no worker would emerge from the gates to join in. Only rarely did workers' councils go on the offensive, e.g., temporarily suspending bourgeois papers.

Hence, the policy suggested by this situation was self-evident: "The revolution," said *Rote Fahne*, the Spartakus newspaper, "should try to mobilize the masses, and by educating them through conscious activity, shape them into a decisive political force."²⁸ In January 1919, and not without some reluctance and soul-searching, the splinter groups united. At the formative congress of the German Communist Party (KPD), a majority of the delegates (62 of 85) rejected the idea of participating in the elections to the National Assembly, an idea supported by the Spartakus leaders, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and their friends.²⁹ However, the latter were elected to lead the party; Liebknecht even persisted, against the majority's wishes, in carrying on secret and useless negotiations with leaders of the Independents and with left wing trade union officials.

Rote Fahne called for a rededication to the revolution: "The rapid transformation of the revolution of November 9, in which soldiers predominated, into a revolution of working class character, requires... from the revolutionary class a degree of political maturity, education and passionate dedication much higher than was sufficient during the first phase. Revolutionary feelings must stiffen into inflexible conviction; the systematic must replace the merely spontaneous; the workers and soldiers councils,

26. Tyszko was nicknamed "Doktor Kraft" by the Bremen group, for he was a great advocate of the "strong (*kraft*) approach."

27. *Kommunist* (Bremen), Dec. 6, 1918; cited by S.I. Spiwak, *Die Presse der Sowjet Union*, 144, 1956.

28. *Rote Fahne*, 1, 8A Dec. 19, 1918.

29. Cf. André and Dori Prudhommeaux, *la Commune de Berlin* (Paris, 1949). This work contains a report of the Congress and an excellent chronology of events.

improvisations of the moment, must become a breastplate of steel." 30

Having decided to strike the enemy in a critical phase at the source of his power—the machinery of propaganda and agitation³¹—and deprived, through lack of funds, of the means to spread their ideas widely and systematically, the spartacist demonstrators (anarchists, left-Marxists, Independent socialist militants, and other rebels) attempted to occupy the offices of reactionary newspapers and of the Majority Party. The latter gave the generals the go-ahead for repression, and there followed the "bloody week" in Berlin, the assassinations of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the ebbing of the Spartakus movement, and the holding of elections. Fighting continued, mostly underground, but with large and prolonged strikes, notably among the miners of the Ruhr and of Upper Silesia, with temporary seizures of power (Bavaria, Bremen), with scattered street fighting, an effort to stand against a bestial repression.³² And these fighters, armed with little but their revolutionary passion, standing alone and unaided³³ and unwilling to die like dogs, faced up to well-armed mercenaries, trained to kill, behind whom skulked the treacherous leaders of German Social Democracy and the trade unions, products of a period of peaceful conflict and, for the moment, the last ramparts of capital. These desperate fighters were crushed mercilessly.

In the course of this revolutionary phase, the ideas that were propagated, especially after November 1918, developed naturally. In particular, the *Räteidee*, the idea of councils, was clarified through practical experience and through a great number of public meetings and discussions whose proceedings then became subject matter for newspaper articles³⁴ and

30. *Rote Fahne*, 11, 3, Jan. 3, 1919.

31. See, for example, the following statements by a trade unionist leader of the Ruhr: "The Spartakists are exercising unlimited domination in the whole district [of Duisberg]. They are supported by the big bosses of industry . . . whose plan is to destroy the trade unions with the help of the communists, to divide the miners and so reestablish their own power . . ." *Niederrheinische Volkstimme*, 66, March 1919; cited by Hans Spethmann, *Zwölf Jahre Ruhrbergbau*, 1 (Berlin, 1928), p. 253. See also, *L'Humanité*, May-June 1968, to find a tone and an inspiration which is analogous. Over a period of fifty years, there has existed, it would seem, a "spontaneous" continuity in the words and the behavior of the workers' bureaucracy.

32. According to Eberhard Kolb (*Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innerpolitik* [Düsseldorf, 1962], p. 302), the councils were incapable of taking on the functions of real and full administration, because of "putschist elements who were opposed to the stabilization of order;" this author then states unblushingly that, even if "order" had not been disturbed, the local leftist-activist strongholds—for example, Bremen—"would not, in any case, have been able to subsist." This amounts to saying that their only expedient was action.

33. "In practice, there were no definite links between the Russian Communists and the German Communists from November 1918 to spring 1919," writes Kolb (*ibid.*, p. 157); cf. especially A. Prudhommeaux, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

34. For example, the series of articles, "Gewerkschaften und Räte-system" which appeared in

pamphlets.³⁵ Linked to the needs of mass conflict and the contemporary image of the Russian soviets, a similar process was going on in England³⁶ and in Italy where anarchists³⁷ and Marxists³⁸ elaborated on the idea of revolutionary factory councils. The quintessence of all this is contained in the pamphlet, *Sozialdemokratie und Kommunismus*, to which we now turn.³⁹

Rote Fahne (from no. 27, Feb. 13, 1919), whose editorial control was in the hands of the leftists and not of the *Zentrale* set up at the Congress, and in which the critique of the trade unions was the basis for the idea of constructing new organs both for the revolutionary struggle and for the administration of the society of the future.

35. For instance, that of Karl Schröder (1885-1950), who was to become one of the first leaders and one of the principal theoreticians of the KAPD. *Betriebsorganisation oder Gewerkschaft?* (Hamburg, 1919).

36. Cf. J.T. Murphy, *The Workers' Committee* (Sheffield, 1918).

37. Cf. "L'Autogestion de l'Etat," *Noir et Rouge*, 242 (Supp.), May 1968, pp. 5-8. The German anarchists with one or two exceptions were to remain faithful to the traditional trade unionist ideas.

38. The *Ordine Nuovo* group, and particularly Antonio Gramsci. Pannekoek's work was published in Amadeo Bordiga's paper, *Il Soviet*.

39. Notably: K. Horner (Anton Pannekoek), "Kommunismus und Sozialdemokratie," *Arbeiterpolitik*, IV, 7, Feb. 15, 1919; "Die neue Welt," *Die kommunistische Internationale*, 1-2, May-June 1919; "Die Sozialisierung," *Die Internationale*, 1, 13-14, Sept. 1919, pp. 254-259. (See footnote 4 of next chapter). There was also a pamphlet dealing with the division of the surplus-value within the dominant class, a pamphlet in which the role of the state bureaucracy is especially highlighted. *Die Teilung der Beute* (Moscow, 1918).

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND COMMUNISM

"The war," writes Pannekoek,¹ "has transformed social relationships." Socialism, "which is not a doctrine laid down once and for all," should therefore also continually renew itself. Having made its appearance for the first time in the class struggles that accompanied the 1848 Revolution, "the proletarian movement, the communist movement" was pushed into the background during the long period of prosperity which followed. The expansion of the workers' movement was then as vigorous as it was large, but its activities were limited. In effect, the class struggle was no longer being fought to achieve "the final goal, socialism," but to raise the standard of living. After 1870, the headlong development of the German economy gave rise to energetic clashes. It was at that time that Social Democracy became impregnated with the old communist ideas and came to adopt Marxism. However, this new Marxism depended on a gradual evolution, and postponed indefinitely any pursuit of proper communist objectives. Pannekoek points out that Social Democracy and the trade unions that grew up with it were expressions of the will of the working masses to escape pauperization. Taking on the task of representing the workers in Parliament, Social Democracy became an enormous, highly organized body within the bourgeois order and was dominated by an army of bureaucrats, all concerned with promoting their own specific interests above all else. Their highest ideal, as Kautsky clearly implied,² was to secure for themselves at some future point the posts held by the bourgeois parliamentary ministers.

It was the war that brought Social Democracy to power. At a time when the whole world was lapsing into bankruptcy and misery, this party saw salvation only in the preservation of the old capitalist order. "But the war had also enormously increased the demands of capital for profits. The national debt came to be counted in as many thousand of millions as it had previously numbered in millions alone. This meant that the holders of war credits expected to reap a rich harvest on the produce of the people's work and, as

1. K. Horner (i.e., Pannekoek), *Sozialdemokratie und Kommunismus* (Hamburg, undated [probably autumn 1919]).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 8. This is a clear allusion to the 1912 controversy.

revenue pocketed without work, on the interest on their thousands of millions, which the state was collecting in the form of taxes."

Increased worker exploitation was inevitable. That was why "even during the war, the communists were pointing out that it would be impossible to pay the enormous war debts, so that their declared policy was the cancellation of war debts and war indemnities."³ But it was not enough to oppose the capitalists' thirst for profit in the area of armaments production, while giving them complete freedom in all other matters. Now that the reconstruction of the economy had become a matter of great urgency, "the profits from capital, whatever the source, represent for production a charge that increases the difficulties of its reorganization. . . . That is why the basic principle of communism—that all attempts of capital to monopolize profits must be resisted—is the only effectively realizable principle. The economy can be reconstructed in real terms only through the elimination of capital.

"This used to be the basic viewpoint of Social Democracy. What, today, is the position of the Independents, the left-wing of Social Democracy, claiming to be authentically Marxist and faithful to principles? They are campaigning for the socialization of industrial enterprises and indemnifying the owners with state treasury bonds. In other words, these capitalists are to receive from the state part of the product of labor, without at the same time having to work. The exploitation of the workers by capital will thereby be perpetuated.

"This runs counter to the whole concept of socialism, which involves two basic elements: abolishing exploitation, and setting up production in a socialist order. The first indicates the essential objective of the proletariat; the second points to technical organization, the national method for increasing the revenues of society. If one accepts the present Social Democratic plans, exploitation continues and the expropriation of industrial enterprises leads quite simply to a kind of state capitalism. This socialization—in the form in which it is urged today by the Social Democrats—is tantamount to duping the proletariat, since it involves just the façade of socialism, behind which exploitation continues to operate. The reason for this attitude is, no doubt, fear of a severe clash with the bourgeoisie at a time when the proletariat, still awakening, has not yet gathered all its forces. But in practice these plans can serve only to reorganize capitalism on new foundations."⁴

3. This was one of the points in the program of the left Zimmerwaldians. Pannekoek developed it in the second article he published in *Vorbote*, in passages not included here.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 13. In the article on socialization cited in note 41 of Chapter Five, Pannekoek emphasized that the only possible "expropriation of the expropriators" lies in abolishing profits for the capitalist; and that the only possible means of doing so is the class struggle. And he added

In the final analysis, "both majority socialists and independents are aiming only at maintaining capitalist exploitation. The first is doing so openly; the other, by a furtive trick. The first allows the capitalists to do as they wish; the second looks to the state to implement and organize exploitation. This is why both have only one solution to offer the proletariat: 'Work! Work! Work! harder and longer till you are completely exhausted!' For the reconstruction of the capitalist economy is possible only if the proletariat resigns itself to exploitation at its worst.

"The absolute antagonism between communism and Social Democracy was already evident before the war, though under other names. The question at issue then concerned the tactics to be followed in the class conflict. Under the name of 'left-wing radicals,' an opposition grew up within the ranks of Social Democracy (it was from this opposition that today's veteran communists come); in opposition to the radicals and the revisionists this left-wing faction argued the need to resort to mass action. These confrontations ended by highlighting the counter-revolutionary character of the ideas and tactics advocated by the radical spokesmen, with Kautsky at their head.

"Parliamentary and trade union action had enabled the workers to gain some slight improvement in their condition at a time when capitalism was undergoing a vigorous expansion, while at the same time this action was protecting them against the permanent tendencies of capitalism toward impoverishment. But, over the course of ten years, and despite an organization showing both lively and steady growth, the effectiveness of this protection had been gradually reduced: imperialism had strengthened the industrialists and the army, weakened the Parliament, threw the trade unions back on the defensive, and paved the way to World War. It was clear, therefore, that the old methods of class struggle no longer amounted to very much. This was something that the masses realized instinctively; in many countries, they suddenly resorted to direct action, frequently against the wishes of their leaders, this action taking the form of huge trade union clashes, transport strikes paralyzing the economy, and political demonstrations. Sometimes, these explosions of proletarian rage shook the complacency of the bourgeoisie to the point of forcing them to make concessions; sometimes, too, they were crushed in blood. For the party, Social Democratic leaders sought to utilize these movements for their own ends; they

that this socialization, conceived as "juridical expropriation of the capitalists, with payment of indemnities but without economic expropriation," shows that the proletariat are masters only in appearance and are consenting to be exploited anew. Just as the "socialist" government is the continuation of the old bourgeois domination, so too does socialization amount to pursuing the old bourgeois exploitation under the flag of socialism.

acknowledged the usefulness of political strikes for securing specific objectives,⁵ but only on condition that such strikes did not exceed the predetermined limits, that they began and ended on the leaders' orders, and, above all, that they conformed to the official tactics laid down by these leaders. Strikes of this orthodox kind did sometimes take place, but without much effect. Forced to pursue a policy of compromise, the impetuous violence natural to spontaneous explosions of the masses was mitigated. The element of class action that immediately creates panic in the ruling bourgeoisie—the fear that the workers' movement might take on a revolutionary character—disappeared from these 'disciplined' mass actions, since every precaution had been taken to ensure their harmlessness.

"The Marxist revolutionaries, who are communists now, had emphasized at that time the extreme narrowness of the dominant conception of Social Democracy. They pointed out that, throughout history, the classes themselves have constituted the motive force of the great social upheavals. Never, in fact, has a revolution occurred as a result of a wise decision reached by an acknowledged leader. When their situation becomes intolerable, the masses go into action for any reason whatsoever, and sweep away the ruling power; then the new class or social category, called to rule the state, adapts that state to its own needs. Only during 50 years of peaceful capitalist development did the illusion arise and flourish that industrial leaders, thanks to their superior clearheadedness, are able to shape history. As members of the central bodies of the party and of trade unions, the deputies take it for granted that *their* acts, *their* speeches, *their* decisions fix the course of events; the masses are to intervene only on *their* invitation and only to lend more weight to *their* words, and then disappear as quickly as possible from the political scene. The masses are to play only the passive role of electing leaders who are to constitute the sole active and real agents of development."

And Pannekoek emphasizes that, if this conception was already too narrow to explain the bourgeois revolutions of the past, it was even less adequate in regard to the proletarian revolution, since the latter required the masses' fullest initiative. He continues with a critique of parliamentary and trade union action, whose main ideas, as repeated in his pamphlet on communist tactics, we shall deal with later. In what follows, we will consider the fifth and final section of the pamphlet now being discussed, a section entitled 'Proletarian Democracy, or the System of Councils.'"⁶

5. Thus Bernstein, during the great 1905 debate, personally advocated the general strike as a means of forcing the imperial power to abrogate restricted suffrage. Cf. Eduard Bernstein, *Der politische Massenstreik* (Breslau, 1905), p. 3.

6. *Op. cit.*, pp. 23-29.

"Social Democracy viewed the proletarian conquest of political power in terms of the workers' taking over the state machinery. The state machinery was, therefore, to remain intact and be put at the service of the working class. This was also the opinion of the Social Democratic Marxists—Kautsky, for example—despite the fact that Marx had always taken a completely different attitude. According to Marx and Engels, the state constituted a weapon of oppression created by the ruling class and which was then developed and perfected by them as the proletariat began to revolt in the 19th century. Marx's view was that the proletariat should destroy this state machinery and create completely new organs of administration. He was well aware that the state fulfills many functions that at first sight seem to serve the entire community—protecting the citizens, providing means of transportation, education, administration—but he also knew that all these activities had only one purpose: to look after the interests of capital, to guarantee its domination. That is why Marx could not nurse the illusion that, to emancipate the population, one need only assign other objectives to the state. The proletariat must themselves forge the instrument of their own liberation.

"It was impossible to foresee what form this instrument would take, since this would show itself only in practice. In fact, it did show itself in the Paris Commune, when the proletariat won state power for the first time. Bourgeois and working class Parisians then elected a parliament on the old model; but this parliament immediately became something very different from our types. It did in any way beguile and subdue the people by means of splendid speeches that would allow the clique of capitalists and leaders to continue in peace with their own personal affairs. Far from being a purely parliamentary institution, this assembly was transformed into an institution where everyone really worked. Newly formed commissions saw to it that the new laws were carried out properly. The bureaucracy disappeared as a special, independent class ruling the people, and the separation between the legislative and executive branches was abolished. Those senior civil servants who might have been tempted to frustrate the will of the people now got their mandate from these same people and could be dismissed at any time.

"The short life of the Paris Commune did not allow this new creation to mature. It was born, as it were, instinctively and only as a kind of by-product, within the context of feverish struggle for existence. It took the genius of Marx to see it as the embryonic form that proletarian state power should assume in the future.⁷ A step just as novel as it was important was taken in Russia, in

7. Clearly, while the Pannekoek-Kautsky controversy indirectly enabled Lenin to clarify his views in *The State and Revolution*, Pannekoek in turn was affected by the way in which Lenin constructed the Marxian interpretation of the Paris Commune. We might recall that, in a

1905, with the creation of the councils, the soviets, as organs of proletarian revolutionary intervention. These organs, however, did not give political power to the proletariat, even when the conflict was directed the central Workers' Council of Petersburg, which, for some time, exercised considerable power. But when the new revolution broke out in 1917, the soviets then made their appearance as organs of proletarian power. The second historical example of proletarian state power occurred in the German November Revolution, when the proletariat took over the political direction of the country. However, the Russian example revealed much more clearly the forms and the principles that the proletariat would have to adopt to achieve socialism. These are the principles that communism sets up against those of Social Democracy.

"The first principle is the dictatorship of the proletariat. According to Marx, who returns to the subject several times, the proletariat should establish its dictatorship as soon as it has assumed power. Dictatorship means the exercise of power by one class to the exclusion of the others. This, of course, seldom fails to arouse protests: we must demand democracy and equal rights for all, they say, and therefore a dictatorship of this kind, which deprives certain social groups of their rights, is contrary to justice. But such objections have little to do with the foundations of equality. Every class feels it has a right to whatever seems to be good or necessary for it; the exploiter inveighs against injustice whenever it affects his own class. Not long since, the proud aristocracy and the rich, arrogant bourgeoisie were denying equality and political rights to the low, poorly educated worker ground under foot and reduced to slavery; and, at that time, it was already a very clear symptom of the proletarian aspirations towards human dignity that their cry became: 'we have the same rights as you!'"

"The democratic principle was the first display of class consciousness within the proletariat, which did not yet dare to say: 'I am nothing, but I want to be everything!' When the general body of workers seeks to control public life and to make supreme decisions, are the criminals, the thieves, the war profiteers, the traders, the landed gentry, the usurer, the stockholders—in short, all who do no useful work and live as parasites on the working population—are they justified in invoking some law or other claimed to be natural or sent down from the heavens? If the ordinary man has the same rights as anyone else to

different period and therefore from a different viewpoint, Pannekoek had broached the question of the Commune in 1911 (cf. above, Chapter Three, Note 16). However, the method followed above differs from that of Lenin, to the extent to which it is concerned, not with "restoring" a given body of doctrine valid for all times, but with synthesizing the most advanced forms of action developing out of the class struggle.

decide political questions, then he has surely an even more natural right to live without misery and hunger. And when, to secure the second of these rights, he must violate the first, the democratic spirit is soon reconciled to this.

"The validity of communism does not depend on any abstract right but simply on the needs of the social groups. The proletariat's task is to build up socialist production and to organize work according to a different pattern. But, in doing so, it meets with passionate resistance from the ruling class, which does its utmost to hinder and disturb the realization of these aims. That is why the ruling class should forfeit all rights to have any say in politics. When one class seeks to push ahead and the other to drag its feet, they can only paralyze each other and bring society to a standstill by any attempt at cooperation. In the first phase of capitalism, in the period of full development and consolidation, the bourgeoisie established its dictatorship by establishing property qualifications for the right to vote. Subsequently, it became necessary and prudent to change to a democratic regime, which conceded a pseudo-equality of rights to the workers in order to keep them quiet. This democratic form in no way affected the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but merely camouflaged it; it did, however, enable the rising proletariat to unite and to fight for their class interests. After the first victory of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie still retained a number of weapons, both of moral and material, which, if given complete freedom of political action, they could use to disrupt severely, even paralyze, the work of setting up the new proletarian order. It would be necessary to dominate the bourgeoisie and to repress with the utmost vigor any attempt to hinder or to undermine the reorganization of the economy, the worst worst of crime against the people.

"It will perhaps be objected that the exclusion of a particular class always takes on the character of a completely arbitrary and unjust act. This undoubtedly applies to a parliamentary system. But as far as the specific organization of the proletarian state—the system of councils—is concerned, it can be said that all the exploiters and parasites automatically eliminate themselves from participation in the administration of society.

"The system of councils, in effect, forms the second principle of the communist order. Within this framework, the political organization has for its foundation the process of the economy of labor. The parliamentary system rests on the individual in his capacity as citizen. The historical reason for this is that, originally bourgeois society was composed of individual producers isolated from one another. They each produced their merchandise on their own, and the ensemble of these small industrial concerns made up the whole process of production. But in modern society, with its giant industrial

complexes and class antagonisms, these foundations are becoming increasingly obsolete. In this connection, the sharp criticisms of the parliamentary system from the theoreticians of French revolutionary syndicalism (Lagardelle, for example) are completely justified. According to the parliamentary idea, every man is primarily a citizen, an individual theoretically equal to everyone else. But in practice man is a worker; the practical content of his existence resides in his activities; and the activities of all these individuals complement one another to form the social process of labor.

"It is neither the state nor politics, but society and labor that form the great human community. The politico-parliamentary practice is to divide up the electorate into electoral districts; but, within the same district, workers, stockholders, shopkeepers, factory hands, in fact all classes and all trades, are haphazardly lumped together simply on the basis of living there. The natural human groups forming part of one and the same whole are production groups, workers in a particular factory or branch of industry, the peasants of a village, and, on a more general level, the various classes. Of course, certain political parties succeed in recruiting their supporters principally from a given class, and represent them; but their success is very limited, since joining a party is decided by one's political convictions, not by one's class. Do not great sectors of the working class unflinchingly choose to vote for candidates that are not Social Democrats?

"The new society makes labor and its organization a conscious objective and the basis of all political life, where 'political' signifies outward arrangement of economic life. In the capitalist system, such arrangement is done covertly; in the society of the future, it will be done with complete openness. People themselves act directly within their work groups. The workers of a particular factory select one among themselves to express their will; this representative remains in permanent contact with the rank and file, and is replaceable at any time. Those delegates decide on all matters within their competence, and hold meetings whose composition varies according to whether the agenda is about matters relating to a particular profession, or a particular district, and so forth. The central directive bodies for each area stem from these; at need, they can supply one another with experts.

"These flexible organizations do not offer the least place for bourgeois representation. There is no need to take formal steps to exclude such representation, since the mere fact that someone does not directly participate in a production group precludes his participation in decision making. On the other hand, the former bourgeois who cooperates with the new society according to his capacities—as a factory manager, for instance—can have his

say, like any other worker, at the personnel meetings and can decide in common with the others. The professionals at a high level of general culture, such as teachers and doctors, form their own councils, which, within the areas of their competence, education and health services, make decisions jointly with representatives from other areas of labor. In every domain of society, self-administration and total organization represent the means to direct all the forces of the people towards the great objective; at the summit, all their various energies are synthesized into a central body that insures that each and all are adequately brought into play.⁸

"The system of councils is a state organization, but without the bureaucracy that turns the state into a power external to the people it governs. Engels once remarked that in the proletarian state the government of men will be replaced by the administration of things; this formula is applied here. The subordinate officials, always necessary to the efficient discharge of day-to-day matters, are secretaries holding little desired posts accessible to anyone who has been adequately trained. Administration proper is in the hands of delegates, who can be removed at any time and who receive the same salary as the workers. During some transition periods, it may be difficult to keep strictly to this principle, since every delegate does not necessarily have, from one day to the next, the required aptitudes. However, with a bourgeois press continually praising to the point of absurdity the ability of the present bureaucracy, it is worthwhile recalling that, in November 1918, the German workers' and soldiers' councils successfully carried out such formidable tasks

8. By comparing this passage with an earlier one (cf. Chapter Four) the reader will see how Pannekoek, following his usual practice, carries similar ideas and formulas from one text to another, in a particular period. It is, of course, impossible here to compare his views with those of other theoreticians of a similar tendency, each of whom, naturally, emphasizes slightly different aspects within the framework of an overall similar group of problems. However, we shall glance at a few lines here and there in the articles which the Italian, Antonio Gramsci, contributed in 1919 to the *Ordine Nuovo*: "The system of councils tends to assemble all the producers into a unitary organism which, on the basis of the place of work, brings together the laborer and the skilled worker, the office worker and the engineer or technical director. . . . These organisms form the cells of a new state, the workers' state, founded on a new system of representation, the system of councils. And this state is destined to disappear as a state through its organic incorporation into a world system, the Communist International. . . . By their struggles, the trade unions have secured labor legislation which has undoubtedly improved the material living conditions of the working class, but they have done so on the basis of a compromise which ensures that the relationships of forces are always unfavorable to the proletariat. The trade union appears, therefore, as an institution of the existing order, destined to hold back the class struggle. Unlike this bureaucratic form, the councils tend to inculcate an active spirit and to create a new world of production and of work, not to carve up the old one." Antonio Gramsci, *Opere*, IX, (Turin, 1954), p. 46, 126, 134. Too fragmentary to have really significant value, these extracts do suggest the idea of a "spontaneous" theoretical convergence, from one region to another, under certain historical conditions.

that the state and military bureaucracy recoiled from them. In the councils, there is no place at all for bureaucrats and career politicians, those complementary instruments of bourgeois domination, because the power to legislate and the power to execute are merged, so the delegates must themselves implement what they have decided. The communist party is therefore very far from having the usual objectives of a political party, or, in other words, of an organization of career politicians—namely, to take direct control of the state machine. Its purpose is not to seize power for its own sake, but to propagate communist principles in order to show the proletariat why and how the system of councils should be established. There is absolute opposition, therefore, between the immediate, practical objectives of Social Democracy and those of communism: the first relies on the organization of the old bourgeois state; the second is laying the foundations of a new political system."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SPLIT IN EUROPEAN COMMUNISM

World War I marked a decisive stage in capitalist development in Western Europe, where its immediate aftermath (especially in Germany) was an equally remarkable phenomenon: the emergence of proletarian organs of self-emancipation and the theoretical elaboration of almost completely new strategic perspectives.¹

At this level, the Western European workers movement converged in some areas with the Russian Revolution; but in both cases, and for very different reasons, the new movement of ideas and of action underwent a rapid regression. It had arisen during a feverish crisis of the state and of society in general. In Germany, however, this crisis in no way affected capitalist relations and the fear that was constantly engendered in the masses through the very conditions of social life in general and of work in particular. This is behind Rosa Luxemburg's remark that: "No proletariat in the world—including the German proletariat—can overnight completely eradicate the traces of an age-old serfdom."²

Because all classes have a historical task, they forge for themselves, through impassioned conflicts, a more or less clear-sighted awareness of their objectives. Furthermore, in modern times, the propertied class, because of its social situation, holds a permanent position of strength it can fall back upon when the inevitable reverses come, and which supplies it with a basis for a new historical offensive. On the other hand, the proletariat has no strength, even if at first sight it would seem that the law accords them some. Properly considered, however, these legal guarantees serve merely to protect the conditions that ensure the reproduction of labor. The classical forms of organization such as found in parties and trade unions could only secure the satisfaction of immediate demands and the legal legitimation of social progress at the cost of limited battles led by specialists. In contrast, orthodox Marxist tactics called for—in addition to parliamentary and trade union

1. Dirk J. Struik, a Dutch Communist, wrote in 1919: "Three years ago, the most clear-sighted minds of the International were still showing themselves to be almost incapable of appreciating the importance of the councils." The allusion to Pannekoek's *Vorbote* articles is clear. Cf. Struik's article in *De Nieuwe Tijd* (1919), p. 466.

2. Rosa Luxemburg, *Rote Fahne*, Dec. 3, 1918.

action—the use of more radical methods, such as mass actions (according to Rosa Luxemburg) or armed insurrection (according to Lenin). In other words, such tactics envisaged a completely different historico-social context, and therefore were based on a different conception of the role of the specialized leaders. In the first case, we are dealing with classical social democracy; in the second, with radical social democracy.

At this point, a new set of tactics made its appearance in Germany and other industrialized countries, which, feeble as it was, rejected both radical and classical tactics of social democracy. We have seen, very briefly, the essential reason for its eventual failure: the conflict had involved only a small fraction of the working class, most of which was imbued with a tradition of peaceful methods incapable of shaking off its daily, age-old habit of servitude. And, although radical social democrats agreed with the emphasis placed on councils by the new tactic, in practice, they gave absolute and unquestioned priority³ to parliamentarianism—but without admitting it too openly, seeing that such an approach was utterly repudiated by the rank-and-file militants.

By a substantial majority, the young communists decided to resign *en masse* from the trade unions (they were being systematically expelled in any case) and to develop workers unions (*Arbeiterunionen*). These associations had sprung into life with particular force among sailors and miners, particularly those of the Ruhr, after the major wildcat strikes of 1919.⁴ Animated by a fighting spirit and violently opposed to the trade union leaders and to the police (who returned the hate in good measure), the workers unions demanded socialization on the basis of the councils system, disarming the *Freikorps* and formation of a workers militia, and the resumption of relations between Germany and Soviet Russia. Based on the direct representation of the workers through a network of delegates, they were also demanding labor reforms, such as the seven-hour day.⁵

The social democrats of the two parties had at that time one sole concern:

3. At the Heidelberg conference, Paul Levi, the perfect "gentleman-dandy" who coopted to the Central Committee of the KPD, defended the radical theses on parliamentary and trade unionist action: "They contain nothing new; they even contain what should be self-evident to those who are united in a political party." *Bericht über den 2. Parteitag der KPD* (October 1919), p. 25.

4. Cf. P. von Oertzen, "Die Grosse Streiks der Ruhrarbeiterschaft in Frühjahr 1919," *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte*, 1958.

5. Cf. especially H. Bötcher, *Zur revolutionären Gewerkschaftsbewegung in Amerika, Deutschland und England* (Jena, 1922), which gives a complete account of the movement and its ideas. Cf. also Peter von Oertzen, *Betriebsräte in der Novemberrevolution* (Düsseldorf, 1963), which devotes a chapter—unfortunately very short (pp. 207-218)—to the "role of the unions in the council movement."

"return to normal," to the old type of administrative structure, suitably democratized to meet their new needs. Within this framework, the workers councils served a dual purpose; but, in a period marked by turbulence, they were still able to avoid strong leaders.⁶ That is why the leaders asked Parliament to "anchor" the councils in the republican Constitution. Parliament was happy to oblige, adopting on February 4, 1920, a definitive legal statute relegating the status of industrial committees (*Betriebsräte*) to that of a mere extension of the trade unions, a sort of training ground for their future officials. This is why the left-communists, seeking to adapt to the situation, wholeheartedly supported the workers unions (*Arbeiterunionen*), those associations born naturally from the struggle against the traditional organizational forms.

The majority of the left-communists were in no way challenging the need for a political party.⁷ But in their view, this party should be that of an elite, firmly linked to principles, adapting them to the situation and propagating them—something impossible for a mass party, inevitably subjected to a bureaucratic apparatus, dedicated to the representation of the immediate interests of the workers, and therefore committed to sacrificing the ultimate objective in favor of conciliatory methods. The opposite was true of the workers' unions: animated by the Communist Party and possessing a rigorously independent class consciousness, they transformed themselves through the class struggle into revolutionary workers councils, into organs of the proletarian dictatorship. The old methods had had their day; the capitalist system was moving toward its fatal crisis; it was necessary to prepare the way for new forms, to build the "unitary organization."

The tension between the radicals and the leftists became more acute. Indeed, the radical current scarcely existed outside the circle of party leaders, the Berlin *Zentrale* and a few provincial committees—a clique, but one supported by the executive of the Third International, and having as its sole objective a merger with the socialist independents. The latter were at a crossroads: on the one hand, nothing fundamental separated them from the classical tactics of the Majority Socialists; on the other hand, most of them

6. A jurist, Brigl-Matthias, in *Das Betriebsratprobleme* (Berlin, 1926), p. 2, stresses that the law was intended to curb the attempts at "wildcat" occupations on the basis "of political workers councils and of revolutionary industrial organizations."

7. In this connection, Wolfheim declared at the Heidelberg Congress: "Let me say emphatically, we have never regarded the existence of the KPD as superfluous. . . . Today, the proletariat forms, not a unified party, but a unified class. That is why its dictatorship cannot be a dictatorship of the party. . . . To those who say: 'You are trying to transform the party into a propaganda center,' we answer, 'Certainly! In our view, the party's mission is to enlighten, . . . to propagate the idea of the unions as an organizational basis of a system of councils.'" *Op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

were convinced that cooperation with the bourgeois parties would almost obliterate the prospects for effective reforms. Moreover, the independents did not favor direct action, any more than did the Central Committee of the German Communist Party or the leadership of the International. They called such action putschist tactics, which would frighten the voters and therefore injure their parliamentary tactics.

The *Zentrale* took steps to exclude its opponents wherever possible, but this was not enough. Determined to deliver a decisive blow, they held a Party Congress at Heidelberg in October 1919 despite laws forbidding it. Making use of such secrecy, Paul Levi assembled some of the most reliable members and got most of them to vote to exclude the opposition elements. But it was a paper majority, purely bureaucratic. Thus, at Berlin, where the party claimed 12,000 members, an eye witness noted,⁸ "there were 36 people in the room" when William Piek returned to report on the Congress.

In the months that followed, the excluded members vainly called on the party to convene a truly representative congress. In the meantime, in March 1920, a reactionary attempt was made at a coup d'état, known as the Kapp Putsch. A general strike, ordered by the trade unions, quickly put an end to this. At that time the sentiment among the workers favored formation of a "workers government" involving a coalition of groups extending from the Christian trade unionists to the independents. After some hesitation, the *Zentrale* chose to support the official strike under prescribed conditions, urging the workers not to take to the streets, and solemnly promising its "loyal opposition" to the eventual "workers government."⁹

The "excluded" members resorted to a campaign of posters and handbills. But they were excluded not only from the party. Doomed for the most part to unemployment because of their political activities, they were also excluded from production—an additional reason for their being, once again, the spearhead of the movement "at the street level," especially in the insurgent Ruhr. Shortly afterward, a formative congress was held in Berlin, and, on April 3, the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) came into existence, with about 30,000 members.¹⁰ The new party drew from a party of workers unions which—at the Hanover Congress, where it claimed to have 80,000 adherents—had just joined together to form the Central Workers Union of Germany (AAUD).¹¹

8. Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), p. 119.

9. O. Flechtheim, *Die K.P.D. in der Weimarer Republik* (Offenbach, 1948), pp. 62-66.

10. Cf. Bernard Reichenbach, "Zur Geschichte der K.A.P.D.," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, XIII (1928), pp. 117-40.

11. For a complete account, see the anonymous study, "Le Mouvement pour les Conseils in Allemagne," *Informations Correspondance Ouvrières*, 42 (Aug.-Sept. 1965)—a translation of an

Needless to say, Pannekoek followed these events very closely, since similar confrontations were occurring in different sections of the International. In Holland itself, a split was about to take place that created the KAP-N and the AAB-B (comprising especially the textile workers of Friesland) but with the new organizational form being a minority group in relation to the parliamentarian Communist Party. The whole range of problems raised by these internal conflicts was the center of the debate at the Second Congress of the International (July 1920). It was in this chaotic context that Pannekoek wrote the pamphlet presented in our next chapter.¹²

article first published in *Radecommunismus*, 3 (1938).

12. Cf. the two articles he wrote in 1919 for *Nieuwe Tijd*: "Strijd over de Kommunistische Taktiek in Duitsland," pp. 693-99; "Het Duitse Kommunisme," pp. 777-85.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WORLD REVOLUTION AND COMMUNIST TACTICS ¹

"Theory, too, changes into a material force only when it penetrates the masses. Theory is capable of penetrating the masses... only when it becomes radical."

Marx

I.

"The transformation of capitalism into communism depends on two forces, one proceeding from the other: a material force and a spiritual force. The material development of the economy clarifies the real course of things, and this, in its turn, engenders a revolutionary will. It was from general tendencies within the capitalist system that the Marxist system was born. Originally a theory of the Socialist Party and later of the Communist Party, Marxism confers upon the revolutionary movement a powerful spiritual homogeneity. While Marxism slowly penetrates a part of the proletariat, the masses are led, through direct experiences, to see that capitalism is in an untenable position. The World War and the accelerated economic collapse reveal the objective need for revolution, even while the masses have not yet understood the idea of communism. This basic contradiction underlies the various clashes, interruptions and waverings that make the revolution a slow and painful process. Undoubtedly, theory is taking on a new urgency and is penetrating the masses with increasing effect; but despite all this, when confronted with practical tasks that have suddenly become gigantic, these two phenomena themselves also slow down.

"In Western Europe, the development of the revolution is principally

1. Anton Pannekoek, *Weltrevolution und kommunistische Taktik* (Vienna, 1920), p. 50. This edition includes a "postscript" absent from the other versions. The text first appeared in *Nieuwe Tijd* beginning March 15, 1920 (no. 6, pp. 161-69; then 193-207 and 257-71). It bears the pen name K. Horner, as does the German version published in Petrograd, entitled *Die Entwicklung der Weltrevolution und die Taktik des Kommunismus*. This version was also published in *Kommunismus*, the theoretical organ of the Communist International for southeastern Europe (*Kommunismus*, Aug. 1, 1920, pp. 976-1018).

determined by the stagnation of the capitalist economy and by the example of Soviet Russia. We need not dwell on what enabled the Russian proletariat to succeed in a relatively quick and easy manner: the weaknesses of the bourgeoisie, the alliance with the peasants, a wartime crisis. The example of a state where the workers exercise power, where they have triumphed over capitalism and are thus in a position to build up communism, was to make a deep impression on the proletariat of the whole world. Of course, this example by itself would have been insufficient to incite the workers of other countries to revolution. The spirit of man is responsive, above all else, to the influence of material conditions of the existing milieu; consequently, if the forces of the different types of international capitalism had remained intact, the interest in what happens in Russia would have been much less intense. When Rutgers² returned from Russia, he described the masses as having a 'respectful but timorous admiration' for the Russian Revolution, but as lacking 'the will to act to save Russia and the world.' At the end of the war, a prompt expansion of the economy was generally expected in the West, while the lying press continually described Russia as in the grips of chaos and barbarism. But since then the opposite has occurred: chaos is increasing in the old, civilized countries, while the new order is consolidating itself in Russia. And now, in these countries, too, the masses are on the march. Economic stagnation is the principal motive force of revolution."

The crisis raged throughout Western Europe, culminating in widespread strikes that gradually assumed the appearance of conscious revolutionary battles; "without being communists, the masses nevertheless pursue communist objectives."³ An advance guard formed, which adhered to the Third International and severed its organizational links to social democracy, both in Western Europe where protection of the bourgeois state required the formation of socialist governments, and in Italy where "the will of the masses to revolutionary combat, which shows itself in a permanent minor war against the government and the bourgeoisie, makes it possible to accept without question a mixture of left-wing socialist, revolutionary trade-unionist, and communist ideas." And the unexpectedly strong resistance of Soviet Russia to

2. S. J. Rutgers, a Tribunist, went to Russia with his wife toward the end of 1918, via the United States and Japan. A delegate for Holland and the United States, with consultative vote, at the First Congress of the Communist International, he left Petrograd for Amsterdam in October 1919, his mission being to organize there the auxiliary Bureau of the Third International, whose creation had been envisaged at the Congress. For a time, he made common cause with the ultra-leftists. An agronomist engineer, he was later to return to Russia during the Stalinist era.

3. A few days after these lines were written, the Ruhr insurrection occurred, accompanied by the formation of a "red army" in which the Communist Workers' Party militants were the most active. Cf. Gerhard Colm, *Beitrag zur Geschichte und Soziologie des Ruhraufstandes vom Marz-April 1920* (Essen, 1921), especially pp. 69-83.

the assaults of world reaction increased still more Russia's influence over the socialist left. "Many communists, however, tend to see only the steady increase of positive forces, without taking the weaknesses into account. The proletarian revolution clearly seems to have taken shape as a result of the appearance of communism and of the Russian example. But powerful factors have also appeared that will make this revolution an extremely difficult and complicated process."

II.

"Slogans, programs and tactics do not flow from abstract principles but are determined solely by experience, by real praxis. What the communists think about their objectives and about the road to be followed ought to conform to actual revolutionary praxis. The Russian Revolution and the unfolding of the German Revolution offer us a body of revealing facts about the motive forces, conditions and forms of proletarian revolution.

"In the Russian Revolution the proletariat seized political power with an impetuosity, which, at the time, took Western European observers completely by surprise. And today, considering the obstacles we face in Western Europe, it still seems extraordinary, even though the causes are clearly discernible. In the enthusiasm of the early days, it was natural that the difficulties of the revolution would be underestimated. The Russian Revolution had, in effect, set before the eyes of the world proletariat the principles of the new world in all their purity and splendor: the dictatorship of the proletariat,⁴ the system of soviets as the form of the new democracy, the reorganization of industry, of agriculture and of education. In many respects it presented such a clear and almost idyllic picture of the nature and content of the proletarian revolution that it could seem almost simplicity itself to follow this example. But the German Revolution has shown that it was not as simple as all that, and that the forces at work on that occasion are at work throughout Europe.

"When German imperialism collapsed in November 1918, the working class was completely unprepared to assume power. Exhausted both spiritually and morally from four years of war, and mentally imprisoned within the traditions of social democracy, they were unable, in the few weeks following the disappearance of bourgeois governmental power, to understand their

4. In his major pamphlet, *Workers' Councils*, Pannekoek returns to this idea, pointing out, however, that if it has taken on "the ominous sound" with the dictatorship of a totalitarian party, "as in Russia," it remains nonetheless true that: "When production is regulated by the producers themselves, the formerly exploiting class automatically is excluded from taking part in the decisions, without any artificial stipulation. Marx's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat now appears to be identical with the labor democracy of council organization" (p. 51).

tasks clearly. Although communist propaganda had been intensive, it had not been in operation long enough to remedy the lack of working class preparation. The German bourgeoisie learned the lessons of the Russian Revolution much better than did the proletariat; while draping themselves in red to lull the suspicions of the workers, they immediately set about reconstituting their means of domination. Of their own accord, the workers relinquished their powers to the leaders of social democracy and parliamentary democracy.⁵ Far from disarming the bourgeoisie, the worker-soldiers allowed themselves to be disarmed; the most activist of the workers groups were overcome by the new units of volunteers and by the bourgeoisie in the ranks of the national guard."

While this experience remains unique in Western Europe, it "nevertheless has characteristics of a general kind and repercussions of considerable importance. It highlights *the nature of the forces* that will necessarily make the revolution in Western Europe a long, drawn-out process.

"...In the phases of accelerated revolutionary development, tactical differences are quickly reconciled in the course of action, or even fail to emerge distinctly; a work of systematic agitation enlightens the minds, while the masses spontaneously erupt and action completely overthrows the old ideas. However, when a phase of accelerated stagnation sets in, when the masses allow anything at all to be inflicted upon them, and when the revolutionary movement seems to have lost its attraction; when obstacles accumulate and when the enemy seems to emerge stronger than ever from each encounter; when the Communist Party is weak and suffers defeat after defeat—then divisions appear and there is a search for new ways and new strategies. Two tendencies have emerged and are essentially the same in every country, despite minor local differences. The first is a tendency that seeks to radicalize the minds of men, to enlighten by word and action, and therefore attempts with the utmost vigor to challenge old ideas with new principles. The second tendency, in order to woo the reluctant masses to practical activity, assiduously seeks to avoid shocking them, and therefore emphasizes what unites rather than what separates. The first seeks to provoke a clear and distinct cleavage, while the second is concerned only with gathering the masses together; radical would be an appropriate name for the first, and opportunist for the second. In Western Europe at the present time, the revolution is meeting with considerable resistance, while the power of Soviet

5. Held in Berlin Dec. 16-21, 1918, the "General Congress of Soldiers' and Workers' Councils of Germany" was dominated and manipulated by Social Democratic delegates of the type most aligned with the state. It refused to set itself up as an executive body, declared in favor of a National Assembly, and elected a "central council" composed of former "Kaiser Socialists." Cf. Kolb, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-216.

Russia, still intact after numerous attempts of the Entente governments to bring it down, is making a deep impression on the masses. Therefore certain workers groups, hitherto hesitant, are turning more and more toward the Third International;⁶ it is beyond doubt, therefore, that opportunism will take on a singular importance within the Communist International.

"Opportunism does not necessarily resort to easygoing, reassuring and engaging words giving radicals the monopoly on more aggressive language; on the contrary, it all too often indulges in frenetic declamations to hide its lack of clear, principled tactics; furthermore, its nature causes it to rely in revolutionary situations on a single action. It tends to look only to the immediate without bothering about the future, so that it remains at the surface of things instead of probing into their depths. When available forces prevent it from achieving its objective, it does not try to strengthen these forces, but seeks to reach the objective by roundabout ways. Seeking immediate success, it sacrifices to that success the conditions of a future, lasting achievement. There must, in its view, be a union with other 'progressive' groups, and concessions made to their outmoded ideas, if nothing else in order to divide the enemy—the coalition of capitalist classes—and thus create more favorable conditions of struggle. However, it emerges clearly that such power can only be the shadow of power, the personal power of a few leaders, not that of the proletarian class, and that this contradiction begets only confusion, corruption and dissention. Were the working class to come into governmental power without having really acquired the maturity needed for its exercise, they would inevitably either lose power very soon or be forced to make so many concessions to backward tendencies that this power would crumble from within. Dividing the enemy—the recipe of reformism *par excellence*—is not a tactical move that destroys the internal unity of the bourgeoisie, but one that deceives, misleads, and weakens the proletariat. Of course, it can happen that the proletarian communist *avant-garde* must necessarily assume political power before the normal conditions exist for it to do so; but in that case, the clarity, knowledge, unity and autonomy that the masses have acquired will serve as a basis for a later development toward communism.

"The history of the Second International abounds in examples of this policy of opportunism, and the latter is already beginning to show itself within the Third International. For the Second, it consisted of striving to achieve the

6. The reference is to talks between the Communist International branches of the socialist left in different countries—negotiations which, in Germany, led to merger of two-thirds of the Independents with the meager troops of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party in December 1920.

socialist objective through a coalition of non-socialist workers groups and other classes, and employing every means to win them over. These practices were bound to lead to the decomposition of the movement and its ultimate collapse. At the present time, the Third International is in a very different situation, because the phase of the harmonious expansion of capitalism is over—the phase in which social democracy could do nothing but enlighten the masses through a policy based on principles, in preparation for the revolutionary phase to come. Capitalism has collapsed; the world cannot wait for the day when our propaganda will have led the majority of men to understand exactly what communism is; the masses must intervene as soon as possible to save the world and to save themselves. Of what use is a small party and its loyalty to principles when what is needed is the intervention of the masses? Has not opportunism, which seeks a rapid grouping of large masses, some reason to claim that it is bowing to necessity?

“However, a huge mass party or a coalition of different parties is no more capable of leading a successful rebellion than is a small radical party. Revolution is the work of the masses; it begins spontaneously. Certain actions decided upon by a party can sometimes (rarely, however) be the point of departure, but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychic factors deeply embedded in the subconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics. The task of a revolutionary party is the advance propagation of clear knowledge, so that, within the masses, some may come to know what should be done in a crisis and will be able to judge the situation for themselves. And, during the revolution, the party should establish the program, the slogans and the directives that the masses spontaneously recognize to be correct and appropriate—as the precise formulation of their own revolutionary objectives. It is in this sense that the party directs the combat. As long as the masses are inactive, the party's efforts may seem useless; however, the principles propagated reach many people who for the moment are outside the party, and, in the course of the revolution, these principles take on an active force which helps guide such people along the desired path. On the other hand, to soften these principles as a preliminary step to forming a more broadly based party through coalitions and concessions enables people with confused ideas to acquire, in time of revolution, an ascendancy that the masses cannot challenge because of their own deficient education. To compromise with outmoded conceptions is to move toward power without first securing its fundamental condition—the complete transformation of ideas. And this ultimately hinders the course of the revolution. Moreover, the effectiveness of such a policy is extremely illusory, since the most radical ideas can penetrate the masses only during a

period of revolution; at other times, the masses tend to be moderate. A revolution is always accompanied by a profound upheaval of ideas among the masses; it thus creates the precondition for the revolution. That is why it is incumbent on the Communist Party to direct the revolution on the basis of clear principles aimed at transforming the world.

“What divides the Communists from the Social Democrats is the intransigence with which the Communists give priority to the new principles (the system of soviets and the dictatorship of the proletariat). Opportunism in the Third International uses as much as possible the forms and methods of warfare bequeathed to it by the Second International. After the Russian Revolution had replaced parliamentarianism by a system of soviets and built up the trade union movement on a factory basis, certain attempts—the first of their kind—to copy this model were made in Europe.⁷ The German Communist Party boycotted the Reichstag elections and propagated the idea of an organized withdrawal from the trade unions.⁸ But in 1919, when the revolution began to ebb and stagnate, the party leaders decided on a new tactic, reverting to parliamentarianism and supporting the old trade union organizations against the new organizations of workers unions (*Arbeiterunionen*). As a decisive argument, they urged the party not to cut itself off from the masses. The masses, they argued, continued to think in parliamentary terms, and therefore the best means of reaching them was through electoral campaigns and parliamentary speeches, as well as mass entry into the trade unions, with about seven million members....” According to Radek,⁹ “in Western Europe, the proletarian revolution will be a long drawn-out process during which communism should use every means of propaganda. Parliamentarianism and the trade union movement are the principal weapons of the proletariat, to which should be added, as a new battle aim, the gradual securing of workers' control.

7. Pannekoek, when alluding to the workers' councils of Germany, Italy and Scotland, was clearly unaware that from January 1918 on the Russian trade unions had taken back from the factory committees—at least on the juridical level and with the latter's more or less qualified consent—the powers which they were exercising within the industrial enterprises. Cf. P. Avrich, “The Bolshevik Revolution and Workers' Control in Russian Industry,” *Slavic Review*, XXII:1, 1963. At the time, however, such ignorance was general among the few Communists in Western Europe who were at all interested in the effective power structure of the U.S.S.R.

8. Cf. A. and D. Prudhommeaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-56.

9. Pannekoek refers here to a pamphlet “composed in prison by our friend Radek” and dealing with “the development of the world revolution and the tasks of the Communist Party.” In fact, Radek wrote two such pamphlets at the time: one before the Heidelberg Congress (*Die Entwicklung der deutschen Revolution und die Aufgaben der K.P.*), the other after (*Die Entwicklung der Weltrevolution und die Taktik der K.P. in Kämpfe um die Diktatur des Proletariats*). No doubt Pannekoek's reference is to the second and more complete of these; he also borrowed the title for his own pamphlet.

"An examination of the principles, conditions and the difficulties of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will show whether or not this line of argument has any justification.

III.

"It is often maintained that, in Western Europe, the revolution will continue for a long time because the bourgeoisie is much more powerful there than it was in Russia. Let us analyze this strength. Is it numerical? The proletarian masses are far more numerous than the bourgeoisie. Does it lie in the fact that the bourgeoisie dominates all of economic life? This is indeed a primary element of strength, but such a domination has perceptibly lessened and, in Central Europe, the economy is completely bankrupt. Is it ultimately the result of the bourgeoisie's grip on the state and on the means of repression? Certainly this has enabled the bourgeoisie to prevail continually over the proletariat, which is why the conquest of state power is the first objective of the proletariat. However, in November 1918, state power in Germany and Austria did fall into the hands of the working class. The state's repressive machinery was absolutely in abeyance, and the masses were reigning as masters. Despite all this, the bourgeoisie succeeded in reconstructing this state power and in replacing the yoke on the workers. This shows the existence of another factor of the power of this class, a hidden factor, one which remained intact and which enabled them to re-establish their domination, however shattered it may have seemed. This hidden factor is the spiritual power of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. It explains why the masses still remain totally subject to bourgeois ideas, to the extent that, when bourgeois domination collapses, the masses rebuild it with their own hands.

"The German experience clearly raises the great problem of revolution in Western Europe. In these countries, the bourgeois mode of production and the advanced culture linked to it for centuries have deeply impregnated the way the masses feel and think. That is why the spiritual characteristics of these masses are completely absent in the countries of the East, which have never known this domination by bourgeois culture. And herein lies the primary reason for the different directions taken by the revolution in the East and in the West. In England, France, Holland, Scandinavia, Italy, Germany, a strong bourgeoisie has flourished since the middle ages, on the basis of petty bourgeoisie and primitive capitalist production. After the overthrow of the feudal system, a strong class independent of the peasants and masters of their own goods, developed in the rural areas. This basis enabled the spiritual life of the bourgeoisie to blossom into a vigorous national culture, especially in

the maritime countries, such as France and England, the first to undergo capitalist development. In the 19th century, capitalism, encompassing the whole of the economy, and bringing even the most remote farms within the framework of the world economy, perfected still further this national culture, and, with the help of its propaganda mechanisms—press, school, church—drummed it into the minds of the masses, both the newly proletarianized and urbanized elements and those remaining in the rural districts. This was the situation, not only in the countries where capitalism had originated, but also, in slightly different forms, in America and Australia, where the Europeans had founded new states, and in the countries of Central Europe—Germany, Austria, Italy—where the new capitalist development was grafted onto a small, stagnant landholder economy and petty-bourgeois culture. When it penetrated into Eastern Europe, capitalism encountered a completely different situation and completely different traditions. In Russia, Poland, Hungary, and in Eastern Germany, there was no powerful bourgeoisie with a long established spiritual domination; the pattern there was defined by relationships within a system of primitive agricultural production—the big landed proprietors, patriarchal feudalism, and the village community. Communism there found itself dealing with a people more primitive, more simple, more open, and therefore more receptive. The socialists of Western Europe would often express their amused surprise at seeing the 'ignorant' Russians in the front line of the workers' cause. In this connection, as an English delegate to the Amsterdam Conference¹⁰ rightly pointed out, it may be that the Russians are ignorant, but the English workers are so stuffed with prejudices that communist propaganda among them is much more difficult. These 'prejudices,' however, constitute only a primary aspect of the mode of bourgeois thinking that saturates the English masses and the American masses of Western European origin.

"This mode of thinking, in its opposition to the proletarian-communist conception of the world, involves conceptions so varied and so confused that one can scarcely sum it up in a few words. Its primary quality is an individualism that goes back to the first petty bourgeois and peasant forms of labor, and which yields only reluctantly to the new concept of proletarian community. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, this individualism deeply impregnates both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The outlook does not reach beyond the workplace; it certainly does not embrace the whole social group. Steeped in the principle of the division of labor, these individualists do

10. Cf. note 24 below.

not regard 'politics,' the direction of the whole society, as a matter that concerns everyone, but as a monopoly of the ruling class, as a branch of activity reserved for highly specialized career politicians. A century of assiduous interaction of a material and also of a spiritual kind through art and literature has inculcated in the masses a sense of belonging on the national level, a sentiment that can sometimes take the form of class solidarity at that level, but which in no way facilitates international action. This feeling remains firmly implanted in the subconscious, as is seen in the indifference shown about what is happening elsewhere, or, at best, by a façade of internationalism.

"Bourgeois culture in the proletariat is first manifested in the guise of a spiritual tradition. The masses, prisoners of this tradition, think in terms of ideology and not of reality; bourgeois thinking always assumes an ideological character. But this ideology and this tradition in no way constitute a homogeneous whole. As the result of innumerable and age-old class confrontations, spiritual reflexes develop in political and religious systems. The proletarians that adhere to them are therefore subdivided into distinct groups according to their ideological conceptions, churches, sects, parties. In addition, the bourgeois past of the proletariat is manifested in an organizational tradition that runs counter to the class unity required for the coming of a new world; the workers are reduced, within these traditional organizations, to the role of followers of a bourgeois vanguard. During these ideological conflicts, it is the intellectuals who become the direct leaders. The intellectuals—churchmen, teachers, writers, journalists, artists, politicians—form a large class which serves to uphold, develop and propagate bourgeois culture. They transmit this culture to the masses and serve as intermediaries between the power of capital and the interests of the masses. Their spiritual authority over the masses strengthens the hegemony of capital. Consequently, the oppressed masses cannot rise in revolt under the leadership of the intellectuals. And when these leaders openly pass into the capitalist camp, the cohesion and discipline they acquired through conflict then makes them the strongest mainstays of the system."

This was the case with Christian ideology, which showed itself to be reactionary after having supported the conflict of the petty bourgeoisie with the state—that of the Catholics at the time of the *Kulturkampf*, for example.¹¹ The same is true of Social Democracy, which has helped to

11. In fact the trade union associations—most notably in the Ruhr—first came into existence, in the late 1860s, through the initiative of Catholic priests. Ridiculed by the Protestant authorities and frowned on at that time by the bosses, they were incapable of assuring an autonomous representation of the workers and soon yielded to formations inspired by Social

extirpate the old ideologies but which, "on the other hand, is grounded in the spiritual dependence of the masses on political and other leaders, whom the masses regard as specialists and to whom therefore they hand over the conduct of major class matters of a general kind, instead of seeing to them themselves. The cohesion and discipline forged by 50 years of impassioned conflict could not destroy capitalism, because they were linked to the power that organizations and leaders exercised over the proletarian masses. This was the power that, in August 1914 and in November 1918, made the masses a passive instrument of the bourgeoisie, imperialism and reaction. The spiritual hegemony that the bourgeois past exercises over the workers has led to a splitting of the proletariat into ideologically antagonistic groups in different countries of Western Europe, thus precluding any class unity. Originally, Social Democracy tried to establish unity, but because of its opportunist tactics, these efforts were useless.

"The domination of bourgeois ideology over the masses does not rule out the fact that, in times of crisis, when the masses are driven to despair and to action, the power of tradition is temporarily eclipsed—as in Germany of November 1918. However, the ideology soon reasserts itself and becomes one of the factors contributing to the re-emergence of the bourgeoisie. The German example shows the concrete forces at work, forces that we will refer to as the hegemony of the bourgeois: the veneration of abstract formulas, such as 'democracy'; the force of habit in thinking, such as in the idea that socialism can be established by parliamentary leaders and through a socialist government; the proletariat's lack of self-confidence, as shown by the influence exercised over it by the monstrous dissemination of false reports about Russia; the proletariat's lack of faith in its own resources; but above all else, the belief in the party, the organization, the leaders who, over several decades, personified the revolutionary conflict and its objectives. The enormous material and spiritual power of these organizations, these gigantic machines created by the masses themselves through long years of hard work—machines that embodied the tradition of forms of conflict appropriate for the entire period that the workers' movement had been a part of the vigorous development of capitalism—now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies that were awakening among the masses.

"This case was not to remain an isolated one. The contradictions between the proletariat's spiritual immaturity, as evidenced by the strength of bourgeois traditions within it, and the rapid collapse of the capitalist economy can be resolved only through the process of revolutionary

Democracy. Cf. Walter Neumann, *Die Gewerkschaften in Ruhrgebiet* (Cologne, 1951), pp. 10ff. They degenerated into paternalism and parochialism.

development, by revolts and seizures of power, and with many reverses; for this contradiction is not an accidental one, since the spiritual maturity required to win power and freedom is inconceivable within the framework of a flourishing capitalism. That is why the idea of a revolutionary course of action—during which the proletariat would long and vainly besiege the fortress of capital with both old and new methods of warfare, and then one day conquer it completely—is among the least likely of hypotheses. Suddenly, the tactic of the well-organized and prolonged siege led by clever strategists is without foundation. The tactical problem is not one of establishing the feasibility of a quick conquest of power, since in this case there would be an illusion of power. But, rather, this problem is one of developing the preconditions within the proletariat for a permanent class power. No minority agitators can solve this problem, since its solution can come only through the action of the revolutionary class as a whole. Even if the prospect of such a seizure of power seems to kindle little enthusiasm in the populace, this does not mean that they are categorically opposed; on the contrary, it indicates that, to the extent to which the population has not been won over to communism, they are ready at all times to close their ranks, with the utmost vigor, in support of the reaction against the revolution. A party dictatorship of such fragility can only mask itself behind an alliance that strongly suggests the proverbial 'hangman's noose.'¹²

"When the proletariat has succeeded, through a powerful insurrection, in breaking the bankrupt domination of the bourgeoisie and when its more clear-sighted vanguard, the Communist Party, has assumed political leadership, then its imperative mission is to use whatever means necessary to combat the weaknesses of the working class and to strengthen its power, so that it can meet the challenge of the revolutionary conflicts to come. The main objective should be to raise the masses to the highest level of activity, to stimulate their spirit of initiative, to increase their self-confidence, enabling them to decide for themselves the task they must fulfill and the means to do this. To achieve this, the predominance of the traditional organizations and old leaders must come to an end—and this precludes any type of coalition government, since it can only weaken the proletariat. New forms of organization must be perfected; the material strength of the masses must be

12. These lines refer primarily to the Hungarian Commune. This partly explains why this text appeared in *Kommunismus*, which was predominantly the voice of those who saw in the collaboration of the Hungarian Communists and Socialists one of the main causes of the collapse of August 1919. Cf. Ladislaus Rudas, "Die Proletarierdiktatur in Ungarn," *Kommunismus*, 1, 1921; and the documents published by Helmut Gruber in the collection, *International Communism in the Era of Lenin* (New York, 1967), pp. 135-69.

increased. Only in this way will it be possible to reorganize production as the most effective defense against the attacks of foreign capital; for, if this is not done, the counter-revolution will reappear in strengthened form.

"The power held by the bourgeoisie in this phase is simply the spiritual dependence of the proletariat. The development of the revolution lies in the process of the proletariat's emancipating itself from this dependence, from this tradition of past ages, an emancipation possible only through the direct experience of class struggles. When capitalism has held sway for a long time, and when, in consequence, the workers' struggle extends over several generations, the proletariat is compelled, in each period, to forge for itself the methods, forms, and means of combat suitable for the stage of development reached by capitalism. But soon these forms cease to be viewed for what they really are: instruments with a time limit to their usefulness. In fact, they are overvalued, viewed as permanent forms, absolutely valid and ideologically sanctified—only to become later on chains from which the proletariat must struggle to free itself. While the working class is undergoing an accelerated transformation and development, its leaders remain fixed in the mental attitudes of an earlier completed stage, and become spokesmen for a bygone phase. Therefore these leaders' influence is liable to hinder the movement; the old forms of action, hardened in dogmas and organizations, are elevated to objectives in themselves, and this makes a new orientation and adaptation to new conditions of conflict more difficult. This is equally true of the present period. In each phase of its evolution, the class struggle should shake off the traditions of the earlier phases, in order to focus clearly on its own tasks and to carry them to completion. The revolution, therefore, develops through a process of internal conflict. In effect, then, it is within the proletariat's own ranks that the main obstacles are generated over which the proletariat must triumph. Once these obstacles have been overcome and the proletariat has risen above its own limitations, the path is open to communism."

IV.

"During the period of the Second International, the two main forms of the class conflict were parliamentarianism and trade unionism.

"It was the first International Workingmen's Association that originally formulated the principles of this tactical approach. It thus took up a position (in a manner consistent with Marxist theory) toward the ideas born in the precapitalist, petty-bourgeois phase, and which were therefore outmoded with the passing of that phase. According to those conceptions, the proletarian class struggle should take on the character of an uninterrupted struggle to improve the workers' conditions, culminating in the conquest of

political power. Since the era of bourgeois revolutions and armed insurrections was completed, political action could be pursued only within the framework of national states, and trade union action only within an even narrower framework. The First International was doomed to break up for this reason and also because of the division between the new tactical approach, which it was not attempting to implement, and anarchism, in which the old ideas and methods of struggle survived. It bequeathed this new tactical approach to those charged with carrying it out—that is, to the Social Democratic Parties, which were springing up everywhere simultaneously with the trade unions. When the Second International developed from this legacy, in the form of a rather loosely knit federation, it had to confront once again the traditions of the preceding period, embodied in anarchism, and, it regarded the heritage of the First International as a foundation to be adopted without question.

"Today, every militant communist knows why these methods of struggle were necessary and useful. When the working class first effectively emerged and grew with capitalism, it was not yet in a position to create organs allowing it to direct and control social life, nor indeed would the idea of doing so have occurred to it. It first had to discover its own way and understand what is meant by capitalism and class power. Through propaganda, the Social Democratic Party, vanguard of the proletariat, had to unmask the nature of the regime, and, by establishing class demands, point out to the masses what their objectives should be. That is why it was necessary for their representatives to go into Parliament, the center of bourgeois domination, to voice their views there and to participate in the conflicts of the political parties.

"Things are different now that the proletarian struggle has reached a revolutionary stage. We shall not discuss here whether parliamentarianism, as a system of government, has any value whatever for the self-government of the masses, or whether it weakens rather than strengthens the system of soviets. At the point we have reached, it is a matter of using it as an instrument for the proletarian conflict. Parliamentarianism constitutes the typical form of struggle waged through leaders, with the masses themselves playing only a subordinate role. In practice, it boils down to handing over effective leadership of the class struggle to special people, to deputies; and, this naturally fosters the illusion among the masses that others can wage the struggle on their behalf. Yesterday it was assumed that such deputies were able to secure by parliamentary activity important reforms benefitting the workers. The illusion was even fostered that they could achieve the socialist revolution through a few parliamentary decrees. Today, when the system

appears to be in decay, it is noteworthy that the utilization of the parliamentary seat holds an extraordinary interest for communist propaganda. In both cases, power reverts to the leaders, and it goes without saying that the shaping of policy is left to the specialists—if need be, under the democratic guise of discussions and congressional motions. But the history of Social Democracy is one of a constant succession of vain efforts aimed at enabling the militants themselves to determine party policy. As long as the masses have not created the organs for their own action, and as long as revolution is not the order of the day, this is inevitable. On the other hand, as soon as the masses show that they are capable of actively intervening, and therefore of deciding for themselves, the damage caused by parliamentarianism is of unprecedented seriousness.

"As we have already emphasized, the tactical problem boils down to the essential question: How are we to uproot among the proletarian masses the traditional bourgeois mode of thinking that is paralyzing them? Anything that strengthens routine ideas is harmful. The most tenacious, the most solidly anchored, aspect of this mentality is a dependence on leaders which induces the masses to abandon to such people the power to shape and to direct matters pertaining to their class. . . .

"The revolution requires that the proletariat itself solve all the major problems of social reconstruction, make difficult decisions, and participate completely in the creative movement. It follows that the vanguard, and then the ever increasing masses, should take matters into their own hands, should regard themselves as responsible agents, should investigate, propagandize, fight, experiment, weigh and then dare and be involved to the utmost. But all this is difficult and painful; and that is why, as long as the working class believes that there is an easier way, that of having others act for them. . . . they will evade the issue and will remain inactive, imprisoned in old ways of thinking and old weaknesses."

Parliamentarianism not only insures the absolute predominance of leaders over the masses, but also corrupts the masses by leading them to make a fetish of legality and of party coalitions and to regard means as essential, and not ends. "From being a vanguard uniting the whole working class for revolutionary action, the Communist Party is changing into a parliamentary formation, with a legal existence equal to that of other parties—in fact, a new version of the old Social Democracy, but with leftist slogans. . . ."

V.

"On the spiritual level, the dominance of the leadership over the masses is embodied in parliamentarianism; on the material level, it is embodied in the

trade union movement. In a capitalist system, the trade unions constitute the natural proletarian form of organization—and Marx, in a period now remote, stressed their importance as such. With the development of capitalism and, still more, in the era of imperialism, the trade unions were transformed increasingly into huge bureaucratic associations with a tendency to proliferate, analogous to that of the former bourgeois state organism. A class of officials, a bureaucracy, was created among them, which had at its disposal all the means of power: money, the press, the promotion of junior personnel. In many respects, they had extensive prerogatives, so many that their members, originally intended to be the servants of the masses, have now become their masters and identify the organization with themselves. The trade unions also resemble the state and its bureaucracy in this respect, so that, despite a democratic set-up, the rank and file trade unionists have no means of imposing their wishes on the leaders; in effect, an ingenious system of regulations and statutes smothers the least sign of revolt before it can become a threat to higher echelons."

Years of incessant efforts on the part of a trade union opposition are required to secure any gains, which are often only a change of leaders. "That is why, in recent years, both before and after the war, revolts occurred on several occasions in England, America, and Germany, in which the rank and file unionists went out on strike despite their leaders' intentions and the decisions of their organizations. This occurred in a wholly natural way and was regarded as such. It shows that trade unions, far from unifying their members, became estranged from them. We have here another point in common with the state: the workers are no longer masters in their own house, but find themselves as opposed to their own organizations as they are to external powers above them and against which they see themselves compelled to revolt, even though such organizations were produced by their own efforts and wishes. When the revolt dies down, the old leaders resume their place and continue to maintain their power, despite the hatred and powerless exasperation of the masses, because they can count on their indifference, their lack of foresight, united will and perseverance. The old leaders have in their favor the intrinsic need for the trade union, since these organizations represent for the workers the only means of combatting capital.

"By limiting capitalist tendencies toward absolutism, thus ensuring the existence of the working class, the trade union movement fulfills its role within the system and thereby becomes a major foundation of the system. But from the moment that revolution breaks down the proletariat assumes a different role and is transformed from a force stabilizing capitalist society into

an agent of its destruction. Consequently, the proletariat must also come into conflict with the trade unions."

The trade union bureaucracy does not limit itself to dealing with the state bureaucracy. It also encourages workers to approve the agreements it has reached with the capitalists. In Germany it resorts to demagoguery, to violence, and to the most shameless lying; in England, it uses more subtle methods so as "to give the workers the impression that it is using every means to achieve their demands, while in reality it is sabotaging them.

"Marx and Lenin have repeatedly said of the state that its mode of functioning, despite the existence of formal democracy, precludes its use as an instrument of proletarian revolution. The same, we believe, can be said of the trade unions. Their counterrevolutionary power will not be destroyed or even impaired simply by a change of leadership, by the substitution of leftists or 'revolutionaries' for reactionary leaders. Rather, the form of organization itself reduces the masses to impotence and prevents them from making it the instrument of their will. The revolution can conquer only if the trade union is overthrown, or rather, wholly shattered so as to become something completely different.

"Arising from within the proletariat, the system of soviets (workers councils) can uproot and supplant both the state and trade union bureaucracies. The mission of the soviets is to serve as new political organs for the proletariat in place of parliament and as the nucleus for new trade unions. During the recent lively controversies within the German Social Democratic Party, certain people derided the idea that an organizational form could have a revolutionary character, since the whole question centered on the attitude of the militants. However, if the revolution is one in which the masses assume control of their own affairs—the direction of society and of production—any form of organization that excludes the possibility of their ruling and directing themselves is counterrevolutionary and harmful. It must be replaced by a revolutionary organization, revolutionary in the sense that it enables the workers to make all decisions. This in no way implies that a new form of organization should be created and perfected—but without their help—so that they may then be able to use it to manifest their revolutionary will. On the contrary, this new form can be created only within the revolutionary process, by the workers radicalizing themselves. It is necessary, however, to know the real nature of the present forms of organization in order to determine the attitude of communist militants toward subsequent attempts to weak or to destroy the old forms.

"In the revolutionary syndicalist tendencies and even more in the 'industrial' trade union movement is to be found the greatest evidence of a

desire to restrain the bureaucratic machinery and rely on the activity of the masses. For this reason, the majority of communists support these organizations instead of the centralized federations. As long as capitalism continues, these new formations will have only a limited following. The IWW is important because of a special circumstance: the great many unskilled workers, mainly recent immigrants, who made a mass exodus from the old federation.¹³ The English *shop committees* and *shop stewards* represent an example much closer to the practical organ of struggle created by the masses confronting bureaucracy.¹⁴ By design, the German unions conform even more to the idea of workers councils but remain weak because of the stagnation of the revolution. To the extent that it succeeds in weakening the cohesion of the centralized associations and the counter-revolutionary power of the trade union bureaucracy, every new formation of this kind clears the way for revolution. The idea of unifying all opposition forces within these associations to secure a majority there and to transform them completely is certainly attractive. But, in the first place, it is just as absurd as the idea of conquering the Social Democratic Party from within (since bureaucracy is so adept at strangling an opposition before it really becomes a threat). In the second place, a revolution does not unfold

13. Pannekoek would return to this subject in an article published in the United States. An extract from it will show his skill to get to the essence of a revolutionary current, assessing its strengths and its weaknesses. He first recalls that the IWW came about in response to the narrow conservatism of the American Federation of Labor and the multiplicity of trade union organizations within the same industry, to which they counterposed their slogan: "one big union." "Contrary to the haughty disdain of the well-paid old American skilled labor toward the unorganized immigrants, it was these worst paid proletarians that the IWW led into the fight. . . . By a glorious series of big battles it infused the spirit of organization and self-reliance into the hearts of these masses. . . . Instead of the heavy stone-masoned buildings of the old unions, they represented the flexible construction, with a fluctuating membership, contracting in time of peace, swelling and growing in the fight itself. Contrary to the conservative capitalist spirit of the trade unionism, the Industrial Workers were anti-capitalist and stood for revolution. Therefore they were persecuted with intense hatred by the whole capitalist world. They were thrown into jail and tortured on false accusations; a new crime was even invented on their behalf: that of 'criminal syndicalism.'

"Industrial unionism alone as a method of fighting the capitalist class is not sufficient to overthrow capitalist society and to conquer the world for the working class. It fights the capitalists as employers on the economic field of production, but doesn't have the means to overthrow their political stronghold, state power. Nevertheless, the IWW so far has been the most revolutionary organization in America. More than any other it has contributed to rouse class consciousness and insight, solidarity and unity in the working class, to turn its eyes toward communism, and to prepare its fighting power." Pannekoek wrote this under the pen name of J. Harper, "Trade-Unionism," *International Council Correspondence*, II:1, Jan. 1936, pp. 18-19. Cf. also, *Workers' Councils*, pp. 170-71. For an excellent account of this, cf. Daniel Guérin, *Mouvement ouvrier aux Etats-Unis, 1867-1967* (Paris, 1968), pp. 36-46, 51.

14. Cf. Branko Pribicevic, *The Shop-Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control, 1910-1922* (Oxford, 1959).

according to a well-ordered program. Rather it is the spontaneous explosion of committed, active groups that is the major motive force. If the communists opposed these attempts by opportunists to obtain immediate advantages by glossing over the different trade union tendencies, they would then find that the obstacles presented by the opportunists are larger than ever.

"When the workers have succeeded in creating the soviets, their own organs of power and action, it can be said that the state is already disintegrated, abolished. The trade unions, a modern form of self-generated organization, will survive the state for a time because they are rooted in more recent traditions, based on intense personal experience. They will continue to function as representative organs of the proletariat, even though the illusions of the democratic state have dissipated. The new formations will appear as attempts to adapt trade unions, which, after all, are the products of working class activity, to new conditions. As a result of the revolutionary process, the new forms of proletarian struggle and organization will develop on the soviet model through constant metamorphoses and new developments."

VI.¹⁵

It is a neo-reformist idea to suppose that capitalism will succumb to a well-ordered siege, using methods proven by the army of the Communist Party and mounting wave after wave of assault, while workers gradually take control in the factories. Such thinking is out of touch with reality in Western Europe. First the old conditions must be dissolved and the workers must free themselves from old ways of thinking; bourgeois power must be crippled by strikes; the peasants must sweep away the vestiges of feudalism. Put simply, "a period of social and political chaos is inevitable. . . ."

"However, two questions can be dealt with briefly. The first, concerning industrial technicians, will cause only passing difficulties. Even though these specialists think in an absolutely bourgeois manner and are passionate enemies of proletarian power, they will necessarily come around in the end. The proper functioning of transportation and industry involves, above all else, the supply of raw materials. It coincides, therefore, with the problem of replenishing supplies, an essential problem of the revolution in Western Europe, where highly industrialized capitalist countries cannot subsist without imports. In the context of the revolution, the problem of renewing food supplies is closely linked to the agrarian question; from the beginning of the revolutionary period, a communist reorganization of agriculture should

15. This section and the following have been substantially cut. They deal with problems of the "transitional phase" in immediate, concrete terms and therefore have at best a historical interest. However, we have included one passage to give a general idea of Pannekoek's concerns.

take precautions against famine. The big landed estates of the nobility are ripe for expropriation and collective administration. The small peasant class will find itself freed from all capitalist exploitation and encouraged toward intensive cultivation through state cooperation and assistance. The middle peasant class, which, for example in western and southern Germany,¹⁶ holds half of the land, thinks in highly individualistic terms and is therefore anti-communist. But because it holds an unshakable economic position and cannot be expropriated, it must be integrated into the whole economic process by controlling the exchange of foodstuffs, and encouraging productivity. In agriculture, communism will pursue a policy of increasing productivity and of restricting individual cultivation, similar to the policy it pursues in industry. It follows from this that the workers should regard the landed proprietors as their enemies, the agricultural labors and lower peasant class as their allies, while taking care not to alienate the middle peasant class, although the latter might well be hostile to them at first. Thus, during the chaotic first phase when the economy is badly disrupted, the requisition of food supplies produced by these categories of peasants should be resorted to only as an exceptional measure and solely for the purpose of securing a scarcity balance between urban and rural areas. It is imports, above all else, which will win the battle against famine. Soviet Russia, with its abundance of agricultural products and raw materials, will be the savior and the sustainer of the revolution in Western Europe. Therefore, it is vital to its own interests that the working class of Western Europe should defend Russia.

"The reconstruction of the economy, however formidable, is not a problem to be solved by the Communist Party. It is the proletarian masses who will solve it, as soon as their spiritual and moral capabilities are brought into play. The Party's task is to arouse these forces and accelerate their development. It should seek to uproot all the accepted ideas that intimidate the proletariat and threaten its confidence; it should discredit everything that fosters the illusion that there is an easier and which therefore dissuades the proletariat from using radical methods, limiting them to half-measures and compromises.

VII.

"The transition from capitalism to communism will not be achieved by the simple conquest of political power, the establishment of soviets or the abolition of private property, although such measures do provide the broad

16. On the peasants' councils in Bavaria, cf. Paul Werner (Frölich), *Die bayrische Räterepublik*, undated (1919), pp. 36-37; and especially Wilhelm Mattes, *Die bayrischen Bauernräte* (Stuttgart, 1921).

outlines of development. This transition will be made possible only through the power to build anew. At the present, the forms of enterprise and organization created by capitalism are solidly grounded in the minds of the masses, and it will take political and economic revolution to change this. Within the working class under capitalism, forms of organization have come into existence whose power cannot be immediately and fully measured and which, therefore, will play a fundamental role in the course of the revolution.

"The primary such form is the political party. The notorious role of Social Democracy in the present crisis of capitalism is nearing its end.¹⁷ Its left-wing factions (such as the USP in Germany) are harmful, not only because they divide the proletariat, but even more because they foster confusion and prevent the masses from resorting to action due to their concept of Social Democracy, according to which the dominant political leaders shape the destiny of the people by their acts and negotiations. And if a communist party opts for the parliamentary road and aspires, not to class dictatorship, but to party dictatorship—in other words, dictatorship by the party leaders—this, too, may shackle development. A case in point is the attitude of the KPD during the March revolutionary movement; by favoring a 'loyal opposition' in the event that a 'purely socialist government' should come into power—their pretext being that the proletariat was not ready to exercise its dictatorship—they deflected any vigorous mass opposition to this kind of regime. . . .

"Not only is such a government incapable of actively promoting the revolution, but its only purpose can be to arrest its development at some halfway stage. Seeking by every means to prevent enlarging the divisions in capitalism and the emergence of workers' power, it behaves in a deliberately counterrevolutionary fashion. The communists have no choice but to combat it vigorously and with no concern for the consequences."

In the Anglo-Saxon countries the leftist trade union leaders such as those of the IWW, who adhere to the Third International, "do not regard the system of soviets as the purest form of the dictatorship of the proletariat but, on the contrary, as a government of politicians and intellectuals whose permanent basis is supplied by the workers' organizations. In their view, then, it is the trade union movement. . . that should exercise power. If the old ideal of

17. This prognosis was by no means an exaggeration at the time, at least in regard to Germany, as election results show. While by the Constituent Assembly elections of January 19, 1919, the Majority Party had secured 11.5 million votes, or 38 percent of the votes cast, compared with 2.3 million votes—8 percent—received by the Independents, in the next year's National Assembly (June 6, 1920), the USPD polled nearly 6 million votes (18 percent), only 700,000 more than that (21 percent), and the KPD just 442,000 votes (2 percent); in Berlin 456,000 electors voted USPD; only 186,000 voted SPD.

'industrial democracy' is realized, if the trade unions become masters of the factories, economic administration as a whole will return to their common organ, the congress of trade unions. Thus the workers' parliament will replace the parliament of the bourgeois parties. But, in such situations, some will recoil at the idea of an exclusive and 'unjust' class dictatorship, regarding it as a violation of democracy: by all means led the workers accede to power, they say, but the others must not be deprived of their rights. Consequently, in addition to the workers parliament, which administers everything connected with labor, they suggest a second chamber, elected by universal suffrage, representing all classes and invested with certain powers over matters of public and cultural life as well as political questions in general."¹⁸

Pannekoek is not concerned here with the idea of a 'labor' government endorsed in England by the official trade union movement, since such a government could only serve the bourgeoisie. "However, it still remains to be seen whether the discerning English bourgeoisie, with their liberal views, will prove capable by themselves of deceiving and choking the masses more effectively than is done by the workers' bureaucrats."

The leftist trade unionists, for their part, express "a limited ideology, which was developed in the course of trade union conflicts and which hinders them from seeing in world capital a totality with multiple interlocking forms—financial, banking, agrarian, colonial—since they are aware only of its industrial form. . . . As a result of their failure to see that the whole abstract domain of political and spiritual life is conditioned by the mode of production, they are ready to hand over that domain to the intellectual bourgeoisie, provided that it agrees to allow labor to predominate. Such a workers' government would be, in reality, a government by the trade union bureaucracy, aided by the leftist sector of the old state government, the first handing over to the second, because of its specialized ability, control over the domains of culture, politics, etc. Its economic program would surely have nothing in common with communist expropriation, but would merely seek to expropriate big capital, the larger banks and landed capital, while leaving untouched the 'honest' profit of the small employer, fleeced by big capital and dependent upon it. It is even doubtful whether this government would support full and complete freedom for the Indies, whereas this demand is an essential part of the communist program.

"One cannot foresee the manner in which a political form such as this will be realized. In effect, it is possible to discern the motive forces and the general

18. In this connection, cf. Max Adler, *Démocratie et conseils ouvriers* (Paris, 1967). Originally published in 1919.

tendencies—the abstract characteristics—but not the concrete aspects it will assume from one country to another, the particular combinations on which it will rest. Thus, the English bourgeoisie has always shown its skill in making timely concessions that take the steam out of the revolutionary thrust; and that is why the limits of this tactic will vary in terms of the intensity of the economic crisis at any given moment. If rank-and-file revolt threatens trade union discipline while the masses are opting for communism, the reformist or radical trade union leaders will adopt a middle course; if the opposition against the old political policy of the reformist leaders is accentuated, the leftist leaders and the communists will walk hand in hand.

"These tendencies are not peculiar to England. In every country, the trade unions constitute the most powerful workers' organization; and after a political conflagration, when the old power is overthrown, they are the ones that emerge as the best organized force and that have the greatest authority." The old trade union leaders then try to increase still more their grip on governmental power, but this has the effect of compromising them with the masses. In these circumstances, other, more leftist leaders seek to form a workers' government; in Germany, their chances of succeeding are by no means negligible. But this regime would be unstable, since a new split is inevitable: some would simply aim at consolidating their positions of strength within the bureaucracy and, eventually, at the parliamentary level; others would strive to extend the system of soviets. "It may be that the road taken by the communists often skirts that of certain leftist leaders, but, nonetheless, it would be a mistake not to stress the differences of principles and objectives. This is relevant to the communists' attitude toward the present trade union organizations, since everything that contributes to strengthening their cohesion and power also strengthens a force destined one day to be a stumbling block in the way of the revolutionary movement.

"When communism wages a bitter struggle against these transitional political forms, it represents the living revolutionary tendency within the proletariat. This same proletarian action, which, by shattering the old machinery of bourgeois power, opens the door to workers' bureaucracies, is the action that simultaneously leads the masses to create their own organs, the councils, and set about undermining the nucleus of this bureaucratic machinery in the trade unions. Thus, the creation of the system of soviets also represents the struggle of the proletariat to replace the incomplete form of class dictatorship with its complete form.

"Due to the problems involved in 'reorganizing' the economy, a bureaucracy of leaders could retain a great measure of power for a long time while the ability of the masses to rid themselves of this bureaucracy slowly

develops. These diverse forms and phases of development, however, do not gradually evolve in the logical succession we have outlined here. On the contrary, they parallel, intermingle with and crisscross each other in a chaotic mix of complementary tendencies and separate conflicts so that it is impossible to grasp the course of development in its entirety. As Marx pointed out, the proletarian revolutions 'constantly criticize one another, interrupt at every moment their own course, turn back to what seemed disposed of in order to begin on it anew, pitilessly ridicule the hesitations and weaknesses and miseries of their early attempts, seem to knock down their enemy only to allow him to draw new strength from the ground and to rise up again in formidable opposition. . . .'

"Those forms of proletarian power that insufficiently express its strength must be overturned as part of the process of developing this strength—a process that occurs through the oppositions and catastrophes of class struggle. At the beginning there was action, but the action was only a beginning. A moment of unanimous determination is enough to sweep away one form of power; but only permanent unity—whose necessary condition is clear-sightedness—can ensure that the victory is not dissipated for those who have won it at such cost. In the absence of this unity, a complete reversal of the situation occurs, not the return of the old masters, but new forms of domination, with new people and new illusions.

"Every new phase of the revolution sees the emergence of a new category of leaders who hitherto did not have any leadership role. They now emerge as the representatives of specific forms of organization whose triumph corresponds to a new, more advanced stage in the self-emancipation of the proletariat.

VIII.

"While capitalism in Western Europe is collapsing, in Russia the productive apparatus is making progress under the new regime despite great difficulties. The existence of a communist regime does not imply that production has been completely collectivized, for this can only be the end product of a prolonged process of development. It does signify, however, that the working class is deliberately directing production toward communism. This process cannot exceed the present level of technical and social development. That is why it necessarily assumes transitional forms in which vestiges of the old bourgeoisie take on a special importance. On the basis of what we know in Western Europe, this is what has happened in Russia.

"Russia constitutes an immense peasant region, where industry has not developed to the point where exports and expansion are a vital necessity, as

they are in Western Europe, the 'workshop' of the world. Despite that, Russia's social development has still provided it with a working class that has progressed to the point of being able to take over the administration of society. Since most of its population are agricultural workers, the big modern industrial enterprises employ only a minority of the workers. While small enterprises still predominate, they no longer constitute a factor of exploitation and misery as in Western Europe. On the contrary, they are industrial enterprises that are attempting to improve the peasants' living standards, and which the Soviet government is seeking to link more closely with the whole society by providing them with needed products and implements, as well as by accelerating scientific and cultural education. In spite of all this, it is understandable that this form of enterprise engenders a certain individualist spirit, which can foster communism among the 'rich' peasants. The Entente was certainly relying on this when it made certain commercial propositions to the agricultural cooperatives in order to draw these social categories into the profit cycle and thereby create a bourgeois opposition movement. But the fear of feudal reaction is the stronger motivation, and their loyalties are therefore with the present government. That is why these attempts are doomed to failure, and if Western European capitalism collapses, this danger will vanish completely.

"Industry, now largely centralized, is devoid of any kind of exploitation; it is the heart of the new order, and the state leaders rely on the industrial proletariat. But this production, too, is in a transitional situation; the technical and administrative cadres of state factories and services have considerable powers, an understandable phenomenon in this developing communist regime. The need both to secure a rapid production growth and to raise an army to meet the reactionary assaults demanded that something be done with all urgency to remedy the dearth of highly skilled personnel. The threats of famine and enemy attack precluded full dedication to the much more prolonged task of developing the necessary skill and raising the cultural level of all citizens in order to lay the foundations of the communist collectivity. That is why a new bureaucracy had to be constructed out of political leaders and high officials; and why it was necessary to include what remained of the old order—of that class whose existence had, up to then, been regarded as a threat to the new order.¹⁹ The only effective way to counter this threat is to work zealously to develop the masses, but there will be no permanent foundations for this development until the time of abundance

19. The problem of the administration of industrial enterprises had at that time (March-April 1920) been discussed at the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Cf. Léonard Schapiro, *Les Bolchéviks et l'Opposition* (Paris, 1947), pp. 184-98.

comes, when man will cease to be a slave to his work. Abundance alone creates the conditions for freedom and equality. As long as the struggle against nature and capital remains undecided, excessive specialization cannot be avoided.

"It is notable that our analysis of the different situations in Western Europe (insofar as one can foresee the resumption of the revolutionary process there) and in Russia uncovers the same politico-economic structure: a basically communist industry, within which the workers' councils form the organs of self-administration, but which is subject to the technical direction and political domination of a workers' bureaucracy; while alongside this, agriculture, dominated by small and medium landed property owners, preserves an individualist and petty bourgeois character. There is nothing surprising about this coincidence, since such social structure is not decided by political prehistory but by basic economic and technological conditions—the degree both of industrial and of agricultural development and of the formation of the masses; and this level was identical in both places. But apart from this similarity there is a great difference of direction and of aim. In Western Europe, this politico-economic structure constitutes merely a passing stage in the bourgeoisie's last-ditch effort to avoid downfall, whereas in Russia it represents a deliberate attempt to move toward communism. In Western Europe, this structure represents a phase of the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; in Russia it is a phase of economic reconstruction. Although externally similar, Western Europe is a civilization moving toward decline, whereas Russia is on its way to a new civilization.

"When the Russian Revolution, still very recent and weak, was placing its hopes of success in a prompt outbreak of the European revolution, in the West a very different idea of Russia's significance was taking shape. Russia, it was then asserted, was just the advance post of the revolution. Circumstances as favorable as they were fortuitous enabled the Russian proletariat to seize power, but this occurred too soon. In effect, this proletariat, small and uneducated, counts for little compared with the enormous mass of peasants. In view of Russia's economic backwardness, it can only lead the way for a while. As soon as the revolution occurs among the proletarian masses of Western Europe, with their experience and education in matters of technology and organization, we shall see a blossoming of communism against which the beginnings of Russian communism, however worthy of interest, will seem poor by comparison. It is in England, Germany, America, the countries where capitalism has reached its highest stage of development, where the possibility of a new mode of production has been raised that the center and the strength of the new communist world will be found.

"This way of viewing the question does not take into account the difficulties faced by the revolution in Western Europe. In a situation where the proletariat progresses only slowly in strengthening its power, and where the bourgeoisie is capable of continually regaining power or sectors of power, there can be no question of economic reorganization. In a capitalist context, the reason for this is simple: every time the bourgeoisie sees that the possibility is becoming real, they create a new chaos and destroy the foundations for a communist system of production. Resorting always to bloody repression and to ruthless destruction, they prevent a new proletarian order from developing any kind of strength. This has been the pattern in Russia. The destruction of the industrial and mining installations of the Urals and of the Donetz Basin by the armies of Kolchak and of Denikin and the need to mobilize the cream of the workers and the bulk of productive capacity against these armies have seriously injured and delayed the construction of the communist economy. . . .

"In Russia, the Soviet Republic nonetheless remains impregnable. . . , while in Western Europe, where the destruction has been equally severe, the best proletarian forces not only have been annihilated, but they also lack that source of power supplied by the existence of a great soviet state. As long as chaos and misery prevail, there can be no question of construction. Such is the fate of countries where the proletariat has not immediately grasped its task with a clear understanding of its nature and with a unanimous will—i.e., the countries in which bourgeois traditions have weakened and divided the workers, making them timorous and destroying their ideas. In the old capitalist countries, it will take decades to overcome the stupefying influence exerted over the proletariat by bourgeois culture; and, in the meantime, production will be doomed to stagnation and the land to economic sterility.

"While Western Europe is painfully struggling to free itself from its bourgeois past," stagnation is eroding its material riches and diminishing the productive capacities of its population. "The indestructible forces, the knowledge, the technical skills, are not linked with these countries; those who possess them are finding a new fatherland in Russia, where the importation of European material goods and technology can also have liberating effects. The probable outcome of the commercial agreements that Russia has concluded with Western Europe and America—if they are seriously and extensively carried out—will be a deepening of these contrasts, since they will stimulate the economic construction in Russia while in Europe they will delay the day of destruction, allow capitalism to get a second wind, and paralyze the action of the masses. Neither the duration nor the extent of this process is presently foreseeable. At the political level, this will probably lead to stagnation,

expressed either in a bourgeois government or in one of the forms of government we have described above, accompanied by a rapid spread of opportunism in the communist movement. Resuming the old methods of struggle—participating in parliamentary activities and acting as a loyal opposition within the old trade unions—the communist parties of Western Europe will adapt to the institutions exactly as did Social Democracy before them, and they will attempt to suppress the radical, revolutionary tendency, now reduced to a minority. The idea of a new and real development of capitalism seems, however, extremely unlikely. . . . While it is possible to hold back an aggravation of the crisis”—due in large part to trade with Russia, “a permanent amelioration is out of the question, and sooner or later the crisis will recur. While the process of revolution and civil war will initially be retarded, they will come and when they do, they will involve a long, protracted struggle. . . . Meantime, in the East, the economy is developing unhindered, and new perspectives are opening up. Mankind’s newly acquired domination of social forces is drawing support from the most developed natural sciences—which the West does not know how to use—and is being united with the social sciences. And these forces, multiplied a hundredfold by the new energies engendered by liberty and equality, will make Russia the center of the new communist world order.

“Of course, this will not be the first time in human history that, during the transition to a new mode of production or to one of its phases, the center of the world has shifted. In antiquity, it shifted from the Near East to Southern Europe; then, in the Middle Ages, from the South to the West. With the appearance of mercantile capital and colonialism, first Spain, then Holland and England, took the lead—a lead that would remain with England alone after the birth of the industrial revolution. In seeking to understand the causes of these changes, one must also be guided by the general principle that, when the primitive economic form has reached its full maturity, the material and spiritual forces, the political and juridical institutions guaranteeing its existence and necessary to its development, become almost irresistible obstacles to any development toward new forms. For instance, toward the end of antiquity, the slave system held back the development of the feudal order; subsequently, guild regulations, in force throughout the great and rich cities of the Middle Ages, compelled capitalist enterprise to establish itself only in places hitherto devoid of economic importance. Similarly, the political order of French absolutism, though encouraging industry under Colbert, was later in the 18th century to shackle the expansion of new major industry, which in England was in the process of transforming the country into a manufacturing economy.

“Everything occurs, therefore, as though there exists a law of the ‘survival of outmoded forms,’ analogous to Darwin’s law of ‘the survival of the fittest’ in organic nature. When an animal species—for example, the saurians of the second era—evolved into a great variety of forms, perfectly adapted to the living conditions appropriate to a particular epoch, they became unable to evolve into a new type, because they had lost all their ability to develop. At the time of the origin of a new type, one always finds primitive forms that, because they have remained in an undifferentiated condition, have kept their evolutionary potential, while the adaptive abilities of the old species have disappeared. In society we see the phenomenon that bourgeois science shrugs off by terming it an imaginary ‘exhaustion of vital energies’ among a people or race in which economic, political and cultural primacy constantly passes from one people or country to another.

“We have just seen the reasons why the predominance of Western Europe and of America—a predominance that the bourgeoisie so readily attributes to a racial superiority that is both spiritual and moral—has vanished; we have also seen where there is a major possibility of a new predominance emerging. The countries destined to constitute the center of the new communist universe are those new countries where the masses, far from being intoxicated by the ideological miasmas of the bourgeoisie, have emerged, with the onset of industrialization, from their old, resigned passivity, acquiring at the same time a sense of community, which the communist spirit was awakening among them; countries in which there exists the raw materials necessary for the modern technology they have inherited from capitalism, now used for the renovation of traditional forms of production; countries where oppression inevitably engenders conflicts and the will to struggle, but where there is no bourgeoisie with the power to block it. Russia, a veritable subcontinent, is destined henceforth to figure in the first rank. These conditions also exist in other countries of the East—the Indies and China. Even if these Asian countries are still quite underdeveloped, any consideration of the world communist revolution must take these regions into account.

“To consider the world revolution only from the Western European perspective is to miss its universal significance; Russia is not just the eastern part of Europe, but is, to a far greater extent, the western part of Asia, both economically and politically as well as geographically. The Russia of former times had almost nothing in common with Europe. Compared with the West, it seemed close to those political and economic formations that Marx called ‘oriental despotism,’ a genre to which all the giant Asian empires, old and new, belong. In that genre, an aristocracy and princes with absolute power reigned over a largely homogeneous peasantry that varied little from one