

region to another. Equally important, they also had full control of commerce, which, though relatively modest, was important at this primitive stage. Despite frequent changes of masters, which in no way altered the basic structure, the same mode of production continued unaltered for thousands of years. Western European capital has burst upon these countries as a disruptive factor, bringing about their overthrow and impoverishment, and the subjugation and exploitation of their masses. . . .

"Although Russia has been numbered among the large world powers since 1700, it too has become a colony of European capital. Its contacts with Europe, often warlike, made it choose the same road that would later on be followed by Persia and China. Before the last war, 70 percent of the iron industry, most of the railways, 90 percent of platinum production, and 75 percent of petroleum extraction were in the hands of European capitalists.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the enormous debts of the czarist state forced the European capitalists to squeeze the Russian peasants almost to the point of starvation. While the working class in Russia labored under working conditions similar to those in Western Europe—whence the emergence of a proletarian community with revolutionary Marxist ideas—their economic situation as a whole made the country still just the most western of Asian lands.

"The Russian Revolution marks the beginning of the great Asian revolt against Western European capitalism, concentrated in England.<sup>21</sup> As a general rule, Western Europe has been interested only in the reactions of the West to this revolution, in which Russian revolutionaries, because of their high level of theoretical development, have become the educators of a proletariat aspiring toward communism. But the revolution's effects in the East are more important still, and that is why the policy of the Soviet Republic is governed by Asiatic considerations as much, or nearly so, as by European. From Moscow, where Asiatic delegations arrive one after another, there issues a constant call for liberation, for the peoples' right to self-determination, and for constant struggle against European capitalism throughout the whole of Asia. . . .

"The Asiatic cause is the cause of humanity. In Russia, in China and in the

20. For statistical data showing that the essential sectors of pre-1914 Russian industry were largely in the hands of foreign capital and that foreign banking capital had penetrated into all domains there, see Peter Lyaschchenko, *History of the National Economy of Russia to the 1917 Revolution* (New York, 1949), pp. 712-17.

21. Such sentiments were also repeatedly expressed by Lenin. For instance, at Zurich in 1917, he said: "The 1905 Revolution not only signified the awakening of the biggerst and most backward of the Asian countries. . . ; it also set all of Asia ablaze." Cited by Stanley Page, "Lenin: Prophet of World Revolution from the East," *The Russian Review*, XI, April 1952; cf. also the collection edited by Stuart Schramm and Hélène Carrière d'Encausse, *Le Marxisme et l'Asie* (Paris, 1965), pp. 170-94.

Indies, in the Russo-Siberian plain and in the fertile valleys of the Ganges and the Yangtse-Kiang, are 800 million people, more than half the earth's population, almost three times as many as in Europe. Outside Russia, the revolution is germinating everywhere: on the one hand, major strikes are breaking out in towns where the industrial proletariat are penned up, such as Bombay and Hangkow; on the other hand, national movements led by intellectuals are emerging but are still weak. As far as one can judge from the sparse information that the English press allows to filter through, the World War has greatly facilitated national movements, even though they are still violently repressed, while industry is undergoing such a level of development that American gold is copiously flowing into the Far East. The wave of economic crises, when it reaches these countries—it seems to have already reached Japan—will provoke a fresh outbreak of conflict there. It may be questioned, therefore, whether support should be given to the purely nationalist movements in Asia, which aim at restoring a capitalist regime and which are opposed to movements to free the proletariat. However, it is probable that this development will take a different course. Up to now, the emerging intellectual class has certainly drawn its inspiration from European nationalism, and, inasmuch as it is composed of ideologists of the nascent native bourgeoisie, it propagates the idea of a bourgeois-national government modeled after the Western type. But this ideal is losing its attraction as Europe declines; and doubtless the intellectuals are bound to feel strongly the influence of Russian bolshevism, thereby will be led to join the proletarian movement of strikes and insurrections.<sup>22</sup> Thus, sooner perhaps than one might suppose, the Asiatic movements of national liberation will adopt a communist outlook and a communist program, on the solid material basis offered by the class struggle of workers and peasants against the barbarous oppression that world capital is exercising over them.<sup>23</sup>

22. This is an allusion to two articles published in German in *Vorbote* on April 2, 1916: Radek's "Theses on Imperialism and Oppression"; and Lenin's "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Peoples." We shall return to this question shortly.

23. Rudi Dutschke, *La Révolte des étudiants allemands* (Paris, 1968), pp. 95-96, cited in a flippant way certain lines from the end of this section, omitting among other things any reference to the links between intellectuals and the bourgeoisie in the national liberation wars in underdeveloped countries. According to him, Pannekoek's analysis remains "descriptive" while taking on a "prophetic" aspect. And Dutschke comments on this as follows: "This passage vaguely outlines the need for a prolonged cultural evolution, especially in the highly developed countries of Central Europe, as a prelude to a possible revolutionization of the whole of society." Then, after having cited long extracts from an article by Lenin on the emergence of the revolution in Asia, he adds in connection with the Bolshevik leader: "One searches his work in vain for an answer to the very essential questions posed by the need to transform the consciousness of the European proletariat." One could not find a clearer example of what has separated Russian Bolshevism from Western European Communism.

"The fact that these societies are mostly peasant does not pose an insurmountable obstacle, any more than it did in Russia. The communist collectivity does not form a dense network of manufacturing towns, for the capitalist division between industrial and agricultural areas does not exist in Russia; on the contrary, agriculture must occupy a major position there. No doubt, the predominance of the agricultural sector makes the revolution more difficult, since the necessary mental attitudes are not quite as strong among the peasants as the proletariat. Certainly, therefore, a longer period of political and spiritual upheavals will be required. In these countries the difficulties are completely different from those found in Europe. More passive than active, they are less concerned with the effort of resistance than they are with the delay in the formation of the homogeneous force required to rout the foreign exploiter. We shall not dwell here on their specific traits: religious and national divisions in the Indies, or the petty-bourgeois character of China. In whatever way the political and economic forms develop, the basic and preliminary problem is to end the domination of European and American capital.

"The great task of the workers of Western Europe and the United States, united with the Asian multitudes, is to accomplish the final destruction of the capitalist system. This task now is only in its beginning stages. When the German revolution has taken a decisive turn and has successfully joined Russia; when the wars of the revolutionary masses break out in England and in America; and when the Indies are in the grip of insurrection; when communism extends from the Rhine to the Indian Ocean—then the world revolution will enter into its most violent phase. The English bourgeoisie, masters of the world, supported by their vassals in the League of Nations and by their Japanese and American allies, will find themselves attacked both from within and from without. In the colonies, upheavals and wars of liberation will threaten its hegemony, while at the center, its power will be paralyzed by strikes and civil war. England will be compelled to mobilize all its forces and to raise armies of mercenaries in order to hold out against these two enemies. When the English working class, vigorously supported by the rest of the European proletariat, moves to the offensive, it will fight in two ways for communism—by opening up the way to communism in England, and by helping Asia emancipate itself. In return, it can count on the support of the communist forces when the bourgeois mercenaries attempt to drown the proletariat's struggle in blood—for Western Europe, including Great Britain, is simply a large, island-like extension of the immense Russo-Asian geographical unit. It is through the common struggle against capitalism that the proletarian masses of the world will be united. And on the day when, after

many difficult struggles, the exhausted European workers at last see the radiant dawn of Liberty, they will be greeted from the East by the emancipated peoples of Asia. At the center of everything will be Moscow, capital of the new humanity."

#### Postscript

"Drawn up in April, the preceding reflections were sent to Russia so that they might influence some of the decisions to be made by the Executive Committee and the Congress of the Communist International. Since then, the Moscow executive and the Russian leadership have wholeheartedly rallied to opportunism, thus insuring the dominance of this tendency during the Second Congress of the Communist International.

"This policy was first applied in Germany, where Radek became its most zealous advocate. It consisted of imposing on the German communists—over whom he exercised control through the leadership of the German Communist Party (KPD)—his tactics of parliamentarianism and of support for the trade union federation. The effect of this was to divide and weaken the movement. Since Radek has become secretary of the executive, this policy has become that of this organ as a whole. Although fruitless thus far, the attempts to persuade the Independents to attach themselves to Moscow have been pursued with the utmost vigor. On the other hand, the anti-parliamentarian members of the German Communist Workers Party (KAPD) have been treated in a completely different way, although it cannot be doubted that they naturally belong with the Communist International. The KAPD, it was said, had taken positions against the Third International in all important matters, and it was admitted as a member only on certain conditions. The auxiliary bureau in Amsterdam, which was once looked upon as its equivalent and treated as such, has been reduced to silence.<sup>24</sup> Talks have begun with

24. This auxiliary (or provisional) bureau was set up in January 1920 at the initiative of the executive of the Communist International (and of Radek) to serve as a liaison among the various groups or parties of Western Europe and America that claimed membership in the International. Its objectives were to serve as a regional propaganda center, to publish a theoretical organ, and to organize exchanges at the regional level. Due to a lack of funds, only the last of these objectives was achieved. In addition, an international conference was held in Amsterdam in February 1920, but the police intervened and the assembly had to disperse. Cf. James Hulse, *The Forming of the International* (Stamford, 1964), pp. 152-60. The leadership of the bureau (Wijnkoop, Roland-Holst and Rutgers) was up to its neck in the controversy within the Dutch Communist Party between the majority parliamentarian sector led by the deputies Wijnkoop and Ravesteyn (who had the upper hand in the editorship of *De Tribune*) and the partisans of the council form. Cf. van Ravesteyn, *op. cit.*; and H. Gorter, *Het opportunisme in die N. C. P.* (Amsterdam, 1921). The Bureau's first and only *Bulletin* published "Theses on Parliamentarianism," whose author could easily have been Rutgers. According to these theses, parliamentary action is useful for propaganda, but not in a revolutionary period, when Parliament "can serve only as a rallying

delegates of the center of the French Socialist Party with a view to their admission.<sup>25</sup> According to Lenin, the English communists should not only take part in the legislative elections, but also join the Labor Party—a political association affiliated with the Second International and with the majority of the reaction trade union leaders as its members. These various options show the determination of the Russian leaders to establish close relations with the workers' organizations of Western Europe, even though they are not yet communist. While the radical communists still try to enlighten the masses and to inculcate revolutionary ideas in them through a vigorous and principled struggle against all bourgeois, social-patriotic and wavering tendencies, the leaders of the International are trying to win them over *en masse*, without demanding that they fundamentally revise their basic ideas.<sup>26</sup>

"The Russian Bolsheviks, who only recently were actively advocating radical tactics, have therefore taken a position squarely opposed to that of the radical communists of Western Europe. This emerges notably and clearly in Lenin's recent pamphlet: *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. The importance of this pamphlet lies in the stature of its author rather than in its content, since there is little new in the arguments put forward; for the most part, they are identical to the ones others have long been using. The novelty lies in the fact that Lenin is now espousing them. There is no need, therefore, to refute them. Their basic error lies in establishing a similarity between the conditions prevailing in Western Europe—parties, organizations, parliamentary activities, etc.—and that which in Russia goes by the same names. What all of this points to, of course, is the crystallization of a particular policy.

"As can readily be seen, the needs of the Soviet Republic lie at the basis of this policy." Understandably, Russia, ruined by civil war, is seeking a political and economic *modus vivendi* with the West. But it is the International's task to prepare for the proletarian revolution throughout the whole world. It should therefore be independent of the Soviet government; but instead, the International is its instrument. "Rather than counting on a radical

point for the bourgeoisie." The "theses on the trade union movement" came out in favor of revolutionary trade unions and of wildcat strikes against the workers' bureaucracy, but looked to factory councils rather than a federation of trade unions as the basis of a new socialist society.

25. Two prominent social-patriots, Frossard and Cachin, went to Moscow on a negotiating mission at the time of the Congress. The merger was to be approved shortly afterwards at the Tours Congress in December 1920.

26. For example, the famous 21 "conditions for the admission of parties into the Communist International," adopted at the Second Congress, extols parliamentary and trade union action and is drawn up so as to eliminate certain persons; in fact, it contains no features that were not already contained in the programs of classical Social Democracy, the only difference being in their more "leftist" rhetoric.

communist party working toward a future revolution, Moscow wants to be able to rely on a large organized proletarian force capable of intervening on its behalf now and of bringing pressure on their respective governments.

"Hence it is advocating in Western Europe a policy that does not too blatantly contradict the traditional ideas and methods of the large mass organizations," one that favors the coming to power of leftist governments, with participation of trade unions and of the Communist Party under the aegis of "an organization of councils on the Russian model. . . . The task of communism is to uncover the forces and the tendencies that seek to stop the revolution midway; to show to the masses the way to forge ahead, the way to reach, through impassioned conflict, the ultimate goal of undivided power; to arouse the energies of the proletariat and to deepen the revolutionary course. And it can do all this only if, here and now, it opposes the tendencies to subject itself to the power of the leaders. . . .

"If one accepts the perspective of immediate protection of Soviet Russia, one inevitably accepts this particular idea of the world revolution (seizure of power by the workers' leaders whose sympathies are with the Soviet Union). In effect, if other European countries have political systems similar to Russia's—namely, domination by a workers' bureaucracy based on a system of councils—it will be possible to keep imperialism in check, at least in Europe. Russia, surrounded by friendly workers' republics, would then be able to pursue in peace its economic construction in the direction of communism. Hence, what we regard only as intermediate and inadequate forms to be vigorously opposed is regarded by Moscow as the full realization of the proletarian revolution, the supreme purpose of communist policy.

"... If those in power in Russia fraternize with the Western European workers' bureaucracy—corrupted by its situation, its opposition to the masses, its compromise with the bourgeois world—and become impregnated with its spirit, the force that is drawing Russia toward communism will evaporate. And similarly, if this group of leaders relies on the peasant proprietors rather than on the workers, there is a danger that bourgeois-agrarian forms will develop, causing the world revolution to stagnate.<sup>27</sup> The source of this stagnation lies in the fact that the political system in Russia, which represents the transitory form of the road toward com-

27. It will be seen here that Pannekoek envisions a "degeneration" of the Soviet leaders through contact with and imitation of the traditional workers' movement and its chiefs. This hypothesis is diametrically opposed to all the judgments reached by observers of all persuasions since then. Without, of course, being able to measure the extent of such a counter-influence, one can trace some real indication of it at the level both of the Communist International and the Communist Party (not to mention the ideological level), particularly in the early 1920s, a period in which the distinctive traits of classical Marxist-Leninism were taking shape.

munism—and which has not yet developed into a full-fledged bureaucracy—signifies in Western Europe a decidedly reactionary obstacle to revolution. We have already stressed that such a 'workers' government' is incapable of arousing the energy demanded for the construction of communism. But since, after the revolution, the middle and lower middle classes (allied with the peasants) will still hold an inordinate amount of power—a situation very different from that in Russia after the October Revolution—the reaction will have every opportunity to sabotage even the smallest efforts at construction, while the proletarian masses, for their part, will have to redouble their efforts to break away from this system...."

## CHAPTER NINE

### COMMUNISM AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

Ten years (but what years!) separate the writing of *Tactical Differences* from that of *Communist Tactics*. Ten years before, Pannekoek, like all the international Left, believed it was possible to fight revisionism by radical tactics. Now, however, facts showed that this strategy belonged to a current that was seeking to gain power by imposing on Western Europe the old methods of struggle—i.e., parliamentary and trade union action, both of which were products of the lack of solidarity and the spiritual weakness of the proletariat. On this basis, Pannekoek could predict that the policy of a "workers' government" (or the Popular Front, as it was later called) was doomed to impotence and failure, and, in fact, that it would on occasion help dissipate revolutionary forces.

Another prognosis of the highest importance concerned Russia and, in a more general way, the Asia countries. The revolt against foreign capital, he said, broadening his 1909 views, would henceforth be extended to the bourgeois intellectuals with socialist leanings, but this expansion would depend on the course taken by the proletarian revolution in Western Europe and America. In Russia, the backwardness of the country necessarily entailed the emergence of a bureaucracy in the state and in industry that fused with the old bureaucracy. From this was constituted an independent administrative machinery, a leadership power based on the system of councils which, in order to survive, had to compromise with the capitalist powers. Hence, while maintaining the unity of the Communist International, the policy pursued in Western Europe had to be free of the least interference from Moscow. Furthermore, the fate of the revolution, the destiny of the contemporary world, depended on the masses' initiative, which it was the Communist Party's mission to express and to stimulate, and not to deflect into actions decided from "above." This "above" represented a body of professionals committed to achieving a compromise between the classes on the basis of immediate forces and by means of specialized procedures—in Parliament, in the arbitration of labor disputes, in municipal councils, in a host of administrative services. Needless to say, its own specific interests carried a certain weight in the measures that it undertook in the name of its "electors."

Such was the twofold criticism that Pannekoek would henceforth make of Social Democracy's basic premise (and therefore equally that of Western European Leninism and, for that matter of every exploitative society): "Someone must lead." And Pannekoek would not base his critique on a popular policy, as a defender of a rival third party, but he would argue in terms of the new organizational forms that had emerged during the great revolutionary crisis of the first half of this century.

There is one further point that should be mentioned here, even though it is only indirectly connected. Pannekoek was aware of the differences among the left-Zimmerwaldians over the national question, yet he did not enter directly into the controversy. At most, he emphasized a little earlier that the independence of the Indies was something that the Communists should demand.

The German left (Luxemburg, Knief, and others), convinced that the era of the bourgeois national liberation wars was over, maintained that in the future the only thing that counted was the class struggle for socialism. What had Pannekoek and his friend Gorter to say about this? Early in 1918, Gorter wrote: "The nations ardently aspire to real self-determination. But however cruel this may seem, the realization of this right, unless it is subordinated to socialism, can be expressed only in imperialism. Capitalism, and in particular imperialism, cannot effectively resolve the problem of nations. Some nations may attain independence, but in that case the small nations become the stake in a conflict between the great nations, or of the small nations among themselves, which seek to subjugate or annex them."

However, Gorter very carefully added the following footnote: "With regard to the right to self-determination, a decided distinction must be made between Western and Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and Asian countries and the colonies, on the other."<sup>1</sup> In the theses which Lenin published in *Vorbote*, he remarked about a pamphlet on imperialism that Gorter had just published: "Gorter errs when he denies the principle of national self-determination, but he correctly applies this principle when he demands the immediate 'political and national independence' of the Dutch Indies and unmasks the Dutch opportunists who are refusing to formulate this demand and to fight for it."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin, with his eminently practical mind, thus clearly highlighted the basic divergence: what to him was a position of principle was in no way so for the

1. H. Gorter, *Die Wereldrevolutie* (Amsterdam, undated), p. 30.

2. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," *Works*, XXII, p. 164.

Western European Communists. According to them, the slogan of self-determination came from one imperialist group wanting to plunder another,<sup>3</sup> and therefore created confusion; or it came from a rising dominant class, in which case it could be historically progressive (as can be inferred from their analysis of the situation in Asia). But it was not there that the importance lay, at least in regard to the developed industrial world centers of Europe and America.

Lenin once contended that his theses established with particular clarity the connection between the question of self-determination and the general question of the struggle for democratic reforms."<sup>4</sup> Now, at this general level, a decisive question of principle was involved: the Western European communists were rejecting, once and for all, the idea of subordinating the proletarian class struggle to practical reforms to be achieved only by parliamentary action.

Unlike the classical Social Democrats, they made no secret of their sympathy for the national liberation movements in the colonies (movements still almost non-existent in this period); but confined active solidarity with the colonized nations to the framework of the class struggle since this solidarity in itself did not at all constitute a significant force in this struggle.

At the level of theoretical analysis, Gorter clearly distinguishes between the colonies' prospects for national emancipation and those that existed in the major Asian countries. Twenty-five years later, Pannekoek's "Workers' Councils" makes this same distinction but in a changed context: "When socialism grew up, half a century ago, the general expectation was that the liberation of the colonial peoples would take place together with the liberation of the workers. The colonies there and the workers here were exploited by the same capitalism; so they were allies in the fight against the common foe. It is true that their fight for freedom did not mean freedom for the entire people; it meant the rise of a new ruling class. But even then it was commonly accepted, with only occasional doubts, that the working class in Europe and the rising bourgeoisie in the colonies should be allies. For the Communist Party this was still more self-evident; it meant that the new ruling class of Russia looked upon the future ruling classes in the colonies as its natural friends, and tried to help them." At that time, however, Pannekoek says in effect that the forces operating in favor of the liberation of the colonies were very weak.

3. Anton Pannekoek, in *Das Wilsonsche Programm* (Vienna, 1919), sees in self-determination "the ideological garb of the world domination of Anglo-American capital," but makes no allusion to the right of self-determination as such.

4. Lenin, *Works*, XXIII, p. 10.

"The essence of colonial policy is exploitation of foreign countries while preserving their primitive forms of production or even lowering their productivity. Here capital is not a revolutionary agent developing production to higher forms; just the reverse. European capital is here a dissolving agent, destroying the old modes of work and life without replacing them by better techniques. European capital, like a vampire, clasps the defenseless tropical peoples and sucks their lifeblood without caring whether the victims succumb. . . .

"The Western bourgeoisie considers its rule over the colonies a natural and lasting state of things, idealizing it into a division of tasks profitable to both parties. The energetic intelligent race from the cool climes, it says, serves as the leaders of production, whereas the lazy, careless colored races execute under their command the unintelligent manual labor. Thus the tropical products, indispensable raw materials and important delicacies, are inserted into the world's commerce. And European capital wins its well deserved profits because by its government it guaranteed to the fatalistic aborigines security, peace and, by its medical service and hygienic measures, health, too. Suppose this idyll of a paternal government, honest illusion or deceptive talk of theorists and officials, was true even though in reality it is impossible under capitalist rule, then still it would be faced with an insoluble dilemma: If by the cessation of wars, epidemics and infant mortality the population increases, there results a shortage of arable land notwithstanding all the irrigation and reclaiming, the conflict is only delayed. Industrialization for export, properly speaking an unnatural way out for the most fertile lands, can give only temporary relief. Every population that is ruled from above must arrive at such a state if left to its own instincts. Every economic system develops its own system of population increase. If an autocratic rule from above suppresses the feelings of responsibility, then any active force of self-restraint and self-rule over the conditions of life is extinguished. The impending clash between the population increase and the restriction of means of subsistence can find its solution only in a strong display of inner energy and will-power among a people, consequence of its self-reliance and freedom, or of an active fight for freedom.

"In the latter part of the 19th century and thereafter it is not the commercial capital in the first place that exploits the colonies. . . . In India, in such towns as Bombay, a class of rich merchants also take part and constitute the burgeoisings of a modern Indian bourgeoisie. This Indian industry consists almost exclusively of textile factories; and of all the textile goods consumed in India, nearly 60 percent is imported from England and Japan, 20 percent comes from the cottage industry, and only 20 percent is

provided by Indian factories. Yet to exhibit and introduce aspects of modern work and life is sufficient inspiration for a nationalist movement to throw off the yoke of the Western rulers. Its spokesmen are the intellectuals, especially younger ones, who are acquainted with Western science, and who, in order to oppose it, study and emphasize with strong conviction their own national culture. . . . The movement, of course, is still too weak to throw off the domination of Western capitalism. With the rise of capitalist factories there also arises a class of industrial workers with extremely low wages and an incredibly low standard of living! Strikes have occurred against Indian as well as European employers. But compared with the immense population, all this is an insignificant start, important only as indication of future development.

"With the present world war, colonial exploitation and the problem of liberation acquire a new aspect. A fight for independence in its old meaning has no longer any chance against the enormously increasing power of capitalism. On the other hand, it is likely that, from now on, world capital under American hegemony will act as a revolutionary agent. By a more rational system of exploitation of these hundreds of millions of people, capital will be able to increase its profits considerably—by following another way than the previous primitive impoverishing methods of plunder, by raising labor in the colonies to a higher level of productivity, by better techniques, by improvement of traffic, by investing more capital, by social regulations and progress in education. All of this is not possible without according a large amount of independence or at least self-rule to the colonies.

"Self-rule of the colonies, of India, and of the Malayan islands, has already been announced. It means that European parliaments and viceroys can no longer rule the colonies despotically. It does not mean that politically the working masses will be their own masters, that as free producers they will dispose of their means of production. Self-rule relates only to the upper classes of these colonies; not only will they be inserted into the lower ranks of administration, but they will occupy the leading places, assisted of course by white advisers and experts, to ensure that capital interests are properly served. Already from the upper classes of India a rather large group of intellectuals has emerged, quite capable as ruling officials of modernizing political and social life.

"To characterize modern capitalist production as a system wherein the workers by their own free responsibility and will-power are driven to the utmost exertion, the expression was often used that a free worker is no coolie. The problem of Asia now is to make the coolie a free worker. In China, the process is taking its course; there the workers of olden times possessed a strong individualism. In tropical countries it will be much more difficult to

transform the passive downtrodden masses, kept in deep ignorance and superstition by heavy oppression, into active, skilled workers capable of handling the modern productive apparatus and forces. Thus capital is faced with many problems. Modernization of the government apparatus through self-rule is necessary, but more is needed: the possibility of social and spiritual organization and progress, based on political and social rights and liberties, on solid general instruction. Whether world capital will be able and willing to follow this course cannot be foreseen. If it does, then the working classes of these countries will be capable of independent fighting for their class interests and for freedom along with the Western workers.

"To all the peoples and tribes living in primitive forms of production in Africa, in Asia, in Australia, it will, of course, mean an entire change of the world, when the working class will have annihilated capitalism. Instead of as hard exploiting masters and cruel tyrants, the white race will come to them as friends to help them and to teach them how to take part in the progressing development of humanity."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, according to Pannekoek, the colonies as late as 1947 were not capable of liberating themselves by their own means. Of course, a subcontinent such as India had some chance of initiating a really new stage of its development, capable of engendering a complete overthrow of outmoded attitudes; but, in every respect, all this was still remote and depended on the development of Western capitalism. As for the other countries, everything seemed to indicate that these prospects, however tenuous, were closed to them. If salvation was to be, it had to come from the workers of the West.<sup>6</sup> But China—both because of the historical weakness of the traditional "bourgeoisie" and because of the pressure of the peasant masses—in all probability is about to have at its head an exploiting class capable of leading it out of its age-old backwardness: "The Chinese Communist Party, and still more the Red Army, however, consists of rebellious peasants. Not the name stuck on a label outside, but the class character determines the real content of thought and action. . . . To the red leaders the ideal of the future was a democratic middle-class China, with free peasants as owners, or at least well-to-do farmers of the soil. Under Communist ideas and slogans they were the heralds and champions of the capitalist development of China. . . ."

"The ideals and aims for which the working masses of China are fighting will, of course, not be realized. Landowners, exploitation and poverty will not disappear; what disappears are the old stagnant primitive forms of misery,

5. Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-200.

6. Cf. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1968). Of course, it would be wrong to exaggerate the parallel between the European left-Marxist and the African nationalist.

usury and oppression. The productivity of labor will be enhanced; the new forms of direct exploitation by industrial capital will replace the old ones. The problems facing Chinese capitalism will require central regulations by a powerful government. That means forms of dictatorship in the central government, perhaps complemented by domestic forms of autonomy in the small units of district and village. The introduction of mechanical force into agriculture requires the conjunction of the small lots into large production units; whether by gradual expropriation of the small peasants, or by the foundation of cooperatives or *kolchozes* after the Russian model, will depend on the relative power of the contending classes. This development will not go on without producing deep changes in the economic, and thereby in the social relations, the spiritual life and the old family structure. The dimensions, however, of things there, of the country, of the population, of its misery, of its traditions, of its old cultural life are so colossal, that to change conditions, even if it's done with the utmost energy, will take many dozens of years.

"The intensity of this development of economic conditions will stir the energies and stimulate the activity of the classes. The fight against capitalism will arise simultaneously with capitalism. The fight of the industrial workers will spring up with the growth of factories. And in China, with the strong spirit of organization and great solidarity shown so often by the Chinese proletarians and artisans, a powerful working class movement may be expected to arise more quickly than in Europe. To be sure, the industrial workers will remain a minority compared with the mass of the agrarian population, which is equally subjected to capitalist exploitation, though in different ways. The mechanization of agriculture, however, will weave strong ties between them, manifesting itself in the community of interests and fights. So the character of the fight for freedom and mastery in many regards may take on different aspects in China than in Western Europe and America."<sup>7</sup>

7. Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-95.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE COUNCIL STATE

Pannekoek saw no need to reply specifically to Lenin's pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, since, as he rightly emphasized, it contained no new line of argument. But Gorter did discuss it, in his *Open Letter to Lenin*.<sup>1</sup> We need not return to it here, except to consider one aspect of the controversy: the accusation of utopianism.

When the accusation came from the Western academic camp, it consisted in ascribing to religious delusions anything in the ideas or activity of a human group that rejected the equation of passive submission to circumstances with active adaptation to the existing order. It involves, therefore, a value judgment whose values themselves need to be judged, were its content not so clear to begin with. Considered from a political viewpoint, however, this assertion sought to defend the old organizational forms by presenting the new forms as an historical accident in normal times, and as a necessary but subordinate element in critical times. Held in common by the spokesmen of both branches of Social Democracy, it was therefore formulated either in classical or radical terminology.

The classical formulation would run along these lines: "Even though Lenin may have been right beyond question at the tactical level, Gorter was right when he maintained that the Russian Revolution was moving to its destruction, toward a new slavery."<sup>2</sup> In other words, the Leninist tactic was excellent so long as it was not applied; if in Russia and in the underdeveloped countries it led to known catastrophes, it would lead to similar fiascos in Western Europe. But, this judgment is itself completely a-historical, since the left-communists had devoted most of their attention to the backward and therefore reactionary character of the old Marxist tactics, both classical and radical. In fact, if these criticisms are of any value today, it is in terms of a battle that was not even theirs: the electoral rivalry between the Socialist

1. H. Gorter, *Réponse à Lénine* (Paris, 1930), pp. 26-29, 50-51. Here Gorter takes up the criticisms of trade union and parliamentary action made in *La Tactique Communiste*. Translated and prefaced by André Prudhommeaux, the text first appeared in the *Ouvrier communiste*, organ of a group of Parisian council communists.

2. S. Tas, "Herman Gorter, révolutionnaire et poète," *la Révolution prolétarienne*, 50 (May 1951), p. 172.



Party and the Communist Party, grafted onto the ideological conflict between the two blocs.

From the same basic assumptions, Arthur Rosenberg, a historian and a former Communist deputy, reached a similar judgment. He presented a portrait of the KAP members, which at least sheds light on the feelings of the petty Leninists of his type toward the left communists: "To this movement (utopian extremism) belong the poorest and most hopeless of the workers. They passionately hate not only bourgeois society but all those whose existence is a little less wretched than their own. They reject all diplomacy and all compromise, and accept only extremist action. . . . It is a purely emotional movement, incapable of elaborating any doctrine or organized action whatsoever. The utopian extremists accept Bolshevik ideas *en masse*."<sup>3</sup>

This in no way prevented Rosenberg from paying homage to Gorter, whom he regarded along with Trotsky and Luxemburg as "representing the future within the proletariat," and as a theoretician who "really raised the essential question" when he challenged the domination of Moscow over the Communist International.<sup>4</sup> Once more, theory, regarded as a good research instrument, was divorced from its practical consequences, was ascribed to particular people, and was approved only to the extent to which it agreed with the views of a Social Democracy, which did not even dare speak its name.<sup>5</sup>

Georg Lukács was, of course, a theorist of a completely different persuasion. He clearly pinpointed the meaning of "the 1912 Pannekoek-Kautsky controversy" when he wrote about Kautsky: "For to adopt the stance of opposition means that the existing order is accepted in all essentials as an immutable foundation and the efforts of the 'opposition' are restricted to making as many gains as possible for the workers within the established system."<sup>6</sup> According to this classical perspective, the state is regarded as the prize in a class war between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, while for the revolutionary, the state constitutes an element of force against which the proletariat must be mobilized. But what is this revolutionary tactic based on? Lukács rejected the solution of the German Left since they, along with Rosa Luxemburg, did not acknowledge the council form as "the weapon by which to fight for and gain by force the presuppositions of socialism,"<sup>7</sup> and he

3. A. Rosenberg, *Histoire du bolchevisme* (Paris, 1936), p. 176.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 85, and 222-24.

5. Thus one finds Pannekoek's successful "refutation of Lenin" acknowledged "despite his penchant for an orthodox Marxism." M. Rubel, *Karl Marx* (Paris, 1957), p. 324, n. 49.

6. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 260.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

stressed that Rosa, "in her criticism of the replacement of the constituent Assembly by the soviets. . . imagines the proletarian revolution as having the structural forms of the bourgeois revolutions."<sup>8</sup> Curiously, however, he traced this idea to her tendency "to overestimate the importance of spontaneous mass actions,"<sup>9</sup> whereas Luxemburg herself justified participation in the elections in Germany, by the need "to educate the masses," to remedy the "immaturity" of the proletariat.<sup>10</sup>

Lukács invoked this same idea as the theoretical basis of the categories of mediation—party and trade unions. The desire for a synthesis between parliamentary and trade union action and the council form, then animating the German left wing, especially the KPD (against which Pannekoek speaks out in *Communist Tactics*), is therefore shaped on the idea of a specialized kind of Jacobin "political leadership" freed from the influence of backward social categories. In regard to the refusal of the Dutch and the KAP to identify the "dictatorship of the proletariat and dictatorship of the party," Lukács accused them of placing "utopian and exaggerated hopes on the anticipation of subsequent phases of development," and of ignoring "the real structure of forces here and now."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, as Lukács—whose opinion in this matter has varied little—quite recently reaffirmed, utopian sectarianism involves the effort to realize general or final principles independently of a socio-historical development that yields permanent transformations of forms and functions and in which new mediations constantly appear, while the old forms lose their validity or undergo essential modifications.<sup>12</sup> In reality, this is to return "within the established order." The classical tactic, linked with the old form of organization and with the old methods of struggle, could not but become an end in itself, as is shown, for example, in the history of the German Communist Party. Based on the "real structure" (i.e., on the market relationships and the relationships of immediate forces) the parliamentary and trade union tactic takes precedence, in ordinary circumstances, over the new tactic, without the former being able to develop into the latter in time of crisis. Theoretically intended to allow for accommodations, the old tactic in

8. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

10. Prudhommeaux, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

11. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness, op. cit.*, p. 296.

12. G. Lukács, "Reflections on the Split," *Studies on the Left*, IV, 1, 1964, p. 25. Lukács here regards the anti-parliamentary position of the 1920 "sectarians" as tantamount to what he calls the "extreme subjectivism" of Stalin and of Mao, which consists of dogmatizing without regard to the "facts." These "facts" are, of course, decided by Lukács in his own way.

practice only strengthens the trade unionist consciousness of the masses, making them forget that they ought to act directly, by themselves.

In contrast, the partisans of the new tactic wanted to develop the initiative of the masses through extra-parliamentary forms of organization. In the 1920s, they were concerned, therefore, with creating or strengthening organs linked with the concrete life of the exploited and with their immediate demands: in the factories, these organs were the factory organizations, the *Revolutionäre Betriebsorganisation* (RBO), which, in theory at least, united workers of all tendencies on the basis of their enterprise; while a little later on, there emerged the action committees (*Aktionsausschüsse*) centered on districts, employment exchanges, etc.<sup>13</sup> Regrouped within the AAU, these organs were animated by militants of the vanguard party, the KAP. The latter did not intend to become a mass party. Its mission was "to point the way through the confusion and the wavering of the proletarian revolution, to keep the course steadily fixed toward Communism." The party, "an organization of the most conscious elements, should attempt to put an end to these waverings, and not allow itself to be drawn into them. Its task is to help the masses to surmount them as quickly and as completely as possible, by the clarity and purity of its conduct, by the consistency between its words and its actions, its presence in the front line of battle, and the correctness of its foresight."<sup>14</sup> Consequently, this party of the elite should show a particularly rigid attitude where principles are concerned. Nothing shows this more clearly than does a letter written by Pannekoek in the fall of 1920, in answer to a proposition made by Eric Mühsam. Mühsam, the anarchist leader, had put forward the idea of a federation of all the groups "who resolutely walk the Bolshevik path to communism, without bowing to the decrees of Moscow."<sup>15</sup>

"If I understand you correctly," Pannekoek wrote, "you blame the [Second] Moscow Congress for having excluded a section of the revolutionaries [notably

13. Cf. *Programm und organisations-statut der K.A.P.D.* (Berlin, 1924), pp. 45-47.

14. *Die Hauptfragen der revolutionären Taktik* (Berlin, 1921), pamphlet of the KAPD, pp. 7-8. The party, notes Gorter, is "a nucleus as tough as steel, as pure as crystal." In Gorter, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

15. *Die Aktion*, X:45-46, Nov. 13, 1920. Mühsam was then in prison, after the crushing of the Bavarian Commune. The anarchists, after participating very actively in the operations of the Spartakists in Berlin, the Ruhr, and elsewhere, had for a time separated from both Communist wings. Thus, in March 1919, one of their principal leaders, Rudolf Rocker, declared that the centralism of the Bolsheviks could lead only to a kind of state socialism; in December of the same year he denounced even more vigorously "the Russian 'commissariocracy,' founded on a principle of authority like that of all other class depotisms." Cf. Peter Losche, *Der Bolshevismus im Urteil der deutschen S.D., 1903-1920* (West Berlin, 1967), pp. 276ff. For Pannekoek's assessment of anarchism, see the final paragraph of the present chapter.

the KAP] and, by doing so, for having committed the same error and shown the same narrow intolerance as did the Congress of the First International [The Hague, 1872] and of the Second International [London, 1892]. And you propose to all the groups or parties outside the Moscow International that they should form themselves into a free federation, leaving to each of its members complete freedom of agitation and of action. I shall now give the reasons why I am opposed to this idea.

"We regard the Congress as guilty of showing itself to be, not intolerant, but much too tolerant. We do not reproach the leaders of the Third International for excluding us; we censure them for seeking to include as many opportunists as possible. In our criticism, we are not concerned about ourselves, but about the tactics of Communism; we do not criticize the secondary fact that we ourselves were excluded from the community of communists, but rather the primary fact that the Third International is following in Western Europe a tactic both false and disastrous for the proletariat. The exclusion is simply the disagreeable form assumed by the necessary separation from those who want to be able to manifest their opposition freely and are not content to slink furtively away. And yet, struggle of tendencies is necessary, since it enables the proletariat to find its way. The fact that men with ardent revolutionary ideas embrace and congratulate one another on their excellence serves no useful purpose; what is necessary, however, is that the proletariat, the huge masses, clearly see the path and the purpose, cease to hesitate and waver at the mercy of events, and move resolutely into action. This cannot be the fruit of purely sentimental aspirations toward unity. It can only result from a clear and coherent theory of combat—a theory which, in the heat of battle and under the pressure of necessity, ultimately imposes itself, so that the theory and the people become as one.

"The First International in 1872 was therefore right to exclude the anarchists; and, even though opportunism had already risen in its ranks, the Second International was equally justified in repeating this expulsion. The theory of combat which alone can lead the proletariat to victory is none other than Marxism. Precise knowledge about the conditions appropriate to the proletarian revolution can be acquired only by the science of Marxism, a factor in the radical overthrow of ideas. No doubt, in recent years, Marxism has been deformed by those who have misused it in order to exorcise the revolution: first of all, by the conservatives of the Marxist tradition of the USPD type, and then by the *Rote Fahne* following them along the same road. It must therefore be proclaimed with the utmost clarity that the agitation and the tactic of the KAPD, which does not involve Marx at every turn, is linked to

a more authentic and more practical Marxism, in which the revolutionary flame of Marx burns more actively and effectually than it does for the spokesmen of the USPD and the KPD, who are constantly paying lip service to Marx.

"Because of this deformation—which is causing many young revolutionaries to turn aside as though Marxism were really a theory of mechanical evolution and fatalistic certitude—the emphasis must constantly be placed on the importance of Marxism for the revolution. This in no way implies that those most learned in the letter of Marxism make the best militants: on the contrary, experience has shown over and over again that theoretical knowledge and enthusiasm for action were linked with dispositions of mind which often made these two qualities incompatible, and that there are many who come to proper revolutionary actions without theory, thanks to intuitive practice. What we mean by the importance of Marxism is that the materialist-revolutionary conception of the world and of society, which was that of Marx, should penetrate the masses in order to make them clear-sighted and self-assured.

"You want to create a federation of all the revolutionary groups excluded by Moscow. We disagree, because a federation of this kind would automatically become a declared opponent of Moscow. Although the Congress has excluded our tendency, we feel a solidarity with the Russian Bolsheviks. We reproach them for having insufficient knowledge of the situation in Western Europe, the conditions of class struggle in the key countries, capitalist for centuries, or of not taking sufficient account of them, and with allying themselves with the big opportunist parties in the hope of achieving the world revolution more quickly. And we say to them: the opportunists have no right to be in your ranks; *we* are the ones who should be there. We reproach them for underestimating both the enormous differences between Russia and Western Europe and those between the Bolshevik Party and the Western European parties, and for the error of reinforcing the power of leaders whose exclusion is the first condition for securing revolution in the west. However, it would be an example of the same narrow doctrinaire attitude to commit a similar error by applying to Russian conditions considerations that are valid only for Western Europe, by projecting our analysis of the role of the leaders here on to what it is there, that role being very different because it is exercised under very different conditions. We therefore proclaim our solidarity, not only with the Russian proletariat, but also with their Bolshevik leaders, even while we criticize with the utmost vigor their intervention within international communism. It is from this same position—of complete fraternal solidarity with the Russian communists,

linked with an equally categorical rejection of the tactics they are pursuing in Western Europe—that the KAPD has proposed affiliation with the Third International as a 'sympathetic' party."<sup>16</sup>

We shall return to Pannekoek's final analysis of Russian Bolshevism, and also to his definitive ideas about anarchism. But, first, without going into details, we shall attempt to trace the trajectory of the KAP.

From the onset, the party faced a difficult task. This, however, is something it had in common with all the young communist formations of the period, orthodox or not, which were forced out of necessity to compete with the old socialist and trade union organizations. The latter had long years of consummate experience in the manipulation of the masses and in dialogue with the authorities, not to mention the strength they drew from direct participation in state power (ministries, public administrations, police, etc.). They therefore enjoyed a superficial stability which, in turn, won for them the support of the most stable strata of the working class and of a section of the petty bourgeoisie. The KPD, compelled therefore to recruit in the socially less stable strata,<sup>17</sup> was caught between the extreme aspirations of a group often subjected to abrupt and terrible setbacks and those of a group whose sole purpose, in the final analysis, was to enlist as many people as possible by every means possible, from electoral promises to chauvinism. By its nature, the KAP could not increase its audience—the aim of every political organization—by resorting to these means, except for the last one.

In February-March 1921, the Communist International (or some of its leaders) decided to launch an "offensive" in Germany, partly because of an explosive situation in Russia (this was the eve of the Kronstadt rising). Unambiguously invited to prepare an armed insurrection, the *Zentrale* of the

16. *Die Aktion*, XI:11-12, March 19, 1921. We cannot deal in detail here with the various relations of the KAPD with both the Third International and the KPD. The following quotation from Lenin sums up very well the attitude of the Communist International to those whom it had just used—with their consent—as cannon fodder during the "March action" of 1921: "Provided that Communist parties of sufficient strength, experience and influence, have secured firm footholds, at least in the most important countries, then we should tolerate the presence of semi-anarchist (KAP) elements at our international congresses. Their presence may even be useful up to a point, to the extent to which such elements provide a 'discouraging example' to Communists devoid of experience, and also to the extent to which these elements are themselves amenable to instruction. . . . In Germany, we have tolerated them too long. The Third Congress of the International has delivered an ultimatum with a precise expiration date. If today, they have themselves withdrawn from the Communist International, so much the better. . . . By arguing with them, we merely provide publicity for their ideas. They are very unintelligent; it is a mistake to take them seriously; it is not worth irritating ourselves over them. They have no influence, nor will they have any if we take a firm line against them." Lenin, "Letter to the German Communists," *Works*, Vol. XXXII.

17. On the considerable fluctuations of KPD membership, see Flechtheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236.

KPD (in the absence of Paul Levi, then touring Italy) complied docilely with the orders. The Moscow emissaries (Bela Kun, in particular) contacted the KAP's "gang leaders" (to adopt an expression used by one of them),<sup>18</sup> who then gave the green light.

In Saxony, the spirit of revolt remained alive among the workers, and, since the bosses' repressive machinery (spies, private and semi-public militias) proved incapable of coping with it, the Social Democratic authorities, with their usual servility, decided to send in the armed forces. When the police battalions were sent into central Germany to occupy the factories, strikes occurred, with the support of the KPD, and at Mansfeld, at Eisleben, at the Leuna chemical factories (near Merseburg, a bastion of the AAU), the police were met with rifle fire. Almost everywhere in the country, the Kapists sought to unleash strikes, and even resorted to violence in order to induce the recalcitrants to stop work. On the whole, these efforts proved useless and, due to a lack of active solidarity, the insurrection (March 16-31) soon ended in a blood bath.<sup>19</sup>

The leaders of the KAPD saw in the terrorist action (whose results were always ridiculous) a way to give the proletariat confidence in its own strength, "to uproot the belief in the superiority, cohesion and unshakable character of bourgeois power, and to dissipate forever the fear of the omnipotent directors and bosses."<sup>20</sup> And they did not hesitate to present the March action as an indication of the "radicalization" of the KPD militants: "The masses of the Communist Party," they wrote in their central organ,<sup>21</sup> "are adopting our

18. Karl Plaetner, *Der mitteldeutsche Bandenführer* (Berlin, 1930). Cf. also Max Hölz, *Vom "Weissen Kreuz" zur Roten Fahne* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 141-71.

19. Here are two viewpoints of the time. First, that of Paul Levi, opposed to Moscow: "Only the will, clearheadedness and resoluteness of the masses themselves can set a mass party in motion, and it is only when this preliminary condition has been met that a good leadership is able to lead. . . . This distrust and this total negation of the Marxist principle regarding relations between the Communists and the masses, has almost automatically engendered. . . the undoubtedly anarchist qualities of the March action. The struggle of the unemployed against the employed, the intervention of the *lumpenproletariat*, the dynamite attempts (an abortive campaign of Max Hölz), followed inevitably. And all this shows the true character of the March movement—the biggest Bakuninist putsch of history." P. Levi, *Unser Weg wider Putschismus* (Berlin, 1921), p. 39. And the viewpoint of the ex-KAPist Reichenbach: "When for months a parliamentary and trade unionist tactic has predominated exclusively and when from one day to the next sees a headlong plunge into revolutionary activity, a central leadership can no doubt adapt to so sudden a change, but not the ensemble of permanent officials, not the mass of the militants. . . . The March action was the last attempt to involve the latent elements of the revolutionary class struggle on a broad basis, with a view to inaugurating the struggle for the conquest of power." Reichenbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-25. Recent academic literature on the subject merely reflects the division of the world into two ideological blocs.

20. *Kommunistische Arbeiter Zeitung*, No. 189, Sept 20, 1921.

21. *Ibid.*, No. 181, March 24, 1921.

slogans, and are forcing them on their leaders." (The latter, of course, were keeping well out of the way).

However, the KAP and the AAU constituted only one wing, the bigger and more combative one, of *Rätekommunismus*, or council communism, as it was beginning to be called to distinguish it from *Parlementskommunismus*, or parliamentary communism. The other wing sought to be "a unitary organization" (the AAU-E, which was constituted late in 1920). It rejected the party form (at least in theory), and regarded Bolshevik Russia as a state founded on centralism, "an organizational principle of the bourgeois-capitalist epoch."<sup>22</sup> Otto Rühle, one of its principal theoreticians, harshly criticized the whole March operation, particularly for what he regarded as a bourgeois military type strategy, that of guerrilla warfare by ill-equipped small groups. For this, he would substitute armed self-defense of the factories (in spite of the failure at Leuna).<sup>23</sup>

These differences assumed an immediate practical political character that they certainly never had in Holland. This is why Pannekoek could concentrate on analyzing the real significance of these events. In his view, the special importance of the March operation lay in its being symptomatic of "the internal development of communism," of the limits assigned to its action: "The March movement," he writes,<sup>24</sup> "was a fiasco that resulted from the policy planned by Moscow and from the tactics determined by the Second Congress. That is why an end must be put to the dictatorship of Russia over the Western European revolution." It was a tactical error "such as has often been made in the past, and dearly paid for" by the fighting workers with whom Pannekoek expressed his unqualified solidarity.

To establish a tactical error, the tactic itself and its consequences must be examined, and then it must be traced back to its material and conceptual origins. Pannekoek does this as follows: "In Western Europe, Communism will never successfully progress in the form of a new party—with completely new cadres, slogans and programs—but a party analogous in its internal nature to the old parties, with the same political jobbery, the same blustering leadership tactics, and the same noisy publicity. Certainly, Russia has been a beacon in the darkness and has awakened enduring hope; however, this light could only feebly filter through the thick smokescreen thrown up by lies in the

22. O. Rühle, "Bericht über Russland," *Die Aktion*, X:39-40, Oct. 2, 1920.

23. "Das Ende der mitteldeutschen Kämpfe," *Die Aktion*, XI:15-16, May 16, 1921; For information on Rühle, see Paul Mattick, "Otto Rühle et le mouvement ouvrier," *Cahiers du communisme de conseil*, No. 3, January 1968.

24. Anton Pannekoek, "Sovjet-Rusland en het West-Europese Kommuniste," *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 1921, pp. 436-48.

news; and those who presented themselves here as the emissaries of this light were often too much influenced by the old Second International spirit to be able to contribute effectively toward arousing the necessary enthusiasm. Simply replacing Scheidemann with Levi is not enough to give the workers the courage to face up to death and misery."

Both on the basis of international solidarity and the instinct of self-preservation, he continued, the Russian Communists should have supported the Western European revolution. But they did so only in their own way, that is, by "misinterpreting" the whole situation. And Pannekoek stresses: "What we wrote at the time in *Verbote* about the major catastrophe of the Second International when faced with the war (namely, that this catastrophe signified much more than the fact that the proletariat was still too weak to defeat the bourgeoisie), applies equally to this minor catastrophe of the March action: It signifies that the methods of the Second International period are incapable of raising the material and spiritual force of the proletariat to the strength required to break the power of the dominant class."

Despite its "enormous exemplary value," the Russia of the Soviets, through the Communist International has contributed in no small way to maintain this condition of weakness, Pannekoek says, by imposing a return to parliamentary and trade unionist tactics, at the expense of tactics based on "the factory organizations of Germany and of England, which arose spontaneously and in a more or less deliberate way among the most advanced workers. . . . These tactics consist of building up by means of theoretical propaganda and of practical struggle, organizational forms that exclude any possibility of domination by professional leaders, and that combine, on the basis of the factory, all the wills to combat existing within the proletariat, so as to transform them into forces for action. That these tactics alone can achieve our objective is something which the March experience has just shown."

Its tragic results derived, first of all, from the fact that the German workers were not able to set about finding their way for themselves. Why? Because, Pannekoek writes, "the policy and the tactics of the Third International are closely connected to the state policy of the Soviet Republic. The new orientation of the Russian state policy ought, therefore, to exercise a reciprocal influence on the Third International's practice." Now, this policy is committed to two essential imperatives: at home, to make concessions to capital and to private property; abroad to re-establish trade with the capitalist countries.

At home, "the Russian leaders know that they must foster a spirit of

development among the peasantry in order to create a basis for the building of communism. No doubt, this has less to do with a Marxist perspective than with the attitude of the peasants. The sabotage of agricultural production, the peasant uprisings and the Kronstadt insurrection have shown to the Russian government the dangers that it faces. In effect, there is a chance that a peasant counterrevolution may follow the revolution, as has happened in the past (1792, 1848). While the peasants, completely imbued with bourgeois lies, are leaning toward the restoration of a capitalist government, the Russian leaders, of Marxist persuasion, are consciously adapting their policy to economic necessity, while attempting to steer the economy in the direction of communism.

"To summarize this situation, it can be said that the Russian Revolution is a bourgeois revolution, like the French one of 1789: at the economic level, its essential content has been the transformation of the peasantry into freeholders and small producers; at the political level, it represents the coming to power of a new bureaucracy whose primary concern must be to satisfy the interests of these peasants. Of course, there are big differences between these two revolutions in regard to class relationships, degree of development, orientation of the movement and perspectives, which are not taken into account here. Nevertheless, this relationship highlights one important fact, and therefore clarifies the relations between Russia and Western European communism."<sup>25</sup>

Pannekoek then described the NEP, which he refused to regard, as did the Leninist press of the time, as "a major triumph of communism." According to him, the strengthening of private property in the rural areas and in towns, together with the commercial agreements with the capitalist powers, though unavoidable measures, posed serious consequences for the future of communism in Russia, and were in danger of strengthening the forces of reaction there. "It is to be hoped, however, that the Russian leaders who, of course, are perfectly aware of the danger, will succeed in strangling these forces by means of their political power, by means of 'state capitalism'; but, at the present time, the new capital is about to attempt to bring pressure on the government through doubtful elements of the bureaucracy of the Soviets."

In the final part of this article, Pannekoek once again severely criticizes the German Leninists who were seeking to form joint "workers' governments" with the Social Democrats, who, in other respects, were their professed enemies and, whom, at times during this period, they were actually fighting.

Shortly after the publication of this article, *Nieuwe Tijd* ran out of funds

25. Pannekoek, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

and was forced to cease publication at the very time when the Dutch group, the KAPN, was experiencing repercussions of the crisis that was shaking its (relatively) powerful German equivalent. Beginning in 1921, Pannekoek's name appeared only rarely in the journals and magazines of the extreme left. Because of the changed situation, the astronomer took over from the militant thinker. We shall see, however, that there was no question of the theoretician's renouncing the struggle; but simply that the theoretician's intervention, without breaking with the movement (or with what remained of it), took on a less immediate character.

The March 1921 defeat began a period of particularly bestial repression legally sanctioned by a law "for the protection of the Republic." Arrests, tortures, condemnations multiplied; the KAPist newspapers were suspended, their premises seized. The historical drama was redoubled by personal dramas; the enforced disintegration of the practical movement was accompanied by a theoretical stagnation, and "the most active militants, driven underground, resorted to conspiratorial methods that only precipitated the movement's disintegration."<sup>26</sup>

Such were the causes of a sudden and swift decline. But all this does not explain why the council movement was not able to regain its position after the defeat. The KPD also underwent the rigors of repressions, but it then found a permanent *raison d'être* in day-to-day action, first and foremost within the established institutions, and therefore in the ordinary forms of bourgeois politics, where it constituted an effective force. However, the revolutionary elements, disgusted with everything, renounced political activity and abandoned the party *en masse*.<sup>27</sup> The party continued, of course, to recruit but, in fact, it had lost its substance. As a result of this policy, it found itself unable to offer any real resistance to the Nazis—an incapacity whose main cause is most frequently attributed, in a manner as frivolous as it is revealing, to a strategic error, to a refusal to form a common parliamentary front with the Social Democrats for which Stalin alone was to blame.

In any case, the membership of the KAP, once counted in the thousands, in time came to be counted in hundreds.<sup>28</sup> On several occasions, the temptation to resort to a "flexible tactic" was felt in its ranks (especially within the AAU); a temptation to a modified return to trade union practice, to propaganda for immediate demands. The first serious crisis occurred in 1921-22, which ended

26. Paul Mattick, "Otto Rühle . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 17.

27. In 1927, in the region of Thuringia, nearly 75 percent of the ex-militants of the USPD and of the Spartakusbund had left the party. Cf. the excellent study by Siegfried Bahne, "Die K.P.D." in *Das Ende der Parteien* (Dusseldorf, 1960), p. 661.

28. Cf. *Informations Correspondance Ouvrières, op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

in a new split.<sup>29</sup> In 1927, the problem came up again. In effect, the "ultra-left" wing of the KPD drew close to the KAPD, after its expulsion from the Communist Party.<sup>30</sup> Its militants put the accent on the "anti-parliamentary parliamentarianism," and more especially on the "revolutionary trade unionism" of the early days of the Communist International.

From 1921, Pannekoek remained to a large extent outside the party, and intervened only to emphasize "the need for an intensive propaganda centered on the new situation and the new tasks."<sup>31</sup> He was to return to and develop his arguments in 1927, in an article entitled "Principle and Tactic,"<sup>32</sup> with which we shall now deal.

Pannekoek began by offering this diagnosis: "From 1918 to the present day, every chapter of European history could be headed: *The Defeat of the Revolution*."

The World War, he continued, had increased to the utmost the distinctive traits of capitalism: exploitation of the masses, militarist oppression, misery and privations. "The collapse occurred first in Russia, the country with the lowest level of capitalist organization. After the revolts in the towns caused by famine, the mutiny of the peasant troops, the overthrow of the Czarist regime, there followed some six months of feverish political development. Petty bourgeois strata and parties succeeded one another in power: the Kadets, the Mensheviks, the socialist-revolutionaries, each showed themselves to be too timorous, too corrupt from the spiritual viewpoint, to take the necessary drastic measures. They lacked the resolution to see things through, to break once and for all out of centuries accumulated misery. The course taken by the revolution did not fit in with these exhausted organizations. Only the Bolsheviks, formed on radical Marxism, carried the revolution on to its uttermost limits, and founded in 1917 the Republic of Soviets; the Communist Party came to power in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Then, Germany cracked. Soldiers' and workers' councils came into existence, and were immediately coopted by "a whole stratum, almost a class,

29. Cf. H. Gorter, *Die Notwendigkeit der Wiedervereinigung der K.A.P.D.* (Berlin, 1923).

30. Cf. S. Bahne, "Zwischen 'Luxemburgismus' und 'Stalinismus.' Die 'ultra-linke' Opposition in der K.P.D.," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, October, 1961.

31. K. Horner, "Marxismus und Idealismus," *Proletarier* (theoretical organ of the KAPD), 1, 4, February-March 1921.

32. K. Horner, "Prinzip und Taktik," *Proletarier*, No. 7-8, 1927, pp. 141-48 and 178-86. An editorial note states: "Since before the war, the author of this article has defended, within the Social Democratic Party and in concert with Rosa Luxemburg, the Marxist line against reformism. We shall return to various points of this work which demand a reply or additional information."

of permanent officials," the working class having been disciplined by a prolonged Social Democratic and trade union education." Moreover, "there was no party, however small, that was animated by revolutionary class consciousness. The formation of such a party was prevented by circumstances arising as much from questions of personalities as from concrete difficulties. Everywhere, small groups were spontaneously organizing themselves, and through their spokesmen, Liebknecht and Luxemburg, made their appeal to the masses, but there was neither program nor cohesion. The revolutionary workers were defeated after bitter clashes, and their leaders were assassinated. Then began the decline of the revolution. . . ."

"Whereas the proletariat was scarcely prepared for its historic mission, the bourgeoisie knew how to exploit proletarian deficiencies to the fullest. . . . Becoming socialist minded, they agreed, without a blow having been struck, to the reforms which they had stubbornly opposed for decades: the Republic, universal suffrage, the eight-hour day, the recognition of the right to trade unions. . . . The republican regime and democracy served solely as means to inaugurate new forms of political domination for the benefit of capital. The worst aspect of this was not that these reforms had been set up by the workers in the course of a revolutionary movement, but the fact that the workers believed that they had gained something by all this. Under modern capitalism, the purpose of democracy, both in terms of its nature and its function, is to nourish this conviction and to weaken the workers' will to action. Thus, democracy, once acquired, was exploited to the full: henceforth, the task of elaborating and implementing reforms and other measures was entrusted exclusively to parliamentarians, to trade union leaders, to ministers. For it is of the essence of democracy to see to it that the working masses are kept away from the political terrain, that they are kept to their routine tasks in the domain of production, and doomed to revolutionary inactivity. And thus, the revolutionary episode was terminated; in effect, revolution is considered to be the intensive, daily and direct political action of the masses themselves. . . ."

"The power of the bourgeoisie stems essentially from the immaturity, the fears, the illusions of the proletariat, from lack of proletarian class consciousness, clear vision of purposes, unity and cohesion. Since no one knew to what extent the workers would be capable of powerful and united actions, the bourgeoisie was forced to jettison the ballast." Then, "the revolutionary elite having been decimated," power moved toward the right "as the fear of the proletariat diminished." And the Social Democrats found themselves gradually ousted.

"In Western Europe, the effect of the revolution scarcely went beyond some

kind of social reforms (e.g. the eight-hour day); but in Eastern Europe, a very important economic revolution took place, where the big, more or less feudal estates were parceled out, and gave rise in turn to small or medium forms of exploitation. This revolution was made more radical by the fact that modern industry and modern class antagonisms were less developed there. It was in Russia that the revolution went furthest. It is still going on in the neighboring states, which have been re-established or enlarged after the war (Poland, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, etc.). Finally "throughout the whole of Europe, capitalism feels politically strong and self-assured: the specter of socialism, which had terrified it for decades, has been removed. . . ."

Nevertheless, the KAP holds the theory that capitalism has entered a final crisis, "an economic crisis from which capitalism can never emerge and is therefore heading toward its destruction." This thesis, says Pannekoek, has nothing in common with Marxism. "Marx and Engels have constantly and emphatically stressed that only the conscious action of the proletariat, with power acquired through the class struggle and later through the establishment of a new mode of production, could put an end to capitalism. . . . Socialism is something that concerns people, something that involves the will, the clearheadedness and the energy to seize power and to break all the fetters shackling the new economic development, by overthrowing the political, juridical and ideological system of the bourgeoisie. What happens in the economic domain must first become alive in the minds of men, for only there does the transforming act occur. . . . Economic causes act as a stimulus to class consciousness, but with an intensity that varies very greatly from case to case. Whereas in phases of prosperity the masses are satisfied with their lot and think only about working, these phases are followed by crises in which discontent grows, revolutionary attitudes gain strength, and the proletariat moves into action. . . . Favorable and fortuitous circumstances can never compensate the lack of internal vigor, but can merely open up ways."

These are considerations of a general kind. The present great postwar political crisis is over: "minor crises can no doubt still occur in the field of capital, and establish whether it is better to govern through democracy or through reaction. But, as far as the proletariat is concerned, it is for the moment solely a question of economic crisis, for too much credence must not be given to the constant prophesying of world wars. The bourgeoisie is now on its guard. The capitalist world is making every effort to overcome the deep postwar crisis, but the fact is that we are still at the very center of this crisis and that unemployment weighs heavily on the working class.

"What, then, are the prospects for revolutionary development?"

It is often alleged that "if we move toward a prolonged and severe economic depression, its effect will be to revolutionize the proletariat and lead to an uninterrupted development of the revolution.

"The idea that the capitalist system is caught up in a permanent and irresolvable crisis has undoubtedly some value—insofar, at least, as it is not just wishful thinking, but is traceable in part to Luxemburg's work on the accumulation of capital, which provides something of a theoretical basis for it. Since her book was published two years before the war, Rosa Luxemburg did not herself formulate this perspective; but, today, this conclusion is drawn from it. It is therefore absolutely necessary to return to this subject.

"In the last section of Book Two of *Capital*, Marx deals with the process of capitalist reproduction. He does so by means of mathematical examples of purely theoretical value, and consequently this section of the book aroused very little attention; but the way that these examples are being invoked at the present time shows the extent to which a clearly abstract question can assume a practical relevance for the tactics of the class struggle. Marx shows in these pages how the capitalist production goes on by its own accord as long as all the products return in the new "circuits" of production, in the form of consumer goods, or of raw materials, or again of the means of production. This holds equally true for the stage when production is constantly expanding; a different distribution suffices for this, according to the branches of production and the types of merchandise—for example, when there is a relatively greater need for means of production. If a correct relationship is established between the different branches, supply and demand will always strike a balance. Of course, this is true only at the level of theoretical abstraction; since capitalist production is decentralized, supply and demand remain unknown quantities and equilibrium is not achieved without certain merchandise remaining unsold. That is why the branch producing such merchandise does not expand, and sometimes goes into a deep depression. And since at the same time, equilibrium is established, capital grows and sets off in quest of new fields of investment; the abstract equilibrium is in perpetual development and is kept in motion through ceaseless creations and trial runs, in quest of a final, self-regulating situation.

"From the theoretical viewpoint, however, it is important that equilibrium be established on an average, for this makes it possible to verify that the capitalist process of production can have, with equal likelihood, a large or a small output, since it is not concerned with consumer needs outside its own cycle. Capitalism does not produce the necessities of life in terms of human needs; what interests it is not the number of men who are starving, but the quantity of workers in its service whose salaries are convertible into necessities

of life. In a time of crisis, the whole process contracts; in a time of prosperity, it expands. Of course, the reserves of men and of raw materials available ultimately impose limits on this process, but both also increase in a regular way. For it absorbs the vestiges of the primitive modes of production, small enterprises and sectors where self-consumption still dominates, with which it establishes exchange relationships, and which supply it with merchandise and raw material, while at the same time serving it as reservoirs of work power, and at whose expense it ceaselessly expands.

"In her book on accumulation, Luxemburg believed she had detected an error in Marx's calculations. She therefore concluded that, in the process of capitalist production, supply and demand could not coincide, and that, through the accumulation of capital, there was always an excess of merchandise for which there was no demand—and that all this holds true even at the level of abstract theory. This, therefore, must necessarily produce a marketing crisis that cannot be remedied except by violence and by the opening up of new territories to serve as markets. It is this, then, that is the basic cause of imperialism: because of its internal necessities, the capitalist system is inevitably forced to undertake the conquest of foreign countries.

"It is only a short step from this theory to the idea that the marketing crisis, linked by its very nature to the expansion of production, is bound to assume such breadth and gravity that it becomes impossible to surmount it. Hence, with any amelioration of the situation ruled out, capitalism finds itself in an impasse, and one can most certainly see in this a fatal crisis. We have already pointed out that Luxemburg never concluded that capitalism will one day inevitably find itself face to face with such an insurmountable crisis. She formulated her theory purely as an explanation in economic terms of imperialism and of the reasons why every crisis necessarily leads to an enforced extension of the sphere of imperialism; the fact that today there are no further markets to open up is something that scarcely needs emphasizing.

"In any case, this theory is incorrect. As was pointed out in the *Bremer Bürger-Zeitung*,<sup>33</sup> shortly after the publication of Luxemburg's book, she was

33. Cf. Pannekoek's articles in the Bremen paper—issues for January 29 and 30, 1913 (and also in *Neue Zeit*, XXXI:1, pp. 780-92, and *Nieuwe Tijd*, XXI, 1916, pp. 268-83). Pannekoek returns again to this problem in *Rätekorrespondenz*, No. 1, 1934, pp. 1-20, where he criticizes the important work by Henryk Grossmann: *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchs-gesetz der kapitalistischen Systems* (Leipzig, 1929). Grossmann also upheld the theses of the inevitable economic collapse, but in a sense different from Luxemburg. In both cases, Pannekoek strongly challenges, on the basis of a simple mathematical treatment of Marxian schemas, the possibility of disproportionalities between the two sectors of production over a long period and with regular growth. According to him, the overthrow of capitalism cannot occur without the massive and conscious intervention of the exploited and of their struggle by and for themselves.



wrong in saying that Marx had made an error in his tables. We cannot dwell here on the details of the theory (already discussed in one of the early numbers of *Proletarier*); suffice it to recall that the accumulation of capital, the perpetual formation of new masses of capital in quest of investments in spheres yielding the highest profits, furnishes a primary and absolutely adequate explanation of the reasons why capitalism is constantly enlarging its domain at the expense of more primitive modes of production, as well as of the means which it uses to achieve this end, with or without recourse to violence according to the existing relationships of forces.

"So, therefore, anyone seeking to base his tactics on the idea that capitalism will embroil itself in a permanent crisis that it will not be able to surmount commits a dangerous error. An illusion of this kind leads one to elaborate, in effect, what is merely a short-term tactic, and the subsequent disillusionment is calculated to breed discouragement. It must also be stressed that this belief has no serious foundation—indeed, no foundation other than wishful thinking and the patent fact that up to now capitalism has not succeeded in surmounting its postwar crisis. But the bases of Marx's theory remain valid: it is entirely possible for capitalism to increase production and thereby surmount a highly unfavorable situation. The difficulty, in fact, is the one that always follows crisis: how to start up production again. For one must first buy in order to be able to sell; each branch of production must therefore wait for the others, since in a period of speculation no one dares to extend credit. However, if there is an upsurge in any one branch that enables it to get under way again, the others begin to get orders, and the expansion begins to spread from branch to branch. Of course, different factors may delay this recovery (for example, the present political restructuring of Europe is, in many ways, shackling economic growth). How and when production will begin a new cycle depends on so many unknown factors that any prediction on the matter would be highly speculative; nevertheless, one thing is certain—that there is no foundation whatever for the idea that there can be no chance of a change in the conjuncture of circumstances now working against capitalism."

Pannekoek cites two factors in favor of an eventual resumption of the production cycle: a large-scale increase in gold production, owing to the discovery of new gold fields, and "the promotion of eastern Asia to the rank of an autonomous sector of capitalist production. . . . Capitalism is far from being at its last gasp. According to those who think that it is, it is enough simply to wait awhile and then the final victory will come. But this is just sugar coating the pill. The hard fact is that an arduous climb still lies before us; we have only reached the foot of the mountains. It is difficult today to foresee the short-term economic development. If a phase of expansion has just

begun, it is equally certain that it will be followed by just as significant a crisis. And with the crisis, the revolution will reappear. The old revolution is finished: we must prepare the new one."

In the second part of this article, Pannekoek attempts to define the nature and the function of the Communist Party, whose task it is to prepare the future. (Clearly, he is concerned with Western European Communism, not with that of the Third International). Later, we shall present a text especially devoted to this subject. However, even at the risk of some repetition, it is interesting to see what he has to say here.

"Since both Social Democracy and communism take as their objective the seizure of social power by the working class, they cannot be distinguished from one another by their aims. Nor can they be distinguished by the methods used to attain this common objective. While it remains true that the communists opt for the method of *revolution* whereas the Social Democrats look to an *evolution* involving the slow maturation of the future state in the womb of the present society, this division is blurred by the fact that they both foresee the possibility of a final class-against-class struggle in order to deliver the final blow after a period of numerous proletarian successes and defeats. Again, a basis for distinguishing between them cannot be that the communists seek to take power by a single blow rather than waiting for power to fall into their hands, like the Social Democrats: this is not the communist idea. We are well aware that the transition to social power constitutes a process full of shifts, of victories and defeats, in many countries and regions of the world—in fact, a whole historical period dominated by a violence whose harbingers have appeared in the course of the events of the last ten years.

"The fundamental difference between these two tendencies lies in the idea they have each formed of the means, of the organs, through which the proletariat will gain power.

"Social Democracy has always viewed the party (linked with the trade unions) as the organ that is to lead the revolution to victory. This does not necessarily imply the exclusive use of electoral methods; in the opinion of the radical wing, the party should combine the pressures of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means, such as strikes and demonstrations, in order to assert the power of the proletariat. But, when all is said and done, it was the party that directed the battle, called the masses into the streets, or acted as an advance detachment. And if the oppressive mantle of state power were to be whisked off, it is again the party, as representing the proletariat, that must assume power, along with the trade unions who were exercising the basic economic role of executive organs of production.

"That is the reason why, according to this conception, the Social

Democratic Party was quite different from any other party. It was the party of the working class, a party serving as a political organization of the proletariat; in due course, it would prevail over the organizations of the bourgeoisie, and its apparatus in full maturity would then come to power. And it was for this reason that it was necessary to attract more and more workers within the sphere of the party, as militants, as members, and as electors. The party card was to show which side of the barricade one had opted for. Moscow propagated an idea that although basically the same, was carried to grotesque lengths: the idea of the dictatorship of a small party that was the incarnation of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' The development of Social Democracy before, during and after the War has shown that it was impossible to fulfill this project. A party that develops in this way, with a corresponding apparatus of permanent officials, takes on a conservative character. Its bureaucracy naturally fears the consequences of a revolution and has an interest in maintaining and improving the established order. Its body of officials hope to succeed the capitalist bureaucracy naturally and peacefully, or to govern in coalition with the latter, at least for some time. Within a democratic party of this kind, exactly as within a democratic state, the mass of militants lack the means to impose their will on a bureaucracy holding all the means of power; and this is all the more true in a dictatorial party of the Moscow type."

Contemporary mass movements "have shown how things happen and must happen, in what way the great conflicts blow up, and have thus confirmed the history of former revolutions. In all of these, it was the gigantic power of immense masses of the people at their highest degree of expansion and unity that overthrew the old order and opened the way to new developments. Such a power does not suddenly appear in a meteoric fashion; it originates from deep and long-felt discontent, from an intense agitation that gives the masses a clear picture of the situation, from a series of experiences that educate the doubters and the hesitant. Frequently, it is preceded by abortive attempts and violent clashes, for only through such things does the power of the masses take shape. In previous revolutions, it was mostly petty bourgeoisie or artisans who intervened on the basis of craft or of district. In the modern proletarian revolutions, the majority belong to the major enterprises; the working masses intervene and make decisions on the basis of their factory. The general assemblies (of a factory, or of the branch of industry as a larger unit) decide on maintaining social peace or on holding a strike or demonstration, deliberate with the other enterprises through delegate assemblies, and pour their members into the street to form a compact nucleus around which the class as a whole crystalizes.

"These experiences have shaped communist thinking about revolution. It is not the party that makes the revolution, but *the class as a whole*. Hence, the party has a completely different function from that ascribed to it in the old Social Democratic conception. It cannot absorb in itself the whole of the class and act for the class; on the contrary, it can only be the avant-garde of the class and remain true to its spiritual orientation. In their places of work, the communists are the ones who see farthest, who have the clearest ideas, and who are the most devoted to cause; that is why they are able to step forward at any time, to propose the best solutions, to size up the situation, to disperse the fears of the hesitant, and to deflect anything liable to set the movement on a wrong course. The party also plays this role in connection with general delegate assemblies charged with taking major decisions, inasmuch as it points out the right road to them and presents a program of action. Again, both during the growth period and the period of rapid development, it is the party that spreads among the masses the slogans needed to show the way, to clarify the situation, and to avoid mistakes.

"All action invariably demands a spiritual battle of the masses aimed at achieving lucidity—a battle in which opposing parties and tendencies meet and clash; and the Communist Party should wage this battle for the workers under the eyes of the workers. In this way, then, the party becomes, at each stage of the class struggle, a primordial organ, as it were, the soul of the revolution. . . .

"Quite simply, the party is the organization of communist militants animated with the same sentiments. Its strength grows through discussions about program and principles, and through the participation of all its members in agitation and in action." There is no question of recruitment at any price. "Quality, correctness of principles, that is what counts most in the eyes of the party. . . ."

Today, certain people call for "flexible tactics calculated to increase the attractiveness of the KAP. Anyone lately involved in the workers' movement and familiar with its literature will read between the lines propositions analogous to those of an earlier period that sought a softening of principles and an adaptation to circumstances. The slogan, 'Let's be done with powerlessness!', also constituted, at that time, the point of departure for opportunism. . . . But the party's power to attract does not reside in the party itself, but in its principles. And when the workers do not want to listen—in other words, when conditions are such that no challenge of a revolutionary kind presents itself with any urgency—other principles predominate. In these circumstances, it is useless for the party to try to prevail at any and all costs, for this would signify that it had sacrificed its principles to secure an

accommodation with things as they are. Nor does it serve any good to compromise with principles in order to make them appear acceptable to a large number of people; what matters for the future is not the number of adherents who find the principles acceptable, but the communists who understand them and who make them deeply and personally their own."

Hence, according to Pannekoek, "what is of greatest value in the KAP press is not the impassioned appeals, which now interest only a small number of workers, but serious information, critical commentary on the economic situation, and discussion of tactical problems linked with that situation...."

"The main objection to carrying out a tactic based on the theoretical principles of Marxism is that the tactic is inapplicable and ineffectual. Those who delve into bookish theory can completely and contentedly accept an attitude strictly in accordance with these principles and with these alone. But the masses, who have not studied the theory, take a very different view: they are concerned only with practical consequences. And if one wishes to win them over, one must bear in mind their objectives and their aspirations: the securing of reforms. It could be said that principle is the salt of practice, but if one over-salts the dishes, the meal becomes inedible.

"However, excessive attachment to one of these mutually opposing positions within the workers' movement involves the danger of overlooking what is *essential*. The difference between a principle-centered tactic and an opportunist tactic is not that the first originates out of fear that the theory may lose its purity through contact with a bad world, whereas the second never leaves the terrain of real life. The alleged dogmatist always guides his tactic toward praxis—revolutionary praxis, that is. The difference between these two tendencies arises from whether the emphasis is placed on short- or long-term tactics. There is no question here of reproaching the opportunists for their fixation on practice in general, but for their limited practice, which takes into account only the present moment and sacrifices what is of permanent value for the future to immediate gains."

In times of prosperity, when the workers are concerned only with securing reforms, opportunism thrives. A mass party will feel the repercussion of this and will inevitably be drawn into opportunism, whatever its past history; German Social Democracy is a case in point, but merely a typical case. "A small party is better able to defend itself against these influences. Faced with a given alternative, it can choose: it can reject the inclinations of the masses, stick firmly to principle, and therefore undergo a shrinkage of size and influence; or it can attempt to increase its membership, win influence, and fall into the morass. We are speaking here only about the spiritual effects of economic circumstances on the workers. Political situations can, of course,

also develop and present a party with the same type of choice. A case in point was the Third International when it plunged with both feet into the morass of opportunism, simply to gain a rapid increase of its political influence."

In a revolutionary phase, the picture changes completely. The masses are transformed: "they cease to react in the manner of petty bourgeoisie, who are deeply disturbed by any talk of revolution, and they themselves seek revolution. They demand clear slogans, clear-cut programs, radical objectives and turn increasingly toward the party that can give them these, owing to its principle-centered attitude. It can thus happen that the old parties find themselves abandoned one after the other, and that a small group, hitherto despised as dreamers devoid of common sense and as rigid dogmatists, suddenly comes forward and takes over the direction of the masses in the course of the revolution. This was what occurred in the case of the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution; without the rigid, intolerant dogmatism that led Lenin and his comrades to extirpate from their party, during the pre-revolutionary phase, every inclination toward opportunism, the Russian Revolution would not have presented the clear-cut, radical character that carried it to success and made it a model for the proletarian revolution. The subsequent fact that, through the absence of revolution in Europe and through the petty bourgeois structure of Russia itself, a relapse into bourgeois politics inevitably occurred, does not lessen in any way the exemplary value of those first years of the Russian Revolution.

"In thus contrasting the principle-centered tactic with the opportunist type, we have also created a clear distinction between revolutionary periods and reactionary periods." But this is a broad distinction; for, in reality, all kinds of intermediate phases exist. Even in times of crisis, the principle-centered tactic "does not always have the ear of the proletariat, at least as a whole. The unemployed look for temporary assistance, for reforms, so that they may return to being salaried slaves; those who are employed continue to count on the stability and continuance of the capitalist system. Despite their revolt, the masses have not yet the desire to achieve the objective, still lack the feel of their own power and the will to strive toward the ultimate goal—the primary conditions for revolution.... It is therefore impossible to forecast with certainty whether the situation in times of crisis favors or does not favor communist propaganda; there are so many economic, traditional, ideological and other factors at work to make minds receptive or non-receptive, that only by hindsight can one measure what has finally prevailed." But, in any case, to attempt to adapt to a contingent situation is to carry the spirit of an outmoded phase into a new phase of the class struggle.

"However, the principle-centered tactic is not learned from books, or

through courses on theory and political formation, but through real life practice of the class struggle. It is true that prior to action, as well as after action, theory can be expressed in concepts that present organized knowledge; but, in order to develop in a real sense, this knowledge itself must be acquired in the hard school of experience, a harsh lived experience that shapes the mind in the full heat of combat. Practical action brings into reality all factors of which the theory speaks, and enables one to see the increasing forces of solidarity, of awareness, but also—through the defeats that the enemy inflicts thanks to its spiritual resources—the weaknesses of one's own class. It is only through the practice of its struggles against capitalism, as Marx in his time already stressed, that the proletariat is transformed into a revolutionary class capable of conquering the capitalist system. . . .

"These reflections are also valid for the struggle against the bosses, and, in this sense, are of particular relevance to the *Allgemeine Arbeiterunion*. Like the KAP, the AAU is essentially an organization for revolution. Under other conditions, during a period of revolutionary ebb, one would not dream of founding such an organization. But it is all that remains from the revolutionary years; the workers who created it and who fought under its banners, do not want the experience of those struggles to be forgotten, and therefore are conserving the AAU as a precious means of future development. That is why a period such as the present one brings even more contradictions for this union than it does for the KAP.

"Were the AAU to decide to act as a trade union organization, we would have simply another *Kraft-Zentrale*. At present, it is AAU policy that, in revolutionary phases, all the members of the various confederations should follow the same path to insure coherent unity of all the factories. And it's clear propaganda for this idea could only founder if the AAU set itself up as a competitor to the other confederations, instead of acting as the proponent of a tactic that completely transcended their aims.

"... It has sometimes been said that the AAU was the proponent of an organizational principle: factory organization as superior to the trade unions." But, in any case, it is not concerned with being an instrument for reanimating a trade union kind of combativeness. "To adopt this objective would be to transform itself into an organization involved out of necessity in compromising with the bosses and in the formation of a bureaucratic stratum, and for these reasons would therefore be drawn onto the path of reformism. . . . When the struggles for better pay and working conditions led by the trade unions are in accordance with reformist principles, in the manner of carpet sellers or of pleaders before a court, the AAU should subject

them to the most severe criticism. If, against the wishes of the trade unions, the workers declare war on the bosses, the AAU should support them with enlightenment and advice and put at their disposal its machinery of agitation; however, in doing so, it must never act as though seeking to fight its competitors, as though attempting to lure members away from the trade unions. It should not, therefore, adopt the attitude of a new organization that places itself at the head of the workers, but, on the contrary, should seek to make the new principles prevail. There is no question, for the AAU, of refusing to assume the leadership of the struggle because its membership is small. On the contrary, indeed, these principles demand that the workers fight, think and decide for themselves, and not that they appeal for direction from organizations other than the trade unions. . . . It will follow the proper course only if all its decisions are in accordance with the principle of not trying to develop as a specific organization, but instead attempting to contribute to the maturation of the workers. This is tantamount to saying that the mission of the AAU is to assist the progress of all social conflicts toward revolution. But it cannot be maintained that the revolution can be achieved through any and every social conflict; and therefore the mission of the AAU must be to transform every conflict into a phase of revolutionary development by raising the level of knowledge and of the will to fight.

"What really matters is that—in the years of decline, of confusion, of deceit—the principles of the class struggle, in the Marxist sense, have been protected by a handful of men welded together; for without this, no revival would be possible. Clear and proven principles and an ardent zeal for struggle are the two pillars on which the revolutionary development must be reconstructed."

To argue that the realities of the situation left room for no other choice is not to lessen the immediate importance of the preceding considerations. The idea of "flexible" (or "dynamic") tactics no doubt embodied a legitimate aspiration to break out of the group-centered life—that framework within which, unable to direct one's aggression effectively against the world, one directed it against the nearest group, and, through lack of numbers, one saw discussions about principles in terms of personal antagonisms. Almost until the last days of *Rätekommunismus*, that was toward the end of 1932—when the Social Democratic repression was directed against the leftist press, while at the same time the different tendencies were uniting against fascism—this question provoked stormy controversies and individual or collective rifts. But the Leninist Communist Party itself, although relatively large, succeeded neither in securing a foothold in the reformist trade unions (a policy urged

on it by its impractical masters) nor in creating a really competitive central body.<sup>34</sup>

Pannekoek in no respect sought to develop elaborate formulations. He was interested only in the best hypotheses of development, the only ones really worth envisaging, the others being of no practical value. And he noted, in *Prinzip und Taktik*, that even in the time of crisis, when the inevitable outcome of the situation is "the rapid growth of the party and of its influence, there is a strong probability that one can only prepare the way for the coming revolutionary wave, every phase of this kind constituting merely a stage within a total process."<sup>35</sup>

It is well known that the official workers' movement, with its paramilitary organizations, its rituals and its banners, collapsed before the National Socialists and the petty bourgeoisie, without daring to fling itself into a real battle, and offering as a pretext the argument that the consequences of an extra-parliamentary conflict were hazardous (while the movement itself had done everything to ensure that this was so). And we know what a fearful price the people of Europe have paid for this new bankruptcy—a consequence of an entire tactic, to use Pannekoek's terminology. It will be argued that there were many other causes for the triumph of fascism besides this shameful surrender; but one can argue against this particular cause. And this was what was attempted, though in vain, by the council movement in Germany.

34. Under the pressure of the 1929 crisis, the KPD attempted to revive, in its own fashion, the KAPist tactic of the self-activation of the masses by "a twofold organization"—political and trade-unionist. Cf. Flechtheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-62. This attempt at adaptation, always linked with the old parliamentary tactic, soon came to nothing.

35. *Ibid.*, 8, p. 183.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Almost all the 'organized' forces of council communism disappeared shortly after the inauguration of the Nazi reign of terror. There remained only isolated elements and small groups scattered throughout the world. Only one group—the *Groep van Internationale Communisten*, or GIC—continued to display at that time any theoretical or practical activity. We shall discuss it later. For the moment, though, let us note that it published several pamphlets by Pannekoek (generally anonymous).<sup>1</sup>

One of these GIC publications was his *Lenin as Philosopher*<sup>2</sup> to which we have already referred. The title is itself revealing, since the pamphlet (subtitled "A Critical Examination of the Philosophical Basis of Leninism") is in effect a critique of Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* published in 1908, and issued in German in 1927. Following Marx and Dietzgen, Pannekoek examined the objective character both of matter (in the modern sense, including wave phenomena) and of mental representations (from the simplest to the most complex—a mathematical model, for example), as well as the forms of interaction between the material world and the spiritual world.

Pannekoek follows Marx, we have said, but this needs qualification. In effect, Pannekoek stresses that Marxism is a body of ideas that are by definition revolutionary, and that the politics of Marx, like his theories, developed in close connection with the organic transformation of society. "The method of research that they [Marx and Engels] framed remains up to this day an excellent guide and tool toward the understanding and interpretation of new events;" this method is that of historical materialism, "a

1. For instance, in the pamphlet *De Arbeiders, het Parlement en het Kommunismus*, Pannekoek deals in broad outline with the idea of the councils. The table of contents provides a good summary of this pamphlet: crisis and misery; the conflict between work and property; the class struggles; parliamentarianism as an instrument of emancipation; leaders as emancipators; the utility of parliament; the Communist Party; the direct action of the masses; the workers' councils.

2. J. Harper, *Lenin als Philosoph. Kritische Betrachtung der philosophischen Grundlage des Leninismus* (Amsterdam, 1938), mimeographed. The English version appears as Anton Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher* (New York, 1948).

living theory that grows with the proletariat and with the tasks and aims of its struggle."<sup>3</sup>

Pannekoek applies this method to the study of the bourgeois ideas of the world, whose development rests primarily on the idea of the natural sciences, "the spiritual basis of capitalism." These ideas, he says, took on a materialist character as long as the bourgeoisie fought for political power against feudal absolutism and religion, the latter still being at that time the spiritual basis of the former. But when the bourgeoisie had come into power and the class struggle had emerged, the new dominant class stressed the weaknesses of materialism and the limits of science.

And it is in this context, with Marx having "stated that realities determine thought, that Dietzgen established the relationship between reality and thought." He was to show, in effect, that spiritual and material phenomena "constitute the entire real world, a coherent entity in which matter determines mind" (that is, thoughts are "material for our brain activity of forming concepts") and mind, through human activity, determines matter. We are therefore dealing with what "may rightly be called monism"—a monism that Pannekoek was to take up on his own account, adapting it to the evolution of the exact sciences.<sup>4</sup>

Pannekoek therefore examines, from this monist and materialist perspective, the epistemological theories of Mach and of Avenarius. We can deal here with only one aspect of this masterly account, which certainly deserves to be published in full. Mach, whose philosophical work made a considerable contribution to the development of quantitative physics, reduced the world to a system of objects, the knowledge of which was a matter of sensations of a predominantly intersubjective character—not the interaction of, but the near-identity of matter and mind. To this, Pannekoek answers, in line with Marxism, that knowledge does not originate in personal meditation (as Avenarius holds) or only in the activity of the professional philosopher alone (as Mach holds), but in social labor, in the interaction of man and nature in general.

Continuing with a close analysis of this anti-Machist work by Lenin, Pannekoek shows that the latter, who was in no way equipped to understand modern physics—and therefore the ideas of the Austrian physicist—thoroughly misinterprets and misunderstands it, and, by way of refutation, can only indulge in invective. According to Lenin, "the philosophical

3. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25. Pierre Naville finds in the Pannekoek pamphlet, which has "some good chapters," a "vague realism," then a "dualism," and finally an "existentialism"! Cf. P. Naville, *Psychologie, Marxisme, materialisme* (Paris, 1947), pp. 141-45.

expression of objective reality" covers only physical matter, whereas *matter* "in Historical Materialism [is] the designation of all that is really existing in the world."<sup>5</sup> But, says Pannekoek, what must be specially noted is the identity relationship that Lenin establishes between Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and the bourgeois materialists, on the other (with the exception of three points—namely, the "mechanistic materialism" of the bourgeois thinkers; "the anti-dialectical character of their philosophy;" and the "non-intelligibility of historical materialism").<sup>6</sup> In this connection, Pannekoek points out: "Of course, theoretical ideas must be criticized by theoretical arguments. But the social consequences are emphasized with such vehemence, the social origins of the contested ideas should not be left out of consideration. This most essential character of Marxism does not seem to exist for Lenin."<sup>7</sup>

Lenin, in speaking of a book by Haeckel, the materialist popularizer, says: "This little book has become a weapon in the class struggle."<sup>8</sup> But what class struggle does he mean, at what period and under what conditions? Pannekoek comments as follows: "Socialist workers embraced the social doctrines of Marx and the materialism of natural science with equal interest. Their labor under capitalism, their daily experience and their awakening understanding of social forces contributed greatly toward undermining traditional religion. Then to solve their doubts, the need for scientific knowledge grew, and the workers became the most zealous readers of the works of Buechner and Haeckel. . . . This, by the way, concurs with the fact that the working-class movement had not yet reached beyond capitalism, that in practice the class struggle only tended to secure its place within capitalist society, and that the democratic solutions of the early bourgeois movements were also accepted as valid for the working class. The full comprehension of revolutionary Marxist theory is possible only in connection with revolutionary practice."<sup>9</sup>

"Wherein, then, do bourgeois materialism and Historical Materialism stand opposed to one another?"

"Both agree insofar as they are materialist philosophies, that is both recognize the primacy of the experienced material world: both recognize that spiritual phenomena, sensation, consciousness, ideas, are derived from the former. They are opposite in that bourgeois materialism bases itself upon natural science, whereas Historical Materialism is primarily the science of

5. Pannekoek, *ibid.*, p. 61.

6. Lenin, *Materialisme et empiriocriticisme* (Paris, 1956), pp. 205-206.

7. Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher, op. cit.*, p. 64.

8. Lenin, *Materialisme et empiriocriticisme, op. cit.*, p. 306.

9. Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher, op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

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

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

"For bourgeois materialism the problem of the meaning of knowledge is a question of the relationship of a spiritual phenomenon to the physico-chemical-biological phenomena of the brain matter. For Historical Materialism it is a question of the relationship of our thoughts to the phenomena that we experience as the external world. Now man's position in society is not simply that of an observing being; he is a dynamic force who reacts upon his environment and changes it."<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely this attitude of bourgeois materialism that Pannekoek traces in Lenin and in his teacher, Plekhanov, after having shown its connection with conditions that made possible the emergence of classical Social Democracy. When Plekhanov identified the ideas of Marx as an extension of those of Feuerbach,<sup>11</sup> he was, in a certain sense, uttering a simple truism; but he also highlights the basic and distinctive trait of the Marxist theory of knowledge, which "proceeds from the action of society, this self-made material world of man, upon the mind, and so belongs to the proletarian class struggle."<sup>12</sup> It was on this basis that Pannekoek wrote the chapter "The Russian Revolution," which follows.

"The basic philosophical agreement of Lenin and Plekhanov and their common divergence from Marxism points to their common origin in Russian

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

11. In this connection, Pannekoek uses many citations from Plekhanov's *Questions fondamentales du marxisme* (Paris, undated), 2nd ed. pp. 15-21.

12. Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

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

"In their early days Marx and Engels stood in the first ranks of the opposition to German absolutism—an opposition that was still unified, containing both the bourgeoisie and the working class. Their development toward Historical Materialism, then, was the theoretical reflection of the development of the working class toward independent action against the bourgeoisie. The practical class-antagonism found its expression in the theoretical antagonism. The fight of the bourgeoisie against feudalism was expressed by middle-class materialism, the cognate of Feuerbach's doctrine, which used natural science to fight religion as the consecration of the old powers. The working class in its own fight has little use for natural science, the instrument of its foe; its theoretical weapon is social science, the science of social development. To fight religion by means of natural science has no significance for the workers; they know, moreover, that its roots will be cut off anyhow first by capitalist development, then by their own class struggle. Nor have they any use for the obvious fact that thoughts are produced by the brain. They have to understand how ideas are produced by society. This is the content of Marxism as it grows among the workers as a living and stirring power, as the theory expressing their growing power of organization and knowledge. When in the second half of the 19th century capitalism gained complete mastery in Western and Central Europe as well as in America, bourgeois materialism disappeared. Marxism was the only materialist class-view remaining.

"In Russia, however, matters were different. Here the fight against czarism was analogous to the former fight against absolutism in Europe. In Russia, too, church and religion were the strongest supports of the system of government; they held the rural masses, engaged in primitive agrarian production, in complete ignorance and superstition. The struggle against religion was here a prime social necessity. Since in Russia there was no significant bourgeoisie that could take up the fight as a future ruling class, the task fell to the intelligentsia; during scores of years it waged a strenuous fight for enlightenment of the masses against czarism. Among the Western

bourgeoisie, now reactionary and anti-materialist, it could find no support whatever in this struggle. It had to appeal to the socialist workers, who alone sympathized with it, and it took over their acknowledged theory, Marxism. Thus it came about that even intellectuals who were spokesmen of the first rudiments of a Russian bourgeoisie, such as Peter Struve and Tugan Baranovski, presented themselves as Marxists. They had nothing in common with the proletarian Marxism of the West; what they learned from Marx was the doctrine of social development with capitalism as the next phase. A revolutionary force emerged in Russia for the first time when the workers took up the fight, first by strikes alone, then in combination with political demands. Now the intellectuals found a revolutionary class to join up with, in order to become its spokesmen in a socialist party.

"Thus the proletarian class struggle in Russia was at the same time a struggle against czarist absolutism, under the banner of socialism. So Marxism in Russia, developing as the theory of those engaged in the social conflict, necessarily assumed a different character than it had in Western Europe. It was still the theory of a fighting working class; but this class had to fight first and foremost for what in Western Europe had been the function and work of the bourgeoisie, with the help of the intellectuals. So the Russian intellectuals, in adapting the theory to this local task, had to find a form of Marxism in which criticism of religion stood in the forefront. They found it in an approach to earlier forms of materialism, and in the first writings of Marx from the time when in Germany the fight of the bourgeoisie and the workers against absolutism was still undivided."<sup>13</sup>

Plekhanov, Pannekoek recalls, was the first to adopt this approach, and to establish a close relationship between the materialism of Marx and the theories both of the major French materialists and of Feuerbach. In the ranks of German socialism, "Plekhanov was known as the herald of the Russian working-class struggle, which he predicted theoretically at a time when practically there was hardly any trace." Nearer as he was to the Western socialists, Plekhanov "was determined by Russian conditions less than was Lenin."

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68. An expert Sovietologist, the Dominican priest Bochenski, citing this passage, approves of its content in so far as it pertains to the importance attached to the struggle against religion by the Russian revolutionaries. But he reproaches Pannekoek, on the one hand, for not seeing in Lenin a "classic" materialist, rarely "original" but "rather less crude than Engels;" and on the other, for confining to "religious values" only the hate that Lenin had for all "values." Finally, he says Pannekoek focuses too much on the conditions that determined the personality of Lenin, and not sufficiently on this personality itself. Cf. Bochenski, *Der Sowjetrussische dialektische Materialisme* (Bern, 1950), pp. 41-44. Thus, Pannekoek, too "existentialist" for Naville, is not sufficiently so for this priest.

Above all else, Pannekoek writes, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party saw as the first task "the annihilation of czarism and of the backward, barbarous social system of Russia. Church and religion were the theoretical foundations of that system"—hence the need for "a relentless fight against them." "The struggle against religion stood in the center of Lenin's theoretical thought; any concession, however small, to 'fideism' was an attack on the life-nerve of the movement." This fight "was very similar to the former fight of the bourgeoisie and intellectuals in Western Europe. . . . In Russia, however, it was the working class that had to wage the fight; so the fighting organization had to be a socialist party, proclaiming Marxism as its creed, and taking from Marxism what was necessary for the Russian Revolution: the doctrine of social development from capitalism to socialism, and the doctrine of class war as its moving force. Hence Lenin gave to his materialism the name and garb of Marxism, and assumed it to be the real Marxism.

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

"Lenin, on the contrary, had to rely on the working class, and because his fight had to be implacable and radical, he espoused the radical ideology of the Western proletariat fighting world-capitalism—Marxism, in other words. Since, however, the Russian Revolution showed a mixture of two characters (bourgeois revolution in its immediate aims, proletarian revolution in its active forces), the appropriate bolshevist theory likewise had to present two characters, bourgeois materialism in its basic philosophy, proletarian evolutionism in its doctrine of class struggle. This mixture was termed Marxism. But it is clear that Lenin's Marxism, as determined by the special Russian attitude toward capitalism, had to be fundamentally different from



the real Marxism growing as the basic view of the worker in the countries of big capital. Marxism in Western Europe is the worldview of a working class confronting the task of converting a most highly developed capitalism, its own world of life and action, into communism. The Russian workers and intellectuals could not make this their object: they had first to open the way for a free development of a modern industrial society. To the Russian Marxists the nucleus of Marxism is not contained in Marx's thesis that social reality determines consciousness, but in the sentence of young Marx, inscribed in big letters in the Moscow People's House, that religion is the opium of the people.

"It may happen that in a theoretical work there appear, not the immediate surroundings and tasks of the author, but more general and remote influences and wider tasks. In Lenin's book, however, nothing of the sort is perceptible. It is a manifest and exclusive reflection of the Russian Revolution at which he was aiming. Its character so entirely corresponds to bourgeois materialism that, had it been known at the time in Western Europe (only confused rumors on the internal strifes of Russian socialism penetrated here) and had it been properly interpreted, one could have predicted that the Russian Revolution must somehow result in a kind of capitalism based on a workers' struggle.

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

liberating the entire proletarian class from capitalism; its theoretical expression was the legend of Marxism.

"Of course Lenin was a pupil of Marx; from Marx he learned what was most essential for the Russian Revolution, the uncompromising proletarian class struggle. Just as for similar reasons, the social democrats were pupils of Marx. And surely the fight of the Russian workers, in their mass actions and their soviets, was the most important practical example of modern proletarian warfare. That, however, Lenin did not understand Marxism as the theory of proletarian revolution, that he did not understand capitalism, bourgeoisie, proletariat in their highest modern development, was shown strikingly when from Russia, by means of the Third International, the world revolution was to be begun, and the advice and warnings of Western Marxists were entirely disregarded. An unbroken series of blunders, failures and defeats that resulted in the present weakness of the workers' movement showed the unavoidable shortcoming of the Russian leadership."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Pannekoek links Russian conditions to Lenin's fragmentary development of Marxism. But, according to Pannekoek, Lenin regarded ideas as truths having an existence independent of society, without seeing in them "generalizations of former experiences and necessities;" he thus assigns to them "an unlimited validity" and, under the guise of restoring Marxism in view of idealist tendencies, he hardens them into the dogmas of bourgeois materialism—divinized abstractions: matter, energy and causality in nature; freedom and progress in social life—replaced in our day by the cult "of the state and of the nation."

The sphere of influence of Leninism is not limited to Russia, Pannekoek wrote in 1938: "The aim of the Communist Party<sup>15</sup>—which is called world revolution—is to bring to power, by means of the fighting force of the workers, a stratum of leaders who institute planned production by means of state power; in its essence it coincides with the aims of social democracy. The social ideals of well-ordered organization of production for use under the direction of technical and scientific experts inspire "daring radicalism of materialist thought. Thus the Communist Party sees in this class a natural ally, and seeks to draw it into its camp. By means of a suitable propaganda, it tries therefore to withdraw the intelligentsia from the spiritual influences of the bourgeoisie and of private capitalism in decline, and to win them over to a revolution destined to give them their true place as a new dominant class. At the philosophical level, this means winning them over to materialism. A

14. Pannekoek, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-72.

15. The reference is, of course, to the Communist Party in the generic sense.

revolution is incompatible with the soft-centered and conciliatory ideology of an idealist system; it needs the exciting and audacious radicalism of materialism.

"There is, of course, the difficulty that the intellectual class is too limited in number, too heterogeneous in social position, and hence too feeble to be able single-handedly to seriously threaten capitalist domination. Neither are the leaders of the Second and the Third Internationals a match for the power of the bourgeoisie, even if they could impose themselves by strong and clear politics instead of being rotten through opportunism. When, however, capitalism is tumbling into a heavy economic or political crisis that rouses the masses, when the working class has taken up the fight and succeeds in shattering capitalism in an initial victory—then their time will come. Then they will intervene and slide themselves in as leaders of the revolution, nominally to give their aid by taking part in the fight, in reality to deflect the action in the direction of their party aims. Whether or not the defeated bourgeoisie will then rally with them to save what can be saved of capitalism, their intervention in any case comes down to cheating the workers, leading them off the road to freedom." 16

In his major work, *Workers' Councils*, Pannekoek deals with the Russian Revolution as follows:

"The Russian Revolution was an important episode in the development of the working class movement—first, as already mentioned, by the display of new forms of political strike, instruments of revolution. Moreover, in a higher degree, by the first appearance of new forms of self-organization of the fighting workers, known as soviets, i.e., councils. In 1905 they were hardly noticed as a special phenomenon and they disappeared with the revolutionary activity itself. In 1917 they reappeared with greater power; now their importance was grasped by the workers of Western Europe, and they played a role here in the class struggles after World War I.

"The soviets, essentially, were simply the strike committees, such as always arise in wide strikes. Since the strikes in Russia broke out in large factories and

16. Pannekoek, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79. Karl Korsch, in a laudatory account of Pannekoek's work, clarifies the "sliding" of historical materialism into dialectical materialism, under the aegis of Lenin, who fitted the Hegelian dialectic to the old bourgeois materialism and pointed out the close link existing between the latter and the Jacobin political form (state, party dictatorship) of Russian and international Bolshevism. Cf. Korsch, "Lenin's Philosophy," *Living Marxism*, IV:5 (November 1938), pp. 138-44. Cf. also Mousso and Philippe, "Politique et philosophie de Lénine a Harper," *Internationalisme*, 30 (January 1948), pp. 28-36; Philippe, *ibid.*, pp. 31-33. Both reproach Pannekoek for seeing the October Revolution as a purely bourgeois movement, and for reducing the whole works of Lenin to a philosophic exposé "of more than doubtful quality," and consequently neglecting the "political positions" of the Bolsheviks, the most advanced positions of that time, we are told.

rapidly expanded over towns and districts, the workers had to keep in continual touch. In the shops the workers assembled and talked regularly after the close of work, or in times of tension even continually, the entire day. They sent their delegates to other factories and to the central committees, where information was interchanged, difficulties discussed, decisions taken, and new tasks considered.

"But here the tasks proved more encompassing than in ordinary strikes. The workers had to throw off the heavy oppression of czarism; they felt that their action was changing Russian society at its foundations. They had to consider not only wages and labor conditions in their shops, but all questions related to society at large. They had to find their own way in these realms and to take decisions on political matters. When the strike flared up, extended over the entire country, stopped all industry and traffic and paralyzed governmental functions, the soviets were confronted with new problems. They had to regulate public life, they had to take care of public security and order, they had to provide the indispensable public utilities and services. They had to perform governmental functions; what they decided was executed by the workers, whereas the government and police stood aloof, conscious of their impotence against the rebellious masses. Then the delegates of other groups, of intellectuals, of peasants, of soldiers, who came to join the central soviets, took part in the discussions and decisions. But all this power was like a flash of lightning, like a passing meteor. When at last the czarist government mustered its military forces and beat down the movement, the soviets disappeared.

"Thus it was in 1905. In 1917 the war had weakened government through the defeats at the front and the hunger in the towns, and now the soldiers, mostly peasants, took part in the action. Besides the workers' councils in the towns, soldiers' councils were formed in the army; the officers were shot when they did not acquiesce to the soviets taking all power into their hands to prevent entire anarchy. After half a year of vain attempts on the part of politicians and military commanders to impose new governments, the soviets, supported by the socialist parties, were master of society.

"Now the soviets stood before a new task. From organs of revolution they had to become organs of reconstruction. The masses were their own master and of course began to build up production according to their needs and life interest. What they wanted and did was not determined, as always in such cases, by inculcated doctrines, but by their own class character, by their conditions of life. What were these conditions? Russia was a primitive agrarian country with only the beginnings of industrial development. The masses of the people were uncivilized and ignorant peasants, spiritually