

dominated by a gold, glittering church, and even the industrial workers were strongly connected with their old villages. The village soviets arising everywhere were self-governing peasant committees. They seized the large estates of the former large landowners and divided them up. The development went in the direction of small holders with private property, and displayed already the distinctions between larger and smaller properties, between influential wealthy and more humble poor farmers.

"In the towns, on the other hand, there could be no development to private capitalist industry because there was no bourgeoisie of any significance. The workers wanted some form of socialist production, the only one possible under these conditions. But their minds and character, only superficially touched by the beginnings of capitalism, were hardly adequate to the task of themselves regulating production. So their foremost and leading elements, the socialists of the Bolshevik Party—organized and hardened by years of devoted fight, their leaders in the revolution—became the leaders in the reconstruction. Moreover, were these working class tendencies not to be drowned by the flood of aspirations for private property coming from the land, a strong central government had to be formed, able to restrain the peasants' tendencies. In this heavy task of organizing industry, of organizing the defensive war against counterrevolutionary attacks, of subduing the resistance of capitalist tendencies among the peasants, and of educating them to modern scientific ideas instead of their old beliefs, all the capable elements among the workers and intellectuals, supplemented by such of the former officials and officers as were willing to cooperate, had to combine in the Bolshevik Party as the leading body. It formed the new government. The soviets gradually were eliminated as organs of self-rule, and reduced to subordinate organs of the government apparatus. The name of Soviet Republic, however, was preserved as a camouflage, and the ruling party retained the name of Communist Party."¹⁷

Pannekoek then goes on to describe the manner in which a system of state capitalist production developed in Russia, but we cannot do more than mention it here. His account concludes with the following, which is highly characteristic of his method: "For the working class, the significance of the Russian Revolution must be looked for in quite different directions. Russia showed to the European and American workers, confined within reformist ideas and practice, first how an industrial working class by a gigantic mass action of wild strikes is able to undermine and destroy an obsolete state power; and second, how in such actions the strike committees develop into

17. Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-85.

workers' councils, organs of fight and of self-management, acquiring political tasks and functions."¹⁸

It is on the same basis that, in *Lenin as Philosopher*, Pannekoek defines what he means by revolutionary Marxism. Here again, he is not at all concerned with restoring a body of ideas, still less with polemics, but he reasons in accordance with the real conditions and the final purpose of an all-out working class struggle in the developed capitalist countries: "In reality, for the working class in the countries of developed capitalism, in Western Europe and America, matters are entirely different. Its task is not the overthrow of a backward absolutist monarchy. Its task is to vanquish a ruling class commanding the mightiest material and spiritual forces the world ever knew. Its object cannot be to replace the domination of stockbrokers and monopolists over a disorderly production by the domination of state officials over a production regulated from above. Its object is to be itself master of production and itself to regulate labor, the basis of life. Only then is capitalism really destroyed. Such an aim cannot be attained by an ignorant mass, the confident disciples of a party that presents itself as expert leadership. It can be attained only if the workers themselves, the entire class, understand the conditions, ways and means of their fight; when every man knows from his own judgment what to do. They must, every one of them, act themselves, decide themselves, hence think out and know for themselves. Only in this way will a real class organization be built up from below, having the form of something like workers' councils. It is of no avail that they have been convinced that their leaders know what is afoot and have gained the point in theoretical discussion—an easy thing when each is acquainted with the writings of his own party only. Out of the contest of arguments they have to form a clear opinion themselves. There is not truth lying ready at hand that has only to be imbibed; in every new case truth must be contrived by exertion of one's own brain.

"This does not mean, of course, that every worker should judge on scientific arguments in fields that can be mastered only by professional study. It means first, that all workers should give attention not only to their direct working and living conditions but also to the great social issues connected with their class struggle and the organization of labor and would know how to take decisions here. But it implies, secondly, a certain standard of argument in propaganda and political strife. When the views of the opponent are distorted because the willingness or the capacity to understand them is lacking, then in the eyes of the believing adherents you may score a success; but the only result—which in party strife is even intended—is to bind them with stronger

18. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

fanaticism to the party. For the workers, however, what is of importance is not the increase of party power but the increase of their own capacity to seize power and to establish their mastery over society. Only when, in arguing and discussing, the opponent is given his full pound, when in weighing arguments against one another each solid opinion is understood out of social class relations, will the participant hearers gain such well-founded insight as is necessary for a working class to assure its freedom.

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

"When the working class has grown more numerous, more powerful, and society is full of the proletarian class struggle, another part of Marxism has to come to the forefront. That they should know that they are exploited and have to fight is not the main point any more; they must know how to fight, how to overcome their weakness, how to build up their unity and strength. Their economic position is so easy to understand, their exploitation so manifest that their unity in struggle, their common will to seize power over production should presumably result at once. What hampers them is chiefly the power of the inherited and infused ideas, the formidable spiritual power of the middle-class world, enveloping their minds into a thick cloud of beliefs and ideologies, dividing them, and making them uncertain and confused. The process of enlightenment, of clearing up and vanquishing this world of old ideas and ideologies is the essential process of building the working class power, is the progress of revolution. Here that part of Marxism is needed that we call its *philosophy*, the relation of ideas to reality."¹⁹

Pannekoek applied to anarchism this evolutionary conception of Marxism linked with the new character of the class struggle. In the earlier sections of the present collection,²⁰ we have seen that he reproached anarchism for

19. *Lenin as Philosopher, op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

20. Although the answer to Mühsam says nothing specific, its author is clearly against the

slowing down events. After World War II, he returned to this, but this time he ascribed a different motivation to it. This is shown by a letter to the Australian publisher of "Workers' Councils:"²¹

"In the present times of increasing submission by the workers to powerful state tyranny, it is natural that more sympathy is directed toward anarchism, with its propaganda of freedom. Just as social democracy, its opponents, it had its roots in 19th-century capitalism. One took its necessity from exploitation and capitalist competition, the other from the entire enslaving and suppression of personality; one found its force in the need for and propaganda of organization, the other in the need for and propaganda of freedom. Since the former was felt most immediately and overwhelmingly by the workers, social democracy won the masses an anarchism could not compete with it. Now under rising state capitalism it seems to have a better chance. But we have to bear in mind that both in the same way carry the mark of their origin out of the primitive conditions of the 19th century. The principle of freedom, originating from bourgeois conditions of early capitalism, freedom of trade and enterprise, is not adequate to the working class. The problems or goals for the workers are to combine freedom and organization. Anarchism, by setting up freedom as its goal, forgets that the free society of workers can only exist by a strong feeling of community as the prominent character of the collaborating producers. This new character, coming forth as strong solidarity in the workers' fights already, is the basis of organization—without compulsion from above. The self-made organization by free collaborating workers is the basis at the same time of their personal freedom, i.e., of their feeling as free masters of their own work. Freedom as the chief content of anarchist teaching may awake strong sympathies now, but it is only a part, not even the basic part, of the goal of the working class, which is expressed by self-rule, self-determination, by means of council organization. It seems, then, that in the present times there is in anarchism a certain approach toward the idea of workers' councils, especially where it involves groups of workers. But the old pure anarchist doctrine is too narrow to be of value for the workers' class struggle now."

idea of common action with the anarchists. A year later, when a section of the KAPD proposed to create a new anti-Moscow International, it was Gorter who drew up its manifesto, *Die kommunistische Arbeiter Internationale* (Berlin, 1921). The attempt had little impact, except in Holland, of course, and in Bulgaria, where a KAP of a thousand members was set up after the sabotage by the Leninist Communist Party of a rail workers' strike in 1919-1920. Cf. Joseph Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria* (New York, 1959), pp. 99, 155, 296.

21. "Anarchism Not Suitable," *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils*, 42 (February 1948). The title is J. A. Dawson's, editor of the paper, who also published studies by other council communists (Mattick, Korsch) and by non-conformist anarchists (Lain Diez, translator of *Lenin as Philosopher* into Spanish, and Kennafick).

CHAPTER TWELVE

PARTY AND WORKING CLASS

Needless to say, the GIC¹ hammered out its ideas by criticizing other political organizations, including the KAP. In its view, the basic condition for a new world was "control over the natural course of production and distribution" by the workers' councils. This demanded a definitive break with the classical party form, since the latter was regarded as a de facto leadership organ representing the councils—a role that the KAPD (and its various factions) effectively sought to corner for itself. However, the GIC in no way questioned the need for an autonomous communist body of ideas; in fact, it envisioned political organization in the form of a federation of "work groups."² These groups, functioning as "organs of collective thought," lived and multiplied by their own activity: theoretical elaboration. But this activity was possible only when linked with mass actions, with actions arising spontaneously from the contradictions of modern society and not at anyone's beck and call³—as, for instance, in the Amsterdam disturbances of 1934.

Of course, this viewpoint was criticized. One criticism was concerned particularly with the need for a more intensive, more concrete participation in the conflicts, and therefore with the need for a political group endowed with a coherence greater than that of a simple federation.⁴ Pannekoek intervened in the discussion a little later, with an article entitled "Partei und Arbeiterklasse" ("The Party and the Working Class"),⁵ which follows.

"We are only at the very earliest stages of a new workers' movement. The old movement was embodied in parties, and today belief in the party constitutes the most powerful check on the working class' capacity for action. That is why we are not trying to create a new party. This is so, not because our numbers are small—a party of any kind begins with a few people—but

1. On the history of this group, cf. "Aperçu sur l'histoire des communistes de conseils en Hollande," *Informations et liaisons ouvrières*, 30, May 6, 1959.

2. "Ueber die Notwendigkeit einer Partei," *Der Kampfbruf* (organ of the AAU—Berlin), 3-4, January 1930.

3. "Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung," *Raetekorrespondenz*, 8-9, April-May 1935, pp. 1-28.

4. *Ibid.*, 10-11, July-August 1935, pp. 22-26.

5. Anton Pannekoek, "Partei und Arbeiterklasse," *ibid.*, 15, March 1936, pp. 1-6. All articles in *Raetekorrespondenz* were published anonymously.

because, in our day, a party cannot be other than an organization aimed at directing and dominating the proletariat. To this type of organization we oppose the principle that the working class can effectively come into its own and prevail only by taking its destiny into its own hands. The workers are not to adopt the slogans of any group whatsoever, not even our own groups; they are to think, decide and act for themselves. Therefore, in this transitional period, the natural organs of education and enlightenment are, in our view, work groups, study and discussion circles, which have formed of their own accord and are seeking their own way.

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

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

"In recent times, it was supposed for theoretical and practical reasons that this fundamental difference would disappear within a class party, the 'workers' party.' During the period when Social Democracy was in full growth, the current impression was that this party would gradually unite all the workers, some as militants, others as sympathizers. And since the theory was that identical interests would necessarily engender identical ideas and aims, the distinction between class and party was bound, it was believed, to disappear. Social Democracy remained a minority group, and moreover became the target of attack by new workers' groups. Splits occurred within it, while its own character underwent radical change and certain articles of its program were either revised or interpreted in a totally different sense. Society does not develop in a continuous way, free from setbacks, but through conflicts and antagonisms. While the working class battle is widening in scope, the enemy's strength is increasing. Uncertainty about the way to be followed constantly and repeatedly troubles the minds of the combatants;

and doubt is a factor in division, of internal quarrels and conflicts within the workers' movement.

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

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

"No doubt, if certain people holding the same ideas get together to discuss the prospects for action, to hammer out ideas by discussion, to indulge in propaganda for these attitudes, then it is possible to describe such groups as parties. The name matters little, provided that these parties adopt a role distinct from that which existing parties seek to fulfill. Practical action, that is, concrete class struggle, is a matter for the masses themselves, acting as a whole, within their natural groups, notably the work gangs, which constitute the units of effective combat. It would be wrong to find the militants of one tendency going on strike, while those of another tendency continued to work. In that case, the militants of each tendency should present their viewpoints to

the factory floor, so that the workers as a whole are able to reach a decision based on knowledge and facts. Since the war is immense and the enemy's strength enormous, victory must be attained by merging all the forces at the masses' disposal—not only material and moral force with a view to action, unity and enthusiasm, but also the spiritual force born of mental clarity. The importance of these parties or groups resides in the fact that they help to secure this mental clarity through their mutual conflicts, their discussions, their propaganda. It is by means of these organs of self-clarification that the working class can succeed in tracing for itself the road to freedom.

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

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

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

"A number of workers are already aware that domination by the Socialist Party or the Communist Party would simply be a camouflaged supremacy of the bourgeois class, and would thus perpetuate exploitation and servitude. But, according to these workers, what should take its place is a 'revolutionary

party' that would really aim at creating proletarian power and communist society. There is no question here of a party in the sense we defined above, i.e., of a group whose sole objective is to educate and enlighten, but of a party in the current sense, i.e., a party fighting to secure power and to exercise it with a view to the liberation of the working class, and all this as a vanguard, as an organization of the enlightened revolutionary minority.

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

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

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

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

"The first is that the masses persist in action. Far from abandoning the fight in order to allow the new party to govern, they organize their power in the factories and workshops and prepare for new battles, this time with a view to the final defeat of capitalism. By means of workers' councils, they form a community that is increasingly close-knit, and therefore capable of taking on the administration of society as a whole. In a word, the masses prove that they are not as incapable of creating the revolution as was supposed. From this moment, conflict inevitably arises between the masses and the new party, the latter seeking to be the only body to exercise power and convinced that the party should lead the working class, that self-activity among the masses is only

a factor of disorder and anarchy. At this point, either the class movement has become strong enough to ignore the party or the party, allied with bourgeois elements, crushes the workers. In either case, the party is shown to be an obstacle to the revolution, because the party seeks to be something other than an organ of propaganda and of enlightenment, and because it adopts as its specific mission the leadership and government of the masses.

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

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

"Therefore, those who contemplate a 'revolutionary party' are learning only a part of the lessons of the past. Not unaware that the workers'

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

In *Workers' Councils*, Pannekoek does not discuss the need for a party with an extremely flexible structure. Perhaps this was because he saw this book as itself a party work, an instrument "of propaganda and of enlightenment." However, while he was not concerned with coining a new word to express the idea of party as a loose body of 'work groups,' the idea itself is present in all his political writings.

In 1947, for example, in "Five Theses on the Fight of the Working Class against Capitalism," a work that is remarkably concise, he writes that the function of parties is "to spread insight and knowledge, to study, discuss and formulate social ideas, and by their propaganda to enlighten the minds of the masses. The workers' councils are the organs for practical action and fight of the working class; to the parties falls the task of the building up of its spiritual power. Their work forms an indispensable part in the self-liberation of the working class."⁶

A few years later, Pannekoek wrote a letter to a Paris group which, pursuing its own path of development, had come upon the idea of workers' councils. In this letter, he emphasized yet again that the theoretical activity "of a party or group" by means "of study and discussion" is linked with one "primordial task: to go out and speak to the workers."⁷

6. Anton Pannekoek, "Five Theses on the Fight of the Working Class against Capitalism," *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils*, May 1947; recently published as an appendix to: *The Mass Strike in France May-June 1968*, Root and Branch Pamphlet 3 (1970), pp. 55-58.

7. *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, IV:14, April-June 1954, pp. 39-43.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATION

Besides the Dutch "work groups," there were similar groups in the United States, especially in areas of German emigration. In the review *Living Marxism*¹ Pannekoek published various articles, many of which were excerpts from *Workers' Councils*,² the only one of his books that he considered to be definitively political. Unfortunately, the limits of the present book do not allow us to reproduce long extracts, much less whole chapters. However, their substance is contained in the following articles:³

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

"With expanding capitalism the workers first built their trade unions. The isolated worker was powerless against the capitalist; so he had to unite with his fellows in bargaining and fighting over the price of his labor-power and the hours of labor. Capitalists and workers have opposite interests in capitalistic production; their class struggle is over the division of the total product between them. In normal capitalism, the workers' share is the value of their labor power, i.e., what is necessary to sustain and restore continually their capacities to work. The remaining part of the product is the surplus value, the share of the capitalist class. The capitalists, in order to increase their profit, try to lower wages and increase the hours of labor. Where the workers were powerless, wages were depressed below the existence minimum; the hours of labor were lengthened until the bodily and mental health of the working class deteriorated so as to endanger the future of society. The formation of unions and of laws regulating working conditions—features rising out of the bitter fight of workers for their very lives—were necessary to

1. Review "for theory and discussion," first published under the title *International Council Correspondence*, and later became *New Essays*. At the center of this review was the ex-KAPist, Paul Mattick.

2. Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils* (Melbourne, 1950).

3. J. Harper, "General Remarks on the Question of Organization," *Living Marxism*, IV:5, November 1938, pp. 144-53.

restore normal conditions of work in capitalism. The capitalist class itself recognized that trade unions are necessary to direct the revolt of the workers into regular channels to prevent them from breaking out in sudden explosions.

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

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

the workers within capitalism. In this way they get the votes of the workers and grow in political influence.

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

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

accept. And then the Socialist Party, as an instrument in the hands of these leaders, has to support them and also, instead of calling upon the workers to fight for their interests, seeks to pacify them, deflect them from the class struggle.

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

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

"The aim and task of the working class is the abolition of capitalism. Capitalism in its highest development, with its ever deeper economic crises, its

imperialism, its armaments, its world wars, threatens the workers with misery and destruction. The proletarian class fight, the resistance and revolt against these conditions, must go on until capitalist domination is overthrown and capitalism is destroyed.

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

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

"It is clear that the organizational forms of trade union and political party, inherited from the period of expanding capitalism, are useless here. They developed into instruments in the hands of leaders unable and unwilling to engage in revolutionary fight. Leaders cannot make revolutions: labor

leaders abhor a proletarian revolution. For the revolutionary fights the workers need new forms of organization in which they keep the powers of action in their own hands. It is pointless to try to construct or to imagine these new forms; they can originate only in the practical fight of the workers themselves. They have already originated there; we have only to look into practice to find its beginnings everywhere that the workers are rebelling against the old powers.

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

"The only examples of a modern industrial working class as the moving force of a political revolution were the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Here the workers of each factory chose delegates, and the delegates of all the factories together formed the 'soviet,' the council where the political situation and necessary actions were discussed. Here the opinions of the factories were collected, their desires harmonized, their decisions formulated. But the councils, though a strong directing influence for revolutionary education through action, were not commanding bodies. Sometimes a whole council was arrested and reorganized with new delegates; at times, when the authorities were paralyzed by a general strike, the soviets acted as a local government, and delegates of free professions joined them to represent their field of work. Here we have the organization of the workers in revolutionary action, though of course only imperfectly, groping and trying for new methods. This is possible only when all the workers with all their forces participate in the action, when their very existence is at stake, when they actually take part in the decisions and are entirely devoted to the revolutionary fight.

"After the revolution this council organization disappeared. The proletarian centers of big industry were small islands in an ocean of primitive

agricultural society where capitalist development had not yet begun. The task of initiating capitalism fell to the Communist Party. Simultaneously, political power centered in its hands and the soviets were reduced to subordinate organs with only nominal powers.

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

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

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

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

"On the other hand, members of parliament are chosen for a fixed number of years; only at the polls are the citizens masters—on this one day when they choose their delegates. Once this day has passed, their power has gone and the delegates are independent, free to act for a term of years according to their own 'conscience,' restricted only by the knowledge that after this period they

have to face the voters anew; but then they count on catching their votes in a noisy election campaign, bombing the confused voters with slogans and demagogic phrases. Thus not the voters but the parliamentarians are the real masters who decide politics. And the voters do not even send persons of their own choice as delegates; they are presented to them by the political parties. And then, if we suppose that people could select and send persons of their own choice, these persons would not form the government; in parliamentary democracy the legislative and the executive powers are separated. The real government dominating the people is formed by a bureaucracy of officials so far removed from the people's vote as to be practically independent. That is how it is possible that capitalistic dominance is maintained through general suffrage and parliamentary democracy. This is why in capitalistic countries, where the majority of the people belongs to the working class, this democracy cannot lead to a conquest of political power. For the working class, parliamentary democracy is a sham democracy, whereas council representation is real democracy: the direct rule of the workers over their own affairs.

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

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

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

the development of capitalism soon find their expression in parliament and government.

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

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

"Bourgeois democracy is founded upon a society consisting of a large number of independent small producers. They want a government to take care of their common interests: public security and order, protection of commerce, uniform systems of weight and money, administering of law and justice. All these things are necessary in order that everybody can do his business in his own way. Private business takes the whole attention, forms the life interests of everybody, and those political factors are, though necessary, only secondary and demand only a small part of their attention. The chief content of social life, the basis of existence of society, the production of all the goods necessary for life, is divided up into private business of the separate citizens, hence it is natural that it takes nearly all their time, and that politics, their collective affair, is a subordinate matter, providing only for auxiliary

conditions. Only in bourgeois revolutionary movements do people take to the streets. But in ordinary times politics are left to a small group of specialists, politicians, whose work consists just of taking care of these general, political conditions of bourgeois business.

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

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

"The two forms of organization are not distinguished in that the one is founded upon a traditional and ideological basis, and the other on the material productive basis of society. Both are founded upon the material basis of the system of production, one on the declining system of the past, the other on the growing system of the future. Right now we are in the period of transition, the time of big capitalism and the beginnings of the proletarian revolution. In big capitalism the old system of production has already been destroyed in its foundations; the large class of independent producers has disappeared. The main part of production is collective work of large groups of workers; but the control and ownership have remained in a few private hands. This contradictory state is maintained by the strong power factors of the capitalists, especially the state power exerted by the governments. The

task of the proletarian revolution is to destroy this state power; its real content is the seizure of the means of production by the workers. The process of revolution is an alternation of actions and defeats that builds up the organization of the proletarian dictatorship, which at the same time is the dissolution, step by step, of the capitalist state power. Hence it is the process of the replacement of the organization system of the past by the organization system of the future.

"We are only in the beginnings of this revolution. The century of class struggle behind us cannot be considered a beginning as such, but only a preamble. It developed invaluable theoretical knowledge, it found gallant revolutionary words in defiance of the capitalist claim of being a final social system; it awakened the workers from the hopelessness of misery. But its actual fight remained bound within the confines of capitalism, it was action through the medium of leaders and sought only to set easy masters in the place of hard ones. Only a sudden flickering of revolt, such as political or mass strikes breaking out against the will of the politicians, now and then announced the future of self-determined mass action. Every wildcat strike, not taking its leaders and catchwords from the offices of parties and unions, is an indication of this development, and at the same time a small step in its direction. All the existing powers in the proletarian movement, the socialist and communist parties, the trade unions, all the leaders whose activity is bound to the bourgeois democracy of the past, denounce these mass actions as anarchistic disturbances. Because their field of vision is limited to their old forms of organization, they cannot see that the spontaneous actions of the workers bear in them the germs of higher forms of organization. In fascist countries, where bourgeois democracy has been destroyed, such spontaneous mass actions will be the only form of future proletarian revolt. Their tendency will not be a restoration of the former middle class democracy but an advance in the direction of the proletarian democracy, i.e., the dictatorship of the working class."

Pannekoek repeats here the essential arguments of his "Social Democracy and Communism," sometimes almost verbatim. The difference, it should also be noted, consists in the inevitable alteration of perspective. The first article was linked with immediate problems; the second takes a long-term view of them. The *Living Marxism* article appeared at a time when one could no longer doubt that World War II was imminent. When, after the war, Pannekoek returned, in *Workers' Councils*, to the whole body of questions dealt with in the above article, his attitude had scarcely changed. This is understandable, in a sense, since, while the war had transformed capitalism, these transformations were only germinally perceptible at the end of the

preceding period (the consequences, however, being then more or less discernible). And this was also true of the class struggle.

Nevertheless, it might be useful to supplement this article with extracts concerning democratic ideology and its historic role, first during the Spanish Civil War—of which Pannekoek does not seem to have seen all the aspects—and then during the period that followed and in which we are still living, at least at the ideological level.

“Something analogous, on a minor scale, was what happened in the civil war in Spain, 1935-1936. In the industrial town of Barcelona the workers, having at the revolt of the generals stormed the barracks and drawn the soldiers to their side, were master of the town. Their armed groups dominated the street, maintained order, took care of the food provision, and, while the chief factories were kept at work under the direction of their syndicalist unions, waged war upon the fascist troops in adjoining provinces. Then their leaders entered into the democratic government of the Catalan republic, consisting of middle-class republicans allied with socialist and communist politicians. This meant that instead of fighting for their class, the workers had to join in and adapt to the common cause. Weakened by democratic illusions and inner dissension, their resistance was crushed by armed troops of the Catalan government. And soon, as a symbol of restored bourgeois order, you could see as in olden times workers' women, waiting before the bakers' shops, brutalized by mounted police. The working class once more was down, the first step in the downfall of the republic that finally led to the dictatorship of the military leaders.

“In social crisis and political revolution, when a government breaks down, power falls into the hands of the working masses; and for the propertied class, for capitalism arises the problem of how to wrest it out of their hands. So it was in the past, so it may happen in the future. Democracy is the means, the appropriate instrument of persuasion. The arguments of formal and legal quality have to induce the workers to give up their power and to let their organization be inserted as a subordinate part into the state structure.

“Against this the workers have to carry in them a strong conviction that council organization is a higher and more perfect form of equality. . . . The equal right in deciding needs not to be secured by any formal regulating paragraph; it is realized in that the work, in every part, is regulated by those who do the work. . . .

“It is often said that in the modern world the point of dispute is between democracy and dictatorship; and that the working class has to throw in its full weight for democracy. The real meaning of this statement of contrast is that capitalist opinion is divided as to whether capitalism should maintain its

sway with soft, deceitful democracy or with hard dictatorial constraint. It is the old problem of whether rebellious slaves are kept down better by kindness or by terror. If asked, the slaves of course prefer kind treatment to terror; but if they let themselves be fooled so as to mistake soft slavery for freedom, it is pernicious to the cause of their freedom. For the working class in the present time the real issue is between council organization, the true democracy of labor, and the apparent, deceitful bourgeois democracy of formal rights. In proclaiming council democracy, the workers transfer the fight from political form to economic contents. Or rather—since politics is only form and means for economy—for the sounding political slogan they substitute the revolutionizing political deed, the seizure of the means of production. The slogan of political democracy serves to detract the attention of the workers from their true goal. It must be the concern of the workers, by putting up the principle of council organization, of actual democracy of labor, to give true expression to the great issue now moving society.”⁴

4. Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-53.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DIRECT ACTION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

For a long time, capitalism has dominated at every level. After the war, it was already climbing toward its triumphant restoration. Under these conditions, communism could be represented only by a handful of theoreticians. Here and there, however, intellectuals with advanced ideas were posing questions, and it was only to be expected that they should come up with the idea of the workers councils—and equally inevitable that they should finally judge it to be impractical. In effect, this was an idea directed toward the future, toward another phase of the struggle; in a phase of decline—that is, a phase of relative harmony among the classes—this idea could more or less explain the past, and be used especially to indicate some advance signs of a very slow reversal of the situation. But, in such a period, this body of theory can scarcely open up perspectives of immediate action to writers, sociologists and philosophers eager to fight for the still-threatened cause of democracy and freedom. Far from doing so, it concerned itself only with details, with wildcat strikes, for example, with actions that generally have no future. After having aroused a vague interest, followed by disillusionment, it was quickly passed over. Such was the case with the editors of *Politics*, a New York review that provided a platform for post-Marxists, post-Freudians, post-anarchists, and many others, and in whose columns the names Karl Korsch and Paul Mattick were to appear several times. Pannekoek published an article in this review, "The Failure of the Working class."¹ Here is the full text:

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

"It is easy to ask: why did the workers not rise against threatening fascism?

1. "The Failure of the Working Class," *Politics*, III, 8, Sept. 1946, pp. 270-72.

To fight you must have a positive aim. Opposed to fascism there were two alternatives: either to maintain or to return to the old capitalism, with its unemployment, its crises, its corruption, its misery—whereas National Socialism presented itself as an anti-capitalist reign of labor, without unemployment, a reign of national greatness, of community politics that could lead to a socialist revolution. Thus, indeed, the deeper question is: why did the German workers not make their revolution?

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

"Could it have been otherwise? The avowed aim of the Socialist Party in Germany—and then in all countries—was state socialism. According to program the working class had to conquer political dominance, and then by its power over the state, had to organize production into a state-directed planned economic system. Its instrument was to be the Socialist Party, developed already into a huge body of 300,000 members, with a million trade-union members and three million voters behind them, led by a big apparatus of politicians, agitators, editors, eager to take the place of the former rulers.² According to program, then, they should expropriate by law the capitalist class and organize production in a centrally directed planned system.

"It is clear that in such a system the workers, though their daily bread may seem to be secured, are only imperfectly liberated. The upper echelons of society have been changed, but the foundations bearing the entire building remain the old ones: factories with wage-earning workers under the command of directors and managers. So we find it described in the English socialist G. D. H. Cole, who after World War I strongly influenced the trade unions by his studies of guild socialism and other reforms of the industrial system. He says: 'The whole people would be no more able than the whole body of shareholders in a great enterprise to manage an industry. . . . It would be necessary, under socialism as much as under large scale capitalism, to entrust the actual management of industrial enterprise to salaried experts, chosen for their specialized knowledge and ability in particular branches of work. . . . There is no reason to suppose that the methods of appointing the actual managers in socialized industries would differ widely from those already in force in large scale capitalist enterprise. . . . There is no reason to

2. By and large, the period in question is around 1903.

suppose that the socialization of any industry would mean a great change in its managerial personnel.'

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

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

"Capitalism, indeed, cannot be annihilated by a change in the commanding persons; but only by the abolition of commanding. The real freedom of the workers consists in their direct mastery over the means of production. The essence of the future free world community is not that the working masses get enough food, but that they direct their work themselves, collectively. For the real content of their life is their productive work; the fundamental change is not a change in the passive realm of consumption, but in the active realm of production. Before them now the problem arises of how to unite freedom and organization; how to combine mastery of the workers over the work with the binding up of all this work into a well-planned social entirety. How to organize production, in every shop as well as over the whole of world economy, in such a way that they themselves as parts of a collaborating community regulate their work. Mastery over production means that the personnel, the bodies of workers, technicians and experts that by their collective effort run the shop and put into action the technical apparatus are at the same time the managers themselves. The organization into a social entity is then performed by delegates of the separate plants, by so-called workers councils, discussing and deciding on the common affairs. The development of such a council organization will afford the solution of the problem; but this development is a historical process, taking time and demanding a deep transformation of outlook and character.

"This new vision of a free communism is only beginning to take hold of the

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

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

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

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

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

"When the workers begin to realize that the trade unions cannot direct their fight against capital they face the task of finding and practicing new forms of struggle. These new forms are the wildcat strikes. Here they shake off direction by the old leaders and the old organizations; here they take the initiative in their own hands; here they have to think out time and ways, to take the decisions, to do all the work of propaganda, of extension, of directing their action themselves. Wildcat strikes are spontaneous outbursts, the genuine practical expression of class struggle against capitalism, though without wider aims as yet; but they embody a new character already in the rebellious masses: self-determination instead of determination by leaders, self-reliance instead of obedience, fighting spirit instead of accepting the dictates from above, unbreakable solidarity and unity with the comrades instead of duty imposed by membership. The unit in action and strike is, of course, the same as the unit of daily productive work, the personnel of the shop, the plant, the docks; it is the common work, the common interest against the common capitalist master that compels them to act as one. In these discussions and decisions all the individual capabilities, all the forces of character and mind of all the workers, exalted and strained to the utmost, are cooperating toward the common goal.

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

assume a political character; they have to broaden their social outlook; their strike committees, embodying their class community, assume wider social functions, taking the character of workers' councils. Then the social revolution, the breakdown of capitalism, comes into view.

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

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

With the exception of one important aspect, to which we shall return shortly, the major outlines of the council idea are now clear. Of course, certain essential aspects of this idea have been, are being and will be highlighted both by historical evolution and by other militant theoreticians. But, as far as Pannekoek is concerned, his writings, from *Workers' Councils* to his death, deal consistently with the same major themes. However, to stress yet again the absence of all conceptual metaphysics in his thought, here is an extract from one of his letters to the editor of a small leftist socialist review.³

3. "Ueber Arbeiteräte," *Funken*, III:1, June 1952, pp. 14-15.

"Workers' councils does not designate a form of organization whose lines are fixed once and for all, and which requires only the subsequent elaboration of the details. It is concerned with a principle—the principle of the workers' self-management of enterprises and of production. This principle can in no way be implemented by a theoretical discussion about the best practical forms it should take. It concerns a practical struggle against the apparatus of capitalist domination. In our day, 'workers' councils,' certainly does not mean a brotherhood that is its own end and purpose; 'workers' councils' is synonymous with the class struggle (where brotherhood plays its part), with revolutionary action against state power. Revolutions cannot, of course, be summoned at will; they arise spontaneously in moments of crisis, when the situation becomes intolerable. They occur only on two conditions: first, if a feeling of intolerability exercises greater and greater pressures on the masses; second, if simultaneously a certain generally accepted awareness of what ought to be done grows up among them. It is at this level that propaganda and public discussion play their part. And these actions cannot secure a lasting success unless large sections of the working class have a clear understanding of the nature and purposes of their warfare; hence the necessity for making the workers councils a theme for discussion.

"So, therefore, the idea of workers councils does not involve a program of practical objectives to be realized tomorrow or next year. It serves solely as a guide for the long and severe fight for freedom, which still lies ahead for the working class. Marx, it will be remembered, said that the hour of capitalism has sounded; but he was careful to add that, in his view, this hour would cover a whole historical period."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION IN THE NEW WORLD

One criticism that the Dutch "work groups" leveled at the different tendencies in the German council movement stands out as essential. While not denying the importance of the fight against the "former workers' movement" (the Second and Third Internationals, trade unions), the GIC accentuated the council form, and saw the study of "the economic form of communism" as a primary theoretical task. In 1929, the communist council press published a circular with the following conclusions: "The program and the principles of the various closed groups that profess allegiance to the idea of the councils base themselves on analyses, satisfactory or otherwise, of the present course of capitalist society. It is obvious, however, that, if a new world is to be constructed, its foundations must first be clearly determined. Suppression of the capitalist merchant economy does not automatically reveal the laws of movement of the communist society—the society destined to succeed it. What will be the bases of this new society? The council movement must be able to answer this question if it intends to contribute to a conscious transformation of the economic process."¹

The result of these reflections was published shortly afterward.² It contained primarily a critique of the anarchist viewpoint (Sébastien Faure), that of the Social Democratic (Kautsky, Otto Leichter) and that of the radical (Lenin, Eugène Varga), as well as a critique of Bolshevik practice during the first years of the Soviet regime. The point at issue was that all these handed the management of the new society over to a central body, with no thought for any active intervention by the workers. A second volume of this work proposed a unit of calculation serving to organize the circulation of use values produced within the new world. This unit of calculation is none other than time, the average social working hour, as Marx and Engels several times pointed out.³

To carry out this principle, based on the reduction of the various categories of work to one category of *labor* pure and simple, means to abolish the salary

1. Cf. *Proletarischer Zeitgeist* (published by the AAUE of Zwickqu), VII:2, January 1929.
2. *Kollektivarbeit der GIK* (Holland), *Grundprinzipien kommunistischer Produktion und Verteilung* (Berlin, 1930).
3. Cf. especially Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program* and Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.

form, which embodies the separation of the producer from the means of production. This abolition is conceivable only if the various enterprises are linked by a system of living relationships—the workers councils—so that, by means of this working time common to all, “the social relationships of men in their various works and their relationship with the end products of their labor remain simple and transparent both in production and in distribution.”⁴ Clearly, the functioning of this principle demands that the workers be directly responsible for social activities. It is on this latter point that the contribution of the GIC was to prove particularly original and fruitful, and was to go beyond the framework of a mere restoration of principles.

We cannot examine here the objections that this idea may raise from the viewpoint of radical Marxism-Leninism,⁵ nor, still less, can we deal with the development both of attitudes and techniques and of the theory itself, in the second half of the twentieth century. Before discussing the terms of a problem these terms themselves should be clearly set out. This is precisely what Pannekoek has attempted in *Workers' Councils*,⁶ and what he has to say will serve as a conclusion to the present book.

Within the organization of councils, he writes, all the workers, whatever their rank in production, have their say both in the management of the enterprise and in the control of the jobs. “All working personnel, men and women, young and old, take their part as equal companions in this shop organization, in the actual work as well as in the general regulation. Of course, there will be many differences in the personal tasks, easier or more difficult according to strengths and talents, different in character according to inclination and ability. And, of course, the differences in general insight will give a preponderance to the advice of the most intelligent. Initially, as an inheritance of capitalism, there are large differences in education and training, and the lack of good technical and general knowledge in the masses will be felt as a heavy deficiency. Then the small number of highly trained professional technicians and scientists must act as technical leaders, without thereby acquiring a commanding or socially leading position, without gaining privileges other than the esteem of their companions and the moral authority that always accompanies skill and knowledge.

“The organization of a shop is the conscious arrangement and connection of all the separate procedures into one whole. All these interconnections of mutually adapted operations may be represented in a well-ordered scheme, a mental image of the actual process. . . . In numerical form this is done by

4. Karl Marx, *Kapital*, Vol. 1.

5. Mitchel, “Problèmes de la période de transition,” *Bilan*, especially nos. 34-36, 1936.

6. Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

bookkeeping. Bookkeeping registers and fixes all that happens in the process of production. . . . In comprehensive accounts, it allows continually to compare the results with the previous estimates in planning, so that production in the shop is made into a mentally controlled process.

“Capitalist management of enterprises also controls production mentally. Here, too, the process involves calculation and bookkeeping. But there is the fundamental difference that capitalist calculation is adapted entirely to the viewpoint of the production of profit. Prices and costs are its fundamental data; work and wages are only factors in calculating the resulting profit on the yearly balance on account. In the new system of production, on the other hand, the work hour is the fundamental datum, whether it is still expressed, in the beginning, in money units, or in its own true form. In capitalist production calculation and bookkeeping is a management secret. It is no concern of the workers; they are objects of exploitation, they are only factors in the calculation of cost and production, accessories to the machines. In the production under common ownership the bookkeeping is a public matter; it lies open to all. The workers always have a complete view of the course of the whole process. Only in this way are they able to discuss matters in the sectional assemblies and in the shop committees, and to decide on what has to be done. The numerical results are made visible, moreover, by statistical tables, by graphs and pictures that display the situation at a glance. This information is not restricted to the shop personnel; it is a public matter, open to all outsiders. Every shop is only a member in the social production, and the connection of its doings with the work outside is expressed in the bookkeeping. Thus insight in the production going on in every enterprise is common knowledge for all the producers.

“Labor is a social process. Each enterprise is part of the productive body of society. The total social production is formed by their connection and collaboration. Like the cells that constitute a living organism, they cannot exist isolated and cut off from the body. So the organization of the work inside the shop is only half of the task of the workers. Over it, a still more important task, stands the joining of the separate enterprises, their combination into a social organization.

“Whereas organization within the shop already existed under capitalism and had only to be replaced by another form of organization based on a new foundation, social organizations of all the shops into one whole is, or was until recent years, something entirely new, without precedent. So utterly new, that during the entire 19th century the establishment of this organization, under the name of ‘socialism’ was considered the main task of the working class. Capitalism consisted of an unorganized mass of independent enterprises—‘a

jostling crowd of separate private employers,' as the program of the Labor Party expresses it—connected only by the chance relations of market and competition, resulting in bankruptcies, overproduction and crisis, unemployment and an enormous waste of materials and labor power. To abolish it, the working class should conquer the political power and use it to organize industry and production. This state-socialism was considered, then, as the first step into a new development.

"In the last years the situation has changed insofar that capitalism itself had made a beginning with state-run organizations. . . . The political power of the state officials is greatly strengthened by their economic power, by their command over the means of production, the foundation of society.

"The principle of the working class is in every respect the exact opposite. The organization of production by the workers is founded on free collaboration: no masters, no servants. The combination of all the enterprises into one social organization takes place according to the same principle. The mechanism for this purpose must be built up by the workers.

"Given the impossibility of calling all the workers into one meeting, they can only express their will by means of delegates. Lately, such bodies of delegates have been called workers councils. Every collaborating group designates the members who have to express its opinion and its wishes in the council assemblies. These took an active part themselves in the deliberations of this group, they came to the front as able defenders of the views that carried the majority. Now they are sent as the spokesmen of the group to confront these views with those of other groups in order to come to a collective decision. Though their personal abilities play a role in persuading their colleagues and in clearing problems, their weight does not lie in their individual strength, but in the strength of the community that delegated them. What carries weight are not simple opinions, but still more the will and the readiness of the group to act accordingly. Different persons will act as delegates according to the different questions raised and the forthcoming problems.

"The chief problem, the basis of all the rest, is production itself. Its organization has two sides, the establishment of general rules and norms and the practical work itself. Norms and rules must be established for the mutual relations in the work, for the rights and duties. Under capitalism the norm consisted in the command of the master, the director. Under state capitalism it consisted in the mightier command of the leader, the central government. Now, however, all producers are free and equal. Now in the economic field of labor the same change takes place as occurred in former centuries in the political field, with the rise of the bourgeoisie. When the rule of the citizens

came in place of the rule of the absolute monarch, this could not mean that for his arbitrary will the arbitrary will of everybody was substituted. It meant that, henceforth, laws established by the common will should regulate the public rights and duties. So now, in the realm of labor, the command of the master gives way to rules fixed in common, to regulate the social rights and duties, in production and consumption. To formulate them will be the first task of the workers councils. This is not a difficult task, not a matter of profound study or serious discord. For every worker these rules will immediately spring up in his consciousness as the natural basis of the new society: everyone's duty to take part in the production in accordance with his forces and capacities, everyone's right to enjoy his adequate part of the collective product.

"How will the quantities of labor spent and the quantities of product to which he is entitled be measured? In a society where the goods are produced directly for consumption there is no market to exchange them; and no value as expression of the labor contained in them establishes itself automatically out of the processes of buying and selling. Here the labor spent must be expressed in a direct way by the number of hours. The administration keeps records of the hours of labor contained in every piece or unit quantity of product, as well as of the hours spent by each of the workers. In the averages of all workers of a factory and finally, of all the factories of the same category, the personal differences are smoothed out and results are compared.

"In the first times of transition when there is much devastation to be repaired, the first problem is to build up the production apparatus and to keep people alive. It is quite possible that the habit, imposed by war and famine, of having the indispensable foodstuffs distributed without distinction is simply continued. It is most probable that, in those times of reconstruction, when all the forces must be exerted to the utmost, when, moreover, the new moral principles of common labor are only gradually forming, the right of consumption will be tied to the performance of work. The old popular saying that whoever does not work shall not eat expresses an instinctive feeling of justice. Here is not only the recognition that labor is the basis of all human life, but also the proclamation that now there is an end to capitalist exploitation and to appropriating the fruits of foreign labor by property titles of an idle class.

"This does not mean, of course, that now the total product is distributed among the producers, according to the time given by each. Or, expressed in another way, that every worker receives products equivalent to the quantity of hours of labor spent in working. A considerable part of the work must be spent on the common property, on the perfection and enlargement of the

productive apparatus. Under capitalism part of the surplus value served this purpose; the capitalist had to use part of his profit, accumulated into new capital, to innovate, expand and modernize his technical equipment, in his case driven by the need to keep up with his competitors. So the progress in techniques took place in forms of exploitation. Now, in the new form of production, this progress is the common concern of the workers. Keeping themselves alive is the most immediate, but building the basis of future production is the most glorious part of their task. They will have to settle what part of their total labor shall be spent on the making of better machines and more efficient tools, on research and experiment, for facilitating the work and improving the production.

"Moreover, part of the total time and labor of society must be spent on activities that are productive but are still necessary—i.e., general administration, education, medical services. Children and old people will receive their share of the product without corresponding achievements. People incapable of work must be sustained; and especially in the initial phase there will be a large number of human wrecks left by the former capitalist world. Probably the rule will prevail that the productive work is the task of the younger adults; or, in other words, is the task of everybody during that period of his life when both the tendency and the capacity for vigorous activity are greatest. By the rapid increase of the productivity of labor this part, the time needed to produce all the necessities of life will continually decrease, and an increasing part of life will be available for other purposes and activities.

"The basis of the social organization of production consists in careful administration, in the form of statistics and bookkeeping.

"...The function and the place numerical administration occupies in society depends on the character of this society. Financial administration of states was always necessary as part of the central government, and the computing officials were subordinate servants of the kings or other rulers. Where in modern capitalism production is subjected to an encompassing central organization, those who have the central administration in their hands will be the leading directors of economy and develop into a ruling bureaucracy. When in Russia the revolution of 1917 led to a rapid expansion of industry, and hosts of workers still permeated by the barbarous ignorance of the villages crowded into the new factories, they lacked the power to check the rising dominance of the bureaucracy then organizing into a new ruling class. When in 1933 in Germany, a sternly organized party conquered the state power, it took control of the organization of all the forces of capitalism as its means of central administration.

"Conditions are entirely different when the workers are masters of their labor and organize production as free producers. Administration by means of bookkeeping and computing is a special task of certain persons, just as hammering steel or baking bread is a special task of other persons, all equally useful and necessary. The workers in the computing offices are neither servants nor rulers. They are not officials in the service of the workers councils, obediently having to perform their orders. They are groups of workers, like other groups collectively regulating their work themselves, disposing of their implements, performing their duties, as does every group, in continual connection with the needs of the whole. They are the experts who have to provide the basic data of the discussions and decisions in the assemblies of workers and of councils. They have to collect the data, to present it in an easily intelligible form of tables, of graphs, of pictures, so that every worker at every moment has a clear image of the state of things. Their knowledge is not a private property giving them power; they are not a body with exclusive administrative knowledge that thereby somehow could exert a deciding influence. The product of their labor, the numerical insight needed for the work's progress, is available to all. This general knowledge is the foundation of all the discussions and decisions of the workers and their councils by which the organization of labor is performed.

"For the first time in history the economic life, in general and in detail, lies as an open book before the eyes of mankind. The foundations of society, under capitalism a huge mass hidden in the dark depths, dimly lighted here and there by statistics on commerce and production, now has entered into the full daylight and shows its detailed structure. Here we dispose of a science of society consisting of a well-ordered knowledge of facts, out of which leading causal relations are readily grasped. It forms the basis of the social organization of labor just as the knowledge of the facts of nature, also condensed into causal relations, forms the basis of the technical organization of labor. As a knowledge of the common simple facts of daily life it is available to everyone and enables him to survey and grasp the necessities of the whole as well as his own part in it. It forms the spiritual equipment through which the producers are able to direct the production and to control their world...."

But this form of organization is not destined to continue in force throughout the ages. It contains within itself, the elements of its own dissolution. Without, of course, dwelling on the question, Pannekoek nevertheless has this to say:

"The workers' councils are the form of self-government which in the times to come will replace the forms of government of the old world. Of course not

for all time; no such form is for eternity. When life and work in community are natural habit, when mankind entirely controls its own life, necessity gives way to freedom and the strict rules of justice established before dissolve into spontaneous behavior. Workers' councils are the form of organization during the transition period in which the working class is fighting for dominance, is destroying capitalism and is organizing social production."⁷

An anthology must of necessity contain more or less arbitrary cuts and omissions. But perhaps this defect is less important in an anthology such as this one than is the inevitable distortion of historical realities—a distortion occasioned by the ascription to a particular theoretician of a body of ideas that is primarily a product of the class struggle and therefore only secondarily ascribable to any individual.

Council communism belongs to the past. To raise the banner of a disinherited name is, quite frankly, a futile occupation; to attempt to revive certain outmoded ideas, to passively seek a signpost to present conduct in a history forever past and gone, can only feed dogma (or harmless dreams). But this having been said, it is proper to point to one idea—"the failure of the working class"—which, for specific reasons, has disappeared from contemporary societies, and which reappears, in diverse aspects, as soon as new conditions establish themselves. The idea of councils is the fruit of an immense, but already remote, effort at emancipation. As such, it is something with both a positive and a negative legacy, and the critical discussion of this can in itself have value for action. Pannekoek himself has expressed this idea very clearly: "The importance of the past lies in the fact that it enables lessons to be drawn of a kind that can throw light on the future."⁸

The anthology form offers precisely the advantage of showing by a cross-section of history what is no longer valid in yesterday's ideas, even though they might have been the most advanced of their own day. The anthology form also highlights the fact that we cannot easily shake off the old forms of thought and organization—certainly not by seeking to reinstate them exactly as they were. Still more, this form stresses the fundamental fact that only the development of new organizational forms makes it possible to pass beyond the old forms, provided there was a decisive break with the existing institutional world, with all its organs of dialogue (political parties, trade unions).

Consider the situation in which the producers are led to fight against

7. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

8. Anton Pannekoek, "Prinzip und Taktik," *op. cit.*, p. 178.

capital, but to do so outside their traditional organizations and ultimately against them; a lull occurs, but then this fight is resumed more intensively and finally becomes one of unparalleled bitterness. The outcome of such a great historical battle depends in large measure on how deeply the producers are aware of the meaning and the purposes of their action. From this perspective, the transmission of teachings from the past—essentially as positive ideas, as general principles—can furnish, in conjunction with other elements of knowledge, a means of discerning more clearly and more quickly, in the autonomous battles of the present, the traits of mass actions and of a new world still in gestation; in other words, it can be an element of orientation. In this sense, pages from a long history of conflicts can serve, first, as matter for reflection and discussion, and then as weapons of propaganda.

If one can speak of the personal genius of Anton Pannekoek, this is not because of any accurate predictions he made (for, in that case, one would have to overlook certain serious errors or gaps in his thinking about the evolution of capitalism). Rather, his genius consists in having set out clearly and boldly toward the end of a particular phase of the struggle for freedom what had been attained by that particular phase. Pannekoek summarized this theme in the final paragraphs of his *Workers' Councils*:

"Socialism, as inherited from the 19th century, was the creed of a social mission for the leaders and politicians: to transform capitalism into a system of a state-directed economy without exploitation, producing abundance for all. It was the creed of class struggle for the workers, the belief that by transferring government into the hands of these socialists they would assure their freedom. Why did it not happen? Because the casting of a secret vote was too insignificant an effort to count as real class struggle. Because the socialist politicians, alone in the entire capitalist fabric of society, stood against the immense power of the capitalist mastery of the production apparatus, with the workers' masses only looking on, expecting them, little squad, to upset the world. What could they do other than run the affair in the usual way, and, by reforming the worst abuses, save their conscience? Now it is seen that socialism in the sense of state-directed planned economy means state capitalism, and that socialism in the sense of workers' emancipation is only possible as a new orientation. The new orientation of socialism is self-direction of production, self-direction of the class-struggle, by means of workers' councils.

"What is called the failure of the working class and what alarms many socialists—i.e., the contradiction between the economic breakdown of capitalism and the inability of the workers to seize power and establish the

new order—is no real contradiction. Economic changes only gradually produce changes in the mind. The workers educated in the belief in socialism stand bewildered now that they see that its very opposite, heavier slavery, is the outcome. To grasp that socialism and communism now both mean doctrines of enslavement is a hard job. New orientation needs time; maybe only a new generation will comprehend its full scope.

“At the end of World War I revolution seemed near; the working class arose full of hope and expectation that now its old dreams would come true. But they were dreams of imperfect freedom, they could not be realized. Now at the end of World War II only slavery and destruction seem near; hope is far distant; but there still looms a task, the greater aim of real freedom. More powerful than before, the working class has to rise in its fight for mastery over the world. Capitalism has found more powerful forms of suppression. . . .

“A century ago, when the workers were a small class of downtrodden, helpless individuals, the call was heard: workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to win. Since then they have become the largest class; and they have united; but only imperfectly. Only in groups, smaller or larger, not yet as one class unity. Only superficially, in outer forms, not yet in deep essence. And still they have nothing to lose but their chains; what else they have they cannot lose by fighting, only by timidly submitting. And the world to be won begins to be perceived dimly. At that time no clear goal could be depicted around which to unite; so their organizations in the end became tools of capitalism. Now the goal becomes distinct; against the stronger domination of the state-directed planned economy of the new capitalism stands what Marx called the association of free and equal producers. So the call for unity must be supplemented by an indication of the goal: take the factories and machines; assert your mastery over the productive apparatus; organize production by means of workers' councils.”⁹

9. Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils, op. cit.*, pp. 230-31.

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