

Klad

June 15, 1957

Dear Comrade Chauvieu.

It was a great satisfaction for me to see that you printed a translation of my letter of Nov. 8 in N° 14 of your review "Socialisme ou Barbarie" ^(and added your critical remarks) in this way involving your readers in a discussion of principles. Because you express the wish to continue the discussion I will present here some remarks on your response. Of course there remain differences of opinion, which by discussion may come to the ^{fore} with greater clarity. Such differences ~~have~~ usually ^{have} their origin in a difference of the points of chief interest, proceeding either from different practical experiences or from living in a different milieu. For me it was the study of the political strikes and mass actions of the workers, in Belgium 1893, in Russia 1905 and 1917, in Germany 1918-19, from which I tried to get a clear understanding of the fundamental character of such actions. Your group is living and working ^{among} the tumultuous working class movements of a big industrial town; so your attention is ^{directed to} ~~stretch~~ by the ^{practical} problem how efficient modes of fight may develop out of the present often inefficient party strife and partial strikes.

Surely I do not suppose that the revolutionary actions of the working class will take place all in a sphere of peaceful discussion. But what I contend is that the final result of the often violent ^{not by accidental facts but} ~~is~~ ^{is} determined by what stands behind them: in the minds of the workers, as a basis of firm convictions acquired by ^{experience} study and discussion of arguments. When ^{the} personnel in a shop has to decide on strike or not it is not by fists and violence but usually by argument ~~that~~ that the decision is taken.

You put the dilemma in an entirely practical way: what shall the party do when it has 45% of the ^{as its adherents} (council) members (and expects that another party (neo-stalinian, aspiring at totalitarian state power) will try to seize power by violent action? Your answer is: forestall them by doing ourselves what we fear they will do. What will be the final result of such an action? ~~There~~ ^{with excellent} was a party (good ^{principles} revolutionary as any, imbued (Look at what happened in Russia. There)

*These is one place in the translation where, probably by lack of clearance in my English's first the reverse has come out of what I meant to say: page 40 line 13 I intended to say: pour compagnie le pouvoir nous ne pouvons pas faire usage de moyens révolutionnaires".

with Marxism; it could moreover lean upon Soviets already formed by the workers; yet it had to seize power ^{for itself} and the result was the totalitarian system of Stalinism. (This "had to" means that the conditions were not yet ripe for a real proletarian revolution; in the highly capitalistic Western world they certainly are more ripe; how much more can only be shown by the course of the class struggle) So ^{the question} ~~it~~ ^{must be asked} ~~is~~ ^{posed}: ~~will~~ the action of the party you suppose will it save the workers' revolution? It seems to me that it would rather be a step towards new despotism.

Certainly there are difficulties in either way. When the situation in France or in the world should call for massal actions of the working class, then immediately the CP will try to bend the action into a pro-Russian party-demonstration. And you will have to wage a strenuous fight with them. But it is not by copying its methods that ~~you~~ ^{we} can defeat the CP. ~~We can win~~ ^{This can be achieved} real and lasting success ~~only~~ only by applying our own method — the genuine mode of action of the fighting class — : by the strength of ~~our~~ argument based on the great principle of self-determination.

The argument with the 45% example fits entirely in the parliamentary world of fighting parties each with a certain percentage of followers. In the workers' revolution which we foresee it is the class that rises into action; there all the conditions ^{e.g. of party-adherence} have changed. We do not say: it shall be our party with its most excellent program that has to seize power and ^{it is our task to} ~~we~~ call upon the workers to sustain us against the others. ^{We say it} ~~It~~ is our task to arouse and induce the workers to establish their own class-power in the shops and enterprises. The difference may be expressed in another more fundamental way. ^{your} ~~our~~ point of view ^(seems to me to be) ~~is~~ ^{is} the worst that could happen to the liberation of the working class is the domination of party-communism; for then the workers will have lost the possibility to propagate and develop their ideas of freedom by means of Council organisation. Or, expressed in another way: our first duty is to prevent the CP ^{and thereby} ~~from~~ establishing a totalitarian state power and to defend against them the western parliamentary democracy. It looks quite sensible and logical; it has the same sense and logic as had reformism.

when it said: revolution is far away; let us for the present by reforms make capitalism tolerable for the workers. Marxist argument then replied: reforms the workers will get not by conciliatory tactics but by increasing their fighting power. So now we may reply: if the workers can prevent mastery of the CP only by developing and strengthening their own class power, i. e. their united will to seize and control themselves, the production apparatus.

The main condition for the working class to win freedom is that the ideas of self-rule and self-management of the production apparatus have taken deep roots in the mind of the masses. There is a certain analogy ^{with} what Jaurès wrote in his *Histoire Socialiste*, on the Constituante: " Cette Assemblée, toute neuve aux choses de la politique, sut, à peine réunie, déjouer toutes les manœuvres de la Cour. Pourquoi? Parce qu'elle portait en elle quelques idées abstraites et grandes, fortement et longement méditées, qui lui étaient une lumière". The cases are different, surely; in stead of the grand political ideas of the ~~vain~~ revolutionary bourgeoisie we will have the grander social ideas of the workers, ^{the ideas} of control of production in organized collaboration: in stead of the ^{six} five hundred delegates elevated by the abstract ideas they had studied we will have the millions guided by their life experience of ^{exploitation in} productive work. Hence I see it to be the noblest and most useful task of a revolutionary party, by its propaganda in thousands of leaflets, pamphlets and papers, to awaken these feelings to ever greater consciousness and clarity.

As to the character of the Russian revolution: the translation of middle-class revolution into révolution bourgeoise (en Allemand on dit: Bürgerliche Revolution) ne rend pas exactement its essence. When in England ^{so called} the (middle class ^{was called thus, because it stood} (the capitalist class, between ^{the} aristocracy and the working people) capitalists or) rose to power it consisted of a numerous class of mostly small (business men, owners of the (industrial) productive apparatus of society. Though the putting down of aristocratic power needed ~~the~~ actions of the masses, these were not yet able to lay hands ^{upon} upon the ^{means of} production apparatus; this spiritual, moral, and

Organisational Capability can be acquired by the workers only by means of their class-struggle in a highly developed capitalism. In Russia there was no bourgeoisie of any importance; so a new "middle class", as directors of the productive work had to arise out of the avant-garde ^{of the revolution} and ^{to} take possession of the production apparatus, ^{as} not individual ^{owners} (each of a small part but as collective ^{owners} of the totality). ^{Generally we can say:} When the working masses (because they come out of pre-capitalist conditions) are not yet capable to take the production in their own hands, the result, inevitably, is a new ruling class, master of the ~~pre~~ production. This similarity is why I called the Russian revolution (in its lasting character) a middle-class revolution. Surely the massal force of the proletarian class was needed to destroy the old system (and this was a school for the workers all over the world). But a revolution of society can achieve no more than corresponds to the nature of the ~~relevant~~ relevant social classes, and when the greatest radicalism was needed to overcome the resistances it has afterwards to retrace its steps. This seems to be a ^{common} general rule in the revolutions till now; thus ^{dig up to} ^{T. French} 1793 the revolution became ever more radical, ~~till~~ until the peasants ^{at last} ^{unquestionably} ^{definitely} (were ~~assured~~) free masters of the soil and the foreign armies were repelled; then the Jacobins were massacred and the ugliest capitalism presented itself as the new master. ^{all} ^{unquestionably} ^{feudal} ^{power} ^{is} ^{gone} ⁱⁿ ^{England}, ^{France}, ^{Germany}. ^{It} ^{is} ^{not} ^{an} ^{abortive} ^{proletarian} ^{revolution}; the proletarian revolution is a thing of the future, before us.

I hope that these expositions, though they contain no new arguments, may serve to clarify some of ^{the differences in} our points of view.