

Epilogue

The Workers Revolution and Beyond

The publication of an anthology is a sign that a movement no longer exists. Publishing another anthology thirty years later is a confession that a new movement has not arisen. Leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions from the texts and the facts assembled here, we would only like to set forth the perspective which informed the production of this work.

There can be no doubt that there have never been so many history books sold, but the “duty to record” evidently does not apply to revolutions. Of the three great attempts at emancipation which marked the first half of the 20th century, two are known well-enough despite the layers of hagiography and calumny with which they are covered: Russia after 1917 and Spain in 1936. For these two series of events, the interested reader may avail himself of a minimum of contradictory accounts, documents and analyses.

Such is not the case for the third attempt: the German revolution, which, without any doubt, had too much power and meaning for the world to accept looking at it face-to-face. It remains the only revolution to have broken out in a “modern” country, that is, one which was highly industrialized and enjoyed a (relatively) democratic political life, and thus the one which was most similar to the revolutionary uprisings we may live to see.

To the slight extent that they show any interest in it, historians retain, first of all, one name, that of Rosa Luxemburg, sometimes in association with that of Karl Liebknecht. The bourgeoisie likes dead revolutionaries. In the 1970s, the same German State that murdered Luxemburg issued a postage stamp in her memory. As for the workers movement, for a long time the Stalinists made “Rosa” into one of their icons, and the Social Democrats selectively preserved, for their own benefit and in a merely democratic sense, Luxemburg’s critique of Lenin. In the best cases, the Bavarian experience and Kurt Eisner would eventually be added. Basically, however, interest has been restricted to one group: the Spartacists. The memory of one of Lenin’s famous books is evoked in *Obsolete Communism, the Left-Wing Alternative*, written by the Cohn-Bendit brothers after 1968,¹ whose title is a kind of reversal of *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (the title of the English version of the book loses the flavor of the original French title, which can be literally rendered as *Leftism, the Remedy for the Infantile Disorder of Communism*), but Hermann Gorter’s response remained almost totally unknown. Furthermore, just as current opinion holds that the refusal of the German Communist Party in 1930 to enter an alliance with social democracy was one of the principal causes of Hitler’s rise to power, similarly the lively antiparliamentarism of the years 1918-1923 arouses distrust.²

Even the basic history of the period 1917-1921 (without focusing on the “leftists”) in Germany remains barely accessible. Taking just France into account (and the situation

is no more brilliant elsewhere), at the time when we began putting this book together, only one Parisian bookstore was selling the last copies of *The Revolution in Germany* by the Trotskyist P. Broué (1973).

The avatars of the little world of publishing reflect, in their own way, the tectonic shifts of “real” history. After decades of oblivion, it required the social disturbances of the sixties and a renaissance of workers self-organization and the critique of bureaucracy to reawaken interest in council communism (reflected in the Situationist International) and to create the need to once again take up the thread of time.

Towards the Unitary Organization

The fact that, at the beginning of the 21st century, the basic accusations hurled at the world in 1919 are still current is nothing to be proud of: it means that the world has not changed basically since 1919. Far from it: the rule of capital is more deeply entrenched and has assumed a planetary scale. Even when the outward appearance has changed, the structures of capitalist society, such as the State, parliament, and the trade unions, have remained and preserve their essential functions. The great practical and theoretical merit of the German revolutionaries was that they counted parliament and the trade unions among their adversaries, at a time when these institutions had until then been the very structure of the workers movement in the advanced capitalist countries.

The repudiation of the trade unions in 1919 in Germany was not mere rhetoric, but reality. Not a renunciation, but an act of creation. “*Get out of the trade unions*” expressed the real activity of hundreds of thousands of workers who abandoned them to form unitary organizations, the *unionen*.

“Union” must be understood here in its two meanings: the reunion of the proletarians, but also the single organization, combining economic and political functions. It did not involve the resurgence of a more or less Proudhonian “economism”, concerned above all with managing the workshop in a different way, and then the factory and finally the whole industry. In the fall of 1919, the AAU of Bremen declared that it was not a trade union, not even a “revolutionary syndicalist” type of trade union, and that it was fighting for political power.

Unionism was the tendency to break down all trade barriers: when workers abandoned their trade unions, they did so by entire factories, rather than by this or that trade. It also signified the will to organize beyond the boundaries of each industry: the unions operated on the scale of whole economic regions.

In a negative sense, unionism is a reaction against the institutions which accepted the war, collaborated with the Sacred Union in order to increase production, and then broke the wartime strikes. In a positive sense, it was solidarity, a community of action. Workerism? The criterion for membership in the AAUD was to declare that one is favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat. A worker in favor of sectional struggles by trade

category would not have been admitted. Unionism does not reduce the proletariat to a producer.

In practice, and especially in Hamburg and Bremen, where this tendency was most vigorous, the communists attacked the trade union offices and distributed the contents of the trade union treasuries to the unemployed, and the rank and file members of the trade union did nothing to defend an institution which they no longer considered to be theirs. This tendency would persist in the KPD even after the purge of its leftists. In 1919, the Heidelberg Congress, which excluded the left, still did not preclude the possibility that "if it becomes necessary", "the destruction of the trade union form and [. . .] the creation of new forms of organization"³ would be undertaken.

Antiparlamentarism

Here, too, we are not confronted by a merely theoretical position, but by the systematization of concrete experience. In 1919, the electoral mechanism, in the Constituent Assembly as well as in the official councils dominated by the social democracy, was revealed to be an obstacle to the revolutionary dynamic. If in 1916 Pannekoek did not exclude the subversive use of parliament,⁴ events would later clarify democracy's function: "Universal suffrage has been . . . a sign that the bourgeoisie has defeated the working class", Johann Knief maintained in January 1919.⁵

At its founding congress (December 30, 1918 to January 1, 1919), the KPD voted 62 to 23 against participation in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. To Rosa Luxemburg, advocate of utilizing a tribune even though she rejected it, those who would still comprise the party majority for a few more months retorted: elections and electoral institutions are some of the most effective ways to detour revolutionary energy, and to drown the radical minority under the opinions of proletarians who are still under social democratic influence. The only way to free them from that influence is action in the factory and the streets, not the utilization of an institution which is alien to the revolutionaries and in which they will always be sure to end up losing, no matter how many delegates they elect.

The problem became more complicated when parliamentarism ceased to operate solely in a visibly "bourgeois" arena, but also within the forms which the social movement against the war assumed. In the same article cited above, J. Knief asserts: "The soldiers councils, which were originally class institutions of the proletariat, have become institutions of bourgeois democracy. . . . The same thing is happening to the workers councils."

In fact, in December 1918, the communists were a tiny minority at the Reich Congress of Workers and Soldiers Councils, and neither Liebknecht nor Luxemburg was allowed to be listed as a candidate . . . because they were not registered with an economic enterprise! Dozens, hundreds of salaried bureaucrats took their seats as *workers* in an assembly from which incontestable representatives and defenders of labor were excluded. This was neither the first nor the last time workerism was used for an anti-working class purpose.

We must point out that many people at that time, including some on the communist left, still conceived of anti-parliamentarism as a tactical and non-essential position. In 1919, Pannekoek thought that although parliament could no longer be the instrument of either revolution or the administration of the future society, it was not out of the question that it could be used in a pre-revolutionary period.[6](#)

In 1919, however, participation in the elections was rejected by a considerable number of those who would later become well-known figures in the KPD, such as Paul Frölich and W. Münzenberg, who were at that time “Leftists”, at least in regard to this essential point.

It was not the parliamentary road to socialism that was in question, since all the KPD’s militants of that period saw the soviets or councils, and not parliament, as the political form of the revolution. In 1919-1920 the debate revolved around the possible use of bourgeois democracy *before* the revolution. In the years prior to 1914, the left wing within the Second International attacked *Nur-Parlamentarismus* (“Parliament Alone”), the idea, and its practical application, according to which the bourgeois electoral mechanism would be sufficient for the socialist transformation. For the left, what were also required (above all) were the strike and mass mobilizations in the streets, without rejecting the established representative institutions in principle. This was just what the left communists rejected in 1919: the tactical use, even for propaganda, even as a tribune, of bourgeois democracy.

Bordiga, for his part, declared that he was always opposed to systematic abstentionism, which was of anarchist inspiration, according to him. Nonetheless, the future founders of the Communist Party of Italy proclaimed “the incompatibility of communist principles and methods with participation in elections to bourgeois representative bodies.”[7](#) His abstentionism was therefore not only bound to the circumstances of 1919, and was indeed very close to a rejection “in principle”. By calling themselves the “Abstentionist Fraction”, they clearly demonstrated the essential importance which they granted to this question.[8](#)

As it turned out, post-1918 Germany deprived the distinction between “tactical” and “principled” anti-parliamentarism of any meaning: endemic rebellion, assassinations, pro- and anti-revolutionary armed gangs, reactionary conspiracies, preparations for *coups d’État* (from the Kapp Putsch in 1920 to the 1923 Munich coup attempt in which Hitler participated), etc. Even disregarding the assassinations of many revolutionary militants and cadres, crime became a part of political life: the assassinations of Haase, the USPD leader (1919), of Erzberger, leader of the *Zentrum*, the moderate Catholic party, and Foreign Minister (1921), of Rathenau, a leading liberal industrialist, and also Foreign Minister (1922). All of these assassinations constituted efforts to eliminate the center, which comprises the pivot of every democracy. Fighting for revolution in such circumstances rules out having any illusions about or participating in a parliamentary democracy which functioned in such a defective manner. From a broader perspective, however, those individuals were rare who, like Otto Rühle, looking forward beyond those turbulent years, proclaimed the definitive end of an era, and declared

parliamentarism, whether feasible or not, as well as trade unionism, whether effective or not, to be henceforth inherent characteristics of the functioning of capitalist society.

In his critique of the Dutch Communist Party (written in the summer of 1919), Gorter showed how democracy strengthens capital.⁹ While it is true that council communism enthusiastically contrasts “workers” democracy to the “bourgeois” variety, it is also clear that it fully grasped the role of the latter, as would be further demonstrated ten years later, after Mussolini had come to power and the Nazis were mobilizing huge crowds. We offer two quotations from among the dozens available:

“Democracy is being fascistized, it is calmly making alliances with the dictatorships; and the dictatorships are covering themselves with a democratic cloak.” (1931)

“Fascism is not opposed to bourgeois democracy; to the contrary, it is its continuation by other means.” (1932)¹⁰

For the council communists, the social democrats and the Stalinists helped the Nazis take power not by refusing to unite, but by uniting against the revolution. In 1933, Hitler only completed the counterrevolution begun by the SPD in 1919 and acquiesced in by the KPD over the following years, due to the social democracy of its origins and its unconditional defense of the Russian State.

The Workers Revolution

The addition of the word “workers” in the KAPD’s name (*Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands*) signaled the intention to found a party upon the basis of its rank and file, and was an appeal to self-organization.

It was an affirmation of *class*: the workers versus the rest of society. As Gorter emphasized, the workers stand alone. Not only must the factory workers prevail over the other classes, but “the obligation to work must be implacably enforced” (Program of the KAPD, Section II.8), which, under the prevailing conditions of that era, would have amounted to the widest possible extension of blue-collar type work.

Such insistence may seem surprising. Let us consider the situation of a schoolteacher who is disgusted by the butchery of 1914-1918, aware of the death of ideals in the trenches, of the collapse of political structures, and who is looking for solutions. How could he follow the revolutionaries, whose program appeared to imply sending his son, and perhaps even his wife, into the factory? This is what communism promised him: a proletarian fate, which appeared to him to be the least enviable of all possible fates. In short, instead of proclaiming the need to supersede the proletarian condition, the KAPD program sought to generalize it. Is this not an excellent way to turn the petit-bourgeoisie against the workers, and to push them into the arms of the parties of order, if not into the arms of the Freikorps...?

Posing the question in this manner is anachronistic. By doing so, one overlooks the fear and the scorn, if not the class hatred, for the factory workers which were then characteristic of tradesmen, shopkeepers, officials and members of the liberal professions. The *workers* revolution was then presented as the only historically possible kind of revolution. Only with the benefit of being able to look back at history are we now capable of understanding how Gorter and the KAPD went so far theorizing a state of affairs which in no way depended upon them, and therefore reinforced, contrary to their own intentions, the obstacles to the revolution they were trying to bring about. The class hatred of the petit-bourgeoisie grew more acute as they contemplated their “demotion” to the status of manual workers.

Hence the insistence on “the worker”:

“The worker is a proletarian in the Marxist sense only in production, in his role as a wage worker.” Outside the factory, “he lives, acts, and feels like a petit-bourgeois,” wrote Rühle.

And Gorter wrote, in 1921: “In the factories, the proletarian means something. There he is a fighter because he is a worker. There he can exist as a free man. . . . There, since the revolution comes from the factories, he can fight . . . with weapons in hand.”¹¹

It is true that other texts called for an infinitely more expansive notion of emancipation. The communist left was not closed to the multifarious aspirations which coursed through Germany prior to 1914, which were reinforced by the social collapse provoked by the war: rejection of mechanical and commercial civilization, flight from the cities, the beginnings of a non-antagonistic relation to nature, the search for another way of living, of eating, of loving, for a poetry “made by all”.... The activities and personalities of the diverse range of people who opted for council communism testify to this surpassing of the domain of the worker.

The same Rühle whom we have just seen theorizing workerism, posed the need to go beyond all cultural values and practices. Against the social democracy (which was soon to be imitated in this respect by Stalinism), which presented itself as the continuator of the “good” conquests of bourgeois civilization, he said:

“The bourgeoisie has bequeathed an evil legacy to the ascendant social class, the proletariat. In the domain of culture, the proletariat faces an essential task. It must have the courage to reject all bourgeois concepts relating to culture, morality, ethics and esthetics.”¹²

Schwab, a former *Wandervögel* (“migratory bird”; one who embraces a back-to-nature lifestyle), would later devote himself to architecture. In Germany and in Holland, non-conformist and dissident artists like H. Roland-Holst, Gorter and F. Jung played a pioneering role. It was not by chance that F. Pfempfert, a leading figure in Expressionism, made his famous journal *Die Aktion* a focal point for the revolutionary movement. We could even cite Traven, and his broadsheet *Der Zeigelbrenner* (the

Brick-burner), which, in December 1918, was distributed by the thousands in the streets of Munich with a lead article entitled *The World Revolution Begins*.¹³ (Traven was to go on to participate in the Bavarian Council Republic and would narrowly escape execution). Such trends, of course, indicate a degree of openness to other demands distinct from self-management of production, however radical this self-management may be.

In 1920, the German group known as the Dadaist Revolutionary Central Council put the following demands in the first lines of its program: the end of property, the suppression of labor by mechanization, a new urbanism, and the fusion of art and life. The *Manifesto of Proletarian Art* declared:

“The proletariat is a condition which must be overcome. The bourgeoisie is a condition which must be overcome.”

We shall add this precocious note of lucidity seldom encountered at that time:

“The bourgeoisie is using the communist apparatus, which is not an invention of the proletariat but of the bourgeoisie, to help renovate its decomposing culture (Russia).”¹⁴

Such claims, however, remained implicit and occupied the margins of the movement “which transforms the conditions of existence”, that is, of the masses in their struggle in the factories and the streets. For the revolutionary organizations, even the artists who had joined the proletariat were still a little too “artistic”, and their esthetic too advanced. And in the eyes of the vanguard artists, the most radical of the workers were still a little “bourgeois” in their esthetic preferences. If Gorter was a poet, he was a poet *outside* of his theoretical texts, in which there is little evidence of poetic creation. (It is in Otto Rühle where theory attempts a new kind of writing, as in *The Revolution is Not a Party Matter*.) Separation reigns. Everything which is presented as positive, everything positive which is done, finally revolves around work. The aspiration for other ways of life transmitted a subterranean impulse to the movement, but could not assert itself in that movement, and did not transcend the “workers” character of the movement’s activities and program.

It was certainly true that, on occasion, it was thought that the Council would go beyond workerism, integrating “all those who must be considered as proletarians, the street vendor or the teacher as well as the artist or the white collar employee”. (K. Schröder, *On the Future of the New Society*, 1920).

By enrolling these categories, Schröder explains, the General Workers Unions will unite them with the factory workers. This position is all the more significant in that it comes from the principal leader of the KAPD. But this perspective thereby universalizes a proletarian condition which it does not suppress, and is limited to the sphere of labor: society is a society of production, and the proletarians are producers. The critique of work as a separate activity (which presupposes an entirely different vision of society

and of human life) does not emerge as a specific point, and even less as an essential one.

This “class against class” position does not perceive that the social classes and, first of all, the two fundamental ones, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, are complementary moments, forms and functions of the reproduction of capital, and that the mere fact of having based a mode of activity, and of having theorized the most radical activities of the time based upon these categories, indicates the limit of this perspective: one remains within capitalism if one clings to the class struggle without going any further.¹⁵

The German communist left was the left current which best understood the nature of the *mediations* standing between the proletarians and their emancipation, mediations which go by the names of parliament, trade union, and political party, and it fought them. But here we come upon the paradox. Gorter, undoubtedly the most “workerist” German left communist, quite correctly included the reformism of the *worker* himself among the enemies of communism. Not illogically, in 1923 he would count among the enemies of communism . . . almost all the world’s workers.¹⁶ In fact, at the end of 1918, the workers who were most firmly rooted in the world of labor, the revolutionary shop stewards (especially among Berlin’s metal workers) refused to join the newborn Communist Party, preferring to remain instead within the “centrist” party, the USPD, which emerged from a split within the SPD in 1917. They would later join the Unified Communist Party (VKPD), without ever connecting with the council communists.

In addition, it was among those workers rather than among the communist left where the *dream of self-management* appears to have been most deeply-rooted, embraced by the workers in the skilled trades who still fulfilled an indispensable function in the organization of production during those pre-Fordist times, workers who were conscious of their specialist skills, and who possessed a highly-developed sense of their value and their role in the enterprise, a role played along with the technicians and engineers, but in rivalry with the latter.

The strength of the USPD, the amalgamation of the Kautskyist old guard and authentic working-class cadres, resided in the fact that it represented a certain kind of labor autonomy within the parliamentary republic born in November 1918. Its implicit program involved transforming the institutionalized workers councils into counter-powers capable of improving the living conditions of the workers by gaining a preponderant influence within bourgeois democracy, even (in the most extreme conception) going so far as to convert the bourgeois democracy into a labor democracy. The fact that this aspiration was quickly shown to be groundless by the ensuing events is evident. In 1917-1921, however, this did not prevent these ideas from holding sway over a significant part of the German working class.

The KAPD therefore situated the revolutionary wellspring (and the guarantee against possible deviations) in a profound working-class nature whose emblematic figure (the metal worker) slipped from their grasp. Gorter came close to an understanding of this paradox, but did not succeed in doing so. One cannot fight except on the basis of one’s

own situation, but when one's struggle rests *solely* on one's situation, one furthers its development without surpassing it. The KAPD delegates to the Third Congress of the International emphasized the power of capital, which was not only capable of absorbing what the proletarians create (trade unions) and utilize (elections) but was also capable of absorbing their demands (reforms). After 1921, during the phase of reflux, some KAPists would question the pertinence of all wage struggles, calling upon the *unionen*, soon to be drained of most of their members, to restrict their activities to revolutionary action.[17](#)

The National-Bolshevik Aberration and its Meaning

It is most unfortunate that the only people who tried to find social means to go beyond workerism did so from a national basis.

In 1915, in *Democracy and Organization*, Laufenberg and Wolffheim explained that the bourgeois State could be neither national nor democratic: only the proletariat would create a "pan-German" republic, that is, it would unite the various German-speaking countries (the voluntary merger of Austria and Germany was, let us recall, a classic watchword of social democracy). For this reason they advocated progressive action: it was not by the classical socialist road (parliament) that an economic democracy could be built, but by the councils which administer vast industrial associations. They thus defended the councils for very different reasons than Pannekoek and Rühle. For Laufenberg and Wolffheim, the councils were the instruments of a transition which would not necessarily be violent thanks to the control exercised over all levels of society by the workers.

But the labor which they wanted to incorporate into the councils was by no means the same labor intended by Gorter: beyond the walls of the factory, it included all the trades and professions which take part in the production of wealth and, ultimately, almost the entire population, the body of which forms what they called *the people*.

The anticapitalism of Wolffheim and Laufenberg was soon (at least as of 1915) set upon a national foundation. Their classless society is the national totality. The fact that, after the war, they formed alliances with reactionaries was a logical, although not inevitable, consequence of this view. To want to create a classless society before the end of classes is, necessarily, to organize this society from above by smothering the class contradictions within it.[18](#)

Wolffheim and Laufenberg are of course to be numbered among the promoters of the councils, but in their view the councils were a means to organize a fusion of classes led by the proletariat in alliance with social groups which are allegedly anti-bourgeois due to their pre-capitalist characteristics, especially the in the army. In this manner they invented a *non-revolutionary* councilism.

Unlike the communist left, but fully within the social democratic tradition, Wolffheim and Laufenberg renounced the critique and destruction of the State. The State, Laufenberg wrote, has two functions: one of exploitation, the other being the framework necessary

for the life of the community, and what needs to be done is to make the second role prevail over the first. Bernstein and revisionism had been saying the same thing.

Wolffheim and Laufenberg advocate a peaceful road to a socialism that would be national.

Nor were they the first to want to rouse the nation against a supposedly weakened and discredited bourgeoisie that was ready to sell its population to international capitalism. From then on their goal was to forge a popular alliance, which would in turn join an alliance with Russia in a revolutionary war against France, England and the United States, countries which had been equated with the real heart of world capitalism, that is, the banks, whose representative within world communism was Paul Levi (former Spartacist, leader of the Communist Party and the incarnation of anti-leftism), “agent of international Jewish finance”. All their uses of anti-semitism (even though it was not a central issue for them as it was for the Nazis) and all their contacts with reactionaries (which the two Hamburg militants were soon to make) were enough to drive them far from the proletarian movement and even into the arms of their declared adversaries. The enemies of our enemies are not our friends. Nonetheless, we may observe that the strategy of Laufenberg and Wolffheim prefigured those strategies which would later launch numerous anti-imperialist national fronts in the Third World, with the intermittent support of western progressives. We lose count of the “communist” parties in Africa or Asia which formed alliances with the military (no matter how murderous) in the name of the construction of national socialism.

National Bolshevism never “took root” in the KAPD as a whole: its audience remained restricted to Hamburg and, to a much lesser extent, to Frankfurt. Nonetheless, even on this small scale, this new marriage of the nation and the proletariat (which had finalized their divorce in the blood and filth of 1914-1918) is certainly one of the monstrosities produced by an era that was not short on monstrosities.

It would fall to the Nazis to reap the fruits of this perspective, in a very different way. The community of proletarian labor solidarity advocated by the KAPD had failed. The National-Bolshevik popular community of the producers was stillborn. A racial-national community would prevail after 1933.

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Our selection of texts begins with the description of the prosaic activities of a workers council and concludes with the founding of a new International doomed to failure. The full range of the movement’s activities is embraced in this selection. The revolutionaries do not need to be glorified.

On the other hand, nothing would be more false than to reduce the movement featured in this book to “Revolution or Nothing!” Precisely because, in 1919-1920, Pannekoek perceived the revolutionary process, despite all appearances, to be a long-term undertaking—and today we know that he was not mistaken—only activity faithful to a

minimum of principles was capable in his eyes of contributing to that movement. For this reason in particular he mistrusted the faith in a small party which was to radicalize the masses.

There is no lack of contradictions among the texts we publish here, and it is tempting to pin labels on them, which would in some cases be deserved: “activism”, “workerism”, “anti-parliamentarism” . . . so many real tendencies whose vigorous emergence was not the result so much of a current of ideas as they were brought about by two or three crucial years of the century. The German communist left did not practice “politics” and did not seek a mass “base” by making demands on its behalf. It is undoubtedly for this reason that it has been forgotten by official history and, though only later, became a collection of groupuscules. Its supersession presupposes nothing less than another course of history. Its continuation therefore remains to be imagined and lived. . . .

Gilles Dauvé
(February 2004)

“A dead conviction leaves the worst aftertaste of disappointment. . . . Today, as much as yesterday, I permit no excuses for those who have abandoned their convictions.”
--Franz Jung, *Le Scarabée-Torpille*, 1961.

- [1.](#) Obsolete Communism, the Left-Wing Alternative appeared in France after May 1968. Lenin’s book was for a long time one of the books most widely distributed by the Stalinist parties, especially in East Germany.
- [2.](#) The situation is different in Germany (where historical books and collections of documents are available at bookstores), but is hardly any better in the English-speaking countries than in France.
- [3.](#) The Communist Left in Germany, 1918-1921.
- [4.](#) Imperialism and the Tasks Facing the Proletariat (1916), in (Dis)Continuité, No. 3, 1998.
- [5.](#) From the Collapse of German Imperialism to the Beginning of the Revolution, Invariance, Texts of the Revolutionary Workers Movement, No. 4, 1996.
- [6.](#) Social Democracy and Communism, op. cit. (Invariance No. 4, 1996).
- [7.](#) Resolution of the Conference of the Abstentionist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party, May 1920, reproduced above.
- [8.](#) Every reader of Left-Wing Communism knows that Lenin gave the German Left a good hiding and treated the “Italian” Left with kid gloves. Forty years later, in “The Infantile Disorder”, a Condemnation of Future Renegades (available from the International Communist Party), Amadeo Bordiga would take pains not to see what he had in common with the German Left, and how he differed from Lenin. Here, for instance, is how his journal, *Il Soviet* (Naples), announced its publication in 1920 of Pannekoek’s text *The World Revolution and Communist Tactics* (see Pannekoek and Gorter’s *Marxism*, ed. and tr. by D. A. Smart, Pluto Press, London, 1978, for an English translation which includes Pannekoek’s April 1920 “Afterword”):
“As is known, comrade Lenin, in his admirable activity, has finally found time to devote himself, in a special pamphlet written on the eve of the Moscow

Congress, to the radical movement within international communism, defining it as an infantile disorder of communism. In this pamphlet our infantilism, along with our journal, are the objects of particular attention and we have resigned ourselves, after having endured father's whip, to patiently bear the gibes of our dear brothers at home, which shall not fail to be heard."

"But just as impertinent children who have been punished never lack a protective uncle who consoles them with some candy, we also have received some candy in the form of a long article—which shall in turn be published as a pamphlet—published under the title given below, by comrade Pannekoek, in No. 28-29 of *Kommunismus*."

"We think it is fitting to recall that in 1912 Pannekoek, before Lenin, clearly asserted what has since become the touchstone of international communism: the destruction of the parliamentary-democratic State as the first task of the proletarian revolution. We also recall that a competent and unimpeachable witness, Karl Radek, has defined Pannekoek as the most perceptive mind of international socialism." (Quoted in *(Dis)Continuité*, No. 7, 1999, p. 46).

[9.](#) Opportunism in the Dutch Communist Party.

[10.](#) Quoted from *The Dutch Communist Left* (P. Bourrinet), *International Communist Current*, 1990, p. 173. The publication of the complete version in English of this important study has been undertaken by Brill Publishers (The Netherlands).

[11.](#) Rühle, quoted in "The KAPD and the Proletarian Movement", *Invariance*, Second Series, No. 1, 1971. Gorter, quoted in *The Dutch Communist Left*, p. 115.

[12.](#) *Die Aktion*, September 4, 1920. Years later, his *Psychology of the Proletarian Child* (1925) echoed a demand which cropped up throughout this whole period: to think and to organize for oneself, against the established authority, against the designated or self-proclaimed leader, in the world of work as in politics, but also in the family and the school. Rühle expresses a will to autonomy, and the rejection of institutional power (especially among the youth). "Society must be the community, and the community is the opposite pole of domination, of authority and of violence. By keeping authority at the greatest possible distance is the way one gets closer to socialism." Theorizing the rank and file against the leaders, self-organization against hierarchy, announcing a rebellion of the youth, Rühle here anticipates the themes which would constitute the strength as well as the weakness of the revolts which would break out forty or fifty years later.

[13.](#) Traven, *Dans l'Etat le plus libre du monde*, L'Insomniaque, 1994.

[14.](#) Quoted by M. Dachy, *Dada & les dadaïsmes*, Gallimard, 1994. In 1966, after Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971), one of the most prominent figures of Dadaism and one of the editors of *Die Aktion*, translated the article "Captive Words" (*I.S.* No. 10) into German, Guy Debord wrote to him on April 25, 1966:

"We are of course aware of your role in German dadaism; so that no approval of our theses on this central issue could be as precious to us as yours. After such organized forgetting, the current acknowledgement does not seem to us to be anything but a moment of a foreseeable process, a moment which arrives with the reduction to rubble of the culture and the ideologies which have reigned over forty years of generalized reaction. The next revolutionary crisis, which could spell the judgment day of the world which you then (and

- later) confronted, will vindicate the entire truth of dadaism.” (Debord, Correspondance, Fayard, Vol. III, 2003. See also Vol. II, pp. 203-205).
- [15.](#) Invariance, Textes du mouvement ouvrier revolutionaire, No. 4, 1996.
 - [16.](#) L’Internationale Communiste ouvrière, in Invariance, Second Series, No. 5, 1974.
 - [17.](#) The Dutch Communist Left, p. 145.
 - [18.](#) “The national idea has ceased to be a means in the hands of the bourgeoisie and has turned against it. . . . The great dialectic of History has made the national idea a means of power for the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.” Ibid., p. 114. The Stalinists would later give this great dialectic, dreamed up on the coast of the North Sea, a planetary dimension.