

## **Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism**

Those who have grown old within the traditional forms of struggle do not reflect that everything in the world is only good and proper in its own time. Once that time is past, what was good becomes bad and what was proper becomes misguided; sense becomes nonsense, merit becomes liability. The revolution, an era of world-shaking change, does not leave the organisations of the proletariat untouched. It throws down all that is old, in order to waken new life from among the ruins. Otto Rühle, 'Basic issues of organisation'.

**Edited and introduced by  
D. A. Smart**

# **Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism**

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# Introduction

During the quarter-century preceding the first world war, Germany was widely regarded as the homeland of the socialist movement, and the German Social-Democratic Party, the SPD, as the 'jewel of the Second International'. It had emerged in triumph from the period of illegality under Bismarck, and the strength and authority of its organisation were steadily increasing. The Erfurt programme of 1891 enshrined its conception of itself as the material and ideological bearer of a socialist future, foreseeing the development of the organised proletariat's economic and political might to the point where it would conquer state power and enact a revolutionary transformation of society.

In fact, however, the very expansion of the social-democratic movement, and in particular the rapid growth of the socialist 'Free Trade Unions' from the mid-nineties onward led to a dissociation of day-to-day campaigns from the ultimate goal. This tendency was endorsed by Eduard Bernstein, who saw the development of trusts ushering in an era of planned capitalism and harmonious class relations in which socialism would be realised as a gradual process of social reform. This 'revisionist' philosophy was fiercely contested by the SPD's orthodox theorists, notably Karl Kautsky, the founder and editor of *Die Neue Zeit*; but the revisionists were able to live with their comrades' censure, particularly since the party's tactics in practice came to accord more and more closely with their political perspectives.

In reaction to revisionism there developed a fundamentalist 'Left Radical' current which held that, far from diminishing, class antagonisms were all the more real in a period dominated by the intensification of economic and political rivalry between colonial powers: it must be brought home to the working class that only their

own efforts could abolish capitalism and its logic of rising prices, militarism and war, and the party must support relentless mass struggle towards the realisation of a new socialist order. The executive of the SPD, however, was too bound by the traditional forms and horizons of parliamentary and trade-union struggle to give more than token endorsement to such considerations; and while professing socialist principles, it suppressed radical campaigns in the interests of the party's respectability among the electorate.

The Left Radicals' worst fears were confirmed with the onset of war. Not only were the Socialist International and the SPD incapable of opposing inter-imperialist conflict with international proletarian solidarity, the organs of the workers' movement actually undertook a vital role in the management of the war effort. The SPD and socialist Free Trade Unions entered into the social truce proposed by the Imperial Chancellor: the party used its authority to suppress political opposition to the war, while the unions abandoned their efforts to gain improved working conditions and took on the role of smoothing labour relations. These became key functions as domestic conditions worsened and disaffection with the expansionist war policy of the imperial state mounted; and when the old regime collapsed in 1918, the social-democratic organisations and the army were left as the sole defenders of the existing social order in the face of a revolutionary proletarian council-movement. In its new role as the party of government, the SPD channelled this revolt into a limited modernisation of the political and economic forms of capitalism, while the trade unions co-opted working-class militancy into the attainment of short-term economic gains and the consolidation of their own managerial status. This process of recuperation was only possible with the assistance of reactionary elements in the armed forces.

The Left Radical current is little known today except through the early work of Rosa Luxemburg, and she was far from being its most consistent representative: her commitment to working through the existing workers' organisations left her condemned to a backward-looking, oppositionist role, compromising with unstable centre tendencies. At the war-time Zimmerwald congress of socialist

internationalists, the German Left Radicals joined with Lenin in denouncing her failure to dissociate herself from Kautsky's 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft', an oppositional group within the SPD which viewed the latter's support for the war-effort as a mere political error. At the height of the German revolution the Spartacus League did break with the centre-left to ally itself with the Left Radicals in the Communist Party of Germany, the KPD(S); but as the revolutionary movement stagnated, the Spartacist leaders – now supported by Lenin and the Comintern – formed up once again with the centrist Independents. The Left Radicals, who maintained that political clarity was more important than numerical strength if the proletariat was to carry through a successful revolution under the conditions obtaining in Western Europe, regrouped in the KAPD, the Communist Workers' Party of Germany; an open break with Moscow ensued after the proclamation of the '21 conditions' at the Second Congress of the Comintern. Anton Pannekoek, one of the most prominent theoreticians of the radical left, denounced the Third International's tactics as directed towards the preservation of the Soviet republic at a time when communism could only be realised internationally through the total overthrow of capitalism in all its guises.

Until the late 1960s the Bolshevik tradition so dominated marxism that the Moscow version of the crisis of social democracy went all but unquestioned among socialist revolutionaries. Pannekoek was remembered largely for an approving mention in *State and Revolution* and for the censure heaped upon him in *'Left-Wing' Communism*, while the reputation of his close friend and fellow-militant Herman Gorter owed more to his lyric poetry than to his political work. But the mass student movements in France and Germany relived the failure of the existing workers' organisations to undertake the transformation of capitalist society, and this experience led to the rediscovery of German Left Radicalism.<sup>1</sup> This short collection of Pannekoek and Gorter's writings is published in English for the first time, the translations being based on the reprint in H. M. Bock, *Organisation und Taktik der proletarischen Revolution*.<sup>2</sup> It proposes to outline the scope of a revolutionary

marxism that is resonant with implications for present-day socialists. The introduction which follows sets out the course of their political development within its historical context: it must be left to the reader to follow up the many issues which can only be indicated in passing.

Anton Pannekoek was born in 1873 in rural Holland. He already had notable achievements as an astronomer behind him when, at the turn of the century, he entered the Dutch social-democratic party, the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (SDAP), and he subsequently described his socialist activities as a logical extension of his scientific concerns. Herman Gorter, some ten years his senior, was at this time co-editing *De Nieuwe Tijd*, the SDAP's theoretical journal, in conjunction with Henriette Roland-Holst. Although very different in temperament and manner – Pannekoek restrained and analytical, Gorter impassioned and assertive – they were to maintain a close collaboration within the international socialist movement over the next two decades and more.

Whereas in Germany the failure of the bourgeois revolution in 1848 had left the Prussian gentry to superintend national unification and the socialist movement to fight for democracy, Holland had a politically emancipated bourgeoisie. Here, as in France, the workers' movement had taken an anarchist bent, its mentor, the former pastor Domela Nieuwenhuis abandoning his seat in parliament to proclaim a syndicalist vision of classless society being ushered in by a massive general strike. In 1894 the socialists left Nieuwenhuis' Sociaal-Democratisch Bond to form the SDAP on the model of the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD). Just as Dutch industry now developed in the wake of the tremendous economic upsurge in Germany, so the SDAP mirrored the development of the German SPD; but in the numerically small Dutch party the revisionist wing was powerful and the internal conflicts intense. Pannekoek and Gorter were soon involved in the fight against revisionism in both the Dutch and German socialist movements, associating closely with Kautsky and Luxemburg. The latter's emphasis upon the political significance of working-class initiative was echoed in Gorter's

criticism of the Dutch party leadership for withholding effective support for the dockers' and railwaymen's strike of 1903: it was 'scorning the revolutionary energy' of the masses. Tension increased within the SDAP when in 1905 the leadership defied a congress resolution and supported the liberal government, dismissing the objections of the left as dogmatism, blind to the advantages that could be gained by exploiting the differences of interest within the bourgeois camp. In 1907 the left founded a journal of its own, *De Tribune*, and when presented with an ultimatum to close it down for the sake of party unity two years later, the 'tribunists' left the SDAP to form an independent organisation, the Sociaal Democratische Partij (SDP).<sup>3</sup> This group remained small even in relation to the SDAP; it was to form the basis of the Communist Party of the Netherlands after the war.

Pannekoek had given up his astronomical work at the University of Leyden in 1906 on being invited to teach at the SPD party college in Berlin. Like the Austrian Rudolf Hilferding, however, he was forced to resign this post under the threat of deportation; the Free Trade Unions were in any case boycotting the college as a hotbed of radicalism. A struggle for control of the workers' movement was then taking place between party and unions over the issue of the mass strike. The party congress of 1905 asserted that it was the party's prerogative as political representative of the working class to call a political strike, though it should only do so in defence of its parliamentary rights; by the following congress, however, the unions had prevailed upon the party executive to acknowledge the 'twin pillars' theory, establishing a division of labour between party and unions. This arrangement effectively gave the unions veto powers, backed up by their option of withholding electoral support for the party, which was already considerably outnumbered in membership by the unions. The trade-union hierarchies were receptive to revisionism, and they were able to use their influence over the party executive to have statements of principle substituted for active campaigns even on issues over which the left enjoyed majority support within the SPD.<sup>4</sup>

Over the following years Pannekoek gained a widespread

reputation as a travelling speaker and journalist. He co-authored a work against revisionism with Gorter,<sup>5</sup> while his wife Anna translated the latter's popular account of historical materialism into German. In this latter, for which Kautsky wrote a preface, Gorter set out from the question 'How does it come about that men think such-and-such at a particular time?' With a characteristic Left Radical emphasis, he stressed that the process whereby concrete historical conditions determine the social being of men is not dead and mechanical: 'We do not make history *how we please* – But . . . *we do make it*.'<sup>6</sup> A new society, Gorter continued, could only be created by a new, self-conscious and self-responsible man. This conception of proletarian self-emancipation was to remain central to the politics of Left Radicalism.

In 1909 Pannekoek settled in Bremen, where there was particularly intense political conflict within the local SPD apparatus. The latter had been built up by Friedrich Ebert, '*mutatis mutandis*, the Stalin of Social Democracy',<sup>7</sup> before his promotion to the post of National Secretary in Berlin. In that capacity he was to put the ramshackle party organisation inherited from the period of illegality on a business-like footing. His organisational abilities and neutral political stance within the party qualified him to take over its leadership from the ageing August Bebel, in effect from 1912.

Bremen was a centre of working-class militancy not only because of its dockers and shipyard-workers, but also because of the engineering industry developing there; the skilled workers of the latter were to play a prominent role in the German revolution.<sup>8</sup> In 1909 it was also the scene of an active campaign on the part of schoolteachers for the abolition of confessional education. Like Gorter in Holland, Pannekoek had already been involved in the debate on religion in the social-democratic movement;<sup>9</sup> he now began to contribute regularly to the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* on this and other current issues from the perspective that 'the conditions of revolutionary transformation are to be found in embryonic form in everyday struggle'.<sup>10</sup>

The same year, Pannekoek's major work of the period, *The Tactical Differences within the Workers' Movement*, was published.

As in all his writing, his concern is both scientific and practical. He does not denounce the errors or deviations of individuals, but analyses the forces at work within the socialist movement in terms of the concrete historical development of human society. He outlines the emergence of the organised proletariat as a revolutionary force within capitalism, discusses the forms taken by the workers' struggle and the significance of the various strata involved. Pannekoek then proceeds to anchor tactical priorities in this analysis. Although both this method and the points of emphasis belong to the ideological mainstream of marxism, it is worth outlining Pannekoek's argument at some length in order to illustrate its integrated character as a principled socialist platform. The maintenance of this integrity was soon to be impossible within the framework of social-democratic politics.

The text opens with the assertion that 'The tactics of proletarian class-struggle are an application of science, of theory, which enables us to grasp the origins and tendencies of social development.' The key characteristic of capitalism is the drive towards change generated by competition. Technological innovation favours the growth of giant enterprises, and the management of industry passes from the hands of the old capitalist entrepreneurs into those of a new middle class. Although the domination of the economy by large combines to some extent mitigates the anarchy of the free market, the fact that a small parasitic class of magnates is the beneficiary conflicts acutely with the increasing socialisation of the production process. But although capitalism produces the conditions of its own supercession, it can only be abolished by the work of men reacting to intolerable constraints, for '*all relations of production are human relations*': it is not a question of disinterested individuals transforming society as lucid agents on the basis of detached reflection.

All men are guided by their own interests, and the interests of those belonging to the same class coincide. Through collective action directed towards the improvement of their working conditions, proletarians come to engage in organised class struggle; and when it is perceived that the state is not an authority above society, but the

agent of the exploiting class, the conquest of political hegemony becomes the goal of the working class. Socialism is the ultimate goal, and the purpose of day-to-day struggle for gains which merely have significance within capitalist society is to develop the proletariat's mental<sup>11</sup> and material strength. The resources of the proletariat are its numbers and intrinsic involvement in production, its consciousness of shared class interests and its understanding of how society functions, its organisation and its discipline. Action can be taken to develop these latter, and the valuable reforms are not those conceded by the bourgeoisie to undermine the solidarity of the working class, but those it obtains by its own efforts.

In marxism the proletariat possesses a unique 'self-consciousness of society', but theory can only be appropriated through practical experience, and marxist theory makes better and better sense to workers as they lose old prejudices and illusions in the course of struggle. The conflicts which have persistently occurred within the workers' movement are not mere 'infantile disorders'\* but the natural course of the movement; 'Among the most immediate causes of tactical differences are the unequal pace of development in the various regions, the dialectical character of social development and the existence of other classes besides capitalists and wage-labourers.'

Marxism, as the theory of the revolutionary proletariat, means a complete change in the way one thinks – 'this is why it is well received by those whose thinking has reasons for changing in the face of the considerable transformations of which they are both witnesses and victims'. It is the workers of the industrial conurbations who are in the ascendant, and it would be absurd for a socialist party to make concessions to outdated perspectives in order to gain support among declining classes. Socialism represents a synthesis of reform and revolution, moments which are pursued in separation by revisionism and anarchism, the two faces of the petty bourgeoisie as it struggles to keep pace with capitalist development:

\* This term was in current polemical use to imply that the phenomenon of anarchism in the First International represented transient growing pains.

'One moment [it] gets drunk with revolutionary slogans and seeks to seize power by means of putsches, the next [it] creeps ignominiously at the feet of the big bourgeoisie, seeking to trick or beg reforms from it.'

Pannekoek now discusses the forms which the workers' class struggle takes. Although the parliamentary system is in fact '*the normal form of the bourgeoisie's political hegemony*', it has 'transformed the proletariat . . . into a conscious and organised class capable of engaging in struggle. Its value lies in this, and not in the illusion that the electoral system can lead our ship by a peaceful course to the haven of the state of the future, without storms.' This latter is a revisionist conception, and substitutes the ingenuity of leaders for the conscious action of the masses. Coalition politics ignores the objective of clarifying and uniting the working class that distinguishes the socialist party from others; in France and Italy it has driven workers to the anarcho-syndicalists. These latter, like the revisionists, see the state as something ethereal, separate from society; but although the state bureaucracy does pursue interests of its own, its primary function is in fact to serve the interests of the ruling class.

Trade unions are the natural form of working-class organisation, but they '*in no way pose themselves as adversaries to capitalism*. . . . They do not contest the fact that labour-power is a commodity, but on the contrary seek to obtain the highest possible price for it. . . . The trade unions only combat the avarice of the *individual* capitalist, and not the class as a whole, not the system as a whole.'<sup>12</sup> They play a vital function within capitalism during its phases of expansion: 'Only they are able, through constant struggle, to counteract the tendency of capitalist development to reduce the working class to utter impoverishment, and thereby prevent production suffering.' But because capitalism does not develop harmoniously, the trade unions need the complement of a political party, if only to defend the freedom of combination; when the unions attempt to take over the party's function of revolutionary education, as in France, they botch the job while prejudicing the organisation of the broad masses which is properly their task. Although the terms of

trade-union struggle are conducive to revisionism and the consolidation of the unions in the face of capitalist trustification has resulted in the growth of a bureaucratic hierarchy within the working class, *'capitalism is not simply what exists at present, it is constantly overturning the whole of reality as it exists.* It is in the nature of the *prevailing* reality of capitalism to transform trade-union struggles into finely calculated limited warfare . . . but it does not follow that this situation is eternal and unchanging.' For, in response to increasing repression by the state, 'political struggle and trade-union action tend more and more to fuse in a united fight of the working class against the ruling class'.

The class struggle between capital and proletariat is made more complex by the involvement of declining classes and such newly emergent strata as 'the officers and NCOs of the industrial army'. The intelligentsia occupies an intermediate role: it does not own its means of production, but the conditions of its labour and formation give it the illusion that 'the mind governs the world'. Its lower orders merge with the relatively privileged strata of skilled craftsmen.

Although the proletariat can form temporary alliances with other classes at times of severe repression, this will only enable it to seize power if the ruling class has lost all authority; and 'it is nonetheless possible that a period of temporary reaction may set in subsequently if the conflicts of interest between the proletariat and its allies emerge after the common victory'. Socialism, as an ideological system, 'can . . . cover very diverse contents and meanings according to the class advancing [its ideals] as political objectives.' The conflicts between the various interests represented in the party take the form of disagreements as to the tactics to be followed.

Even within the industrial proletariat there are considerable differences of interest in the short term: those English and American trade-unionists who enjoy a relatively comfortable situation, for example, 'do not want to hear of class struggle or revolution. Their socialism is "evolutionist"', the theory of the gradual advancement of workers and the nationalisation of the main branches of production by a state obeying the dictates of ethics and philanthropy.' This

tendency is represented within the German social-democratic movement by the revisionists. The interests of the broad proletarian masses must take precedence, however, for those of other strata are at odds with the real course of historical development: 'a party that allowed itself to be guided by them would find itself led irresistibly into the impasse of a reactionary politics, capitalist under its socialist mask.' But unlike other classes, the working class has marxian social science at its disposal, and this enables the worker to 'escape from the influence of short-term, limited interests in the name of the general class interest of the proletariat'. The implementation of socialist theory will play a vital role in directing the movement and '*transforming it from unconscious instinct into the conscious action of men*'.

Pannekoek's deep-seated sense of history and its making emerges in a wider context in his essay *Marxism and Darwinism*, also published in 1909. There he counters the ethical objections to Darwin's theories currently raised in the socialist movement by pointing out that both are based on a conception of development through conflict. Following Engels, Pannekoek argues that 'the practice of life, work, is the source of technology and thought, of tools and science. It is through work that the man-ape rose to the condition of man.'<sup>13</sup> He then proceeds to trace how the social conditions of work evolve from a primitive struggle with nature through the medium of tools into a struggle by the working-class movement for the appropriation of technology on behalf of humanity as a whole, a struggle that will end with the disappearance of classes and the formation of a universal community of producers.

Pannekoek's concern to emphasise the historical role attributed to the human subject by socialism led to an interest, shared with Gorter and Roland-Holst, in the work of Joseph Dietzgen and the latter's theory of mind. In an essay published in *Die Neue Zeit* he described the significance of Dietzgen's *The Nature of Human Brain-Work* thus: 'Marx showed how the world, society, the economy work, affecting the human brain and furnishing it with particular contents. Dietzgen showed how the mind itself works, conferring a particular mental form upon these contents.'<sup>14</sup> The Left

Radicals' stress upon the need for the proletariat to think and act autonomously was also anticipated in Dietzgen's writings: 'For a worker who seeks to take part in the self-emancipation of his class,' he had written, 'the prime necessity is to cease allowing himself to be taught by others and to teach himself instead.'<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, however, Kautsky's *Road to Power* of 1910 asserted the primacy of party discipline: the working class must stand firm but passive while capitalism collapsed around it, and only then would it come into its own. The practical implications of this theoretical stance emerged in the course of the campaign for equal suffrage in Prussia.

The Prussian electoral system retained both a three-tier property qualification and indirect election through voting colleges, and this operated very much to the disadvantage of the Social-Democratic Party. In 1910 there was a massive campaign for its reform, supported within Prussia by both wings of the party and by demonstrations throughout the Reich. On one celebrated occasion a police ban on a mass demonstration in Berlin was thwarted when the venue was changed at the last minute: some hundred thousand socialists took part in a 'suffrage stroll' in the Tiergarten while the police were sealing off Treptow Park, a feat of organisation which led to expressions of anxiety for the security of the state in the bourgeois press. The SPD executive was afraid that the campaign might get out of hand however. There had already been token strikes over the suffrage issue, and the executive now took steps to suppress discussion as to whether mass-strike tactics should be implemented. Kautsky's *Die Neue Zeit* followed the lead of the party organ *Vorwärts* by refusing to print Luxemburg's article 'The next step'.<sup>16</sup> In the following year, Kautsky went on the offensive in his essay 'Action by the masses',<sup>17</sup> and this led to a major polemic with Pannekoek.

Kautsky was concerned to reassert the validity of the socialist movement's 'tried and trusted' tactics of parliamentary and trade-union struggle, and he rejected the conception that action by the masses which fell outside this framework could form part of the SPD's strategy. The organised proletarian elements, he argued,

would be in a minority in spontaneous movements, and these were by their very nature unpredictable. The most that the party could do was to hold itself ready for any eventuality.

Pannekoek countered with 'Mass action and revolution',<sup>18</sup> arguing that the spontaneous emergence of action by the masses as a form of working-class struggle since 1905 was a function of both the development of the proletariat and the growth of imperialism. It was a form of powerful extra-parliamentary political action specific to the working class, and was in no way reducible to mobs taking to the streets; in the guise of the mass strike, it had precisely the opposite effect. He denounced the passivity of Kautsky's conceptions: 'The social revolution is the process whereby all the ruling class's instruments of power, in particular the state, are progressively neutralised, the process whereby the power of the proletariat develops to its most absolute completion.' The state could not prevent the realisation of socialism by repressing the organisations of the working class, for the latter was evolving a sense of organisation that went beyond particular concrete forms: and the contest between the power of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat could not be shirked. Finally, Pannekoek argued, only political intervention by the working class on a mass scale could prevent the outbreak of imperialist war.<sup>19</sup>

Replying in 'The new tactics',<sup>20</sup> Kautsky accused Pannekoek of reducing the organisations of the proletariat to an amorphous spirit, and he completely rejected the thesis that the bourgeois state must be smashed. The objective of social democracy was to win a majority in parliament and establish the latter's sovereignty over the government. Pannekoek reviewed these arguments in the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* before his 'Marxist theory and revolutionary tactics' appeared in *Die Neue Zeit*; the full text of the latter appears below. The debate was brought to a close with 'The latest version of extremism', in which Kautsky accused Pannekoek of being an anarchist, and a 'Conclusion' in which Pannekoek retorted that his opponent was merely using the word as a term of abuse.<sup>21</sup>

The Left Radicals campaigned actively for the party to engage

in widespread anti-war agitation as international relations deteriorated. Karl Radek argued that imperialism strengthened the state executive at the expense of parliament and placed matters not susceptible to parliamentary action at the centre of political interest, thereby 'hollowing out parliamentary action as a weapon of the working class'.<sup>22</sup> The workers' organisations were not prepared to abandon their ideological and material commitment to their traditional forms of action, however. As long ago as 1906 the party had declined to undertake the vigorous anti-militarist campaign among youth prior to their conscription that Karl Liebknecht had pressed for, and at the Stuttgart congress of the International in 1907 Bebel had vehemently opposed the French proposal to organise strike action to forestall war; in the Reichstag he and the young Gustav Noske had rejected the 'slander' that members of the Social-Democratic Party were 'anti-national' or vagabonds without a fatherland'.<sup>23</sup> At the time of the international crisis over the Agadir incident in 1911, the party executive had turned down the International's suggestion of co-ordinated anti-war agitation on the grounds that it would distract attention from domestic issues at the forthcoming elections; and although the SPD congress of the following year passed a resolution to the effect that 'nothing can be left undone to mitigate [imperialism's] dangerous effects',<sup>24</sup> the kind of action generally envisaged by this resolution was support for arms-limitation agreements and for the removal of trade barriers.

In 1913 the party's Reichstag delegation voted in favour of the massive Ludendorff arms budget on the grounds that it was to be funded by property taxes; and the fact that this was the only reform for which the SPD could claim responsibility, although its four-and-a-quarter million votes in the previous year's elections had made it the largest group in the Reichstag, contributed to a widely felt sense of stagnation in the party. Membership, which had reached nearly one million in 1912, increased by only 12,000 in the following year; and 10,000 of these new recruits were to the party women's organisations, still controlled by the left.<sup>25</sup> Although 1913 saw widespread recession outside the armaments industries, it was marked by considerable industrial militancy, notably in a shipyard

strike which the trade unions refused to make official. The alienation of the trade-union rank and file from the leadership which was to characterise the latter part of the war was already beginning to develop: local groups were breaking away from the central confederations in textiles, paint and metal.

In 1914 the SPD had 3,416 paid officials, and the Free Trade Unions' apparatus of 2,867 officials provided the two-and-a-half million members with a wide range of social services.<sup>26</sup> Even far-sighted bourgeois observers such as Max Weber and his pupil Robert Michels recognised what stake the social-democratic movement had in the prevailing order and the moderating influence of its bureaucratic institutions. The Left Radicals also stressed this factor in the assimilation of the workers' organisations into the priorities of capitalism. In the first edition of the Bremen journal *Arbeiterpolitik*, which was set up by Paul Frölich and Johannes Knief when the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* came under social-patriot control and to which Pannekoek contributed regularly, the leading article maintained that:

caught up in the forms of the Prusso-German state, with its increasing militarism and ever more extensive bureaucracy, [the SPD] was compelled to develop these same forms within itself once it became a mass party. . . . The organisation of the masses became its principal concern; and this concern ultimately became an end in itself as the bureaucracy generated by the powerful organisational apparatus ceased to be a means towards an end and became an end in itself.

History, it concluded, had shown that the politics of the party establishment were no longer viable: 'The epoch of workers' politics is now beginning.'<sup>27</sup>

The German Social-Democratic Party's crisis of identity had been swiftly resolved upon the outbreak of war. 'The slogan "Not one man and not one farthing to this system" was finally abandoned for the slogan which had competed with it since 1907: "In the hour of danger, we shall not leave the Fatherland in the lurch."<sup>28</sup> The strongly worded anti-war position adopted by the party executive during the July crisis of 1914 crumbled as the month ran its course.

On 2 August the trade-union confederations halted all strike-support payments for the duration, and went on to conclude an agreement with the employers outlawing strikes and lock-outs and providing for the automatic renewal of wage contracts. The SPD Reichstag delegation voted unanimously in support of the war credits, and the executive used its ideological and juridical authority to harness the party apparatus and press to the national cause, thus opening up a division between the social-democrat leadership and the rank and file. This split was particularly apparent in Hamburg, where the SPD organ for the traditionally militant north had endorsed the national leadership's call for universal military training amongst youth. The Left Radicals Fritz Wolffheim and Heinrich Laufenberg saw this split leading to 'timely alterations in the organisational forms of the German proletariat'.<sup>29</sup>

The various left-wing tendencies within the social-democratic movement had now to take up position with regard to the new political situation. The centre-left current led by Kautsky adopted an oppositional role, supporting a war of national defence but urging peace without annexations. Lenin, who had previously aligned himself with this tendency, for several days refused to believe the newspaper reports to this effect, and the political rethink which he undertook subsequently was to culminate in *State and Revolution*. Lenin was also critical of Luxemburg for her failure to break clearly with the organisations compromised by social patriotism; her *Internationale* group, the forerunner of the Spartacus League, opposed the formation of a new International, and even in her 'Junius' Pamphlet, published in 1916, she still saw the Erfurt programme as having been betrayed rather than superseded historically. Lenin's criticism was endorsed by the German Left Radicals, notably Radek.<sup>30</sup> Gorter analysed the implications of the defeat suffered by the workers' movement in his *Imperialism, the World War and Social Democracy*.<sup>31</sup> He rejected the notion that one nation or another was responsible for the war, arguing that the real front ran between the world proletariat and world capital; the proletariat, however, was fighting the battles of capital, and the latter's ideological domination must be broken by a clear

demarcation of revolutionary from reformist tendencies. The misery engendered by the war would stimulate regeneration in the workers' movement: 'The masses *must* begin to act for themselves now, the masses *must* intervene.'<sup>32</sup>

At the Zimmerwald conference of September 1915 the German Left Radicals, represented by Radek, Pannekoek and Borchardt, supported Lenin against Luxemburg and the social-democrat centre-left. As a result of this alliance, Pannekoek and Roland-Holst became co-editors of *Vorbote*, the German-language organ of the 'Zimmerwald left'. Pannekoek's editorial in the first issue declared that 'the methods of the Second International period are incapable of raising the material and mental resources of the proletariat to the level necessary to break the power of the ruling class.'<sup>33</sup> His essay 'Imperialism and the tasks of the proletariat',<sup>34</sup> printed in the same issue, develops this thesis.

The surrender of SPD at the outbreak of war, Pannekoek argues, showed that 'the party was *internally rotten and incapable of fulfilling its new tasks*'. It could not be foreseen in advance that the party would fail to adopt the tactics demanded by the new conditions, but, in the event, the 'old, established party structure' proved unequal to the task, and the lessons of this failure must now be drawn.

Imperialism, he continues, is paradoxically the precondition of socialism: 'Everyone is drawn into the struggle willy-nilly, no-one can stand aside. And since socialism cannot be achieved and realised by a small kernel of militants in the midst of uninvolved popular masses, but only by the *entire* population, it is only the generalisation of the struggle by imperialism that creates the preconditions for socialism.' The interlude when it seemed that the workers' struggle could be carried on by their leaders is over. The material and ideological moments of revolution are converging: 'just as the French revolution was indeed the result of the bourgeoisie maturing and new ideas coming to the fore, but its outbreak nevertheless the product of the extreme misery of the masses and acute political tension, so too in the proletarian revolution the slow growth of socialist thinking combines with the activating effect of particular social events.'

Pannekoek does not rule out political action within parliament, on the grounds that 'everything which increases the power of the working class is revolutionary'. Similarly, there is no absolute distinction between the struggle for reforms and revolutionary struggle, for reforms can henceforth only be obtained through action by the masses. War has nevertheless made a split in the socialist party inevitable, for reformists and revolutionaries can no longer cooperate within it. It is conceivable that Kautsky and those he represents may yet be won over to the new tactics, but their concern to preserve the party apparatus induces them to stay on the sidelines, 'outside the revolutionary struggle, hence outside real, full-scale life'. Although the reformists support imperialism and the centre-left is opposed to it, they will be able to unite on a common line of criticising it without combating it: 'They will attempt to transform the party into a bourgeois reform party, a labour party on the English model, but with a few socialist slogans, energetically pursuing the day-to-day interests of the workers, but not leading a great revolutionary struggle.' The Left Radicals' pre-war conception of the party initiating mass action no longer obtains; mass action will occur spontaneously, 'sometimes as the unsought consequence of small-scale struggle planned by the party overflowing, sometimes breaking out "in defiance of discipline", against the will and the decisions of the organisations and then, when it gathers momentum, pulling these organisations along with it and forcing them to go along with revolutionary elements for a while'. The signs are that an upheaval of this kind may be imminent. The SPD and the trade unions will thus play a predominantly restraining role in the immediate future, but as the new tactics develop they will be swept up and incorporated 'in a wider mass movement which will bind the masses into a powerful fighting collective not on the basis of the membership card, but of the common nature of the class objective'.

By the second issue of *Vorbote* the divergences between the German Left Radicals and Lenin had become sufficiently acute to put a stop to their collaboration. The differences were most apparent over the issue as to whether socialists should endorse the ideal of national self-determination, a central plank in President Wilson's

liberal peace platform. Although in solidarity with the struggles of colonised peoples to emancipate themselves, the Left Radicals, unlike Lenin, would not support a slogan which, they argued, could not be realised within capitalism and was meaningless in a socialist world order. *Vorbote* no. 2 published an article by Radek to this effect.<sup>35</sup>

An essay by Pannekoek in the same issue<sup>36</sup> foresees social democracy contributing to the development of a hybrid capitalism dominated by the state. Referring to the Kautsky current's demands for the nationalisation of the armaments industry, he insists that 'statifying companies is not socialism; socialism is the power of the proletariat. . . . It is the duty of revolutionary socialism to lead the proletariat in struggle against this new form of servitude.' A clear programme of action, based on the intervention of the masses themselves, must be prepared for the time when the workers resume political struggle: 'The struggle for socialism cannot be other than the class struggle for the essential direct interests of the proletariat, and its revolutionary character is determined by the methods, the means employed.' Traditional demands for democratisation within the state and for the suppression of militarism will 'take on new intensity and significance when, as a result of the accelerated development of state socialism, economic exploitation and military servitude are combined with political oppression.'

1916 did see a deterioration in the proletariat's standard of living and an intensification of political repression in Germany. Bread, fat and potatoes were severely rationed, and the failure of the potato crop resulted in a 'turnip winter'. Real wages fell. The trade-union confederations nevertheless agreed to labour mobilisation legislation prohibiting job-changes in return for a role in works committees and councils of arbitration. Within the party, the tight control which had been relaxed during 1915 to provide a safety-valve for dissent was reimposed. When he began a May speech with the words, 'Down with the war!', Liebknecht was imprisoned; Luxemburg was also held in preventive custody. In 1917, wild-cat strikes erupted, despite the readiness of trade-union officials to denounce trouble-makers to the military authorities. In places local union branches seized their contributions for themselves and

dissociated themselves from their national leaders. The slogan 'Out of the trade unions!' became the watchword of proletarian militants.

Debate developed in Left Radical circles over the forms which the organs of class struggle should take. *Arbeiterpolitik* predicted that the coming engagements with capital would have a 'marked character of spontaneous trials of strength in which elements difficult to organise – unskilled, women and young workers – will be decisive',<sup>37</sup> and argued that the organisations of the future must therefore be flexible. The Hamburg Left Radicals argued that the working class should be organised not by trade, but in 'unions'<sup>38</sup> structured according to industry and based on the factory unit, so that corporate capitalism could be confronted both on the national and on the local level: this would overcome craft divisions and also enable the unorganised masses to be drawn into conflicts which would ultimately become political. Another concept expressed in Left Radical journals at this time was that proletarian organisation should do justice to the fact that the worker 'does not have two souls, a trade union and a party soul',<sup>39</sup> by combining economic and political struggle.

The various left-wing currents were now taking organisational form. The Spartacus League had existed illegally from March 1916, and in January 1917 held a joint conference with Kautsky's *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. This led to the expulsion of the latter from the SPD, and the two groups joined forces as the Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD) that spring, not without protest from Kautsky himself and from Left Radicals in the Spartacus League. The new party was defined only by its opposition to a war of aggression, and while pledging itself to act democratically, it retained the organisational structure of the SPD. The regroupment with the Spartacus League contemplated by the Bremen and Berlin Left Radicals, who had meanwhile taken the name 'International Socialists of Germany' (ISD), was frustrated by its alliance with the centre-left, and *Arbeiterpolitik* commented morosely that the Spartacist rank and file would not necessarily support their leaders' efforts to reinstate 'the old leadership politics'.<sup>40</sup>

Like the ISD, the Spartacus League remained more of a

tendency than a definite organisation, and both shared much the same social base among newly radicalised workers – women, the young, the unskilled. Indeed, the term ‘Spartacist’ was used by the establishment as a synonym for ‘hooligan’ as a result of these elements’ involvement in food riots. In his prison notebooks,<sup>41</sup> Liebknecht, who together with such other Spartacist leaders as Fritz Rück, was politically close to the ISD, identified three social strata within the workers’ movement: the cadres of the Social-Democratic Party, the ‘better placed skilled workers’ who only wanted to ‘protest’ and who could ‘not make up their minds to cross the Rubicon’ and the ‘dispossessed mass of unskilled workers; the proletariat in the strict, narrow sense’ who ‘really have nothing to lose but their chains and everything to gain by overthrowing and smashing [the state]’. These three strata corresponded respectively to the SPD, the centre-left and the Spartacists. His analysis was borne out in the great munitions strikes that occurred in Berlin in February and March 1918, expressing the frustration of the skilled engineering workers at the erosion of their pre-war position in the labour-market by the influx of unskilled ‘dilutees’. The dispute did not go beyond the USPD’s political demand of peace without annexations, and it was resolved through the mediation of the SPD in the person of Ebert, a pattern which the German revolution as a whole was in fact to take.

Meanwhile, however, there had been a revolution in Russia, which both the Spartacist and International Socialist spokesmen welcomed, albeit with different emphases: in contrast with the reservations privately expressed by Luxemburg, Pannekoek was prepared to endorse the distribution of land to the peasants, to ignore the pronouncement in favour of national self-determination and whole-heartedly support the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly.<sup>42</sup> Gorter dedicated his *World Revolution* to Lenin as ‘the foremost vanguard fighter of the international proletariat’,<sup>43</sup> but even at this juncture he emphasised what different conditions the proletariat was fighting under in Western Europe; and in the light of the maximalist programme he set out, the Russian revolution was clearly only a first step towards socialism:

State power in the hands of the proletariat – Legislation by the proletariat – Guarantee of a minimum level of subsistence to all workers and those on a par with workers – Control and regulation of the distribution of products by the proletariat – Compulsory work for everyone – Cancellation of national debts – Confiscation of war profits – Tax upon capital and income only, the former mounting to the expropriation of wealth – Expropriation of banks – Expropriation of all large enterprises – Expropriation of land – Justice by the proletariat – Abolition of all duties and tariffs – Abolition of the military system – Arming of the proletariat.<sup>44</sup>

Gorter was subsequently to recall that as early as 1900 he had opposed a move within the SDAP to adopt a demand for the distribution of land to small farmers.

The Left Radicals hailed the soviet system as a proletarian form of administration. ‘This supple and flexible organism is the world’s first socialist regime’ Gorter declared in *World Revolution*, while Pannekoek welcomed it as a means of putting power into the hands of the workers without any artificial mechanism of exclusion; it realised Engels’ dictum that the government of men would be replaced by the administration of things. The soviet state revealed the ‘absolute opposition between the immediate, practical goals of social democracy and those of communism: the former bases itself on the old bourgeois state organisation, the latter lays down the foundations of a new political system’.<sup>45</sup> In the eyes of the International Socialists, parliamentary struggle was rendered obsolete for the proletariat by the emergence of the council form; *Arbeiterpolitik* dismissed parliamentarianism as ‘the fig-leaf concealing the inner decrepitude of a once-great party, exploited by bourgeois society to desocialise the proletariat’.<sup>46</sup>

The collapse of the old regime in the aftermath of military defeat and the establishment of a proletarian council system was a less radical process in Germany than it had been in Russia due to the role played by the social-democratic organisations. The strategic alliance between the state and the latter, foreshadowed in the relationship of Bismarck with Ferdinand Lassalle and realised in the

social truce, was now consummated upon terms laid down by the military. When it had become apparent that Germany could not afford to continue the war, Ludendorff arranged for the entry of the SPD into a government that was to sue for peace, thus paving the way for the 'stab-in-the-back' legend with which the army laid the blame for the national defeat at the door of their socialist colleagues. As opportunist a socialist politician as Phillip Scheidemann expressed the fear that the SPD might be stepping 'into a bankrupt concern',<sup>47</sup> and Otto Rühle, speaking in the Reichstag on behalf of the ISD, declared that:

In the epoch of imperialism, a compromise peace which can be in the interests of the people, of the working class, is something purely and simply impossible. This proposed peace is only designed to save the system of exploitation and enslavement from the catastrophe which is threatening it.<sup>48</sup>

This threat became serious at the beginning of November 1918. Ships' crews refused to take part in the death-and-glory naval engagement ordered by their officers secretly and in defiance of government policy, and the resulting grass-roots movement represented a real challenge to the prevailing order. Once the sailors had mutinied, they were compelled to carry their revolt against the military authorities further if they were to evade repression by the latter; and although Noske was able to put himself at the head of the Kiel mutineers with the deliberate intention of recuperating the movement – a feat subsequently repeated by Ebert at the national level – their emissaries touched off revolt throughout the Reich. Garrisons elected soldiers' councils, workers elected workers' councils, often by acclamation and with parity between candidates put forward by the SPD and USPD local organisations. There was little bloodshed: the military home commands surrendered, the civil authorities acknowledged the power of the councils, and factories and private property were left untouched. It was all deceptively simple, and within ten days of the Kiel mutiny the trade unions had entered into negotiations which were to result in the 'Stinnes-Legien agreement',<sup>49</sup> consolidating the status of the unions within the factory

and providing for a 'co-operative commonwealth' between workers and employers. Meanwhile, the secretaries of state retained their posts.

In the field in the East and the West the same generals and officers remained in command, and even the Reich government was in effect unchanged – except that at its head, instead of an Imperial Reich Chancellor, there was now a six-man collegium of 'People's Commissioners' among whom one, in effect, was still Reich Chancellor; Ebert. All the staunchly conservative country prefects, provincial prime ministers, ministry officials were at their desks as ever. Not one of them had been removed; they had merely had a few workers' councillors planted over their heads and treated this as extreme provocation.<sup>50</sup>

Except in Munich, where the democratic initiative of the Independent Kurt Eisner played a significant role, the movement developed without systematic leadership: nationally famous radicals such as Liebknecht and Luxemburg were in fact released from prison by it. As the beneficiary of a mood of 'socialist reconciliation', the SPD was the natural candidate to take charge of a campaign dominated by social-democratic perspectives; and although the USPD-orientated Berlin shop stewards (*Obleute*) had been planning a coup even before the naval mutiny, their neo-parliamentarian methods could not outflank SPD orthodoxy. During the remainder of 1918, the Independents played an ineffective oppositional role to the SPD, the leadership of which undertook a return to political normality as the initiative of the left waned. The National Congress of Councils, which was heavily dominated by SPD representatives,<sup>51</sup> did not stand in the way of this: it consented to the early elections to a National Assembly desired by Ebert in order to re-establish constitutional continuity and authority,<sup>52</sup> and even declined to assume legislative powers until this had occurred. It did, however, oppose Ebert's wishes by pressing to have military authority curbed,<sup>53</sup> but the government was able to temporise until it had completed the formation of the Freikorps, volunteer brigades established to suppress working-class opposition to the prevailing social order.

Upon the outbreak of the November revolution, the International Socialists had changed their name to 'International Communists' (IKD), explaining the change thus: 'The communism of 1848 confronted "true" or "German" socialism, which was the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie, with the world-view of the proletariat. The communism of 1918 confronts capitalist-imperialist socialism with the struggle of the proletariat.'<sup>54</sup> Pannekoek, who had returned to Germany from Holland, where he had been deported at the beginning of the war, wrote in *Arbeiterpolitik* on 23 November that the German revolution, like the Russian revolution of 1905, had been a bourgeois revolution effected by the mass power of the proletariat.<sup>55</sup> The Left Radicals adopted the slogan 'From bourgeois to proletarian revolution!', but unlike the Spartacist leaders, the IKD did not see the existing councils as potential vehicles of this: they were 'as confused as the revolution itself', Knief wrote, and the prime need was for clarification of the differences between the revolutionary forces and the social-patriot parties.<sup>56</sup> For his part, Rühle led the East Saxony International Communists out of the councils after a week, declaring that this was long enough to establish that there were no grounds for collaboration with the reformists who dominated them. By Christmas the alliance between the Spartacists and the centre-left had become untenable, and Radek, who had spent the twelve months following the October revolution in Russia, was able to prevail upon the IKD and the Spartacus League to give organisational expression to the unity which their members were showing in action, despite the pronounced differences between their respective leaders.

The debates at the founding congress of the KPD(S) a week later centred on three issues: whether the party should be subject to centralised discipline or based on local initiative; whether or not it should participate in the elections to the National Assembly; and whether or not there should be a return to struggle within the old trade-union confederations. Outside Luxemburg's immediate circle there was little inclination to surrender the de facto local autonomy which had developed in the struggle against the class collaboration of the SPD in favour of the discredited hierarchical party-form.

Luxemburg's plea for use of the parliamentary rostrum for agitational purposes was also coolly received, and when Paul Levi argued that the National Assembly might prove to be a durable institution, Rühle retorted that to lend it credence by joining in the electoral campaign would be 'not only disgraceful, but suicidal. We should only help to shift the revolution from the streets back into the parliamentary chamber.'<sup>57</sup> The congress voted three to one against engaging in parliamentary activity. Luxemburg was only able to avoid another defeat on the trade-union issue by moving the establishment of a special commission to consider whether the trade unions' functions should be assumed by the soldiers' and workers' councils or by the 'unions' embracing both economic and political struggle advocated by the left; and thus the communist movement in Germany remained without a definite line on industrial action for most of 1919.

This was a signal lack, in that the struggle was now shifting from the political to the economic front. The government had dispensed with the services of the USPD People's Commissioners and now set the Freikorps to work. They crushed the desperate January uprising in Berlin, symbolically murdering Luxemburg and Liebknecht in the process; and over the next four months they used pretexts of interference in military affairs to suppress the councils, systematically and bloodily, in one regional centre after another.

The political setback which the revolutionary working class had suffered was crucial, and, unlike Gorter, Pannekoek was sanguine about the potential of 'unions' in such circumstances. But despite the discord between the different Left Radical currents as to the relationship between party and 'union', there was a strong movement among proletarian militants to engage in action impossible within the confines of the old trade-union confederations. 'Unions' sprang up spontaneously, in the great strike-wave among the miners of the Ruhr in spring 1919, for example, as did syndicalist organisations looking to the French anarcho-syndicalist tradition rather than towards the industrial unionism of the American Industrial Workers of the World, the 'Wobblies'.<sup>58</sup> The 'unions' were strongest among the most fiercely exploited sections of the

proletariat. One stronghold was the BASF Leuna works in East Saxony, a massive chemical plant constructed during the war and employing displaced rural labourers;<sup>59</sup> another was among the dockers, seamen and bargemen of the North and North-West. The KPD(S) northern region, which was centred on Hamburg and dominated by Left Radicals, made leaving the old trade unions a condition of party membership; and here the revolutionary factory committees did not go over to the syndicalists, as they did elsewhere.

It was the left communists of Hamburg and Bremen who drew up the statutes for the 'General Workers' Union of Germany' (AAUD), the founding conference of which was held in Bremen in February 1920. This organisation, which at its high-point embraced some 100,000 workers, saw itself as an embryonic revolutionary council system, based on factory organisations associated by district and region in a federal structure with an action committee composed of regional delegates. The emphasis was upon a flexible structure. The programme of the Left Radical Communist Workers' Party (KAPD), which proposed to play a complementary role to the AAUD, stated: 'The development of the revolution will be the main determinant of the AAUD, and not programme, statutes or detailed plans.'<sup>60</sup>

By the time the AAUD had been formed, the KPD(S) had resolved itself into irreconcilably opposed tendencies along the old Spartacus League/IKD lines. After the deaths of Liebknecht, Jogisches and Luxemburg, the latter's former advocate, Paul Levi, had inherited her mantle, and he systematically went about ridding the party of its left-wing majority with a view to a new regroupment with the Independents. He achieved his aim in substance at the Heidelberg congress of October 1919, exploiting the conditions of illegality to pack the assembly with editors, secretaries and central-committee members and to spring a platform of 'tactical principles'<sup>61</sup> upon the congress which all party members were to acknowledge on pain of expulsion. Levi's manifesto which was endorsed by an address from Radek<sup>62</sup> was particularly aimed at the Hamburg Left Radicals. Combining verbal radicalism with pragmatic social-democratic proposals, it denied that particular organisational forms

were required for the revolutionary struggle and called for communist fractions to campaign in parliament, in the trade unions and in the institutionalised factory councils under the direction of a strictly centralised party. In his speech to the congress, Levi stigmatised the left as ‘syndicalist’,<sup>63</sup> and argued that the revolutionary crisis lay some years ahead. Laufenberg replied that the masses could not afford to wait: instead of building a proletarian organisation like the ‘unions’ based upon the direct self-activity of the workers, the central committee had established another party in which initiative was a matter for the leadership.

In the aftermath half the delegates were expelled together with some eighty per cent of the party membership. The regional organisations in the North, North-West, Lower Saxony, East Saxony and Greater Berlin were expelled en bloc. Of the 8,000 party members in the Greater Berlin area, only 500 remained loyal to the central committee; only 43 of the 2,000 members in the Essen area continued to adhere to the party.<sup>64</sup>

Pannekoek aligned himself with the opposition, and in an article entitled ‘The new blanquism’<sup>65</sup> attacked the policies of Radek and the central committee. He starts out from an analysis of blanquism and proudhonism as deviations from a revolutionary mass-struggle perspective in a period when the proletariat could not proceed directly to its self-emancipation: blanquism looked to the conspiratorial activity of resolute minorities as a substitute, while proudhonism sought revolutionary change through economic arrangements. Historically developed forms of the latter are to be seen in syndicalism and of the former in the Radek/Levi strategy, Pannekoek argues. The definition of ‘dictatorship of the working class’ given by Radek in his *Contribution to the Tactics of Communism* as a system which ‘puts the interests of the working class first’ and which ‘can only be realised by the workers’ organisations’ is one which even the SPD meets. What Radek’s thesis amounts to, Pannekoek maintains, is the dictatorship of the communist party:

And it also follows from this theory that it is not even the entire communist party which exercises dictatorship, but the central

committee, and this it does first within the party itself, where it takes it upon itself to expel individuals and uses shabby means to get rid of an opposition. There is in what Struthahn<sup>66</sup> says much that is in itself valid; but the proud words about the centralisation of revolutionary power in the hands of old and tried vanguard fighters would carry more authority if one did not know that they served to defend a short-sighted, opportunist politics of connivance with the Independents and ambition for the parliamentary rostrum.

The Left Radicals were confident that they could gain support against the Levi rump from the author of *State and Revolution*, which Gorter had recently translated into Dutch; the Bolsheviks' success in Russia was after all the result of unswerving commitment to a revolutionary programme and to the council system as the basis of the new order. Only Wolffheim and Laufenberg urged the immediate formation of a new party, and they were becoming increasingly estranged from the other left communists by the developing 'national bolshevist' cast of their politics. They were calling for the formation of a united national front, allied with Russia, to resist the Entente powers and the imposition of the Treaty of Versailles, which put a punitive burden of reparations upon Germany. This strategy presupposed avoiding any tendency towards national division and civil war, and Pannekoek for one denounced it in an article published in December 1919.<sup>67</sup> When the Left Radicals did regroup autonomously in the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD) in April 1920, Wolffheim and Laufenberg were not present: and at the second congress of the KAPD in August of that year they were formally expelled.

It was the actions of the KPD(S) central committee during the Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch of March 1920 that persuaded the left communists to form their own organisation. This incident, which brought another political setback for the working class, showed that the SPD and the military still needed one another in order to continue propping up German capitalism. It was triggered off by a government order to disband the elite Ehrhardt Freikorps brigade<sup>68</sup> as part of the troop reductions laid down in the Versailles Treaty.

The order was flouted, and the SPD ministers had to flee Berlin when they found that the army commanders were not prepared to defend the government against the coup being mounted by General von Lüttwitz; indeed, they only narrowly missed being arrested by the military authorities. The newly formed General Confederation of German Trade Unions responded to the seizure of power with a general strike so totally observed in Berlin that the would-be insurrectionary regime could not function, while in the Ruhr an eighty-thousand strong 'Red Army' was formed and rapidly cleared the military from the entire region. In these sobering circumstances the Centre Party and Democratic Party ministers in the coalition arranged a compromise settlement: the coup leaders were promised new elections<sup>69</sup> and an amnesty for those involved, while the unions called off the strike after an earnest assurance by the SPD that the putschists would be severely punished. The Ehrhardt Brigade marched out of Berlin with its flags flying, machine-gunning a hostile crowd as it left.

The KPD(S), which had initially refused support for the exiled SPD ministers, had subsequently felt obliged to respond to their newly rediscovered language of socialist unity; and rather than backing the movement in the Ruhr or the attempted relief action in East Saxony, it declared that it would serve a 'workers' government' as a loyal opposition. Neither Levi nor Wilhelm Pieck was able to prevail upon the Ruhr militants to lay down their arms in favour of the restored SPD coalition, however; instead, Ebert used army units which had just revolted against his government to re-establish order in the Ruhr.

The politics of the KAPD were based on the premise that capitalism had entered its decadent phase. 'It is becoming increasingly clear', its programme stated,

that the antagonism between exploiters and exploited which is daily increasing and the conflict between capital and labour of which even those layers of the proletariat hitherto most indifferent are now becoming more and more conscious cannot be resolved within the capitalist economic system. Capitalism has experienced its ultimate

fiasco, it has denounced itself historically in the war of imperialist robbery, it has created a chaos, the intolerable prolongation of which places the proletariat before the global alternatives of relapse into barbarism or construction of a socialist world.<sup>70</sup>

This programme was drawn up by Karl Schröder under Gorter's influence. The latter had moved to Berlin in late 1918, and had taken part in the fighting there and in the Ruhr. He was now to act as theoretical spokesman for the KAPD, the activism of which accorded with the maximalist perspective that he and Pannekoek had been elaborating for nearly twenty years. The thirty to forty thousand militants represented by the KAPD at its foundation<sup>71</sup> made it numerically superior to the KPD(S), and it attempted to highlight the 'passivity' of the latter's politics; the KAPD participated in the successful sabotage of munitions supplies to the anti-Bolshevik forces during the Russo-Polish war, for example, an action denounced by the KPD(S) as 'romanticism'.

It was meanwhile becoming apparent that the Russian leaders' support for the Levi faction did not stem from the mere ignorance of the Western European situation to which the left communists had attributed it. Travelling slowly through Russia on his way to represent the KAPD at the Second Congress of the Comintern, Rühle became convinced that the regime was soviet in name only, the soviets 'not councils in a revolutionary sense', but "'show" councils, a political deception'. All power in Russia lay 'with the bureaucracy, the deadly enemy of the council system'.<sup>72</sup> Upon being confronted with the '21 conditions' on his arrival in Moscow, Rühle returned to Germany without waiting for the congress to begin, denouncing the Russian 'party dictatorship' and rejecting any further liaison with the Comintern. This action led to his exclusion from the KAPD.<sup>73</sup>

The publication of *'Left-Wing' Communism* at the Second Congress brought bitter disappointment to the German left communists. Pannekoek, who had just written a major theoretical work urging the congress to choose revolutionary rather than opportunist tactics, added a curt afterword identifying Lenin's

position with the national interests of Soviet Russia;<sup>74</sup> and Gorter composed his celebrated *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*,<sup>75</sup> repeating in detail the Left Radicals' contention that the conditions of class struggle in Western Europe meant total confrontation between capital and proletariat, and that anything less played into the hands of the bourgeoisie. However great a role the peasantry might be called upon to play in revolutions in Asia, Gorter argued, it became more and more implacably opposed to communism the further west one came, while the petty bourgeoisie of Western Europe, far from vacillating between working class and bourgeoisie, had become irrevocably committed to the latter. The proletariat of Western Europe could not make gains by exploiting splits within the bourgeois camp, for there were none of substance; it must develop organisations characterised by the quality of the class-consciousness they fostered rather than by the numbers of their followers. He summarised his argument as follows:

1. The tactics of the Western European revolution must be entirely different from the Russian ones.
2. For here the proletariat stands alone.
3. The proletariat must therefore make the revolution alone here against all the other classes.
4. The significance of the proletarian masses is therefore relatively greater and the significance of the leadership less than in Russia.
5. The proletariat must therefore have the very best weapons for the revolution here.
6. Since the trade unions are inadequate weapons they must be replaced or transformed into factory organisations associated on a federal basis.
7. Since the proletariat must make the revolution here alone and without help, it must attain a high level of intellectual and moral development. It is therefore better not to use parliamentary methods in the revolution.

Whereas Pannekoek's dominant tone is one of laconic analysis, Gorter's *Open Letter* is an impassioned assertion of the validity of the left's politics; and henceforth there is a certain tension between their approaches – Pannekoek's revolutionary patience on the one

hand, and Gorter's militant commitment to the KAPD and AAUD on the other.

The 21 conditions had been passed by the Second Congress before Gorter had completed the *Open Letter*. While regretting the fact that the delegates from Western Europe had allowed themselves to be dazzled by the achievements of the Russian revolution, he stoically declared: 'Very well, we shall take up the struggle within the Third International'. Gorter travelled to Russia with this intention, and despite Levi's opposition secured provisional affiliation for the KAPD. The Comintern, however, made no secret of the fact that its objective was to gain 'the best proletarian elements'<sup>76</sup> of the KAPD for the Levi tendency, which in December 1920 had joined with the Independent left to form the VKPD, the United Communist Party of Germany. At the Third Congress in May 1921 the German left communists only found support among the Bulgarian delegation, the left-wing minority within the Dutch Communist Party<sup>77</sup> and the Russian Workers' Opposition. The KAPD was given an ultimatum to merge with the VKPD, which it rejected. Gorter's subsequent efforts to found a 'Communist Workers' International' bore little fruit, and the AAUD was no more successful in its attempt to affiliate to the Red International of Labour Unions.

Whereas Pannekoek, like Rühle, saw the Soviet regime as a new form of capitalism, Gorter and the other KAPD theorists expected the counter-revolution in Russia to result in the restoration of the bourgeoisie. Gorter's final judgement of the Russian revolution was expressed in his advice to Russian communists to say to their party and government:

You have done giant work as a proletarian and government party. . . . This will remain true for all time. That you could not do everything in a proletarian and communist way and that you had to retreat when the European revolution did not materialise is not your fault. As proletarians we shall fight you the more vigorously as our class enemies the more you return to capitalism. But your real fault, which neither we nor history can forgive, is to have foisted a counter-revolutionary programme and tactics upon the world proletariat, and

to have rejected the really revolutionary ones which could have saved us.<sup>78</sup>

Pannekoek for his part later summarised Lenin's historical function as having been to raise Russia from its primitive, agricultural mode of production to industrialisation by means of a social and political dictatorship which resulted in state socialism: 'The politics of Lenin had their logical culmination in Stalinism in Russia.'<sup>79</sup>

By 1921 the AAUD and KAPD had both begun to show signs of degeneration as the defeated revolutionary movement struggled to keep the fight against social-democratic politics alive. The attempts of the KAPD Berlin Centre to exercise control over both 'union' and party led to friction, especially after it had associated itself with the VKPD's attempted insurrection in Central Germany. Although Peter Utzelmann, the KAPD leader at the centre of the 'March action', declared that the call for an uprising was entirely unrealistic and intended by the VKPD only to divert attention from the contemporary anti-Bolshevik strikes in Petrograd, the Berlin Centre saw the communist party's left wheel as a vindication of its own politics. It could account for the failure of the uprising only as a product of the VKPD's previous 'confusionist tactics',<sup>80</sup> and maintained that the non-observance of the national strike called by the VKPD to support the insurrection showed the inadequacy of a mass party that was not fully communist. Pannekoek commented that the failure of the March action signified more than the simple fact that the proletariat was still too weak to overcome the bourgeoisie:

What at the time we said in *Vorbote* about the great debacle of the Second International in the face of the war applies equally to the minor debacle of the March action; 'It signifies that the methods of the Second International period are incapable of raising the material and mental powers of the proletariat to the level necessary to break the domination of the ruling class.'<sup>81</sup>

1921 also saw Gorter's last major attempt to win the working class to left-communist tactics with his text *The Organisation of the*

*Proletariat's Class Struggle*, which is reprinted below. By the end of that year even the KAPD leadership had to admit that hunger riots and armed skirmishes were not sufficient signs that capitalism was in its death-throes, and that the ebb in the revolutionary tide put small-scale propaganda work on the order of the day. In 1922 the KAPD and AAUD split into 'Berlin' and 'Essen' tendencies over the issue of whether to participate as organisations in wages-struggles and other reform campaigns. Gorter took the part of the 'Essen' tendency, based on the former KAPD Centre, arguing that one group at least should eschew opportunism in readiness for the next upturn in the revolution. Although Pannekoek remained aloof from the factional conflicts, his subsequent essay 'Principles and Tactics'<sup>82</sup> endorsed Gorter's view. It argues that the difference between social-democratic organisations and the communist party is that the former attempt to embrace the whole proletariat in the perspective of taking power on its behalf, whereas the latter is a vanguard in which the most lucid militants are grouped. It has no interest in diluting its revolutionary perspectives for the sake of short-term popularity: its strength and power of attraction depend upon principled consistency, as demonstrated by the Bolsheviks in the course of the Russian revolution. If the communist party makes pragmatic compromises, it condemns itself to enter a new phase of struggle with the mentality of a superseded era.

This viewpoint could not but leave the left communists increasingly estranged from day-to-day events in a period of capitalist recomposition. By the time the left-communist organisations were banned in November 1923 in connection with the refloating of the German economy through the Dawes Plan, they had ceased to be of any immediate political moment. It was only at this late stage that any serious attempt was made in the KAPD to theorise the economic basis of capitalist decadence, largely on the foundation of Luxemburg's theories of accumulation; and Pannekoek, who had criticised the latter on their publication in 1913,<sup>83</sup> warned against the assumption that capitalism could not resolve its crisis. 'The hardest part, almost the whole task, in fact, still lies before us', he wrote in 'Principles and Tactics'. 'We are only at

the foot of the mountain . . . The old revolution is over; it is up to us to prepare the new one.'

Gorter attempted to rally the remnants of the left-communist organisations until his death in 1927. Pannekoek continued to write on scientific, philosophical and political questions until shortly before he died in 1960.

D. A. Smart

London, October 1977

### Notes

1. See S. Bricianer, *Pannekoek et les conseils ouvriers*, Paris, EDI 1969; D. Authier (ed.), *La gauche allemande*, Paris, La Vieille Taupe 1973; H. M. Bock, *Syndicalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918–1923*, Meisenheim am Glan, Verlag Anton Hain, 1969; H. M. Bock, *Organisation und Taktik der proletarischen Revolution*, pirate edition, no place, no date.

In the present decade, however, groups which have attempted to take up the political work of the German left have tended towards bordighist positions, silence or isolation. Cf. in Britain *World Revolution* and other publications of the 'International Communist Current'; 'Socialist Reproduction'; 'Workers' Voice'.

2. See note 1 above.

3. It was apropos of this split that Luxemburg wrote to Roland-Holst: 'The worst working-class party is better than none. . . . We cannot stand outside the organisation, out of contact with the masses.' (Quoted in J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, abridged edition, London, Oxford University Press 1969, p.405.) Lenin, however, took the part of the tribunists in the Bureau of the International, involving himself in the internal organisational conflicts of a foreign socialist party for the first time. (See his *Collected Works*, vol. XVI, pp.140–444.)

4. For details, see C. E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917*, New York, Russell & Russell 1955.

5. *Marxisme en Revisionisme*, Amsterdam, 1906.

6. *Der historische Materialismus, für Arbeiter erklärt*, Stuttgart, 1909; quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.264. All emphasis in this and other texts quoted is as in the original.

7. Schorske, *op. cit.*, p.124.

8. For the recent debate on this role, see S. Bologna, 'Class composition and the theory of the party at the origins of the council movement', *Telos* 13, 1972 (reprinted in Conference of Socialist Economists, *The Labour Process and Class Strategies*, London, 1976) and K. H. Roth, *Die 'Aandere' Arbeiterbewegung*, Munich, Trikont Verlag 1974.
9. Cf. his article 'Das Wesen der Religion' in *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXV/II, pp.872–879; it is discussed in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, as part of a general account of the development of Pannekoek's thought.
10. *Die taktischen Differenzen in der Arbeiterbewegung*, Hamburg, 1909; reprinted in edited form in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, pp.51–98.
11. Pannekoek frequently uses the German word 'geistig', which includes the connotations of 'intellectual', 'psychological' and 'ideological'; here it is generally translated as 'mental'.
12. This was particularly applicable to the trade-union confederations' contemporary tactic of 'Einzelabschlachtung' – concentrating the conflict within a single plant at a time in order to minimise the strain on the unions' fighting funds.
13. *Marxismus und Darwinismus*, Leipzig, 1909; extracts in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, p.13.
14. Quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.55. See also Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher*, London, Merlin 1975.
15. Quoted in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, p.23.
16. Finally published in the *Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung*, 14–15 March 1910; it is included in R. Looker (ed.), *Rosa Luxemburg – Selected Political Writings*, London, Cape 1972.
17. 'Die Aktion der Masse', *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXX/I, pp.43–49, 77–84, 106–117.
18. 'Massenaktion und Revolution', *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXX/II, pp.541–550, 585–593, 609–619; substantial extracts in Bricianer, *op. cit.*
19. Cf. Pannekoek's article 'Die Weltrevolution' in *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, no. 204, 30 December 1911: 'The political revolution in Asia, the revolt of India, the rebellion of the moslem world, will confront the expansion of capitalism in Europe with a decisive barrier. . . . Bloody collisions are becoming increasingly unavoidable. General war between the European nations will accompany wars of independence and colonisation in Asia.' (Quoted in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, p.94.)
20. 'Die neue Taktik', *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXX/II, pp.654–665, 688–698, 723–733. Lenin was referring primarily to the discussion of the state when

he wrote in *State and Revolution* that in this polemic ‘It is not Kautsky but Pannekoek who represents marxism’ while nevertheless expressing undisclosed reservations about the latter’s formulations. (See *State and Revolution*, Peking edition, 1965, p.136.)

21. ‘Der jüngste Radikalismus’, *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXXI/I, pp.436–446; ‘Zum Schluss’, *ibid.*, pp.611–612.

22. Quoted in Schorske, *op. cit.*, p.247.

23. *ibid.* pp.75 and 77.

24. *ibid.*, p.263.

25. *ibid.*, pp.13, 267–268.

26. See Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p. 57. Bricianer puts the figures considerably higher.

27. Pannekoek also contributed to Julian Borchardt’s *Lichtstrahlen*, an ‘Educational organ for thinking workers’ published in Berlin. Borchardt’s anti-authoritarianism carried him out of the left-radical current in the course of the war.

28. Schorske, *op. cit.*, p.285. Schorske illustrates the resolution of the conflict on the personal level in the words of the erstwhile radical Konrad Haenisch: one felt caught between ‘this driving, burning desire to throw oneself into the powerful current of the general national tide’ and ‘the fear lest you betray yourself and your cause’ until ‘the terrible tension was resolved; until one dared to be what one was; until – despite all principles and wooden theories – one could, for the first time in almost a quarter of a century, join with a full heart, a clean conscience and without a sense of treason in the sweeping, stormy song “Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles”.’ (*ibid.*, p.290.)

29. Quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p. 78.

30. The KAPD spokesman Carl Schlicht later commented that Spartacus ‘always left the back door open to Social Democracy’. (Quoted in *ibid.*, p.68.)

31. *Der Imperialismus, der Weltkrieg und die Sozialdemokratie*, Amsterdam, 1915; see below the extract ‘The origins of nationalism in the proletariat’.

32. Bock, *op. cit.*, n.d. p.23.

33. Quoted from extracts in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, pp. 121f.

34. ‘Der Imperialismus und die Aufgaben des Proletariats’; the article is reprinted in full in Bock, *op. cit.*, n.d. pp.88–101.

35. The Left Radical argument on this issue is put in Gorter’s *World Revolution* of 1918: ‘Nations aspire profoundly to genuine self-

determination. But, hard as it may be, the realisation of this right cannot but result in imperialism unless subordinated to socialism. Capitalism, and in particular imperialism, cannot in fact resolve the problem of nationality. Nations may accede to independence, but in this case the small nation becomes the pawn in a struggle between great nations or between small nations amongst themselves as they seek to subject it or annex it to themselves.’ (Quoted in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, p.204.)

36. ‘Wenn der Krieg zu Ende geht’, quoted from extracts in *ibid.*, pp.126–128.

37. *Arbeiterpolitik* no. 12, 1917, quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.84.

38. The English word ‘union’ was adopted, as distinct from the German ‘Gewerkschaft’ – trade union. Where the Left Radical conception of organisation is meant, we have put the word ‘union’ in apostrophes.

39. *Arbeiterpolitik* no. 22, 1917. This concern had been expressed in the socialist movement for some years, for example in Luxemburg’s *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* of 1906: ‘In a revolutionary mass action the political and economic struggle are one, and the artificial boundary between trade union and social democracy as two separate, wholly independent forms of the labour movement is simply swept away. . . . There are not two different class struggles of the working class, an economic and a political one, but only one class struggle.’ (London, Merlin n.d. p.74.)

40. *Arbeiterpolitik*, no. 10, 1917, quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.66.

41. F. Pfemfert (ed.), *Karl Liebknecht, Politische Aufzeichnungen aus seinem Nachlass*, Berlin, Aktions-Verlag 1921; quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.64.

42. See the discussion of these issues in Luxemburg’s essay *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor, 1972.

43. *Die Weltrevolution*, Amsterdam, 1918, quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, n.d. p.25; this latter contains the full text of the section entitled ‘The Russian revolution’, which Gorter added to the pamphlet after the October revolution.

44. Quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.267.

45. *Sozialdemokratie und Kommunismus*, Hamburg, [1919], quoted in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, p.154.

46. *Arbeiterpolitik* no. 23 of 1918; quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.94.

47. Quoted in S. Haffner, *Failure of a Revolution*, London, Deutsch 1973, p.40.

48. Quoted in Socialist Reproduction’s introduction to Rühle’s *From*

*Bourgeois to Proletarian Revolution*, London, 1974, p.vii. This gives a valuable account of the Left Radical movement.

49. The industrialist Hugo Stinnes was head of a vast empire which was to break up in the 1923 inflation crisis; Karl Legien was President of the General Commission of the Free Trade Unions from 1890 and of its successor, the Confederation of German Trade Unions (ADGB), from its formation in 1919.

50. Haffner, *op. cit.*, pp.102–103.

51. Of the 489 delegates, 288 represented the SPD (164 of these were paid officials of the party), 90 were USPD, 25 bourgeois democrats and 10 spoke for the Spartacus League. The congress refused admission to Luxemburg and other 'political elements'. ('November 1918: Kartoffeln – keine Revolution', *Der Spiegel*, no. 48, 1968, p.121.)

52. Ebert dismissed the National Congress of Councils once he had been made President by the newly elected National Assembly. *Arbeiterpolitik*, no. 49, 1918 had identified the calling of the National Assembly as 'an assault – not merely a defence against the onslaught of the proletariat', an attempt 'to erect the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie once again in a democratic form'. (Quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.95.)

53. In a biography of Ernst Reuter co-authored by Willy Brandt, it is argued that the delegates saw the removal of the old military strata from power as the precondition not of the council republic, but of parliamentary democracy: 'In this they showed more insight than the *real* politicians around Ebert.' (Quoted in *Der Spiegel*, no. 48, 1968, p.124.)

54. *Der Kommunist*, Bremen, 1918, no. 10; quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, p.89.

55. *Arbeiterpolitik*, no. 47 1918; quoted in *ibid.*, p.90.

56. *Arbeiterpolitik*, no. 49, 1918; quoted in *ibid.*, p.91.

57. Quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, p.96. Cf. Luxemburg's letter to Roland-Holst of 17 January 1904: 'For a revolutionary movement not to go forward means to go backward. The only means to combat opportunism radically is to move forward ourselves, to develop the tactic, to intensify the revolutionary aspect of the movement. Opportunism is in any case a swamp plant, which develops rapidly and luxuriously in the stagnant waters of the movement; in a swift-running stream it will die of itself.' (Quoted in Schorske, *op. cit.*, p.33.) This is only one of many passages from Luxemburg's earlier work which could be advanced against the politics she stood for in the KPD(S).

58. Wolffheim had edited a West Coast IWW paper before the war, and Karl Dannenberg, another former IWW militant, was carrying on agitation

- in Braunschweig based on IWW perspectives. For a reassessment of the IWW, see Bologna, *op. cit.*
59. For details, see Roth, *op. cit.*, pp.51ff.
60. Quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.194.
61. *Leitsätze über kommunistische Grundsätze und Taktik*; reprinted in full in *ibid.*, pp.360–363.
62. Radek had been impressed by the Bolsheviks' decisiveness during his stay in Moscow, and as early as April 1918 he had written that it was not enough to build on the autonomy of the masses. From February 1919 he was held in custody in Berlin, nevertheless acting as intermediary between the German and Soviet governments. It was from prison that he sent his *Zur Taktik des Kommunismus* to the Heidelberg congress. Like other former Bremen Left Radicals such as Frölich and Becker, he later took a 'left' line on the Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch and the March action.
63. Levi's warning against trusting to 'the chaotic instinct of the seething masses' is a further echo of Kautsky, who had seen mass action as the work of 'motley masses'. (See Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.362 and below, p.54.)
64. See Bock, *op. cit.*, pp.226–227.
65. 'Der neue Blanquismus', *Der Kommunist*, Bremen, 1920, no. 27; reprinted in full in Bock, *op. cit.*, n.d.
66. Radek's Comintern *nom-de-guerre*.
67. See Bock, *op. cit.*, n.d. p.279. The Levi rump and the Comintern attempted to tar the left with the national-bolshevist brush, although Wolffheim and Laufenberg had been expelled from the KPD(S) for their alleged syndicalism and not for their national bolshevism. The KPD(S) itself adopted their position for a time during the French occupation of the Rhineland in 1923.
68. This unit, with its red, white and black colours, swastika insignia and virulent anti-communism, was a direct forerunner of the Hitler SS.
69. The Centre Party and Democratic Popular Party had been planning to force new elections upon the SPD before the attempted coup. When they were in fact held in June 1920, the SPD's share of the vote dropped by half from the twelve million it had received in January 1919, while the USPD's doubled to five million. (See DeMasi and Marramao, 'Councils and State in Weimar Germany', *Telos* 28, 1976, p.9.)
70. The entire programme is reprinted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, pp.407–416.
71. See *ibid.*, p.227 and Bricianer, *op. cit.*, p.161.
72. Grundfragen der Organisation, *Die Aktion*, Berlin 1921, nos. 37/38; extracts in Bock, *op. cit.*, pp.396–404.

73. After Rühle's expulsion for 'activities detrimental to the party', the 'syndicalist' tendency of East Saxony seceded, taking half the AAUD membership with it, and formed an 'integral' organisation combining economic and political struggle, the AAUE. The principal issue between the 'unitarians' (Einheitlern) and the Berlin Centre was that the latter held the view that revolutionary councils could only be formed in the actual course of revolution, whereas Rühle maintained that an organisation which kept economic and political struggle separated was a relic of the bourgeois past. (See *From Bourgeois to Proletarian Revolution*, the definitive statement of this political position, written in 1924, *loc. cit.*) Rühle, previously an educationist, ultimately came to see the failure of the revolutionary movement as a product of the masses' conformist upbringing and education.
74. See below, 'World revolution and communist tactics'.
75. *Offener Brief an den Genossen Lenin*, Berlin, [1921]; the text is reprinted in full in Bock, *op. cit.*, n.d. pp.168–227, and the section 'The question of the trade unions' has been published in English by *Oppositionist*, London, 1973 and in H. Gruber (ed.), *International Communism in the Era of Lenin*, New York, Doubleday Anchor, 1972.
76. Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.257. As Lenin stated in '*Left-Wing' Communism*, 'I find the former [the left communists] have the advantage of being better able to carry on agitation among the masses than the latter [the KPD(S)].' (Peking edition, 1970, p.114.)
77. The Communist Party of the Netherlands had split along similar lines to the KPD(S) over the Wijnkoop group's support for the Entente powers. A left-communist party, the KAPN, was formed after the Second Congress of the Comintern; this in turn reproduced the factions of the KAPD.
78. Quoted from 'World Communism' in *Socialist Reproduction*, *op. cit.*, p.xvi.
79. 'La politique de Gorter', *La Révolution Proletarienne*, August/September 1952; quoted in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, p.273.
80. Cf. *Der Weg des Dr Levi, der Weg der VKPD*, Berlin, 1921, co-authored by Gorter; it is discussed in Bock, *op. cit.*, 1969, pp.305–307. Levi was in fact expelled from the VKPD for his criticism of the March action, although Clara Zetkin managed to persuade the Comintern that it was justified.
81. 'Sovjet-Rusland en het West-Europeesche Kommunisme', *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 1921, pp.436–448; quoted in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, p.220.
82. 'Prinzip und Taktik', *Proletarier*, Berlin, 1927, 7 & 8, pp.141–148 and 178–186; abridged in Bricianer, *op. cit.*, pp.224–236.

**83.** Pannekoek also criticised what he saw as economic determinism in Henryk Grossman; a translation of an article written by Pannekoek in 1934 and published by the 'Essen' tendency of the KAPN, the 'Groep van Internationale Communisten', has recently been printed as 'The theory of the collapse of capitalism', *Capital and Class*, no. 1, London, 1977.

# Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics\*

## 1. Our Differences

For several years past, profound tactical disagreement has been developing on a succession of issues amongst those who had previously shared common ground as marxists and together fought against revisionism in the name of the radical tactic of class struggle. It first came into the open in 1910, in the debate between Kautsky and Luxemburg over the mass strike; then came the dissension over imperialism and the question of disarmament; and finally, with the conflict over the electoral deal made by the Party Executive and the attitude to be adopted towards the liberals, the most important issues of parliamentary politics became the subject of dispute.

One may regret this fact, but no party loyalty can conjure it away; we can only throw *light* upon it, and this is what the interest of the party demands. On the one hand, the causes of the dissension must be identified, in order to show that it is natural and necessary; and on the other, the content of the two perspectives, their most basic principles and their most far-reaching implications, must be extracted from the formulations of the two sides, so that party comrades can orientate themselves and choose between them; this is only possible through theoretical discussion.

The source of the recent tactical disagreements is clear to see: under the influence of the modern forms of capitalism, new forms of action have developed in the labour movement, namely mass action. When they first made their appearance, they were welcomed by all marxists and hailed as a sign of revolutionary development, a product of our revolutionary tactics. But as the practical potential of

\* First published in *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXXI/1, pp.272–281, 365–373, 1912.

mass action developed, it began to pose new problems; the question of social revolution, hitherto an unattainably distant ultimate goal, now became a live issue for the militant proletariat, and the tremendous difficulties involved became clear to everyone, almost as a matter of personal experience. This gave rise to two trends of thought: the one took up the problem of revolution, and by analysing the effectiveness, significance and potential of the new forms of action, sought to grasp how the proletariat would be able to fulfil its mission; the other, as if shrinking before the magnitude of this prospect, groped among the older, parliamentary forms of action in search of tendencies which would for the time being make it possible to postpone tackling the task. The new methods of the labour movement have given rise to an ideological split among those who previously advocated radical marxist party-tactics.

In these circumstances it is our duty as marxists to clarify the differences as far as possible by means of theoretical discussion. This is why, in our article 'Mass action and revolution', we outlined the process of revolutionary development as a reversal of the relations of class power to provide a basic statement of our perspective, and attempted to clarify the differences between our views and those of Kautsky in a critique of two articles by him. In his reply, Kautsky shifted the issue on to a different terrain: instead of contesting the validity of theoretical formulations, he accused us of wanting to force new tactics upon the party. In the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of 9 September, we showed that this turned the whole purpose of our argument on its head.

We had attempted, insofar as it was possible, to clarify the distinctions between the *three* tendencies, two radical and one revisionist, which now confront each other in the party. Comrade Kautsky seems to have missed the point of this entire analysis, since he remarks testily: 'Pannekoek sees my thinking as pure revisionism.'<sup>1</sup>

What we were arguing was on the contrary that Kautsky's position is *not* revisionist. For the very reason that many comrades misjudged Kautsky because they were preoccupied with the

radical–revisionist dichotomy of previous debates, and wondered if he was gradually turning revisionist – for this very reason it was necessary to speak out and grasp Kautsky’s practice in terms of the particular nature of his radical position. Whereas revisionism seeks to limit our activity to parliamentary and trade-union campaigns, to the achievement of reforms and improvements which will evolve naturally into socialism – a perspective which serves as the basis for reformist tactics aimed solely at short-term gains – radicalism stresses the inevitability of the revolutionary struggle for the conquest of power that lies before us, and therefore directs its tactics towards raising class consciousness and increasing the power of the proletariat. It is over the nature of this revolution that our views diverge. As far as Kautsky is concerned, it is an event in the future, a political apocalypse, and all we have to do meanwhile is prepare for the final show-down by gathering our strength and assembling and drilling our troops. In our view, revolution is a *process*, the first stages of which we are now experiencing, for it is only by the struggle for power itself that the masses can be assembled, drilled and formed into an organisation capable of taking power. These different conceptions lead to completely different evaluations of current practice; and it is apparent that the revisionists’ rejection of any revolutionary action and Kautsky’s postponement of it to the indefinite future are bound to unite them on many of the current issues over which they both oppose us.

This is not of course to say that these currents form distinct, conscious groups in the party: to some extent they are no more than conflicting trends of thought. Nor does it mean a blurring of the distinction between Kautskian radicalism and revisionism, merely a rapprochement which will nevertheless become more and more pronounced as the inner logic of development asserts itself, for radicalism that is real and yet passive cannot but lose its mass base. Necessary as it was to keep to traditional methods of struggle in the period when the movement was first developing, the time was bound to come when the proletariat would aspire to transform its heightened awareness of its own potential into the conquest of decisive new positions of strength. The mass actions in the struggle

for suffrage in Prussia testify to this determination. Revisionism was itself an expression of this aspiration to achieve positive results as the fruit of growing power; and despite the disappointments and failures it has brought, it owes its influence primarily to the notions that radical party-tactics simply mean waiting passively without making definite gains and that marxism is a doctrine of fatalism. The proletariat cannot rest from the struggle for fresh advances; those who are not prepared to lead this struggle on a revolutionary course will, whatever their intentions, be inexorably pushed further and further along the reformist path of pursuing positive gains by means of particular parliamentary tactics and bargains with other parties.

## 2. Class and Masses

We argued that Comrade Kautsky had left his marxist analytical tools at home in his analysis of action by the masses, and that the inadequacy of his method was apparent from the fact that he failed to come to any definite conclusion. Kautsky replies: 'Not at all. I came to the very definite conclusion that the unorganised masses in question were highly unpredictable in character.'<sup>2</sup> And he refers to the shifting sands of the desert as similarly unpredictable. With all due respect to this illustration, we must nevertheless stand by our argument. If, in analysing a phenomenon, you find that it takes on various forms and is entirely unpredictable, that merely proves *that you have not found the real basis determining it*. If, after studying the position of the moon, for example, someone 'came to the very definite conclusion' that it sometimes appears in the north-east, sometimes in the south and sometimes in the west, in an entirely arbitrary and unpredictable fashion, then everyone would rightly say that this study was fruitless – though it may of course be that the force at work cannot yet be identified. The investigator would only have deserved criticism if he had completely ignored the method of analysis which, as he perfectly well knew, was the only one which could produce results in that field.

This is how Kautsky treats action by the masses. He observes that the masses have acted in different ways historically, sometimes in a reactionary sense, sometimes in a revolutionary sense, sometimes

remaining passive, and comes to the conclusion that one cannot build on this shifting, unpredictable foundation. But what does marxist theory tell us? That beyond the limits of individual variation, – that is where the masses are concerned – the actions of men are determined by their material situation, their interests and the perspectives arising from the latter and that these, making allowances for the weight of tradition, are different for the different classes. If we are to comprehend the behaviour of the masses, then, we must make clear distinctions between the various classes: the actions of a lumpenproletarian mass, a peasant mass and a modern proletarian mass will be entirely different. Of course Kautsky could come to no conclusion by throwing them all together indiscriminately; the cause of his failure to find a basis for prediction, however, lies not in the object of his historical analysis, but in the inadequacy of the methods he has used.

Kautsky gives another reason for disregarding the class character of the masses of today: as a combination of various classes, they have no class character:

On p.45 of my article, I examined what elements might potentially be involved in action of this kind in Germany today. My finding was that, disregarding children and the agricultural population, one would have to reckon with some thirty million people, only about a tenth of whom would be organised workers. The rest would be made up of unorganised workers, for the most part still infected with the thinking of the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the lumpen-proletariat, together with a good many members of the latter two strata themselves.

Even after Pannekoek's reproaches, I still do not see how a unified class character can be attributed to such motley masses. It is not that I 'left my marxism at home', I never possessed such 'analytic tools'. Comrade Pannekoek clearly thinks the essence of marxism consists in seeing a particular class, namely the class-conscious, industrial wage-proletariat, wherever masses are involved.<sup>3</sup>

Kautsky is not doing himself justice here. In order to legitimate a momentary lapse, he generalises it, and without justification. He claims that he has never possessed the marxist 'analytical tools'

capable of identifying the class character of these 'motley masses' – he says 'unified', – but what is at issue is obviously the predominant class character, the character of the class that makes up the majority and whose perspectives and interests are decisive, as is the case today with the industrial proletariat. But he is doing himself wrong; for this same mass, made all the more motley by the addition of the rural population, arises in the context of parliamentary politics. And all the writers of the Social-Democratic Party set out from the principle that the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat forms the basic content of its parliamentary politics, that the perspectives and interests of wage-labour govern all its policies and represent the perspectives and interests of the people as a whole. Does that which holds good for the masses in the field of parliamentary politics suddenly cease to apply as soon as they turn to mass action?

On the contrary, the proletarian class character comes out all the more clearly in mass action. Where parliamentary politics are concerned, the whole country is involved, even the most isolated villages and hamlets; how densely the population is concentrated has no bearing. But it is mainly the masses pressed together in the big cities who engage in mass action; and according to the most recent official statistics, the population of the 42 major cities of Germany is made up of 15·8 per cent self-employed, 9·1 per cent clerical employees and 75·0 per cent workers, disregarding the 25 per cent to whom no precise occupation can be attributed. If we also note that in 1907 15 per cent of the German labour-force worked in small concerns, 29 per cent in medium-scale concerns and 56 per cent in large-scale and giant concerns, we see how firmly the character of the wage-labourer employed in large-scale industry is stamped upon the masses likely to participate in mass action. If Kautsky can only see motley masses, it is firstly because he counts the wives of organised workers as belonging to the twenty-seven million not organised, and secondly because he denies the proletarian class character of those workers who are not organised or who have still not shrugged off bourgeois traditions. We therefore re-emphasise that what counts in the development of these actions, in which the deepest interests

and passions of the masses break surface, is not membership of the organisation, nor a traditional ideology, but to an ever-increasing extent the real class character of the masses.

It now becomes clear what relationship our methods bear each other. Kautsky denounces my method as 'over-simplified marxism'; I am once again asserting that his is neither over-simplified nor over-sophisticated, but not marxist at all. Any science seeking to investigate an area of reality must start by identifying the main factors and basic underlying forces in their simplest form; this first simple image is then filled out, improved and made more complex as further details, secondary causes and less direct influences are brought in to correct it, so that it approximates more and more closely to reality. Let us take as an illustration Kautsky's analysis of the great French revolution. Here we find as a first approximation the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the feudal classes; an outline of these main factors, the general validity of which cannot be disputed, could be described as 'over-simplified marxism'. In his pamphlet of 1889, Kautsky analysed the sub-divisions within those classes, and was thus able to improve and deepen this first simple sketch significantly. The Kautsky of 1912, however, would maintain that there was no kind of unity to the character of the motley masses which made up the contemporary Third Estate; and that it would be pointless to expect definite actions and results from it. This is how matters stand in this case – except that the situation is more complicated because the future is involved, and the classes of today have to try and locate the forces determining it. As a first approximation aimed at gaining an initial general perspective, we must come down to the basic feature of the capitalist world, the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the two principal classes; we attempted to outline the process of revolution as a development of the power-relations between them. We are, of course, perfectly well aware that reality is much more complex, and that many problems remain to be resolved before we comprehend it: we must to some extent await the lessons of practice in order to do so. The bourgeoisie is no more unified a class than the proletariat; tradition still influences both of them; and among the mass of the

people there are also the lumpenproletarians, petty-bourgeois, and clerical employees whose actions are inevitably determined by their particular class situations. But since they only form admixtures insufficiently important to obscure the basic wage-proletarian character of the masses, the above is merely a qualification which does not refute the initial outline, but rather elaborates it. The collaboration of various tendencies in the form of a debate is necessary to master and clarify these issues. Need we say that we were counting on the author of the *Class Conflicts of 1789* to indicate the problems and difficulties still to be resolved in his criticisms of our initial sketch? But the Kautsky of 1912 declares it beyond his competence to assist in this, the most important question facing the militant proletariat, that of identifying the forces which will shape its coming revolutionary struggle, on the grounds that he does not know how a 'unified class character' can be attributed to 'such motley masses' as the proletarian masses of today. . . .

### **3. The Organisation**

In our article in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, we maintained that Kautsky had without justification taken our emphasis on the essential importance of the spirit of organisation to mean that we consider the organisation itself unnecessary. What we had said was that irrespective of all assaults upon the external forms of association, the masses in which this spirit dwells will always regroup themselves in new organisations; and if, in contrast to the view he expressed at the Dresden party congress in 1903, Kautsky now expects the state to refrain from attacking the workers' organisations, this optimism can only be based upon the spirit of organisation which he so scorns.

The spirit of organisation is in fact the active principle which alone endows the framework of organisation with life and energy. But this immortal soul cannot float ethereally in the kingdom of heaven like that of Christian theology; it continually recreates an organisational form for itself, because it brings together the men in whom it lives for the purpose of joint, organised action. This spirit is not something abstract or imaginary by contrast with the prevailing

form of association, the 'concrete' organisation, but is *just as concrete and real* as the latter. It binds the individual persons which make up the organisation more closely together than any rules or statutes can do, so that they no longer scatter as disparate atoms when the external bond of rules and statutes is severed. If organisations are able to develop and take action as powerful, stable, united bodies, if neither joining battle nor breaking off the engagement, neither struggle nor defeat can crack their solidarity, if all their members see it as the most natural thing in the world to put the common interest before their own individual interest, they do not do so because of the rights and obligations entailed in the statutes, nor because of the magic power of the organisation's funds or its democratic constitution: the reason for all this lies in the proletariat's sense of organisation, the profound transformation that its character has undergone. What Kautsky has to say about the powers which the organisation has at its disposal is all very well: the quality of the arms which the proletariat forges for itself gives it self-confidence and a sense of its own capabilities, and there is no disagreement between us as to the need for the workers to equip themselves as well as possible with powerful centralised associations that have adequate funds at their disposal. But the virtue of this machinery is *dependent* upon the readiness of the members to sacrifice themselves, upon their discipline within the organisation, upon their solidarity towards their comrades, in short, upon the fact that they have become completely different persons from the old individualistic petty-bourgeois and peasants. If Kautsky sees this new character, this spirit of organisation, as a product of organisation, then in the first place there need be no conflict between this view and our own, and in the second place it is only half correct; for this transformation of human nature in the proletariat is primarily the effect of the conditions under which the workers live, trained as they are to act collectively by the shared experience of exploitation in the same factory, and secondarily *a product of class struggle*, that is to say militant action on the part of the organisation; it would be difficult to argue that such activities as electing committees and counting subscriptions make much contribution in this respect.

It immediately becomes clear what constitutes the essence of proletarian organisation if we consider exactly what distinguishes a trade union from a whist club, a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals or an employers' association. Kautsky obviously does not do so, and sees no difference of principle between them; hence he puts the 'yellow associations', which employers compel their workers to join, on a par with the organisations of the militant proletariat. He does not recognise the world-transforming significance of the proletarian organisation. He feels able to accuse us of disdain for the organisation: in reality he values it far less than we do. What distinguishes the workers' organisations from all others is the development of solidarity within them as the basis of their power, the total subordination of the individual to the community, the essence of a new humanity still in the process of formation. The proletarian organisation brings unity to the masses, previously fragmented and powerless, moulding them into an entity with a conscious purpose and with power in its own right. It lays the foundations of a humanity which governs itself, decides its own destiny, and as the first step in that direction, throws off alien oppression. In it there grows up the only agency which can abolish the class hegemony of exploitation; the development of the proletarian organisation in itself signifies the repudiation of all the functions of class rule; it represents the self-created order of the people, and it will fight relentlessly to throw back and put an end to the brutal intervention and despotic attempts at repression which the ruling minority undertakes. It is within the proletarian organisation that the new humanity grows, a humanity now developing into a coherent entity for the first time in the history of the world; production is developing into a unified world economy, and the sense of belonging together is concurrently growing between men, the firm solidarity and fraternity which bind them together as one organism ruled by a single will.

As far as Kautsky is concerned, the organisation consists only in the 'real, concrete' association or club formed by the workers for some practical goal in their own interests and held together only by the external bonds of rules and statutes, just like an employers'

association or a grocers' mutual-aid society. If this external bond is broken, the whole thing fragments into so many isolated individuals and the organisation disappears. It is understandable that a conception of this kind leads Kautsky to paint the external dangers threatening the organisation in such sombre colours and warn so energetically against injudicious 'trials of strength' which bring demoralisation, mass desertion and the collapse of the organisation in their train. At this level of generalisation there can be no objection to his warnings: nobody wants injudicious trials of strength. Nor are the unfortunate consequences of a defeat a fantasy on his part; they correspond to the experience of a young labour movement. When the workers first discover organisation, they expect great things of it, and enter into battle full of enthusiasm; but if the contest is lost, they often turn their backs upon the organisation in despondency and discouragement, because they regard it only from the direct, practical perspective, as an association bringing immediate benefits, and the new spirit has yet to take firm root in them. But what a different picture greets us in the mature labour movement that is setting its stamp ever more distinctly upon the most advanced countries! Again and again we see with what tenacity the workers stick to their organisations, we see how neither defeat nor the most vicious terrorism from the upper classes can induce them to abandon the organisation. They see in the organisation not merely a society formed for purposes of convenience, they feel rather that it is their only strength, their only recourse, that without the organisation they are powerless and defenceless, and this consciousness rules their every action as despotically as an instinct of self-preservation.

This is not yet true of all workers, of course, but it is the direction in which they are developing; this new character is growing stronger and stronger in the proletariat. And the dangers painted so black by Kautsky are therefore becoming of increasingly little moment. Certainly the struggle has its dangers, but it is nevertheless the organisation's element, the only environment in which it can grow and develop internal strength. We know of no strategy that can bring only victories and no defeats; however cautious we may be, setbacks and defeats can only be completely avoided by quitting the

field without a fight, and this would in most cases be worse than a defeat. We must be prepared for our advances to be only too often brought to a halt by defeat, with no way of avoiding battle. When well-meaning leaders hold forth on the serious consequences of defeat, the workers are therefore able to retort: 'Do you think that we, for whom the organisation has become flesh and blood, who know and feel that the organisation is more to us than our very lives – for it represents the life and future of our class – that simply because of a defeat we shall straightway lose confidence in the organisation and run off? Certainly, a whole section of the masses who flooded to us in attack and victory will drift away again when we suffer a reverse; but this only means that we can count on wider support for our actions than the steadily growing phalanx of our unflinching fighting battalions.'

This contrast between Kautsky's views and our own also makes it clear how it is that we differ so sharply in our evaluation of the organisation even though we share the same theoretical matrix. *It is simply that our perspectives correspond to different stages in the development of the organisation*, Kautsky's to the organisation in its first flowering, ours to a more mature level of development. This is why he considers the external form of organisation to be what is essential and believes that the whole organisation is lost if this form suffers. This is why he takes the transformation of the proletarian character to be the consequence of organisation, rather than its essence. This is why he sees the main characterological effect of organisation upon the worker in the confidence and self-restraint brought by the material resources of the collectivity – in other words, the funds. This is why he warns that the workers will turn their backs upon the organisation in demoralisation if it suffers a major defeat. All this corresponds to the conception one would derive from observing the organisation in its initial stages of development. The arguments that he puts against us do, therefore, have a basis in reality; but we claim a *greater* justification for our perspective in that it belongs to the new reality irresistibly unfolding – and let us not forget that Germany has only had powerful proletarian organisations for a decade! It therefore reflects the sentiments of the

young generation of workers that has evolved over the last ten years. The old ideas still apply, of course, but to a decreasing extent; Kautsky's conceptions express the primitive, immature moments in the organisation, still a force to be reckoned with, but an inhibiting, retarding one. It will be revealed by practice what relationship these different forces bear towards each other, in the decisions and acts by which the proletarian masses show what they deem themselves capable of.

#### 4. The Conquest of Power

For a refutation of Kautsky's extraordinary remarks on the role of the state and the conquest of political power and for discussion of his tendency to see anarchists everywhere, we must refer the reader to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of 10 September.<sup>4</sup> Here we will add only a few comments to clarify our differences.

The question as to *how the proletariat gains the fundamental democratic rights* which, once its socialist class consciousness is sufficiently developed, endow it with political hegemony, is the *basic issue underlying our tactics*. We take the view that they can only be won from the ruling class in the course of engagements in which the latter's whole might takes the field against the proletariat and in which, consequently, this whole might is overcome. Another conception would be that the ruling class surrenders these rights voluntarily under the influence of universal democratic or ethical ideals and without recourse to the means of coercion at its disposal – this would be the peaceful evolution towards the state of the future envisaged by the revisionists. Kautsky rejects both these views: what possible alternative is there? We inferred from his statements that he conceived the conquest of power as the destruction of the enemy's strength once and for all, a single act qualitatively different from all the proletariat's previous activity in preparation for this revolution. Since Kautsky rejects this reading and since it is desirable that his basic conceptions regarding tactics should be clearly understood, we will proceed to quote the most important passages. In October 1910, he wrote:

In a situation like that obtaining in Germany, I can only conceive a political general strike as a unique event in which the entire proletariat throughout the nation engages with all its might, as a life-and-death struggle, one in which our adversary is beaten down or else all our organisations, all our strength shattered or at least paralysed for years to come.<sup>5</sup>

It is to be supposed that by beating down our adversary, Kautsky means the conquest of political power; otherwise the unique act would have to be repeated a second or third time. Of course, the campaign might also prove insufficiently powerful, and in this case it would have failed, would have resulted in serious defeat, and would therefore have to be begun over again. But if it succeeded, the final goal would have been attained. Now, however, Kautsky is denying that he ever said that the mass strike could be an event capable of bringing down capitalism at a stroke. How, therefore, we are to take the above quotation I simply do not understand.

In 1911, Kautsky wrote in his article 'Action by the masses' of the spontaneous actions of unorganised crowds:

If the mass action succeeds, however, if it is so dynamic and so tremendously widespread, the masses so aroused and determined, the attack so sudden and the situation in which it catches our adversary so unfavourable to him that its effect is irresistible, then the masses will be able to exploit this victory in a manner quite different from hitherto. [There follows the reference to the workers' organisations.] Where these organisations have taken root, the times are past when the proletariat's victories in spontaneous mass actions succeeded only in snatching the chestnuts from the fire for some particular section of its opponents which happened to be in opposition. Henceforth, it will be able to enjoy them itself.<sup>6</sup>

I can see no other possible interpretation of this passage than that as a result of a powerful spontaneous uprising on the part of the unorganised masses triggered off by some particularly provocative events, political power now falls into the hands of the proletariat itself, instead of into the hands of a bourgeois clique as hitherto. Here too the possibility is envisaged of assaults initially failing and

collapsing in defeat before the attack finally succeeds. The protagonists in a political revolution of this kind and the methods they were using would put it completely outside the framework of the labour movement of today; while the latter was carrying on its routine activity of education and organisation, revolution would break over it without any warning 'as if from another world' under the influence of momentous events. Thus, we can see no other interpretation that that put forward in our article. The crux of it is not that in this view revolution is a *single* sharp act; even if the conquest of power consisted of several such acts (mass strikes and 'street' actions), the main point is the stark contrast between the current activity of the proletariat and the future revolutionary conquest of power, which belongs to a completely different order of things. Kautsky now explicitly confirms this:

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I should like to point out that my polemic with Comrade Luxemburg dealt with the political *general strike* and my article on 'Action by the masses' with *street riots*. I said of the latter that they could in certain circumstances lead to political upheavals, but were unpredictable by nature and could not be instigated at will. I was not referring to simple *street demonstrations*. . . .

I will repeat once again that my theory of 'passive radicalism', that is to say waiting for the appropriate occasion and mood among the masses, neither of which can be predicted in advance or hastened on by decision of the organisation, related only to street riots and mass strikes aimed at securing a particular political decision – and not to street demonstrations, nor to protest strikes. The latter can very well be called by party or trade union from time to time, irrespective of the mood of the masses outside the organisation, but do not necessarily involve new tactics so long as they remain mere demonstrations.<sup>7</sup>

We will not dwell on the fact that a political mass strike only permissible as a once-and-for-all event in 1910 and therefore ruled out of the contemporary Prussian suffrage campaign now suddenly appears among the day-to-day actions which can be initiated at the

drop of a hat as a 'protest strike'. We will merely point out that Kautsky is here making a sharp distinction between day-to-day actions, which are only demonstrations and can be called at will, and the unforeseeable revolutionary events of the future. New rights may occasionally be won in the day-to-day struggle; these are in no sense steps towards the conquest of power, otherwise the ruling class would put up resistance to them which could only be overcome by political strikes. Governments friendly to the workers may alternate with governments hostile to them, street demonstrations and mass strikes may play some part in the process, but for all that, nothing essential will change; our struggle remains 'a political struggle against governments' restricting itself to 'opposition' and leaving the power of the state and its ministries intact. Until one day, when external events trigger off a massive popular uprising with street riots and political strikes that puts an end to this whole business.

It is only possible to maintain such a perspective by restricting one's observation to external political forms and ignoring the political reality behind them. Analysis of the balance of power between the classes in conflict as one rises and the other declines is the only key to understanding revolutionary development. This transcends the sharp distinction between day-to-day action and revolution. The various forms of action mentioned by Kautsky *are not polar opposites, but part of a gradually differentiated range*, weak and powerful forms of action within the same category. *Firstly, in terms of how they develop*: even straightforward demonstrations cannot be called at will, but are only possible when strong feeling has been aroused by external causes, such as the rising cost of living and the danger of war today or the conditions of suffrage in Prussia in 1910. The stronger the feeling aroused, the more vigorously the protests can develop. What Kautsky has to say about the most powerful form of mass strike, namely that we should 'give it the most energetic support and use it to strengthen the proletariat',<sup>8</sup> does not go far enough for cases where this situation has already generated a mass movement; when conditions permit, the party, as the conscious bearer of the exploited masses' deepest sensibilities, *must instigate such action as is necessary and take over leadership of the movement*

– in other words, play the same role in events of major significance as it does today on a smaller scale. The precipitating factors cannot be foreseen, but it is we who act upon them. *Secondly, in terms of those taking part*: we cannot restrict our present demonstrations solely to party members; although these at first form the nucleus, others will come to us in the course of the struggle. In our last article we showed that the circle of those involved grows as the campaign develops, until it takes in the broad masses of the people; there is never any question of unruly street riots in the old sense. *Thirdly, in terms of the effects such action has*: the conquest of power by means of the most potent forms of action basically amounts to liquidating the powers of coercion available to the enemy and building up our own strength; but even today's protests, our simple street demonstrations, display this effect on a small scale. When the police had to abandon their attempts to prevent demonstrations in sheer impotence in 1910, that was a first sign of the state's coercive powers beginning to crumble away; and the content of revolution consists in the total destruction of these powers. In this sense, that instance of mass action can be seen as the beginning of the German revolution.

The contrast between our respective views as set out here may at first sight appear to be purely theoretical; but it nevertheless has great practical significance with respect to the tactics we adopt. As Kautsky sees it, each time the opportunity for vigorous action arises we must stop and consider whether it might not lead to a 'trial of strength', an attempt to make the revolution, that is, by mobilising the entire strength of our adversary against us. And because it is accepted that we are too weak to undertake this, it will be only too easy to shrink from any action – this was the burden of the debate on the mass strike in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1910. Those who reject Kautsky's dichotomy between day-to-day action and revolution, however, assess every action as an immediate issue, to be evaluated in terms of the prevailing conditions and the mood of the masses, and at the same time, as part of a great purpose. In each campaign one presses as far ahead as seems possible in the conditions obtaining, without allowing oneself to be hamstrung by specious theoretical considerations projected into the future; for the issue is never one of

total revolution, nor of a victory with significance only for the present, but always of a step further along the path of revolution.

### **5. Parliamentary Activity and Action by the Masses**

Mass action is nothing new: it is as old as parliamentary activity itself. Every class that has made use of parliament has also on occasion resorted to mass action; for it forms a necessary complement or – better still – a *corrective to parliamentary action*. Since, in developed parliamentary systems, parliament itself enacts legislation, including electoral legislation, a class or clique which has once gained the upper hand is in a position to secure its rule for all time, irrespective of all social development. But if its hegemony becomes incompatible with a new stage of development, mass action, often in the form of a revolution or popular uprising, intervenes as a corrective influence, sweeps the ruling clique away, imposes a new electoral law on parliament, and thus reconciles parliament and society once again. Mass action can also occur when the masses are in particularly dire straits, to impel parliament to alleviate their misery. Fear of the consequences of the masses' indignation often induces the class holding parliamentary power to make concessions which the masses would not otherwise have obtained. Whether or not the masses have spokesmen in parliament on such occasions is far from immaterial, but is nevertheless of secondary importance; the crucial determinant force lies outside.

We have now again entered a period when this corrective influence upon the working of parliament is more necessary than ever; the struggle for democratic suffrage on the one hand and the rising cost of living and the danger of war on the other are kindling mass action. Kautsky likes to point out that there is nothing new in these forms of struggle; he emphasises the similarity with earlier ones. We, however, stress the new elements which distinguish them from all that has gone before. The fact that the socialist proletariat of Germany has begun to use these methods endows them with entirely new significance and implications, and it was precisely to clarifying these that my article was devoted. Firstly, because the highly organised, class-conscious proletariat of which the German

proletariat is the most developed example has a completely different class character from that of the popular masses hitherto, and its actions are therefore qualitatively different. Secondly, because this proletariat is destined to enact a far-reaching revolution, and the action which it takes will therefore have a profoundly subversive effect on the whole of society, on the power of the state and on the masses, even when it does not directly serve an electoral campaign.

Kautsky is therefore not justified in appealing to England as a model 'in which we can best study the nature of modern mass action'. What we are concerned with is mass political action aimed at securing new rights and thus giving parliamentary expression to the power of the proletariat: in England it was a case of mass action by the trade unions, a massive strike in furtherance of trade-union demands, which expressed the weakness of the old conservative trade-union methods by seeking assistance from the government.<sup>9</sup> What we are concerned with is a proletariat as politically mature, as deeply instilled with socialism as it is here in Germany; the socialist awareness and political clarity necessary for such actions were completely lacking among the masses on strike in England. Of course, the latter events also demonstrate that the labour movement cannot get by without mass action; they too are a consequence of imperialism. But despite the admirable solidarity and determination manifested in them, they had rather the character of desperate outbursts than the deliberate actions leading to the conquest of power which only a proletariat deeply imbued with socialism can undertake.

As we pointed out in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, parliamentary activity and action by the masses are not incompatible with each other; mass action in the struggle for suffrage endows parliamentary activity with a new, broader basis. And in our first article we argued that the rising cost of living and the danger of war under imperialism, the modern form of capitalism, are at the root of modern mass action. Comrade Kautsky 'fails to see' how this results in 'the necessity for new tactics' – the necessity for mass action, in other words; for mass action aimed at 'altering or exacting decisions by parliament' can no more do away with the basic effects of capitalism – the causes of the rise in the cost of living, for example,

which lie in bad harvests, gold production and the cartel system – against which parliaments are powerless, than any other form of political action. It is a pity that the Parisians driven to revolt in 1848 by the crisis and the rising cost of living did not know that; they would certainly not have made the February Revolution. Perhaps Comrade Kautsky would see this as yet another demonstration of the incomprehension of the masses, whose instinct is deaf to the urgings of reason. But if, spurred on by hunger and misery, the masses rise up together and demand relief despite the theoretician's arguments that no form of political action can achieve anything in the face of the fundamental evils of capitalism, then it is the masses' instincts that are in the right and the theoretician's science that is in the wrong. Firstly, because the action can set itself immediate goals that are not meaningless; when subjected to powerful pressure, governments and those in authority can do a great deal to alleviate misery, even when this has deeper causes and cannot be altered merely by parliamentary decision – as could duties and tariffs in Germany. Secondly, because the lasting effect of large-scale mass action is a more or less shattering blow to the hegemony of capital, and hence attacks the root of the evil.

Kautsky constantly proceeds upon the assumption that so long as capitalism has not been transformed into socialism, it must be accepted as a fixed, unchangeable fact against the effects of which it is pointless to struggle. During the period when the proletariat is still weak it is true that a particular manifestation of capitalism – such as war, the rising cost of living, unemployment – cannot be done away with so long as the rest of the system continues to function in all its power. But this is not true for the period of capitalist decline, in which the now mighty proletariat, itself an elemental force of capitalism, throws its own will and strength into the balance of elemental forces. If this view of the transition from capitalism to socialism seems 'very obscure and mysterious' to Comrade Kautsky – which only means that it is new to him – then this is only because he regards capitalism and socialism as fixed, ready-made entities, and fails to grasp the transition from one to the other as a dialectical process. Each assault by the proletariat upon the individual effects of

capitalism means a weakening of the power of capital, a strengthening of our own power and a step further in the process of revolution.

## **6. Marxism and the Role of the Party**

In conclusion, a few more words on theory. These are necessary because Kautsky hints from time to time that our work takes leave of the materialist conception of history, the basis of marxism. In one place he describes our conception of the nature of organisation as spiritualism ill befitting a materialist. On another occasion he takes our view that the proletariat must develop its power and freedom 'in constant attack and advance', in a class struggle escalating from one engagement to another, to mean that the party executive is to 'instigate' *the revolution*. . . .

Marxism explains all the historical and political actions of men in terms of their material relations, and in particular their economic relations. A recurrent bourgeois misconception accuses us of ignoring the role of the human mind in this, and making man a dead instrument, a puppet of economic forces. We insist in turn that marxism does not eliminate the mind. Everything which motivates the actions of men does so through the mind. Their actions are determined by their will, and by all the ideals, principles and motives that exist in the mind. But marxism maintains that the content of the human mind is nothing other than a product of the material world in which man lives, and that economic relations therefore only determine his actions by their effects upon his mind and influence upon his will. Social revolution only succeeds the development of capitalism because the economic upheaval first transforms the mind of the proletariat, endowing it with a new content and directing the will in this sense. Just as social-democratic activity is the expression of a new perspective and new determination instilling themselves in the mind of the proletariat, so organisation is an expression and consequence of a profound mental transformation in the proletariat. This mental transformation is the term of mediation by which economic development leads to the act of social revolution. There can surely be no disagreement between Kautsky and ourselves that this is the role which marxism attributes to the mind.

And yet even in this connection our views differ; not in the sphere of abstract, theoretical formulation, but in our practical emphasis. It is only when taken together that the two statements 'The actions of men are entirely determined by their material relations' and 'Men must make their history themselves through their own actions' constitute the marxist view as a whole. The first rules out the arbitrary notion that a revolution can be made at will; the second eliminates the fatalism that would have us simply wait until the revolution happens of its own accord through some perfect fruition of development. While both maxims are correct in theoretical terms, they necessarily receive different degrees of emphasis in the course of historical development. When the party is first flourishing and must before all else organise the proletariat, seeing its own development as the primary aim of its activity, the truth embodied in the first maxim gives it the patience for the slow process of construction, the sense that the time of premature putsches is past and the calm certainty of eventual victory. Marxism takes on a predominantly historico-economic character in this period; it is the theory that all history is economically determined, and drums into us the realisation that we must wait for conditions to mature. But the more the proletariat organises itself into a mass movement capable of forceful intervention in social life, the more it is bound to develop a sense of the second maxim. The awareness now grows that the point is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it. Marxism now becomes the *theory of proletarian action*. The questions of how precisely the proletariat's spirit and will develop under the influence of social conditions and how the various influences shape it now come into the foreground; interest in the philosophical side of marxism and in the nature of the mind now comes to life. Two marxists influenced by these different stages will therefore express themselves differently, the one primarily emphasising the determinate nature of the mind, the other its active role; they will both lead their respective truths into battle against each other, although they both pay homage to the same marxian theory.

From the practical point of view, however, this disagreement takes on another light. We entirely agree with Kautsky that an

individual or group cannot make the revolution. Equally, Kautsky will agree with us that the proletariat *must make* the revolution. But how do matters stand with the party, which is a middle term, on the one hand a large group which consciously decides what action it will take, and on the other the representative and leader of the entire proletariat? What is the *function of the party*?

With respect to revolution, Kautsky puts it as follows in his exposition of his tactics: 'Utilisation of the political general strike, but only in occasional, extreme instances when the masses can no longer be restrained.'<sup>9</sup> Thus, the party is to hold back the masses for as long as they can be held back; so long as it is in any way possible, it should regard its function as to keep the masses placid, to restrain them from taking action; only when this is no longer possible, when popular indignation is threatening to burst all constraint, does it open the flood-gates and if possible put itself at the head of the masses. The roles are thus distributed in such a way that all the energy, all the initiative in which revolution has its origins must come from the masses, while the party's function is to hold this activity back, inhibit it, contain it for as long as possible. But the relationship cannot be conceived in this way. Certainly, all the energy comes from the masses, whose revolutionary potential is aroused by oppression, misery and anarchy, and who by their revolt must then abolish the hegemony of capital. But the party has taught them that desperate outbursts on the part of individuals or individual groups are pointless, and that success can only be achieved through collective, united, organised action. It has disciplined the masses and restrained them from frittering away their revolutionary activity fruitlessly. But this, of course, is only the one, negative side of the party's function; it must simultaneously show in positive terms how these energies can be set to work in a different, productive manner, and lead the way in doing so. The masses have, so to speak, made over part of their energy, their revolutionary purpose, to the organised collectivity, not so that it shall be dissipated, but so that the party can put it to use as their collective will. *The initiative and potential for spontaneous action which the masses surrender by doing so is not in fact lost, but re-appears elsewhere and in another*

*form as the party's initiative and potential for spontaneous action; a transformation of energy takes place, as it were. Even when the fiercest indignation flares up among the masses – over the rising cost of living, for example – they remain calm, for they rely upon the party calling upon them to act in such a way that their energy will be utilised in the most appropriate and most successful manner possible.*

The relationship between masses and party cannot therefore be as Kautsky has presented it. If the party saw its function as restraining the masses from action for as long as it could do so, then party discipline would mean a loss to the masses of their initiative and potential for spontaneous action, a *real* loss, and not a transformation of energy. *The existence of the party would then reduce the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat rather than increase it.* It cannot simply sit down and wait until the masses rise up spontaneously in spite of having entrusted it with part of their autonomy; the discipline and confidence in the party leadership which keep the masses calm place it under an obligation to intervene actively and itself give the masses the call for action at the right moment. Thus, as we have already argued, the party actually has a duty to *instigate* revolutionary action, because it is the bearer of an important part of the masses' capacity for action; but it *cannot do so as and when it pleases*, for it has not assimilated the entire will of the entire proletariat, and cannot therefore order it about like a troop of soldiers. It must wait for the right moment: not until the masses will wait no longer and are rising up of their own accord, but until the conditions arouse such feeling in the masses that large-scale action by the masses has a chance of success. This is the way in which the marxist doctrine is realised that although men are determined and impelled by economic development, they make their own history. The revolutionary potential of the indignation aroused in the masses by the intolerable nature of capitalism must not go untapped and hence be lost; nor must it be frittered away in unorganised outbursts, but made fit for organised use in action instigated by the party with the objective of weakening the hegemony of capital. It is in these revolutionary tactics that marxist theory will become reality.

## The Origins of Nationalism in the Proletariat\*

How is it that the proletariat can so totally deny its own interests and enter so completely into the service of the bourgeoisie?

If we look for the reason, our first finding will be that the proletariat does not yet *know* how to intervene against the bourgeoisie as a single, international entity. And our second will be that the proletariat does not yet *know* how to fight for major, long-term objectives, but only for minor, short-term ones.

This is why it was incapable of acting on an international scale in pursuit of long-term objectives when it became necessary to do so.

It did not *know* what to do.

In a word, international struggle for the ultimate objective, for socialism, meant nothing to it.

For the struggle against the imperialism that dominates the world is the struggle against the expansion of capital, it is the struggle against the essence of capitalism, it is the struggle for socialism.

It is thus the international proletariat's lack of understanding that is to blame for the way it has acted. First and foremost, its lack of understanding.

The working class as a whole and the individual worker must have a high level of awareness in order to take action on an international scale.

The nationalism of the proletarian is quite different in nature from that of the bourgeois. For the bourgeois, the nation is the politico-economic organisation the unity and strength of which enable him to make his capital productive both at home and abroad. At home, the nation governs the workers in his interest: abroad, it

\* This is a section of Gorter's *Der Imperialismus, der Weltkrieg und die Sozialdemokratie*, translated by the author into German, Amsterdam, 1915.

defends his interests by force of arms and for his sake extends its influence.

This is the basis of bourgeois nationalism, which is thus highly active in character, just as the bourgeois' capital is.

The worker, on the other hand, has no capital, he only receives wages. His nationalism is therefore passive, just as to receive wages is passive.

But the great majority of workers nevertheless *live* by the national capital.

The national capital is indeed their enemy, but it is an enemy that they live by, an enemy which feeds them. Thus, although the worker is only passively nationalistic, *he is nationalistic and cannot help being nationalistic* so long as he is not a real socialist.

Because the nation, the nation's capital, is the foundation of his existence.

And therefore, so long as he is not a socialist, he cannot help believing that the interest of the national capital is his own and that he must defend it against enemies, because the welfare of this capital is also his own welfare.

The worker's nationalism consists of a series of generally primitive feelings and instincts which are related to the drive for self-preservation and structured around it. In the first place, the instinct to preserve his existence by working, by his wages. And connected with this, the sentiments attaching to his home, to the parental house, to his family, to tradition, to custom, to comradeship, to the immediate locality, to his people, to his party – and the instinct to preserve all these, which all relate directly to the ego, and which are thus intimately bound up with the drive for self-preservation. Almost moribund in day-to-day life, the threat or semblance of danger arouses them with elemental force, precisely because of this connection with the drive for self-preservation.

And they flare up in a fire of passion, of hatred towards the enemy, of fanatical love for one's country, when the drive for self-preservation allies itself with the social instincts of attachment to and unity with one's peers – in this case, one's fellow-countrymen, those who are of the same class and nation. It takes a high degree of

awareness for this instinct, these sentiments, to be overcome at a given moment, at every moment, always, and for the class struggle not to be abandoned for struggle on behalf of the nation.

And so the worker must *know* that under capitalism nationalism is now doing him a great deal of harm, far more harm than the advantages it confers. He must know what the harm is, and what the advantages. He must have weighed them against each other. And this process of thought, this knowledge, must be of such a kind, must have penetrated his consciousness so completely, that it not only overcomes the instincts of nationalism, but takes their place. This is a task which is extraordinarily difficult and which demands a very long time.

For it demands a high degree of knowledge and understanding of imperialism in the working class, in the individual worker. Capital confronts the worker in his place of work, in his trade association, in the state. It is thus a national phenomenon. Imperialism confronts him through the foreign policy of the state, in high finance, in the capitalist syndicate, in the international trust, in world politics. It requires a great deal of understanding if the worker is always, constantly, to grasp the connection of every issue in the struggle, both trade-union and political, with world politics, with international imperialism.

The worker must therefore *know* that imperialism governs the whole of politics, and how: that it threatens the working class with ruin and fragmentation by causing endless wars, that defensive wars can no longer be waged under imperialism, and last and most important, that imperialism – and here it so nearly coincides with nationalism as to fuse with it – unites all national capitalists against the world proletariat, which must be united against them. And that the struggle against imperialism is therefore the struggle for socialism.

The worker must *know* all this. And not with hollow words and phrases, with a hollow, superficial, fleeting understanding, but with profound, complete knowledge – the concept must have entered his very bones.

This too is a long and weary task. The demystification of

imperialism and the corresponding eradication of nationalism is a mighty step up, a tremendous increase in the consciousness and thus in the development of the militant proletariat.

The new propaganda necessary to achieve this in this new phase of capitalism is one of the loftiest, finest and most fruitful tasks which can be performed in the service of the proletariat.

Against nationalism, against imperialism, for socialism.

The proletariat had never done any of this before. It had always taken action on the national scale, never before on the international scale.

And it had never before taken action against international imperialism.

The national proletariat and hence the international proletariat had never experienced struggle against international imperialism.

There were of course groups and individuals among the workers of every country, and especially in Germany, who had overcome national instincts through knowledge and insight.

Social democracy had of course eradicated these instincts from certain hearts. And these groups and individuals would gladly have fought against war with all their might. But in the first place these groups and individuals were, in our estimation, very few in number. Even in Germany. In England they were hardly to be found.\* Similarly in France.

Secondly, they did not see how they could combat war. Even those who recognised the means to be used against war still did not see how to put them into practice.

As we shall see, the only means to combat imperialist war is national action on a mass scale by the proletariat undertaken simultaneously by the entire international proletariat.

If these groups of workers had recognised the way to engage in such a course of action, clearly seen it before them, they would have

\* The reasons for the opposition of the Independent Labour Party in England to the war are of a petty-bourgeois nature. They are little-Englanders. They believe that England has enough colonies.

opted for it, and not only that, they would have carried the great masses of the workers with them.

We will explain below the reasons why they did not see the way forward, why they did not recognise it.

For what was the previous history of the International?

At first it was a federation of trade unions and progressive and socialist groups. Which brilliantly expressed the thoughts and feelings of the most developed, most militant groups in the working class, particularly in the sphere of foreign policy, of European political issues; which, for the first time in the history of the world and to the amazement of the workers and the terror of the bourgeoisie, supported each other on an international scale; which, for the first time in the history of the world, wove a bond around the entire proletariat; which openly declared communism as their goal; which were a shining light for the workers and the first great challenge to the international bourgeoisie; and which sowed the seed for the parties of the future.

A genius went before them, a sower went through the countries of Europe and America.

They had *one* programme and *one* executive, sending them the addresses that issued from Marx's brain and which lit up the path of the future like bright torches; one executive to give them leadership. But the only joint *actions* they engaged in were demonstrations.

After 1872 this International collapsed through internal fragmentation, long before it could do anything more as a whole, as an entity. It was still too weak for practical, international struggle; the time was not yet ripe for this. It had merely sown the seed in different countries.

From this there then slowly grew the national parties and trade unions.

A great epoch now began for the workers.

Thousands of men and women, inspired by the thought of Marx and the International, plunged among the workers in every country and preached communism and socialism. Theirs were the best brains and the warmest, most impassioned hearts, the highest and most noble characters. For the struggle was hard and full of

danger; the resistance of the bourgeoisie obdurate; the material reward little or none.

And the workers who listened were the best.

The most militant; the most intelligent; the bravest.

And at the same time, all of them plunged into theory as well as practice.

Workers' politics were carried on with one great theoretical goal – revolution. Thus it was in many countries of Europe: in Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Spain, Italy.

We could call this the period of revolution in theory and practice.

The numbers taking part were still few. But it was during this period that the most was achieved in the most countries. Even in terms of reforms. The assault was so wild and furious, the amazement and terror of the ruling class so great, that they conceded some reforms. The best reforms in suffrage and social legislation date from this period in many countries. But this International in its turn, these national parties, concerned themselves only with national issues, with short-term, minor objectives.

All the national parties threw themselves into legislation, into parliamentary activity, into elections: all the trade unions into improvements in wages and working hours, protection of their members, etc. Of course, they had a lofty socialist programme, still based on the genius of Marx.

But that was only theory. That was only internal propaganda, not action.

Nothing ever happened within the national parties to pose the question – capitalism or socialism: reform or revolution.

This state of affairs lasted for years.

So revolution became theory and reform became practice.

And nothing happened in that period to demand internationalism on the part of the national parties. In deeds. To demand that they cast their nationalism aside.

And so, despite all the theory, despite all the finest and most sincere propaganda, despite all the fine words, the International

became a complex of parties striving for improvements, striving for themselves, on the national scale.

But only action demonstrates the truth of a theory or slogan.

The great mass of the international party was composed of men who desired improvements in living conditions for themselves, for those in the same trade as themselves, for their class comrades, for their fellow countrymen. No more than that. International socialism was only a grand slogan. Their internationalism *had no practical aspect*.

Thus, even in the great, heroic period of the pupils of Marx and the old International, that period revolutionary both in theory and practice which began with Lasalle and, gradually declining, came to an end in the nineties, the International was a complex of parties in which each existed for itself, and which were therefore soon not even held together by any external bond.

A new period succeeded the period of revolution in theory and practice in the European countries with which we are concerned.

Attracted by the success of the workers' parties, the great masses of workers thirsting for reforms were drawn in. Those who were not the most militant, not the best, not the bravest. The average. The masses.

*Under capitalism*, the masses are over-worked and deprived of intellectual development. The great majority of them were only concerned, could only be concerned, with everyday issues, work, bread, little gains. The masses were drawn in.

The struggle had also become easier. The workers' parties had at last secured recognition. Governments and capitalists had ceded a little ground, had made concessions here and there.

The great national masses were drawn in, thirsting for reforms.

Solely for reforms. And this great number began to make its influence felt.

With such great numbers, power could be gained. With so many votes, seats in parliament. The quality of the voters now mattered less.

Among these masses, in the national trade unions and the national parties, reform became everything.

An improved standard of living the goal. Theory, the revolutionary theory, went by the board. And with it the entire International. Such things became just noise and hollow words.

Then, making a theory of this practice, revisionism emerged: the doctrine that cries, 'Workers! Workers of the nation, unite for reforms! Reform, the path to the goal, is everything. Unite with the bourgeoisie too, with a section of it, then you will obtain many more reforms.'

And this doctrine put down roots in the minds of these masses, these workers already so receptive to it, especially since times of prosperity were then coming, since a stream of gold was flooding over Europe, after the waves of Californian and Australian gold the wave of gold from the Transvaal, and thoughts of revolution shrank more and more in their minds, and thoughts of reform displaced them. This is how the *masses* evolved.

Then there arose another kind of *leader*.

At first there had been men of principle. Men inspired with the ideal of socialism, who spared no exertion for it and had the highest expectations of realising it. Who had the greatest courage, genuinely revolutionary spirit and determination, genuinely revolutionary energy. Who also, in so far as they were not workers, tried to shake off the bourgeois in them and to think and feel themselves completely into the masses, into the working class.

Who lived out or tried to live out the highest ideal that could be formed of a working class emancipating itself. Who directed all their deeds and words and proposals towards this ideal.

With greater or lesser clarity they proclaimed the revolution to the workers.

Such were Bebel, Guesde, Liebknecht, Plekhanov, Axelrod, Kautsky, Mehring, Labriola, Hyndman, Quelch, Domela Nieuwenhuis in his first period, and many others.

But when power came, others came along.

Philanthropists, moralists, well-educated bourgeois, the ambitious, the unscrupulous, those who deceived the masses. Many with good intentions and weak minds, who knew nothing of socialism and its theory. People who deceived themselves, career

politicians, who made socialism their business, their source of profit, their means of subsistence.

And moved by philanthropic motives, bourgeois ethics, great learning, ambition, stupidity, ignorance, lack of character and scruple, or common sense, they all embraced revisionism.

Revolution was something evil or impossible or too distant: reform possible and immediate and good and advantageous. But the workers were so weak, so uncomprehending, their vote in parliament and in the municipal councils too small. So compromises had to be made with the bourgeoisie!

The old guard, the radicals, who recognised that the high revolutionary ideals were fading, voiced their opposition.

But what good did it do? The masses themselves were everywhere so anxious for reform, reform first and foremost, often reform alone, that they listened to the reformists, and the arguments of the radical idealists, who were in fact unable to bring revolution, were lost to the four winds.

And so it came about that the theory, the revolution, became more and more a thing of the intellect, which the best comrades now and then thought of as something fine and great, a thing of the heart, which now and then beat faster for it – but everyday reality, what was always present, what the masses constantly thought of, day and night, became practice – reform, in other words.

The trade-union movement, which fights only for small gains, which wins only small concessions from the employers by making contracts with them, hastened this process considerably.

Reformists were now elected to the executives of all the trade unions. They appeared everywhere in party executives, newspaper editorial boards, in municipal councils and parliaments. They soon formed a majority everywhere, and in most countries the sole leading force.

But both in the trade-union movement and in the political parties it is the leaders, the members of parliament and the chairmen, that is to say individuals, who gain the victories in parliament, in the municipal councils, in the face of the other parties and in negotiations with the employers, even if such victory is only apparent.

The centre of gravity thus shifted from the masses to the leaders. A worker-bureaucracy formed.

And bureaucracy is conservative from the outset.

The masses, completely preoccupied with desire for gain instead of revolution, were reinforced in this by their leaders. They left the latter to pursue such advances, and themselves became slack and torpid. And the less active the masses became, the more they lost sight of their goal, the more the leaders regarded themselves as the real bearers of the movement. The more they began to believe that the proletarian action of the workers consisted primarily in the tactics and compromises that *they* thought up, and that the only means available to the workers themselves was the ballot, counting subscriptions, with an occasional trade-union struggle or demonstration. That the masses were really passive and led, and they themselves the active force. This is the second phase of the socialist movement, which follows the first phase of revolution in theory and practice. It could be called the period of reform in theory and practice.\*

\* As we have already said, it was during this phase, coinciding approximately with the rise of imperialism, that the least reforms occurred, at least in the powerful imperialist countries, i.e. in Germany, France, Holland, Belgium: England, as we shall see, forms an exception. Although significant improvements in legislation were achieved during revolutionary periods, they now occurred only rarely.

Holland is a good example of this. The first tide of revolution brought a significant improvement in electoral law. The propagation of revolution in theory and practice secured the accident insurance legislation which guarantees workers invalidated by their work 70 per cent of their wages without any contributions on their part. In the period of reform, the poor – not the workers, but the poor – obtained the promise of two guilders a week, provided that they are very poor and behave themselves well and that the parish recognises this. A form of poor relief, in other words. From rights to alms, this is what the shift from revolution to reform means.

The same thing is to be seen in Germany: social legislation was secured by using radical tactics, and nothing by the use of reformist tactics.

Similarly in Belgium. The extension of suffrage through revolutionary tactics, and nothing through reformist tactics.

And what did Millerand, Briand, Viviani achieve in France?

It might be asked how it is that reformism flourishes under imperialism when imperialism in fact renders reform impossible. *(Continued overleaf.)*

This is what happened in England in the Labour Party. This is what happened in France, where socialists even became ministers. This is what happened in Belgium, where the mass campaign for universal suffrage was stifled, in Holland, where links with liberalism were forged, in Italy, where socialists sold themselves to the radicals. This is what happened in Germany, where a policy of moderation was pursued and the mass campaign for suffrage in Prussia strangled. This is what happened in Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, everywhere in a particular manner determined by the political and economic conditions, but everywhere with the same result – the diversion of the proletariat on to the path of minor reforms. Subjection to the leaders, renunciation of autonomous mass action.

The workers' parties in France, England, Germany, in every country, became mass parties interested only in minor, national issues, concerned only with minor, national issues.

But because of militarism and imperialism, which demanded all the available money, minor reforms could no longer be gained.

But the reformists promised reforms all the more. And this demoralised the masses all the more. For nothing is so demoralising and destructive as to make false promises to the masses. While nothing actually happens, and the masses still wait credulously for reforms.

But international imperialism grew more and more haughty. And it became more and more necessary to take up international, global issues instead of minor, national ones.

And so, without really wanting it, more by instinct than lucid awareness, all these parties already tainted with reformism acquired the new International, the hollow shell that we all know so well and

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The answer is this: as far as the reformists are concerned, socialism and the workers' movement consist solely in the struggle for reforms. They cannot imagine any other workers' movement. The less reforms are achieved, the more they must conjure up fake reforms, the more reforms they must drum up and fight for. Otherwise their whole existence, together with the workers' movement as they conceive it, would be pointless, would be nothing.

And all the more under imperialism, precisely because it renders reform impossible.

which has now collapsed. The gaze of that mighty world class which will subject all the forces of the earth, of nature and of society to itself was directed by the reformists to the achievement of a few pence more pay and infrequent and inadequate labour legislation – this as its sole objective. They directed the attention of the workers, of the class which is to overcome the mightiest world power there has ever been – capitalism and its bearers, the banks, the trusts, imperialism – to the fine words which their enemies use to fool them, and told them to believe these words and to form alliances with these people.

This mighty class was tamed by a few ambitious, weak-minded and ignorant leaders. It fell victim to its own lack of understanding and servile mentality.

Something which has already happened a thousand times in the past happened again: the masses were fooled into becoming the servants of their rulers. It should not have succeeded, because this class must now really conquer undisputed, unqualified power.

Yet it did succeed again, the bourgeoisie was able to achieve it – by means of the reformists: by means of the Social-Democratic Party.

There are reformists who go so far as to say that they are in favour of capitalist expansion, in favour of colonies and spheres of influence, in favour of colonial policies. They do not stop to think whether this is the way for the proletariat to become class-conscious, ripe for revolution, revolutionary and socialist in its innermost feelings.

They are concerned only with temporary expedients: with capitalism. Colonialist policies, nationalistic colonialism, imperialism in other words, and hence in its turn imperialist war, can, as we have shown, bring the nation, the national bourgeoisie, enormous profits through the expansion of capital which it generates. It generates new capital investment, stimulates industry, increases wealth. It improves trade, transport, in short the whole economic life of the nation, to an extraordinary degree. Of course, if the proletariat goes along with it, it also means a decline in the class-consciousness of the masses, and thus, *in the long run*, the defeat of the proletariat; for the proletariat it means stern oppression, taxes

and militarism, war and division; but this does not deter the reformists.

So long as capital is growing and flourishing.

This is why many reformists, the big-bourgeois reformists, are supporters of colonialist policies, and thus imperialists.

Schippel and Calwer in Germany, for example, Vandervelde, who endorsed the annexation of the Congo by Belgium, Van Kol, who accepted a mission furthering imperialism from the Dutch government, and so on.

Other reformists are in favour of colonialist policies for the sake of the immediate, minor benefits they bring the proletariat, without heed to the consequences for the future.

We have seen that colonialist policies, and thus imperialism, can bring short-term, small-scale benefits to individuals groups of workers. They bring work and pay. The petty-bourgeois too, the small masters and shop-owners, receive crumbs from the profits of imperialism.

This is why the German petty-bourgeois reformists Bernstein, Noske, etc. etc. are in favour of colonialist policies.

This is why in Holland petty-bourgeois reformists like Troelstra, Vliegen, the parliamentary group, the entire leadership and almost the whole membership of the SDAP are in favour of colonialist policies and oppose autonomy and unconditional freedom for the Indies.

This is why, in every country of the world that possesses colonies, England, Germany, Holland, France, Belgium, and even in those which seek world trade, world influence, world power, Italy, America, Australia, etc. etc. a number of the leaders and the majority of the workers are in favour of colonialist policies, in favour of imperialism, that is.

Thus, it was precisely colonialism that the revisionists fostered. And from colonialism that they promised the workers great advantages.

And the workers, concerned with their own advantage, fell in with them!

The precise area of policy upon which imperialism depends,

colonial policy – imperialism – was taken up by the workers from the reformists, was accepted by the workers.

But imperialism means nationalism.

From the reformists; from the social democrats; from the national social-democratic parties; from the International itself, the workers accepted the imperialism that crept ever nearer, that threatened them with war, death, defeat and division, that was to murder, destroy and infinitely weaken them as individuals and as a class – this imperialism, these colonialist policies, *which, by fostering militarism and a probably endless succession of wars, was to take away all reforms for the present and for years to come.*\*

And so, in the years of imperialism preceding the war, the International accepted its downfall from the bourgeoisie and from itself.

Workers who desire only immediate advantages *must* agree to colonialist policies, and so agree to imperialism and nationalism. For it is these that promise immediate advantages.

Only those who see further, who recognise that colonialist policies ultimately bring more harm than profit, and especially those who realise that they split and fragment the proletariat – in short, only those who think and feel in a truly revolutionary socialist manner – can oppose nationalistic imperialism despite the advantages which it brings.

Only those who penetrate still deeper and recognise that imperialism unites all the capitalists of the world against the proletariat, only they can entirely eradicate nationalism from their hearts and unite with the world proletariat in a single fraternity, in a single revolutionary struggle against world capital.

But reformism and revisionism had meant that all lucid, profound, theoretical insight and all revolutionary, internationalist sensibility had been dissipated.

It was thus reformism which caused the workers, already too

\* There were social democrats who wanted to vote for the war budget just to obtain reforms, reforms that imperialism in fact denies them; thus, for example, the SDAP in Holland.

concerned with minor issues, to become even more attached to the latter.

It was thus reformism, the pursuit of minor reforms, that caused the workers, already so nationalistic, to become even more nationalistic.

It is what caused the workers to give in to colonialist policies even as imperialism crept nearer.

It is what caused the workers' attention to be diverted as imperialism crept nearer, so that they remained unaware of it.

*It is thus, through reformism, that the international leadership of the International in every country and the workers themselves – whatever their own self-conceptions, whatever their protests – became in reality nationalists, imperialists, and even, with the threat of war, chauvinists.*

*The reformists, reformism, together with ignorance, are to blame for the proletariat's surrender to imperialism, to world war, to its own downfall. For its failure to defend itself and strengthen itself by resisting, and instead welcoming its own enfeeblement with joy and even enthusiasm.*

They went for reforms alone, and it was precisely because they no longer sought revolution that they brought weakness, downfall and division upon themselves.

They concerned themselves only with national issues, and it was precisely because of this that they became nationalists and imperialists.

They concerned themselves only with reform within the nation, and precisely because of this they were overtaken by the international violence of imperialism.

When we consider that all these various parties only took action on a national scale – that no opportunity had ever yet presented itself for joint, international action, as a whole, against capital – that the struggle for national objectives was therefore only carried on in the small, confined arena of the nation, which did not accustom the eye to perceiving the struggle of the whole proletariat against capital as a whole – that this struggle was the only one being waged – then we recognise that as that great world cataclysm

between capital and labour drew near, brought on by imperialism, which sets the whole working class against the whole of world capital in a single front – the working class remained unaware of this, and still carried on looking at its own petty interests within its own little national sphere.

Only a very few party publications in Germany taught the proletariat what imperialism is.

The majority, the main publication *Vorwärts* and also the scientific journal *Die Neue Zeit*, did their best *not* to show imperialism as the axis around which politics turns, and thus not to make it the axis, not to make it the central focus of the proletariat's attention and action. And, so far as we know, there was no single organ in other countries, with the exception of the *Tribune* in Holland, which did so.

The revisionists – the Bernsteins, the Adlers, the Vanderfeldes, the Jaurès, the Vliegengs, the Brantings,<sup>1</sup> to name only the best among them – had concentrated the attention of the proletariat on minor issues. The workers were preoccupied with these.

With more favourable taxation, with old-age pensions for workers – often only the hope of them – with the possibility of an alliance with the liberals or the progressives or the radicals to obtain better electoral legislation. . . .

They looked to their leaders, to parliaments, and did nothing themselves. Salvation was to come from the leaders, from the parliaments.

Slowly, inexorably, imperialism crept nearer.

First Egypt was occupied, then the Transvaal, then China.<sup>2</sup> Germany, the homeland of capital, was circled around with hostile powers.

The workers did not notice.

Do you know, reader, what imperialism is? It is the highest form of class struggle there has ever been.

That is why it is also the most complete, most unambiguous refutation of revisionism, the refutation with the knock-out punch.

Revisionist theory has never been of any moment. Kautsky

disposed of it briefly and for good. Nothing has come of the moderation of class struggle which it foresaw, its theory of undermining capitalism, the great expectations that it cherished of trusts of disarmament, of the middle classes, of neo-liberalism. Its theory was without foundation. The revisionists retreated to the domain of practice simply to fool the workers and poison them with the opium of vain hopes.

But this practice, the only thing remaining to them, this practice of imperialism came up and seized them by the throat and struck them dead.

Just consider how the process developed, reader.

There were the workers of all lands busy with the fine plans drawn up for them by the reformists. With their national insurance and taxation proposals and electoral legislation and the pensions that the liberals were to help them obtain. What was not done to achieve even the least step forward! Socialists became ministers, pacts were formed with the liberals, social democracy crawled in the dirt, toned down its own campaigns, drove the marxists out!

Everywhere was seething with small-scale activity. Like little gnomes, the thousands of members of parliament busied about their work; and the masses, in their millions, waited expectantly.

And what was approaching? Downfall. Death.

For millions of workers, for their children, wives, fathers and mothers. It was stagnation, decline, the death of their organisation, for a long time to come.

The revisionists, the Troelstras, the Südekums, the Scheidemanns, the Anseeles, the Turatis, the Franks, the Macdonalds, paraded in front of the bourgeoisie, promised to vote for anything – even war budgets! – visited princes, army leaders, promising the workers golden mountains, awe-inspiring progress, democracy, provided the workers elected them municipal councillor, minister, member of parliament, and gave them a free hand; and slowly but inexorably the first true world war between great imperialist powers crept nearer.

The revisionists had promised reforms for the present. Reform came: death. The revisionists promised the workers democracy;

equality was to come. It came, in the equality of death: for capitalists and workers are truly equal in death. The revisionists promised universal suffrage if the masses would only trust the liberals. The liberals granted the workers suffrage: in death! The dead, the thousands of dead workers, raised their voices in protest.

The revisionists promised class reconciliation, if only the socialists would follow their tactics. War unites all classes in death.

Revisionism had also promised the reconciliation of humanity and disarmament! The peoples of the earth face each other in lines thousands of kilometres long, bristling with weapons and dripping blood.

The revisionists promised moderation of the class-struggle: world war, imperialism practised by every country, is the most acute form of class struggle there has been since capital came into existence.

The revisionists promised advantages from colonialist policies: it was colonialism that brought downfall.

The revisionists promised reform for the future: after this war there is the threat of new war, new arms-races. And hence disruption and downfall. And hence no reform.

A class which has for twenty years been taught to trust the bourgeoisie can no longer combat it.

While the revisionists, together with the bourgeois parties, promised the workers progress, they paved the way for the downfall of the proletariat by dazzling the workers.

This is the culmination of revisionist deception, and there was no avoiding it.

But it also means the downfall of revisionism, of struggle directed solely towards immediate gains.

It is the downfall of this second, reforming phase of the workers' struggle.

For the reformists do not merely share with the capitalists and with the workers' ignorance the blame for our present impotence, confusion, cowardice, for the proletariat's current nationalism, chauvinism and imperialism, for the present misery, fragmentation, weakness, they also share the blame, the responsibility, the guilt, for

everything that will come after the war – weakness that will last for years, misery, the impossibility of reform, the necessity of beginning the struggle for the revolution anew with a very weakened and perhaps demoralised proletariat.

If only the waste and destruction and misery and all the consequences of this war meant that the working population would be purged of the reformists and all their kind!

The author of this article and the party to which he belongs warned the proletariat of their country many years ago. He and the members of his party maintained right up to the outbreak of war in countless meetings, publications and newspaper articles on imperialism that all the fine promises of the bourgeoisie and the revisionists would come to nothing because militarism and colonialist policies – imperialism, in other words – would swallow up all the available money, put a stop to all progress, make the burdens more onerous, and that in all probability world war would come, a period of world wars would set in.

This is why we particularly condemned fraternisation with bourgeois parties which could achieve nothing.

This is why we were thrown out of the Dutch Social-Democratic Party and obliged to found a party of our own.

It was because of the imperialism that we sought to combat, but which they supported, that we were thrown out of the Social-Democratic Party.

The workers can now see who was in the right.

Anton Pannekoek

## World Revolution and Communist Tactics\*

Theory itself becomes a material force once it takes a hold on the masses. Theory is capable of taking a hold on the masses . . . once it becomes radical. *Karl Marx*

### I

The transformation of capitalism into communism is brought about by two forces, one material and the other mental, the latter having its origins in the former. The material development of the economy generates consciousness, and this activates the will to revolution. Marxist science, arising as a function of the general tendencies of capitalist development, forms first the theory of the socialist party and subsequently that of the communist party, and it endows the revolutionary movement with a profound and vigorous intellectual unity. While this theory is gradually penetrating one section of the proletariat, the masses' own experiences are bound to foster practical recognition that capitalism is no longer viable to an increasing extent. World war and rapid economic collapse now make revolution objectively necessary before the masses have grasped communism intellectually: and this contradiction is at the root of the contradictions, hesitations and setbacks which make the revolution a long and painful process. Nevertheless, theory itself now gains new momentum and rapidly takes a hold on the masses; but both these processes are inevitably held up by the practical problems which have suddenly risen up so massively.

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As far as Western Europe is concerned, the development of the revolution is mainly determined by two forces: the collapse of the capitalist economy and the example of Soviet Russia. The reasons why the proletariat was able to achieve victory so quickly and with such relative ease in Russia – the weakness of the bourgeoisie, the alliance with the peasantry, the fact that the revolution took place during the war – need not be elaborated here. The example of a state in which working people are the rulers, where they have abolished capitalism and are engaged in building communism, could not but make a great impression upon the proletariat of the entire world. Of course, this example would not in itself have been sufficient to spur the workers in other countries on to proletarian revolution. The human mind is most strongly influenced by the effects of its own material environment; so that if indigenous capitalism had retained all its old strength, the news from far-away Russia would have made little impression. ‘Full of respectful admiration, but in a timid, petty-bourgeois way, without the courage to save themselves, Russia and humanity as a whole by taking action’ – this was how the masses struck Rutgers<sup>1</sup> upon his return to Western Europe from Russia. When the war came to an end, everyone here hoped for a rapid upturn in the economy, and a lying press depicted Russia as a place of chaos and barbarism; and so the masses bided their time. But since then, the opposite has come about: chaos has spread in the traditional home of civilisation, while the new order in Russia is showing increasing strength. Now the masses are stirring here as well.

Economic collapse is the most powerful spur to revolution. Germany and Austria are already completely shattered and pauperised economically, Italy and France are in inexorable decline. England has suffered so badly that it is doubtful whether its government’s vigorous attempts at reconstruction can avert collapse, and in America the first threatening signs of crisis are appearing. And in each country, more or less in this same order, unrest is growing in the masses; they are struggling against impoverishment in great strike-movements which hit the economy even harder; these struggles are gradually developing into a

conscious revolutionary struggle, and, without being communists by conviction, the masses are more and more following the path which communism shows them, for practical necessity is driving them in that direction.

With the growth of this necessity and mood, carried by them, so to speak, the communist vanguard has been developing in these countries; this vanguard recognises the goals clearly and regroups itself in the Third International. The distinguishing feature of this developing process of revolution is a sharp separation of communism from socialism, in both ideological and organisational terms. This separation is most marked in the countries of Central Europe precipitated into economic crisis by the Treaty of Versailles, where a social-democratic regime was necessary to save the bourgeois state. The crisis is so profound and irremediable there that the mass of radical social-democratic workers, the USP, are pressing for affiliation to Moscow, although they still largely hold to the old social-democratic methods, traditions, slogans and leaders. In Italy, the entire social-democratic party has joined the Third International; a militant revolutionary mood among the masses, who are engaged in constant small-scale warfare against government and bourgeoisie, permits us to overlook the theoretical mixture of socialist, syndicalist and communist perspectives. In France, communist groups have only recently detached themselves from the social-democratic party and the trade-union movement, and are now moving towards the formation of a communist party. In England, the profound effect of the war upon the old, familiar conditions has generated a communist movement, as yet consisting of several groups and parties of different origins and new organisational formations. In America, two communist parties have detached themselves from the Social-Democratic Party, while the latter has also aligned itself with Moscow.

Soviet Russia's unexpected resilience to the onslaughts of reaction has both compelled the Entente to negotiate and also made a new and powerful impression upon the labour parties of the West. The Second International is breaking up; a general movement of the centre groups towards Moscow has set in under the impulsion of the

growing revolutionary mood of the masses. These groups have adopted the new name of communists without their former perspectives having greatly altered, and they are transferring the conceptions and methods of the old social democrats into the new international. As a sign that these countries have now become more ripe for revolution, a phenomenon precisely opposite to the original one is now appearing: with their entry into the Third International or declaration in favour of its principles, as in the case of the USP mentioned above, the sharp distinction between communists and social democrats is once again fading. Whatever attempts are made to keep such parties formally outside the Third International in an effort to conserve some firmness of principle, they nevertheless insinuate themselves into the leadership of each country's revolutionary movement, maintaining their influence over the militant masses by paying lip-service to the new slogans. This is how every ruling stratum behaves: rather than allow itself to be cut off from the masses, it becomes 'revolutionary' itself, in order to deflate the revolution as far as possible by its influence. And many communists tend to see only the increased strength thus accruing to us, and not also the increase in vulnerability.

With the appearance of communism and the Russian example, the proletarian revolution seemed to have gained a simple, straightforward form. In reality, however, the various difficulties now being encountered are revealing the forces which make it an extremely complex and arduous process.

## II

Issues and the solutions to them, programmes and tactics, do not spring from abstract principles, but are only determined by experience, by the real practice of life. The communists' conceptions of their goal and of how it is to be attained must be elaborated on the basis of previous revolutionary practice, as they always have been. The Russian revolution and the course which the German revolution has taken up to this point represent all the evidence so far available to us as to the motive forces, conditions and forms of the proletarian revolution.

The Russian revolution brought the proletariat political control in so astonishingly rapid an upturn that it took Western European observers completely by surprise at the time, and although the reasons for it are clearly identifiable, it has come to seem more and more astonishing in view of the difficulties that we are now experiencing in Western Europe. Its initial effect was inevitably that in the first flush of enthusiasm, the difficulties facing the revolution in Western Europe were underestimated. Before the eyes of the world proletariat, the Russian revolution unveiled the principles of the new order in all the radiance and purity of their power – the dictatorship of the proletariat, the soviet system as a new mode of democracy, the reorganisation of industry, agriculture and education. In many respects, it gave a picture of the nature and content of the proletarian revolution so simple, clear and comprehensive, so idyllic one might almost say, that nothing could seem easier than to follow this example. However, the German revolution has shown that this was not so simple, and the forces which came to the fore in Germany are by and large at work throughout the rest of Europe.

When German imperialism collapsed in November 1918, the working class was completely unprepared for the seizure of power. Shattered in mind and spirit by the four years of war and still caught up in social-democratic traditions, it was unable to achieve clear recognition of its task within the first few weeks, when governmental authority had lapsed; the intensive but brief period of communist propaganda could not compensate for this lack. The German bourgeoisie had learnt more from the Russian example than the proletariat; decking itself out in red in order to lull the workers' vigilance, it immediately began to rebuild the organs of its power. The workers' councils voluntarily surrendered their power to the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party and the democratic parliament. The workers still bearing arms as soldiers disarmed not the bourgeoisie, but themselves; the most active workers' groups were crushed by newly formed white guards, and the bourgeoisie was formed into armed civil militias. With the connivance of the trade-union leaderships, the now defenceless workers were little by little robbed of all the improvements in working conditions won in

the course of the revolution. The way to communism was thus blocked with barbed-wire entanglements to secure the survival of capitalism, to enable it to sink ever deeper into chaos, that is.

These experiences gained in the course of the German revolution cannot, of course, be automatically applied to the other countries of Western Europe; the development of the revolution will follow still other courses there. Power will not suddenly fall into the hands of the unprepared masses as a result of politico-military collapse; the proletariat will have to fight hard for it, and will thus have attained a higher degree of maturity when it is won. What happened at fever-pace in Germany after the November revolution is already taking place more quietly in other countries: the bourgeoisie is drawing the consequences of the Russian revolution, making military preparations for civil war and at the same time organising the political deception of the proletariat by means of social democracy. But in spite of these differences, the German revolution shows certain general characteristics and offers certain lessons of general significance. It has made it apparent that the revolution in Western Europe *will* be a slow, arduous process and revealed *what forces are responsible for this*. The slow tempo of revolutionary development in Western Europe, although only relative, has given rise to a clash of conflicting tactical currents. In times of rapid revolutionary development, tactical differences are quickly overcome in action, or else do not become conscious; intensive principled agitation clarifies people's minds, and at the same time the masses flood in and political action overturns old conceptions. When a period of external stagnation sets in, however; when the masses let anything pass without protest and revolutionary slogans no longer seem able to catch the imagination; when difficulties mount up and the adversary seems to rise up more colossal with each engagement; when the Communist Party remains weak and experiences only defeats – then perspectives diverge, new courses of action and new tactical methods are sought. There then emerge two main tendencies, which can be recognised in every country, for all the local variations. The one current seeks to revolutionise and clarify people's minds by word and deed, and to this end tries to pose the new principles in the

sharpest possible contrast to the old, received conceptions. The other current attempts to draw the masses still on the sidelines into practical activity, and therefore emphasises points of agreement rather than points of difference in an attempt to avoid as far as is possible anything that might deter them. The first strives for a clear, sharp separation among the masses, the second for unity; the first current may be termed the radical tendency, the second the opportunist one. Given the current situation in Western Europe, with the revolution encountering powerful obstacles on the one hand and the Soviet Union's staunch resistance to the Entente governments' efforts to overthrow it making a powerful impression upon the masses on the other, we can expect a greater influx into the Third International of workers' groups until now undecided; and as a result, opportunism will doubtless become a powerful force in the Communist International.

Opportunism does not necessarily mean a pliant, conciliatory attitude and vocabulary, nor radicalism a more acerbic manner; on the contrary, lack of clear, principled tactics is all too often concealed in rabidly strident language; and indeed, in revolutionary situations, it is characteristic of opportunism to suddenly set all its hopes on the great revolutionary deed. Its essence lies in always considering the immediate questions, not what lies in the future, and to fix on the superficial aspects of phenomena rather than seeing the determinant deeper bases. When the forces are not immediately adequate for the attainment of a certain goal, it tends to make for that goal by another way, by roundabout means, rather than strengthen those forces. For its goal is immediate success, and to that it sacrifices the conditions for lasting success in the future. It seeks justification in the fact that by forming alliances with other 'progressive' groups and by making concessions to outdated conceptions, it is often possible to gain power or at least split the enemy, the coalition of capitalist classes, and thus bring about conditions more favourable for the struggle. But power in such cases always turns out to be an illusion, personal power exercised by individual leaders and not the power of the proletarian class; this contradiction brings nothing but confusion, corruption and conflict

in its wake. Conquest of governmental power not based upon a working class fully prepared to exercise its hegemony would be lost again, or else have to make so many concessions to reactionary forces that it would be inwardly spent. A split in the ranks of the class hostile to us – the much vaunted slogan of reformism – would not affect the unity of the inwardly united bourgeoisie, but would deceive, confuse and weaken the proletariat. Of course it can happen that the communist vanguard of the proletariat is obliged to take over political power before the normal conditions are met; but only what the masses thereby gain in terms of clarity, insight, solidarity and autonomy has lasting value as the foundation of further development towards communism.

The history of the Second International is full of examples of this policy of opportunism, and they are beginning to appear in the Third. It used to consist in seeking the assistance of non-socialist workers' groups or other classes to attain the goal of socialism. This led to tactics becoming corrupted, and finally to collapse. The situation of the Third International is now fundamentally different; for that period of quiet capitalist development is over when social democracy in the best sense of the word could do nothing more than prepare for a future revolutionary epoch by fighting confusion with principled policies. Capitalism is now collapsing; the world cannot wait until our propaganda has won a majority to lucid communist insight; the masses must intervene, and as rapidly as possible, if they themselves and the world are to be saved from catastrophe. What can a small party, however principled, do when what is needed are the masses? Is not opportunism, with its efforts to gather the broadest masses quickly, dictated by necessity?

A revolution can no more be made by a big mass party or coalition of different parties than by a small radical party. It breaks out spontaneously among the masses; action instigated by a party can sometimes trigger it off (a rare occurrence), but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychological factors deep in the unconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics. The function of a revolutionary party lies in propagating clear understanding in advance, so that throughout the masses there will

be elements who know what must be done and who are capable of judging the situation for themselves. And in the course of revolution the party has to raise the programme, slogans and directives which the spontaneously acting masses recognise as correct because they find that they express their own aims in their most adequate form and hence achieve greater clarity of purpose; it is thus that the party comes to lead the struggle. So long as the masses remain inactive, this may appear to be an unrewarding tactic; but clarity of principle has an implicit effect on many who at first hold back, and revolution reveals its active power of giving a definite direction to the struggle. If, on the other hand, it has been attempted to assemble a large party by watering down principles, forming alliances and making concessions, then this enables confused elements to gain influence in times of revolution without the masses being able to see through their inadequacy. Conformity to traditional perspectives is an attempt to gain power without the revolution in ideas that is the precondition of doing so; its effect is therefore to hold back the course of revolution. It is also doomed to failure, for only the most radical thinking can take a hold on the masses once they engage in revolution, while moderation only satisfies them so long as the revolution has yet to be made. A revolution simultaneously involves a profound upheaval in the masses' thinking; it creates the conditions for this, and is itself conditioned by it; leadership in the revolution thus falls to the Communist Party by virtue of the world-transforming power of its unambiguous principles.

In contrast with the strong, sharp emphasis on the new principles – soviet system and dictatorship – which distinguish communism from social democracy, opportunism in the Third International relies as far as possible upon the forms of struggle taken over from the Second International. After the Russian revolution had replaced parliamentary activity with the soviet system and built up the trade-union movement on the basis of the factory, the first impulse in Western Europe was to follow this example. The Communist Party of Germany boycotted the elections for the National Assembly and campaigned for immediate or gradual organisational separation from the trade unions. When the

revolution slackened and stagnated in 1919, however, the Central Committee of the KPD introduced a different tactic which amounted to opting for parliamentarianism and supporting the old trade-union confederations against the industrial unions. The main argument behind this is that the Communist Party must not lose the leadership of the masses, who still think entirely in parliamentary terms, who are best reached through electoral campaigns and parliamentary speeches, and who, by entering the trade unions en masse, have increased their membership to seven million. The same thinking is to be seen in England in the attitude of the BSP: they do not want to break with the Labour Party, although it belongs to the Second International, for fear of losing contact with the mass of trade-unionists. These arguments are most sharply formulated and marshalled by our friend Karl Radek, whose *Development of the World Revolution and the Tasks of the Communist Party*, written in prison in Berlin, may be regarded as the programmatic statement of communist opportunism.<sup>2</sup> Here it is argued that the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will be a long drawn-out process, in which communism should use every means of propaganda, in which parliamentary activity and the trade-union movement will remain the principal weapons of the proletariat, with the gradual introduction of workers' control as a new objective.

An examination of the foundations, conditions and difficulties of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will show how far this is correct.

### III

It has repeatedly been emphasised that the revolution will take a long time in Western Europe because the bourgeoisie is so much more powerful here than in Russia. Let us analyse the basis of this power. Does it lie in their numbers? The proletarian masses are much more numerous. Does it lie in the bourgeoisie's mastery over the whole of economic life? This certainly used to be an important power-factor; but their hegemony is fading, and in Central Europe the economy is completely bankrupt. Does it lie in their control of the state, with all its means of coercion? Certainly, it has always used the

latter to hold the proletariat down, which is why the conquest of state power was the proletariat's first objective. But in November 1918, state power slipped from the nerveless grasp of the bourgeoisie in Germany and Austria, the coercive apparatus of the state was completely paralysed, the masses were in control; and the bourgeoisie was nevertheless able to build this state power up again and once more subjugate the workers. This proves that the bourgeoisie possessed another hidden source of power which had remained intact and which permitted it to re-establish its hegemony when everything seemed shattered. This hidden power is the bourgeoisie's ideological hold over the proletariat. Because the proletarian masses were still completely governed by a bourgeois mentality, they restored the hegemony of the bourgeoisie with their own hands after it had collapsed.<sup>3</sup>

The German experience brings us face to face with the major problem of the revolution in Western Europe. In these countries, the old bourgeois mode of production and the centuries-old civilisation which has developed with it have completely impressed themselves upon the thoughts and feelings of the popular masses. Hence, the mentality and inner character of the masses here is quite different from that in the countries of the East, who have not experienced the rule of bourgeois culture; and this is what distinguishes the different courses that the revolution has taken in the East and the West. In England, France, Holland, Italy, Germany and Scandinavia, there has been a powerful burgher class based on petty-bourgeois and primitive capitalist production since the Middle Ages; as feudalism declined, there also grew up in the countryside an equally powerful independent peasant class, in which the individual was also master in his own small business. Bourgeois sensibilities developed into a solid national culture on this foundation, particularly in the maritime countries of England and France, which took the lead in capitalist development. In the nineteenth century, the subjection of the whole economy to capital and the inclusion of the most outlying farms into the capitalist world-trade system enhanced and refined this national culture, and the psychological propaganda of press, school and church drummed it firmly into the heads of the masses, both those

whom capital proletarianised and attracted into the cities and those it left on the land. This is true not only of the homelands of capitalism, but also, albeit in different forms, of America and Australia, where Europeans founded new states, and of the countries of Central Europe, Germany, Austria, Italy, which had until then stagnated, but where the new surge of capitalist development was able to connect with an old, backward, small-peasant economy and a petty-bourgeois culture. But when capitalism pressed into the countries of Eastern Europe, it encountered very different material conditions and traditions. Here, in Russia, Poland, Hungary, even in Germany east of the Elbe, there was no strong bourgeois class which had long dominated the life of the spirit; the latter was determined by primitive agricultural conditions, with large-scale landed property, patriarchal feudalism and village communism. Here, therefore, the masses related to communism in a more primitive, simple, open way, as receptive as blank paper. Western European social democrats often expressed derisive astonishment that the 'ignorant' Russians could claim to be the vanguard of the new world of labour. Referring to these social democrats, an English delegate at the communist conference in Amsterdam<sup>4</sup> pointed up the difference quite correctly: the Russians may be more ignorant, but the English workers are stuffed so full of prejudices that it is harder to propagate communism among them. These 'prejudices' are only the superficial, external aspect of the bourgeois mentality which saturates the majority of the proletariat of England, Western Europe and America.

The entire content of this mentality is so many-sided and complex in its opposition to the proletarian, communist world-view that it can scarcely be summarised in a few sentences. Its primary characteristic is individualism, which has its origins in earlier petty-bourgeois and peasant forms of labour and only gradually gives way to the new proletarian sense of community and of the necessity of accepting discipline – this characteristic is probably most pronounced in the bourgeoisie and proletariat of the Anglo-Saxon countries. The individual's perspective is limited to his work-place, instead of embracing society as a whole; so absolute does the

principle of the division of labour seem, that politics itself, the government of the whole of society, is seen not as everybody's business, but as the monopoly of a ruling stratum, the specialised province of particular experts, the politicians. With its centuries of material and intellectual commerce, its literature and art, bourgeois culture has embedded itself in the proletarian masses, and generates a feeling of national solidarity, anchored deeper in the unconscious than external indifference or superficial internationalism suggest; this can potentially express itself in national class solidarity, and greatly hinders international action.

Bourgeois culture exists in the proletariat primarily as a traditional cast of thought. The masses caught up in it think in ideological instead of real terms: bourgeois thought has always been ideological. But this ideology and tradition are not integrated; the mental reflexes left over from the innumerable class struggles of former centuries have survived as political and religious systems of thought which separate the old bourgeois world, and hence the proletarians born of it, into groups, churches, sects, parties, divided according to their ideological perspectives. The bourgeois past thus also survives in the proletariat as an organisational tradition that stands in the way of the class unity necessary for the creation of the new world; in these archaic organisations the workers make up the followers and adherents of a bourgeois vanguard. It is the intelligentsia which supplies the leaders in these ideological struggles. The intelligentsia – priests, teachers, literati, journalists, artists, politicians – form a numerous class, the function of which is to foster, develop and propagate bourgeois culture; it passes this on to the masses, and acts as mediator between the hegemony of capital and the interests of the masses. The hegemony of capital is rooted in this group's intellectual leadership of the masses. For even though the oppressed masses have often rebelled against capital and its agencies, they have only done so under the leadership of the intelligentsia; and the firm solidarity and discipline won in this common struggle subsequently proves to be the strongest support of the system once these leaders openly go over to the side of capitalism. Thus, the Christian ideology of the declining petty-

bourgeois strata, which had become a living force as an expression of their struggle against the modern capitalist state, often proved its worth subsequently as a reactionary system that bolstered up the state, as with Catholicism in Germany after the Kulturkampf.<sup>5</sup> Despite the value of its theoretical contribution, much the same is true of the role played by social democracy in destroying and extinguishing old ideologies in the rising work-force, as history demanded it should do: it made the proletarian masses mentally dependent upon political and other leaders, who, as specialists, the masses left to manage all the important matters of a general nature affecting the class, instead of themselves taking them in hand. The firm solidarity and discipline which developed in the often acute class struggles of half a century did not bury capitalism, for it represented the power of leadership and organisation over the masses; and in August 1914 and November 1918 these made the masses helpless tools of the bourgeoisie, of imperialism and of reaction. The ideological power of the bourgeois past over the proletariat means that in many of the countries of Western Europe, in Germany and Holland, for example, it is divided into ideologically opposed groups which stand in the way of class unity. Social democracy originally sought to realise this class unity, but partly due to its opportunist tactics, which substituted purely political policies for class politics, it was unsuccessful in this: it merely increased the number of groups by one.

In times of crisis when the masses are driven to desperation and to action, the hegemony of bourgeois ideology over the masses cannot prevent the power of this tradition temporarily flagging, as in Germany in November 1918. But then the ideology comes to the fore again, and turns temporary victory into defeat. The concrete forces which in our view make up the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions can be seen at work in the case of Germany: in reverence for abstract slogans like 'democracy'; in the power of old habits of thought and programme-points, such as the realisation of socialism through parliamentary leaders and a socialist government; in the lack of proletarian self-confidence evidenced by the effect upon the masses of the barrage of filthy lies published about Russia; in the

masses' lack of faith in their own power; but above all, in their trust in the party, in the organisation and in the leaders who for decades had incarnated their struggle, their revolutionary goals, their idealism. The tremendous mental, moral and material power of the organisations, these enormous machines painstakingly created by the masses themselves with years of effort, which incarnated the tradition of the forms of struggle belonging to a period in which the labour movement was a limb of ascendant capital, now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies once more flaring up in the masses.

This example will not remain unique. The contradiction between the rapid economic collapse of capitalism and the immaturity of spirit represented by the power of bourgeois tradition over the proletariat – a contradiction which has not come about by accident, in that the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit required for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism – can only be resolved by the process of revolutionary development, in which spontaneous uprisings and seizures of power alternate with setbacks. It makes it very improbable that the revolution will take a course in which the proletariat for a long time storms the fortress of capital in vain, using both the old and new means of struggle, until it eventually conquers it once and for all; and the tactics of a long drawn-out and carefully engineered siege posed in Radek's schema thus fall through. The tactical problem is not how to win power as quickly as possible if such power will be merely illusory – this is only too easy an option for the communists – but how the basis of lasting class power is to be developed in the proletariat. No 'resolute minority' can resolve the problems which can only be resolved by the action of the class as a whole; and if the populace allows such a seizure of power to take place over its head with apparent indifference, it is not, for all that, a genuinely passive mass, but is capable, in so far as it has not been won over to communism, of rounding upon the revolution at any moment as the active follower of reaction. And a 'coalition with the gallows on hand' would do no more than disguise an untenable party dictatorship of this kind.<sup>6</sup> When a tremendous uprising of the proletariat destroys the bankrupt rule of the bourgeoisie, and the Communist Party, the clearest

vanguard of the proletariat, takes over political control, it has only one task – to eradicate the sources of weakness in the proletariat by all possible means and to strengthen it so that it will be fully equal to the revolutionary struggles that the future holds in store. This means raising the masses themselves to the highest pitch of activity, whipping up their initiative, increasing their self-confidence, so that they themselves will be able to recognise the tasks thrust upon them, for it is only thus that the latter can be successfully carried out. This makes it necessary to break the domination of traditional organisational forms and of the old leaders, and in no circumstances to join them in a coalition government; to develop the new forms, to consolidate the material power of the masses; only in this way will it be possible to reorganise both production and defence against the external assaults of capitalism, and this is the precondition of preventing counter-revolution.

Such power as the bourgeoisie still possesses in this period resides in the proletariat's lack of autonomy and independence of spirit. The process of revolutionary development consists in the proletariat emancipating itself from this dependence, from the traditions of the past – and this is only possible through its own experience of struggle. Where capitalism is already an institution of long standing and the workers have thus already been struggling against it for several generations, the proletariat has in every period had to build up methods, forms and aids to struggle corresponding to the contemporary stage of capitalist development, and these have soon ceased to be seen as the temporary expedients that they are, and instead idolised as lasting, absolute, perfect forms; they have thus subsequently become fetters upon development which had to be broken. Whereas the class is caught up in constant upheaval and rapid development, the leaders remain at a particular stage, as the spokesmen of a particular phase, and their tremendous influence can hold back the movement; forms of action become dogmas, and organisations are raised to the status of ends in themselves, making it all the more difficult to reorientate and readapt to the changed conditions of struggle. This still applies; every stage of the development of the class struggle must overcome the traditions of

previous stages if it is to be capable of recognising its own tasks clearly and carrying them out effectively – except that development is now proceeding at a far faster pace. The revolution thus develops through the process of internal struggle. It is within the proletariat itself that the resistances develop which it must overcome; and in overcoming them, the proletariat overcomes its own limitations and matures towards communism.

#### IV

Parliamentary activity and the trade-union movement were the two principal forms of struggle in the time of the Second International.

The congresses of the first International Working-Men's Association laid the basis of this tactic by taking issue with primitive conceptions belonging to the pre-capitalist, petty-bourgeois period and, in accordance with Marx's social theory, defining the character of the proletarian class struggle as a continuous struggle by the proletariat against capitalism for the means of subsistence, a struggle which would lead to the conquest of political power. When the period of bourgeois revolutions and armed uprisings had come to a close, this political struggle could only be carried on within the framework of the old or newly created national states, and trade-union struggle was often subject to even tighter restrictions. The First International was therefore bound to break up; and the struggle for the new tactics, which it was itself unable to practise, burst it apart; meanwhile, the tradition of the old conceptions and methods of struggle remained alive amongst the anarchists. The new tactics were bequeathed by the International to those who would have to put them into practice, the trade unions and Social-Democratic Parties which were springing up on every hand. When the Second International arose as a loose federation of the latter, it did in fact still have to combat tradition in the form of anarchism; but the legacy of the First International already formed its undisputed tactical base. Today, every communist knows why these methods of struggle were necessary and productive at that time: when the working class is developing within ascendant capitalism, it is not yet capable of

creating organs which would enable it to control and order society, nor can it even conceive the necessity of doing so. It must first orientate itself mentally and learn to understand capitalism and its class rule. The vanguard of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party, must reveal the nature of the system through its propaganda and show the masses their goals by raising class demands. It was therefore necessary for its spokesmen to enter the parliaments, the centres of bourgeois rule, in order to raise their voices on the tribunes and take part in conflicts between the political parties.

Matters change when the struggle of the proletariat enters a revolutionary phase. We are not here concerned with the question of why the parliamentary system is inadequate as a system of government for the masses and why it must give way to the soviet system, but with the utilisation of parliament as a means of struggle by the proletariat.<sup>7</sup> As such, parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. People used to believe that leaders could obtain important reforms for the workers in parliament; and the illusion even arose that parliamentarians could carry out the transformation to socialism by acts of parliament. Now that parliamentarianism has grown more modest in its claims, one hears the argument that deputies in parliament could make an important contribution to communist propaganda.\* But this always means that the main emphasis falls on the leaders, and it is taken for granted that specialists will determine policy – even if this is done under the democratic veil of debates and resolutions by congresses; the history of social democracy is a series of unsuccessful attempts to induce the members themselves to determine policy. This is all inevitable while the proletariat is carrying on a parliamentary struggle, while the

\* It was recently argued in Germany that communists must go into parliament to convince the workers that parliamentary struggle is useless – but you don't take a wrong turning to show other people that it is wrong, you go the right way from the outset!

masses have yet to create organs of self-action, while the revolution has still to be made, that is; and as soon as the masses start to intervene, act and take decisions on their own behalf, the disadvantages of parliamentary struggle become overwhelming.

As we argued above, the tactical problem is how we are to eradicate the traditional bourgeois mentality which paralyses the strength of the proletarian masses; everything which lends new power to the received conceptions is harmful. The most tenacious and intractable element in this mentality is dependence upon leaders, whom the masses leave to determine general questions and to manage their class affairs. *Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution.* Fine speeches may be made in parliament exhorting the proletariat to revolutionary action; it is not in such words that the latter has its origins, however, but in the hard necessity of there being no other alternative.

Revolution also demands something more than the massive assault that topples a government and which, as we know, cannot be summoned up by leaders, but can only spring from the profound impulse of the masses. Revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action – and this is only possible if first the vanguard, then a greater and greater number take matters in hand themselves, know their own responsibilities, investigate, agitate, wrestle, strive, reflect, assess, seize chances and act upon them. But all this is difficult and laborious; thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf – leading agitation from a high platform, taking decisions, giving signals for action, making laws – the old habits of thought and the old weaknesses will make it hesitate and remain passive.

While on the one hand parliamentarianism has the counter-revolutionary effect of strengthening the leaders' dominance over the masses, on the other it has a tendency to corrupt these leaders themselves. When personal statesmanship has to compensate for what is lacking in the active power of the masses, petty diplomacy develops; whatever intentions the party may have started out with, it

has to try and gain a legal base, a position of parliamentary power; and so finally the relationship between means and ends is reversed, and it is no longer parliament that serves as a means towards communism, but communism that stands as an advertising slogan for parliamentary politics. In the process, however, the communist party itself takes on a different character. Instead of a vanguard grouping the entire class behind it for the purpose of revolutionary action, it becomes a parliamentary party with the same legal status as the others, joining in their quarrels, a new edition of the old social democracy under new radical slogans. Whereas there can be no essential antagonism, no internal conflict between the revolutionary working class and the communist party, since the party incarnates a form of synthesis between the proletariat's most lucid class-consciousness and its growing unity, parliamentary activity shatters this unity and creates the possibility of such a conflict: instead of unifying the class, communism becomes a new party with its own party chiefs, a party which falls in with the others and thus perpetuates the political division of the class. All these tendencies will doubtless be cut short once again by the development of the economy in a revolutionary sense; but even the first beginnings of this process can only harm the revolutionary movement by inhibiting the development of lucid class-consciousness; and when the economic situation temporarily favours counter-revolution, this policy will pave the way for a diversion of the revolution on to the terrain of reaction.

What is great and truly communist about the Russian revolution is above all the fact that it has awoken the masses' own activity and ignited the spiritual and physical energy in them to build and sustain a new society. Rousing the masses to this consciousness of their own power is something which cannot be achieved all at once, but only in stages; one stage on this way to independence is the rejection of parliamentarianism. When, in December 1918, the newly formed Communist Party of Germany resolved to boycott the National Assembly, this decision did not proceed from any immature illusion of quick, easy victory, but from the proletariat's need to emancipate itself from its psychological dependence upon

parliamentary representatives – a necessary reaction against the tradition of social democracy – because the way to self-activity could now be seen to lie in building up the council system. However, one half of those united at that time, those who have stayed in the KPD, readopted parliamentarianism with the ebb of the revolution: with what consequences it remains to be seen, but which have in part been demonstrated already. In other countries too, opinion is divided among the communists, and many groups want to refrain from parliamentary activity even before the outbreak of revolution. The international dispute over the use of parliament as a method of struggle will thus clearly be one of the main tactical issues within the Third International over the next few years.

At any rate, everyone is agreed that parliamentary activity only forms a subsidiary feature of our tactics. The Second International was able to develop up to the point where it had brought out and laid bare the essence of the new tactics: that the proletariat can only conquer imperialism with the weapons of mass action. The Second International itself was no longer able to employ these; it was bound to collapse when the world war put the revolutionary class struggle on to an international plane. The legacy of the earlier internationals was the natural foundation of the new international: mass action by the proletariat to the point of general strike and civil war forms the common tactical platform of the communists. In parliamentary activity the proletariat is divided into nations, and a genuinely international intervention is not possible; in mass action against international capital national divisions fall away, and every movement, to whatever countries it extends or is limited, is part of a single world struggle.

## V

Just as parliamentary activity incarnates the leaders' psychological hold over the working masses, so the *trade-union movement* incarnates their material authority. Under capitalism, the trade unions form the natural organisations for the regroupment of the proletariat; and Marx emphasised their significance as such from the first. In developed capitalism, and even more in the epoch of

imperialism, the trade unions have become enormous confederations which manifest the same developmental tendencies as the bourgeois state in an earlier period. There has grown up within them a class of officials, a bureaucracy, which controls all the organisation's resources – funds, press, the appointment of officials; often they have even more far-reaching powers, so that they have changed from being the servants of the collectivity to become its masters, and have identified themselves with the organisation. And the trade unions also resemble the state and its bureaucracy in that, democratic forms notwithstanding, the will of the members is unable to prevail against the bureaucracy; every revolt breaks on the carefully constructed apparatus of orders of business and statutes before it can shake the hierarchy. It is only after years of stubborn persistence that an opposition can sometimes register a limited success, and usually this only amounts to a change in personnel. In the last few years, before and since the war, this situation has therefore often given rise to rebellions by the membership in England, Germany and America; they have struck on their own initiative, against the will of the leadership or the decisions of the union itself. That this should seem natural and be taken as such is an expression of the fact that the organisation is not simply a collective organ of the members, but as it were something alien to them; that the workers do not control their union, but that it stands over them as an external force against which they can rebel, although they themselves are the source of its strength – once again like the state itself. If the revolt dies down, the old order is established once again; it knows how to assert itself in spite of the hatred and impotent bitterness of the masses, for it relies upon these masses' indifference and their lack of clear insight and united, persistent purpose, and is sustained by the inner necessity of trade-union organisation as the only means of finding strength in numbers against capital.

It was by combating capital, combating its tendencies to absolute impoverisation, setting limits to the latter and thus making the existence of the working class possible, that the trade-union movement fulfilled its role in capitalism, and this made it a limb of capitalist society itself. But once the proletariat ceases to be a

member of capitalist society and, with the advent of revolution, becomes its destroyer, the trade union enters into conflict with the proletariat.

It becomes legal, an open supporter of the state and recognised by the latter, it makes 'expansion of the economy before the revolution' its slogan, in other words, the maintenance of capitalism. In Germany today millions of proletarians, until now intimidated by the terrorism of the ruling class, are streaming into the unions out of a mixture of timidity and incipient militancy. The resemblance of the trade-union confederations, which now embrace almost the entire working class, to the state structure is becoming even closer. The trade-union officials collaborate with the state bureaucracy not only in using their power to hold down the working class on behalf of capital, but also in the fact that their 'policy' increasingly amounts to deceiving the masses by demagogic means and securing their consent to the bargains that the unions have made with the capitalists. And even the methods employed vary according to the conditions: rough and brutal in Germany, where the trade-union leaders have landed the workers with piece-work and longer working hours by means of coercion and cunning deception, subtle and refined in England, where the trade-union mandarins, like the government, give the appearance of allowing themselves to be reluctantly pushed on by the workers, while in reality they are sabotaging the latter's demands.

Marx' and Lenin's insistence that the way in which the state is organised precludes its use as an instrument of proletarian revolution, notwithstanding its democratic forms, must therefore also apply to the trade-union organisations. Their counter-revolutionary potential cannot be destroyed or diminished by a change of personnel, by the substitution of radical or 'revolutionary' leaders for reactionary ones. It is the form of the organisation that renders the masses all but impotent and prevents them making the trade union an organ of their will. The revolution can only be successful by destroying this organisation, that is to say so completely revolutionising its organisational structure that it

becomes something completely different. The soviet system, constructed from within, is not only capable of uprooting and abolishing the state bureaucracy, but the trade-union bureaucracy as well; it will form not only the new political organs to replace parliament, but also the basis of the new trade unions. The idea that a particular organisational form is revolutionary has been held up to scorn in the party disputes in Germany on the grounds that what counts is the revolutionary mentality of the members. But if the most important element of the revolution consists in the masses taking their own affairs – the management of society and production – in hand themselves, then any form of organisation which does not permit control and direction by the masses themselves is counter-revolutionary and harmful; and it should therefore be replaced by another form that *is* revolutionary in that it enables the workers themselves to determine everything actively. This is not to say that this form is to be set up within a still passive work-force in readiness for the revolutionary feeling of the workers to function within it in time to come: this new form of organisation can itself only be set up in the process of revolution, by workers making a revolutionary intervention. But recognition of the role played by the current form of organisation determines the attitude which the communists have to take with regard to the attempts already being made to weaken or burst this form.

Efforts to keep the bureaucratic apparatus as small as possible and to look to the activity of the masses for effectiveness have been particularly marked in the syndicalist movement, and even more so in the 'industrial' union movement. This is why so many communists have spoken out for support of these organisations against the central confederations. So long as capitalism remains intact, however, these new formations cannot take on any comprehensive role – the importance of the American IWW derives from particular circumstances, namely the existence of a numerous, unskilled proletariat largely of foreign extraction outside the old confederations. The Shop Committees movement and Shop Stewards movement in England are much closer to the soviet system, in that they are mass organs formed in opposition to the bureaucracy

in the course of struggle. The 'unions' in Germany are even more deliberately modelled on the idea of the soviet, but the stagnation of the revolution has left them weak. Every new formation of this type that weakens the central confederations and their inner cohesion removes an impediment to revolution and weakens the counter-revolutionary potential of the trade-union bureaucracy. The notion of keeping all oppositional and revolutionary forces together within the confederations in order for them eventually to take these organisations over as a majority and revolutionise them is certainly tempting. But in the first place, this is a vain hope, as fanciful as the related notion of taking over the Social-Democratic party, because the bureaucracy already knows how to deal with an opposition before it becomes too dangerous. And secondly, revolution does not proceed according to a smooth programme, but elemental outbreaks on the part of passionately active groups always play a particular role within it as a force driving it forward. If the communists were to defend the central confederations against such initiatives out of opportunistic considerations of temporary gain, they would reinforce the inhibitions which will later be their most formidable obstacle.

The formation by the workers of the soviets, their own organs of power and action, in itself signifies the disintegration and dissolution of the state. As a much more recent form of organisation and one created by the proletariat itself, the trade union will survive much longer, because it has its roots in a much more living tradition of personal experience, and once it has shaken off state-democratic illusions, will therefore claim a place in the conceptual world of the proletariat. But since the trade unions have emerged from the proletariat itself, as products of its own creative activity, it is in this field that we shall see the most new formations as continual attempts to adapt to new conditions; following the process of revolution, new forms of struggle and organisation will be built on the model of the soviets in a process of constant transformation and development.

## VI

The conception that revolution in Western Europe will take the form of an orderly siege of the fortress of capital which the proletariat, organised by the Communist Party into a disciplined army and using time-proven weapons, will repeatedly assault until the enemy surrenders is a neo-reformist perspective that certainly does not correspond to the conditions of struggle in the old capitalist countries. Here there may occur revolutions and conquests of power that quickly turn into defeat; the bourgeoisie will be able to reassert its domination, but this will result in even greater dislocation of the economy; transitional forms may arise which, because of their inadequacy, only prolong the chaos. Certain conditions must be fulfilled in any society for the social process of production and collective existence to be possible, and these relations acquire the firm hold of spontaneous habits and moral norms – sense of duty, industriousness, discipline: in the first instance, the process of revolution consists in a loosening of these old relations. Their decay is a necessary by-product of the dissolution of capitalism, while the new bonds corresponding to the communist reorganisation of work and society, the development of which we have witnessed in Russia, have yet to grow sufficiently strong. Thus, a transitional period of social and political chaos becomes inevitable. Where the proletariat is able to seize power rapidly and keep a firm hold upon it, as in Russia, the transitional period can be short and can be brought rapidly to a close by positive construction. But in Western Europe, the process of destruction will be much more drawn out. In Germany we see the working class split into groups in which this process has reached different stages, and which therefore cannot yet achieve unity in action. The symptoms of recent revolutionary movements indicate that the entire nation, and indeed, Central Europe as a whole, is dissolving, that the popular masses are fragmenting into separate strata and regions, with each acting on its own account: here the masses manage to arm themselves and more or less gain political power; elsewhere they paralyse the power of the bourgeoisie in strike movements; in a third place they shut themselves off as a peasant republic, and somewhere else they support white guards, or

perhaps toss aside the remnants of feudalism in primitive agrarian revolts – the destruction must obviously be thorough-going before we can begin to think of the real construction of communism. It cannot be the task of the Communist Party to act the schoolmaster in this upheaval and make vain attempts to truss it in a strait-jacket of traditional forms; its task is to support the forces of the proletarian movement everywhere, to connect the spontaneous actions together, to give them a broad idea of how they are related to one another, and thereby prepare the unification of the disparate actions and thus put itself at the head of the movement as a whole.

The first phase of the dissolution of capitalism is to be seen in those countries of the Entente where its hegemony is as yet unshaken; in an irresistible decline in production and in the value of their currencies, an increase in the frequency of strikes and a strong aversion to work among the proletariat. The second phase, the period of counter-revolution, i.e. the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie in the epoch of revolution, means complete economic collapse; we can study this best in Germany and the remainder of Central Europe. If a communist system had arisen immediately after the political revolution, organised reconstruction could have begun in spite of the Versailles and St Germain peace treaties, in spite of the poverty and the exhaustion. But the Ebert–Noske regime no more thought of organised reconstruction than did Renner and Bauer;<sup>8</sup> they gave the bourgeoisie a free hand, and saw their duty as consisting solely in the suppression of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, or rather each individual bourgeois, acted in a characteristically bourgeois manner; each of them thought only of making as much profit as possible and of rescuing for his personal use whatever could be saved from the cataclysm. It is true that there was talk in newspapers and manifestoes of the need to rebuild economic life by organised effort, but this was simply for the workers' consumption, fine phrases to conceal the fact that despite their exhaustion, they were under rigorous compulsion to work in the most intensive conditions possible. In reality, of course, not a single bourgeois concerned himself one jot with the general national interest, but only with his personal gain. At first, trade became the

principal means of self-enrichment, as it used to be in the old days; the depreciation of the currency provided the opportunity to export everything that was needed for economic expansion or even for the mere survival of the masses – raw materials, food, finished products, means of production, and after that, factories themselves and property. Racketeering reigned everywhere among the bourgeois strata, supported by unbridled corruption on the part of officialdom. And so all their former possessions and everything that was not to be surrendered as war reparations was packed off abroad by the ‘leaders of production’. Likewise in the domain of production, the private pursuit of profit intervened to wreck economic life by its total indifference towards the common welfare. In order to force piece-work and longer working hours upon proletarians or to get rid of rebellious elements among them, they were locked out and the factories set at a standstill, regardless of the stagnation caused throughout the rest of the industry as a consequence. On top of that came the incompetence of the bureaucratic management in the state enterprises, which degenerated into utter vacillation when the powerful hand of the government was missing. Restriction of production, the most primitive method of raising prices and one which competition would render impossible in a healthy capitalist economy, became respectable once more. In the stock-market reports capitalism seems to be flourishing again, but the high dividends are consuming the last remaining property and are themselves being frittered away on luxuries. What we have witnessed in Germany over the last year is not something out of the ordinary, but the functioning of the general class character of the bourgeoisie. Their only aim is, and always has been, personal profit, which in normal capitalism sustains production, but which brings about the total destruction of the economy as capitalism degenerates. And things will go the same way in other countries; once production has been dislocated beyond a certain point and the currency has depreciated sharply, then the complete collapse of the economy will result if the pursuit of private profit by the bourgeoisie is given free reign – and this is what the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie amounts to, whatever non-communist party it may hide behind.

The difficulties of the reconstruction facing the proletariat of Western Europe in these circumstances are far greater than they were in Russia – the subsequent destruction of industrial productive forces by Kolchak and Denikin is a pale shadow by comparison. Reconstruction cannot wait for a new political order to be set up, it must be begun in the very process of revolution by the proletariat taking over the organisation of production and abolishing the bourgeoisie's control over the material essentials of life wherever the proletariat gains power. Works councils can serve to keep an eye on the use of goods in the factories; but it is clear that this cannot prevent all the anti-social racketeering of the bourgeoisie. To do so, the most resolute utilisation of armed political power is necessary. Where the profiteers recklessly squander the national wealth without heed for the common good, where armed reaction blindly murders and destroys, the proletariat must intervene and fight with no half-measures in order to protect the common good and the life of the people.

The difficulties of reorganising a society that has been completely destroyed are so great that they appear insuperable before the event, and this makes it impossible to set up a programme for reconstruction in advance. But they must be overcome, and the proletariat will overcome them by the infinite self-sacrifice and commitment, the boundless power of soul and spirit and the tremendous psychological and moral energies which the revolution is able to awaken in its weakened and tortured frame.

At this point, a few problems may be touched on in passing. The question of technical cadres in industry will only give temporary difficulties: although their thinking is bourgeois through and through and they are deeply hostile to proletarian rule, they will nevertheless conform in the end. Getting commerce and industry moving will above all be a question of supplying raw materials; and this question coincides with that of food-stuffs. The question of food-supplies is central to the revolution in Western Europe, since the highly industrialised population cannot get by even under capitalism without imports from abroad. For the revolution, however, the question of food-supplies is intimately bound up with the whole agrarian

question, and the principles of communist regulation of agriculture must influence measures taken to deal with hunger even during the revolution. Junker estates and large-scale landed property are ripe for expropriation and collective exploitation; the small farmers will be freed from all capitalist oppression and encouraged to adopt methods of intensive cultivation through support and assistance of every kind from the state and co-operative arrangements; medium-scale farmers – who own half the land in Western and South-Western Germany, for example – have a strongly individualistic and hence anti-communist mentality, but their economic position is as yet unassailable: they cannot therefore be expropriated, and will have to be integrated into the sphere of the economic process as a whole through the exchange of products and the development of productivity, for it is only with communism that maximum productivity can be developed in agriculture and the individual enterprise introduced by capitalism transcended. It follows that the workers will see in the landowners a hostile class and in the rural workers and small farmers allies in the revolution, while they have no cause for making enemies of the middle farming strata, even though the latter may be of a hostile disposition towards them. This means that during the first period of chaos preceding the establishment of a system of exchanging products, requisitions must be carried out only as an emergency measure among these strata, as an absolutely unavoidable balancing operation between famine in the towns and in the country. The struggle against hunger will have to be dealt with primarily by imports from abroad. Soviet Russia, with her rich stocks of foodstuffs and raw materials, will thus save and provide for the revolution in Western Europe. The Western European working class thus has the highest and most personal interest in the defence and support of Soviet Russia.

The reconstruction of the economy, inordinately difficult as it will be, is not the main problem for the Communist Party. When the proletarian masses develop their intellectual and moral potential to the full, they will resolve it themselves. The prime duty of the Communist Party is to arouse and foster this potential. It must eradicate all the received ideas which leave the proletariat timid and

unsure of itself, set itself against everything that breeds illusions among the workers about easier courses and restrains them from the most radical measures, energetically oppose all the tendencies which stop short at half-measures or compromises. And there are still many such tendencies.

## VII

The transition from capitalism to communism will not proceed according to a simple schema of conquering political power, introducing the council system and then abolishing private commerce, even though this represents the broad outline of development. That would only be possible if one could undertake reconstruction in some sort of void. But out of capitalism there have grown forms of production and organisation which have firm roots in the consciousness of the masses, and which can themselves only be overthrown in a process of political and economic revolution. We have already mentioned the agrarian forms of production, which will have to follow a particular course of development. There have grown up in the working class under capitalism forms of organisation, different in detail from country to country, which represent a powerful force, which cannot immediately be abolished and which will thus play an important role in the course of the revolution.

This applies in the first instance to political parties. The role of social democracy in the present crisis of capitalism is sufficiently well known, but in Central Europe it has practically played itself out. Even its most radical sections, such as the USP in Germany, exercise a harmful influence, not only by splitting the proletariat, but above all by confusing the masses and restraining them from action with their social-democratic notions of political leaders directing the fate of the people by their deeds and dealings. And if the Communist Party constitutes itself into a parliamentary party which, instead of attempting to assert the dictatorship of the class, attempts to establish that of the party – that is to say the party leadership – then it too may become a hindrance to development. The attitude of the Communist Party of Germany during the revolutionary March movement, when it announced that the proletariat was not yet ripe

for dictatorship and that it would therefore encounter any 'genuinely socialist government' that might be formed as a 'loyal opposition', in other words restrain the proletariat from waging the fiercest revolutionary struggle against such a government, was itself criticised from many quarters.\*

A government of socialist party leaders may arise in the course of the revolution as a transitional form; this will be expressing a temporary balance between the revolutionary and bourgeois forces, and it will tend to freeze and perpetuate the temporary balance between the destruction of the old and the development of the new. It would be something like a more radical version of the Ebert–Haase–Dittmann regime;<sup>9</sup> and its basis shows what can be expected of it: a seeming balance of hostile classes, but under the preponderance of the bourgeoisie, a mixture of parliamentary democracy and a kind of council system for the workers, socialisation subject to the veto of the Entente powers' imperialism with the profits of capital being maintained, futile attempts to prevent classes clashing violently. It is always the workers who take a beating in such circumstances. Not only can a regime of this sort achieve nothing in terms of reconstruction, it does not even attempt to do so, since its only aim is to halt the revolution in mid-course. Since it attempts both to prevent the further disintegration of capitalism and also the development of the full political power of the proletariat, its effects are directly counter-revolutionary. Communists have no choice but to fight such regimes in the most uncompromising manner.

Just as in Germany the Social-Democratic Party was formerly the leading organisation of the proletariat, so in England the trade-union movement, in the course of almost a century of history, has put down the deepest roots in the working class. Here it has long been the ideal of the younger radical trade-union leaders – Robert Smillie is a typical example – for the working class to govern society by means of the trade-union organisation. Even the revolutionary

\* See, for example, the penetrating criticisms of Comrade Koloszvary in the Viennese weekly *Kommunismus*.

syndicalists and the spokesmen of the IWW in America, although affiliated to the Third International, imagine the future rule of the proletariat primarily along these lines. Radical trade-unionists see the soviet system not as the purest form of proletarian dictatorship, but rather as a regime of politicians and intellectuals built up on a base of working-class organisations. They see the trade-union movement, on the other hand, as the natural organisation of the proletariat, created by the proletariat, which governs itself within it and which will go on to govern the whole of the work-process. Once the old ideal of 'industrial democracy' has been realised and the trade union is master in the factory, its collective organ, the trade-union congress, will take over the function of guiding and managing the economy as a whole. It will then be the real 'parliament of labour' and replace the old bourgeois parliament of parties. These circles often shrink from a one-sided and 'unfair' class dictatorship as an infringement of democracy, however; labour is to rule, but others are not to be without rights. Therefore, in addition to the labour parliament, which governs work, the basis of life, a second house could be elected by universal suffrage to represent the whole nation and exercise its influence on public and cultural matters and questions of general political concern.

This conception of government by the trade unions should not be confused with 'labourism', the politics of the 'Labour Party', which is currently led by trade-unionists. This latter stands for the penetration of the bourgeois parliament of today by the trade unions, who will build a 'workers' party' on the same footing as other parties with the objective of becoming the party of government in their place. This party is completely bourgeois, and there is little to choose between Henderson and Ebert. It will give the English bourgeoisie the opportunity to continue its old policies on a broader basis as soon as the threat of pressure from below makes this necessary, and hence weaken and confuse the workers by taking their leaders into the government. A government of the workers' party, something which seemed imminent a year ago when the masses were in so revolutionary a mood, but which the leaders themselves have put back into the distant future by holding the radical current down,

would, like the Ebert regime in Germany, have been nothing but government on behalf of the bourgeoisie. But it remains to be seen whether the far-sighted, subtle English bourgeoisie does not trust itself to stultify and suppress the masses more effectively than these working-class bureaucrats.

A genuine trade-union government as conceived by the radicals is as unlike this workers' party politics, this 'labourism', as revolution is unlike reform. Only a real revolution in political relationships – whether violent or in keeping with the old English models – could bring it about; and in the eyes of the broad masses, it would represent the conquest of power by the proletariat. But it is nevertheless quite different from the goal of communism. It is based on the limited ideology which develops in trade-union struggles, where one does not confront world capital as a whole in all its interwoven forms – finance capital, bank capital, agricultural capital, colonial capital – but only its industrial form. It is based on marxist economics, now being eagerly studied in the English working class, which show production to be a mechanism of exploitation, but without the deeper marxist social theory, historical materialism. It recognises that work constitutes the basis of the world and thus wants labour to rule the world; but it does not see that all the abstract spheres of political and intellectual life are determined by the mode of production, and it is therefore disposed to leave them to the bourgeois intelligentsia, provided that the latter recognises the primacy of labour. Such a workers' regime would in reality be a government of the trade-union bureaucracy complemented by the radical section of the old state bureaucracy, which it would leave in charge of the specialist fields of culture, politics and such like on the grounds of their special competence in these matters. It is obvious that its economic programme will not coincide with communist expropriation, but will only go so far as the expropriation of big capital, while the 'honest' profits of the smaller entrepreneur, hitherto fleeced and kept in subjection by this big capital, will be spared. It is even open to doubt whether they will take up the standpoint of complete freedom for India, an integral element of the communist programme, on the colonial question, this life-nerve of the ruling class of England.

It cannot be predicted in what manner, to what degree and with what purity a political form of this kind will be realised. The English bourgeoisie has always understood the art of using well-timed concessions to check movement towards revolutionary objectives; how far it is able to continue this tactic in the future will depend primarily on the depth of the economic crisis. If trade-union discipline is eroded from below by uncontrollable industrial revolts and communism simultaneously gains a hold on the masses, then the radical and reformist trade-unionists will agree on a common line; if the struggle goes sharply against the old reformist politics of the leaders, the radical trade-unionists and the communists will go hand in hand.

These tendencies are not confined to England. The trade unions are the most powerful workers' organisations in every country; as soon as a political clash topples the old state power, it will inevitably fall into the hands of the best organised and most influential force on hand. In Germany in November 1918, the trade-union executives formed the counter-revolutionary guard behind Ebert; and in the recent March crisis, they entered the political arena in an attempt to gain direct influence upon the composition of the government. The only purpose of this support for the Ebert regime was to deceive the proletariat the more subtly with the fraud of a 'government under the control of the workers' organisations'. But it shows that the same tendency exists here as in England. And even if the Legiens and Bauers<sup>10</sup> are too tainted by counter-revolution, new radical trade-unionists from the USP tendency will take their place – just as last year the Independents under Dissmann won the leadership of the great metalworkers' federation. If a revolutionary movement overthrows the Ebert regime, this tightly organised force of seven million will doubtless be ready to seize power, in conjunction with the CP or in opposition to it.

A 'government of the working class' along these lines by the trade unions cannot be stable; although it may be able to hold its own for a long time during a slow process of economic decline, in an acute revolutionary crisis it will only be able to survive as a tottering transitional phenomenon. Its programme, as we have outlined above, cannot be radical. But a current which will sanction such

measures not, like communism, as a temporary transitional form at most to be deliberately utilised for the purpose of building up a communist organisation, but as a definitive programme, must necessarily come into conflict with and antagonism towards the masses. Firstly, because it does not render bourgeois elements completely powerless, but grants them a certain position of power in the bureaucracy and perhaps in parliament, from which they can continue to wage the class struggle. The bourgeoisie will endeavour to consolidate these positions of strength, while the proletariat, because it cannot annihilate the hostile class under these conditions, must attempt to establish a straightforward soviet system as the organ of its dictatorship; in this battle between two mighty opponents, economic reconstruction will be impossible.\* And secondly, because a government of trade-union leaders of this kind cannot resolve the problems which society is posing; for the latter can only be resolved through the proletarian masses' own initiative and activity, fuelled by the self-sacrificing and unbounded enthusiasm which only communism, with all its perspectives of total freedom and supreme intellectual and moral elevation, can command. A current which seeks to abolish material poverty and exploitation, but deliberately confines itself to this goal, which leaves the bourgeois superstructure intact and at the same time holds back from revolutionising the mental outlook and ideology of the proletariat, cannot release these great energies in the masses; and so it will be incapable of resolving the material problems of initiating economic expansion and ending the chaos.

The trade-union regime will attempt to consolidate and stabilise the prevailing level of the revolutionary process, just like the 'genuinely socialist' regime – except that it will do so at a much more

\* The absence of obvious and intimidating methods of coercion in the hands of the bourgeoisie in England also inspires the pacifist illusion that violent revolution is not necessary there and that peaceful construction from below, as in the Guild movement and the Shop Committees, will take care of everything. It is certainly true that the most potent weapon of the English bourgeoisie has until now been subtle deception rather than armed force; but if put to it, this world-dominating class will not fail to summon up terrible means to enforce its rule.

developed stage, when the primacy of the bourgeoisie has been destroyed and a certain balance of class power has arisen with the proletariat predominant; when the entire profit of capital can no longer be saved, but only its less repellent petty-capitalist form; when it is no longer bourgeois but socialist expansion that is being attempted, albeit with insufficient resources. It thus signifies the last stand of the bourgeois class: when the bourgeoisie can no longer withstand the assault of the masses on the Scheidemann–Henderson–Renaudel line, it falls back to its last line of defence, the Smillie–Dissman–Merrheim line.<sup>11</sup> When it is no longer able to deceive the proletariat by having ‘workers’ in a bourgeois or socialist regime, it can only attempt to keep the proletariat from its ultimate radical goals by a ‘government of workers’ organisations’ and thus in part retain its privileged position. Such a government is counter-revolutionary in nature, in so far as it seeks to arrest the necessary development of the revolution towards the total destruction of the bourgeois world and prevent total communism from attaining its greatest and clearest objectives. The struggle of the communists may at present often run parallel with that of the radical trade-unionists; but it would be dangerous tactics not to clearly identify the differences of principle and objective when this happens. And these considerations also bear upon the attitude of the communists towards the trade-union confederations of today; everything which consolidates their unity and strength consolidates the force which will one day put itself in the way of the onward march of the revolution.

When communism conducts a strong and principled struggle against this transitional political form, it represents the living revolutionary tendencies in the proletariat. The same revolutionary action on the part of the proletariat which prepares the way for the rule of a worker-bureaucracy by smashing the apparatus of bourgeois power simultaneously drives the masses on to form their own organs, the councils, which immediately undermine the basis of the bureaucratic trade unions’ machinery. The development of the soviet system is at the same time the struggle of the proletariat to replace the incomplete form of its dictatorship by complete

dictatorship. But with the intensive labour which all the never-ending attempts to 'reorganise' the economy will demand, a leadership bureaucracy will be able to retain great power for a long time, and the masses' capacity to get rid of it will only develop slowly. These various forms and phases of the process of development do not, moreover, follow on in the abstract, logical succession in which we have set them down as degrees of maturation: they all occur at the same time, become entangled and coexist in a chaos of tendencies that complement each other, combat each other and dissolve each other, and it is through this struggle that the general development of the revolution proceeds. As Marx himself put it:

Proletarian revolutions constantly criticise themselves, continually interrupt themselves in the course of their own development, come back to the seemingly complete in order to start it all over again, treat the inadequacies of their own first attempts with cruelly radical contempt, seem only to throw their adversaries down to enable them to draw new strength from the earth and rise up again to face them all the more gigantic.

The resistances which issue from the proletariat itself as expressions of weakness must be overcome in order for it to develop its full strength; and this process of development is generated by conflict, it proceeds from crisis to crisis, driven on by struggle. In the beginning was the deed, but it was only the beginning. It demands an instant of united purpose to overthrow a ruling class, but only the lasting unity conferred by clear insight can keep a firm grasp upon victory. Otherwise there comes the reverse which is not a return to the old rulers, but a new hegemony in a new form, with new personnel and new illusions. Each new phase of the revolution brings a new layer of as yet unused leaders to the surface as the representatives of particular forms of organisation, and the overthrow of each of these in turn represents a higher stage in the proletariat's self-emancipation. The strength of the proletariat is not merely the raw power of the single violent act which throws the enemy down, but also the strength of mind which breaks the old mental dependence and thus succeeds in keeping a tight hold on what has been seized by

storm. The growth of this strength in the ebb and flow of revolution is the growth of proletarian freedom.

### VIII

In Western Europe, capitalism is in a state of progressive collapse; yet in Russia, despite the terrible difficulties, production is being built up under a new order. The hegemony of communism does not mean that production is completely based on a communist order – this latter is only possible after a relatively lengthy process of development – but that the working class is consciously developing the system of production towards communism.\* This development cannot at any point go beyond what the prevailing technical and social foundations permit, and therefore it inevitably manifests transitional forms in which vestiges of the old bourgeois world appear. According to what we have heard of the situation in Russia here in Western Europe, such vestiges do indeed exist there.

Russia is an enormous peasant land; industry there has not developed to the unnatural extent of a ‘workshop’ of the world as it has in Western Europe, making export and expansion a question of life and death, but just sufficiently for the formation of a working class able to take over the government of society as a developed class. Agriculture is the occupation of the popular masses, and modern, large-scale farms are in a minority, although they play a valuable role in the development of communism. It is the small units that make up the majority: not the wretched, exploited little properties of Western Europe, but farms which secure the welfare of the peasants and which the soviet regime is seeking to integrate more and more closely into the system as a whole by means of material assistance in the form of extra equipment and tools and by intensive cultural and specialist education. It is nevertheless natural that this form of enterprise generates a certain spirit of individualism alien to

\* This conception of the gradual transformation of the mode of production stands in sharp contrast to the social-democratic conception, which seeks to abolish capitalism and exploitation gradually by a slow process of reform. The direct abolition of all profit on capital and of all exploitation by the victorious proletariat is the precondition of the mode of production being able to move towards communism.

communism, which, among the 'rich peasants', has become a hostile, resolutely anti-communist frame of mind. The Entente has doubtless speculated on this in its proposals to trade with co-operatives, intending to initiate a bourgeois counter-movement by drawing these strata into bourgeois pursuit of profit. But because fear of feudal reaction binds them to the present regime as their major interest, such efforts must come to nothing, and when Western European imperialism collapses this danger will disappear completely.

Industry is predominantly a centrally organised, exploitation-free system of production; it is the heart of the new order, and the leadership of the state is based on the industrial proletariat. But even this system of production is in a transitional phase; the technical and administrative cadres in the factories and in the state apparatus exercise greater authority than is commensurate with developed communism. The need to increase production quickly and the even more urgent need to create an efficient army to fend off the attacks of reaction made it imperative to make good the lack of reliable leaders in the shortest possible time; the threat of famine and the assaults of the enemy did not permit all resources to be directed towards a more gradual raising of the general level of competence and to the development of all as the basis of a collective communist system. Thus a new bureaucracy inevitably arose from the new leaders and functionaries, absorbing the old bureaucracy into itself. This is at times regarded with some anxiety as a peril to the new order, and it can only be removed by a broad development of the masses. Although the latter is being undertaken with the utmost energy, only the communist surplus by which man ceases to be the slave of his labour will form a lasting foundation for it. Only surplus creates the material conditions for freedom and equality; so long as the struggle against nature and against the forces of capital remains intense, an inordinate degree of specialisation will remain necessary.

It is worth noting that although our analysis predicts that development in Western Europe will take a different direction from that of Russia insofar as we can foresee the course which it will follow as the revolution progresses, both manifest the same politico-economic structure: industry run according to communist principles

with workers' councils forming the element of self-management under the technical direction and political hegemony of a worker-bureaucracy, while agriculture retains an individualistic, petty-bourgeois character in the dominant small and medium-scale sectors. But this coincidence is not so extraordinary for all that, in that this kind of social structure is determined not by previous political history, but by basic technico-economic conditions – the level of development attained by industrial and agricultural technology and the formation of the proletarian masses – which are in both cases the same.\* But despite this coincidence, there is a great difference in significance and goal. In Western Europe this politico-economic structure forms a transitional stage at which the bourgeoisie is ultimately able to arrest its decline, whereas in Russia the attempt is consciously being made to pursue development further in a communist direction. In Western Europe, it forms a phase in the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in Russia a phase in the new economic expansion. With the same external forms, Western Europe is on the downward path of a declining culture, Russia on the rising movement of a new culture.

While the Russian revolution was still young and weak and was looking to an imminent outbreak of revolution in Europe to save it, a different conception of its significance reigned. Russia, it was then maintained, was only an outpost of the revolution where favourable circumstances had enabled the proletariat to seize power so early; but this proletariat was weak and unformed and almost swallowed up in the infinite masses of the peasantry. The proletariat of economically backward Russia could only make temporary advances; as soon as the great masses of the fully-fledged Western European proletariat came to power in the most developed industrial countries, with all their technical and organisational experience and their ancient wealth of culture, then we should see communism flourish to an extent that would make the Russian contribution,

\* A prominent example of this kind of convergent development is to be found in the social structure at the end of ancient times and the beginning of the Middle Ages; cf. Engels, *Origins of the Family*, Ch. 8.

welcome as it was, seem weak and inadequate by comparison. The heart and strength of the new communist world lay where capitalism had reached the height of its power, in England, in Germany, in America, and laid the basis for the new mode of production.

This conception takes no account of the difficulties facing the revolution in Western Europe. Where the proletariat only slowly gains firm control and the bourgeoisie is upon occasion able to win back power in part or in whole, nothing can come of economic reconstruction. Capitalist expansion is impossible; every time the bourgeoisie obtains a free hand, it creates new chaos and destroys the bases which could have served for the construction of communist production. Again and again it prevents the consolidation of the new proletarian order by bloody reaction and destruction. This occurred even in Russia: the destruction of industrial installations and mines in the Urals and the Donetz basin by Kolchak and Denikin, as well as the need to deploy the best workers and the greater part of the productive forces against them, was a serious blow to the economy and damaged and delayed communist expansion – and even though the initiation of trade relations with America and the West may considerably favour a new upturn, the greatest, most self-sacrificing effort will be needed on the part of the masses in Russia to achieve complete recovery from this damage. But – and herein lies the difference – the soviet republic has remained intact in Russia as an organised centre of communist power which has already developed tremendous internal stability. In Western Europe there will be just as much destruction and murder, here too the best forces of the proletariat will be wiped out in the course of the struggle, but here we lack an already consolidated, organised soviet state that could serve as a source of strength. The classes are wearing each other out in a devastating civil war, and so long as construction comes to nothing, chaos and misery will continue to rule. This will be the lot of countries where the proletariat does not immediately recognise its task with clear insight and united purpose, that is to say where bourgeois traditions weaken and split the workers, dim their eyes and subdue their hearts. It will take decades to overcome the infectious, paralysing influence of bourgeois culture upon the

proletariat in the old capitalist countries. And meanwhile, production lies in ruins and the country degenerates into an economic desert.

At the same time as Western Europe, stagnating economically, painfully struggles with its bourgeois past, in the East, in Russia, the economy is flourishing under a communist order. What used to distinguish the developed capitalist countries from the backward East was the tremendous sophistication of their material and mental means of production – a dense network of railways, factories, ships, and a dense, technically skilled population. But during the collapse of capitalism, in the long civil war, in the period of stagnation when too little is being produced, this heritage is being dissipated, used up or destroyed. The indestructible forces of production, science, technical capabilities, are not tied to these countries; their bearers will find a new homeland in Russia, where trade will also provide a sanctuary for part of Europe's material and technical riches. Soviet Russia's trade agreement with Western Europe and America will, if taken seriously and operated with a will, tend to accentuate this contradiction, because it furthers the economic expansion of Russia while delaying collapse in Western Europe, thus giving capitalism a breathing space and paralysing the revolutionary potential of the masses – for how long and to what extent remains to be seen. Politically, this will be expressed in an apparent stabilisation of a bourgeois regime or one of the other types discussed above and in a simultaneous rise to power of opportunist tendencies within communism; by recognising the old methods of struggle and engaging in parliamentary activity and loyal opposition within the old trade unions, the communist parties in Western Europe will acquire a legal status, like social democracy before them, and in the face of this, the radical, revolutionary current will see itself forced into a minority. However, it is entirely improbable that capitalism will enjoy a real new flowering; the private interests of the capitalists trading with Russia will not defer to the economy as a whole, and for the sake of profit they will ship off essential basic elements of production to Russia; nor can the proletariat again be brought into a state of dependence. Thus the crisis will drag on; lasting

improvement is impossible and will continually be arrested; the process of revolution and civil war will be delayed and drawn out, the complete rule of communism and the beginning of new growth put off into the distant future. Meanwhile, in the East, the economy will develop untrammelled in a powerful upsurge, and new paths will be opened up on the basis of the most advanced natural science – which the West is incapable of exploiting – together with the new social science, humanity's newly won control over its own social forces. And these forces, increased a hundredfold by the new energies flowing from freedom and equality, will make Russia the centre of the new communist world order.

This will not be the first time in world history that the centre of the civilised world has shifted in the transition to a new mode of production or one of its phases. In antiquity, it moved from the Middle East to Southern Europe, in the Middle Ages, from Southern to Western Europe; with the rise of colonial and merchant capital, first Spain, then Holland and England became the leading nation, and with the rise of industry England. The cause of these shifts can in fact be embraced in a general historical principle: where the earlier economic form reached its highest development, the material and mental forces, the politico-juridical institutions which secured its existence and which were necessary for its full development, were so strongly constructed that they offered almost insuperable resistance to the development of new forms. Thus, the institution of slavery inhibited the development of feudalism at the twilight of antiquity; thus, the guild laws applying in the great wealthy cities of medieval times meant that later capitalist manufacturing could only develop in other centres hitherto insignificant; thus in the late eighteenth century, the political order of French absolutism which had fostered industry under Colbert obstructed the introduction of the large-scale industry that made England a manufacturing nation. There even exists a corresponding law in organic nature, a corollary to Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' known as the law of the 'survival of the unfitted': when a species of animal has become specialised and differentiated into a wealth of forms all perfectly adapted to particular conditions of life in that period – like the Saurians in the

Secondary Era – it becomes incapable of evolving into a new species; all the various options for adaptation and development have been lost and cannot be retrieved. The development of a new species proceeds from primitive forms which, because they have remained undifferentiated, have retained all their potential for development, and the old species which is incapable of further adaptation dies out. The phenomenon whereby leadership in economic, political and cultural development continually shifts from one people or nation to another in the course of human history – explained away by bourgeois science with the fantasy of a nation or race having ‘exhausted its life-force’ – is a particular incidence of this organic rule.

We now see why it is that the primacy of Western Europe and America – which the bourgeoisie is pleased to attribute to the intellectual and moral superiority of their race – will evaporate, and where we can foresee it shifting to. New countries, where the masses are not poisoned by the fug of a bourgeois ideology, where the beginnings of industrial development have raised the mind from its former slumber and a communist sense of solidarity has awoken, where the raw materials are available to use the most advanced technology inherited from capitalism for a renewal of the traditional forms of production, where oppression elicits the development of the qualities fostered by struggle, but where no over-powerful bourgeoisie can obstruct this process of regeneration – it is such countries that will be the centres of the new communist world. Russia, itself half a continent when taken in conjunction with Siberia, already stands first in line. But these conditions are also present to a greater or lesser extent in other countries of the East, in India, in China. Although there may be other sources of immaturity, these Asian countries must not be overlooked in considering the communist world revolution.

This world revolution is not seen in its full universal significance if considered only from the Western European perspective. Russia not only forms the eastern part of Europe, it is much more the western part of Asia, and not only in a geographical, but also in a politico-economic sense. The old Russia had little in common with Europe: it was the westernmost of those politico-

economic structures which Marx termed 'oriental despotic powers', and which included all the great empires of ancient and modern Asia. Based on the village communism of a largely homogeneous peasantry, there evolved within these an absolute rule by princes and the nobility, which also drew support from relatively small-scale but nevertheless important trade in craft goods. Into this mode of production, which, despite superficial changes of ruler, had gone on reproducing itself in the same way for thousands of years, Western European capital penetrated from all sides, dissolving, fermenting, undermining, exploiting, impoverishing; by trade, by direct subjection and plunder, by exploitation of natural riches, by the construction of railways and factories, by state loans to the princes, by the export of food and raw materials – all of which is encompassed in the term 'colonial policy'. Whereas India, with its enormous riches, was conquered early, plundered and then proletarianised and industrialised, it was only later, through modern colonial policy, that other countries fell prey to developed capital. Although on the surface Russia had played the role of a great European power since 1700, it too became a colony of European capital; due to direct military contact with Europe it went earlier and more precipitately the way that Persia and China were subsequently to go. Before the last world war 70 per cent of the iron industry, the greater part of the railways, 90 per cent of platinum production and 75 per cent of the naphtha industry were in the hands of European capitalists, and through the enormous national debts of tsarism, the latter also exploited the Russian peasantry past the point of starvation. While the working class in Russia worked under the same conditions as those of Western Europe, with the result that a body of revolutionary marxist views developed, Russia's entire economic situation nevertheless made it the westernmost of the Asiatic empires.

The Russian revolution is the beginning of the great revolt by Asia against the Western European capital concentrated in England. As a rule, we in Western Europe only consider the effects which it has here, where the advanced theoretical development of the Russian revolutionaries has made them the teachers of the proletariat as it

reaches towards communism. But its workings in the East are more important still; and Asian questions therefore influence the policies of the soviet republic almost more than European questions. The call for freedom and for the self-determination of all peoples and for struggle against European capital throughout Asia is going out from Moscow, where delegations from Asiatic tribes are arriving one after another.\* The threads lead from the soviet republic of Turan to India and the Moslem countries; in Southern China the revolutionaries have sought to follow the example of government by soviets; the pan-Islamic movement developing in the Middle East under the leadership of Turkey is trying to connect with Russia. This is where the significance of the world struggle between Russia and England as the exponents of two social systems lies; and this struggle cannot therefore end in real peace, despite temporary pauses, for the process of ferment in Asia is continuing. English politicians who look a little further ahead than the petty-bourgeois demagogue Lloyd George clearly see the danger here threatening English domination of the world, and with it the whole of capitalism; they rightly say that Russia is more dangerous than Germany ever was. But they cannot act forcefully, for the beginnings of revolutionary development in the English proletariat do not permit any regime other than one of bourgeois demagoguery.

The interests of Asia are in essence the interests of the human race. Eight hundred million people live in Russia, China and India, in the Sibero-Russian plain and the fertile valleys of the Ganges and the Yangtse Kiang, more than half the population of the earth and almost three times as many as in the part of Europe under capitalist domination. And the seeds of revolution have appeared everywhere,

\* This is the basis of the stand taken by Lenin in 1916 at the time of Zimmerwald against Radek, who was representing the view of Western European communists. The latter insisted that the slogan of the right of all peoples to self-determination, which the social patriots had taken up along with Wilson, was merely a deception, since this right can only ever be an appearance and illusion under imperialism, and that we should therefore oppose this slogan. Lenin saw in this standpoint the tendency of Western European socialists to reject the Asiatic peoples' wars of national liberation, thus avoiding radical struggle against the colonial policies of their governments.

besides Russia; on the one hand, powerful strike-movements flaring up where industrial proletarians are huddled together, as in Bombay and Hankow; on the other, nationalist movements under the leadership of the rising national intelligentsia. As far as can be judged from the reticent English press, the world war was a powerful stimulus to national movements, but then suppressed them forcefully, while industry is in such an upsurge that gold is flowing in torrents from America to East Asia. When the wave of economic crisis hits these countries – it seems to have overtaken Japan already – new struggles can be expected. The question may be raised as to whether purely nationalist movements seeking a national capitalist order in Asia should be supported, since they will be hostile to their own proletarian liberation movements; but development will clearly not take this course. It is true that until now the rising intelligentsia has orientated itself in terms of European nationalism and, as the ideologues of the developing indigenous bourgeoisie, advocated a national bourgeois government on Western lines; but this idea is paling with the decline of Europe, and they will doubtless come strongly under the intellectual sway of Russian bolshevism and find in it the means to fuse with the proletarian strike-movements and uprisings. Thus, the national liberation movements of Asia will perhaps adopt a communist world view and a communist programme on the firm material ground of the workers' and peasants' class struggle against the barbaric oppression of world capital sooner than external appearances might lead us to believe.

The fact that these peoples are predominantly agrarian need be no more of an obstacle than it was in Russia: communist communities will not consist of tightly-packed huddles of factory towns, for the capitalist division between industrial and agricultural nations will cease to exist; agriculture will have to take up a great deal of space within them. The predominant agricultural character will nevertheless render the revolution more difficult, since the mental disposition is less favourable under such conditions. Doubtless a prolonged period of intellectual and political upheaval will also be necessary in these countries. The difficulties here are different from those in Europe, less of an active than of a passive nature: they lie

less in the strength of the resistance than in the slow pace at which activity is awakening, not in overcoming internal chaos, but in developing the unity to drive out the foreign exploiter. We will not go into the particulars of these difficulties here – the religious and national fragmentation of India, the petty-bourgeois character of China. However the political and economic forms continue to develop, the central problem which must first be overcome is to destroy the hegemony of European and American capital.

The hard struggle for the annihilation of capitalism is the common task which the workers of Western Europe and the USA have to accomplish hand-in-hand with the vast populations of Asia. We are at present only at the beginning of this process. When the German revolution takes a decisive turn and connects with Russia, when revolutionary mass struggles break out in England and America, when revolt flares up in India, when communism pushes its frontiers forward to the Rhine and the Indian Ocean, then the world revolution will enter into its next mighty phase. With its vassals in the League of Nations and its American and Japanese allies, the world-ruling English bourgeoisie, assaulted from within and without, its world power threatened by colonial rebellions and wars of liberation, paralysed internally by strikes and civil war, will have to exert all its strength and raise mercenary armies against both enemies. When the English working class, backed up by the rest of the European proletariat, attacks its bourgeoisie, it will fight doubly for communism, clearing the way for communism in England and helping to free Asia. And conversely, it will be able to count on the support of the main communist forces when armed hirelings of the bourgeoisie seek to drown its struggle in blood – for Western Europe and the islands off its coast are only a peninsula projecting from the great Russo-Asian complex of lands. The common struggle against capital will unite the proletarian masses of the whole world. And when finally, at the end of the arduous struggle, the European workers, deeply exhausted, stand in the clear morning light of freedom, they will greet the liberated peoples of Asia in the East and shake hands in Moscow, the capital of the new humanity.

## **Afterword to World Revolution and Communist Tactics**

The above theses were written in April and sent off to Russia to be available for consideration by the executive committee and the congress in making their tactical decisions. The situation has meanwhile altered, in that the executive committee in Moscow and the leading comrades in Russia have come down completely on the side of opportunism, with the result that this tendency prevailed at the Second Congress of the Communist International.

The policy in question first made its appearance in Germany, when Radek, using all the ideological and material influence that he and the KPD leadership could muster, attempted to impose his tactics of parliamentarianism and support for the central confederations upon the German communists, thereby splitting and weakening the communist movement. Since Radek was made secretary of the executive committee this policy has become that of the entire executive committee. The previously unsuccessful efforts to secure the affiliation of the German Independents to Moscow have been redoubled, while the anti-parliamentarian communists of the KAPD, who, it can hardly be denied, by rights belong to the CI, have received frosty treatment: they had opposed the Third International on every issue of importance, it was maintained, and could only be admitted upon special conditions. The Amsterdam Auxiliary Bureau, which had accepted them and treated them as equals, was closed down. Lenin told the English communists that they should not only participate in parliamentary elections, but even join the Labour Party, a political organisation consisting largely of reactionary trade-union leaders and a member of the Second International. All these stands manifest the desire of the leading Russian comrades to establish contact with the big workers' organisations of Western Europe that have yet to turn communist. While radical communists

seek to further the revolutionary development of the working masses by means of rigorous, principled struggle against all bourgeois, social-patriotic and vacillating tendencies and their representatives, the leadership of the International is attempting to gain the adherence of the latter to Moscow in droves without their having first to cast off their old perspectives.

The antagonistic stance which the Bolsheviki, whose deeds made them exponents of radical tactics in the past, have taken up towards the radical communists of Western Europe comes out clearly in Lenin's recently-published pamphlet '*Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. Its significance lies not in its content, but in the person of the author, for the arguments are scarcely original and have for the most part already been used by others. What is new is that it is Lenin who is now taking them up. The point is therefore not to combat them – their fallacy resides mainly in the equation of the conditions, parties, organisations and parliamentary practice of Western Europe with their Russian counterparts – and oppose other arguments to them, but to grasp the fact of their appearance in this conjuncture as the product of specific policies.

The basis of these policies can readily be identified in the needs of the Soviet republic. The reactionary insurgents Kolchak and Denikin have destroyed the foundations of the Russian iron industry, and the war effort has forestalled a powerful upsurge in production. Russia urgently needs machines, locomotives and tools for economic reconstruction, and only the undamaged industry of the capitalist countries can provide these. It therefore needs peaceful trade with the rest of the world, and in particular with the nations of the Entente; they in their turn need raw materials and food-stuffs from Russia to stave off the collapse of capitalism. The sluggish pace of revolutionary development in Western Europe thus compels the Soviet republic to seek a *modus vivendi* with the capitalist world, to surrender a portion of its natural wealth as the price of doing so, and to renounce direct support for revolution in other countries. In itself there can be no objection to an arrangement of this kind, which both parties recognise to be necessary; but it would hardly be surprising if

the sense of constraint and the initiation of a policy of compromise with the bourgeois world were to foster a mental disposition towards more moderate perspectives. The Third International, as the association of communist parties preparing proletarian revolution in every country, is not formally bound by the policies of the Russian government, and it is supposed to pursue its own tasks completely independent of the latter. In practice, however, this separation does not exist; just as the CP is the backbone of the Soviet republic, the executive committee is intimately connected with the Praesidium of the Soviet republic through the persons of its members, thus forming an instrument whereby this Praesidium intervenes in the politics of Western Europe. We can now see why the tactics of the Third International, laid down by Congress to apply homogeneously to all capitalist countries and to be directed from the centre, are determined not only by the needs of communist agitation in those countries, but also by the political needs of Soviet Russia.

Now, it is true that England and Russia, the hostile world powers respectively representing capital and labour, both need peaceful trade in order to build up their economies. However, it is not only immediate economic needs which determine their policies, but also the deeper economic antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the question of the future, expressed in the fact that powerful capitalist groups, rightly hostile to the Soviet republic, are attempting to prevent any compromise as a matter of principle. The Soviet government knows that it cannot rely upon the insight of Lloyd George and England's need for peace; they had to bow to the insuperable might of the Red Army on the one hand and to the pressure which English workers and soldiers were exerting upon their government on the other. The Soviet government knows that the menace of the Entente proletariat is one of the most important of its weapons in paralysing the imperialist governments and compelling them to negotiate. It must therefore render this weapon as powerful as possible. What this requires is not a radical communist party preparing a root-and-branch revolution for the future, but a great organised proletarian force which will take the part of Russia and oblige its own government to pay it heed. The

Soviet government needs the masses now, even if they are not fully communist. If it can gain them for itself, their adhesion to Moscow will be a sign to world capital that wars of annihilation against Russia are no longer possible, and that there is therefore no alternative to peace and trade relations.

Moscow must therefore press for communist tactics in Western Europe which do not conflict sharply with the traditional perspectives and methods of the big labour organisations, the influence of which is decisive. Similarly, efforts had to be made to replace the Ebert regime in Germany with one oriented towards the East, since it had shown itself to be a tool of the Entente against Russia; and as the CP was itself too weak, only the Independents could serve this purpose. A revolution in Germany would enormously strengthen the position of Soviet Russia *vis-à-vis* the Entente. The development of such a revolution, however, might ultimately be highly incommodious as far as the policy of peace and compromise with the Entente was concerned, for a radical proletarian revolution would tear up the Versailles Treaty and renew the war – the Hamburg communists wanted to make active preparations for this war in advance. Russia would then itself be drawn into this war, and even though it would be strengthened externally in the process, economic reconstruction and the abolition of poverty would be still further delayed. These consequences could be avoided if the German revolution could be kept within bounds such that although the strength of the workers' governments allied against Entente capital was greatly increased, the latter was not put in the position of having to go to war. This would demand not the radical tactics of the KAPD, but government by the Independents, KPD and trade unions in the form of a council organisation on the Russian model.

This policy does have perspectives beyond merely securing a more favourable position for the current negotiations with the Entente: its goal is world revolution. It is nevertheless apparent that a particular conception of world revolution must be implicit in the particular character of these politics. The revolution which is now advancing across the world and which will shortly overtake Central

Europe and then Western Europe is driven on by the economic collapse of capitalism; if capital is unable to bring about an upturn in production, the masses will be obliged to turn to revolution as the only alternative to going under without a struggle. But although compelled to turn to revolution, the masses are by and large still in a state of mental servitude to the old perspectives, the old organisations and leaders, and it is the latter who will obtain power in the first instance. A distinction must therefore be made between the external revolution which destroys the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and renders capitalism impossible, and the communist revolution, a longer process which revolutionises the masses internally and in which the working class, emancipating itself from all its bonds, takes the construction of communism firmly in hand. It is the task of communism to identify the forces and tendencies which will halt the revolution half-way, to show the masses the way forward, and by the bitterest struggle for the most distant goals, for total power, against these tendencies, to awaken in the proletariat the capacity to impel the revolution onward. This it can only do by even now taking up the struggle against the inhibiting leadership tendencies and the power of its leaders. Opportunism seeks to ally itself with the leaders and share in a new hegemony; believing it can sway them on to the path of communism, it will be compromised by them. By declaring this to be the official tactics of communism, the Third International is setting the seal of 'communist revolution' on the seizure of power by the old organisations and their leaders, consolidating the hegemony of these leaders and obstructing the further progress of the revolution.

From the point of view of safeguarding Soviet Russia there can be no objection to this conception of the goal of world revolution. If a political system similar to that of Russia existed in the other countries of Europe – control by a workers' bureaucracy based on a council system – the power of world imperialism would be broken and contained, at least in Europe. Economic build-up towards communism could then go ahead without fear of reactionary wars of intervention in a Russia surrounded by friendly workers' republics. It is therefore comprehensible that what we regard as a temporary, inadequate, transitional form to be combated with all our might is for

Moscow the achievement of proletarian revolution, the goal of communist policy.

This leads us to the critical considerations to be raised against these policies from the point of view of communism. They relate firstly to its reciprocal ideological effect upon Russia itself. If the stratum in power in Russia fraternises with the workers' bureaucracy of Western Europe and adopts the attitudes of the latter, corrupted as it is by its position, its antagonism towards the masses and its adaptation to the bourgeois world, then the momentum which must carry Russia further on the path of communism is liable to be dissipated; if it bases itself upon the land-owning peasantry over and against the workers, a diversion of development towards bourgeois agrarian forms could not be ruled out, and this would lead to stagnation in the world revolution. There is the further consideration that the political system which arose in Russia as an expedient transitional form towards the realisation of communism – and which could only ossify into a bureaucracy under particular conditions – would from the outset represent a reactionary impediment to revolution in Western Europe. We have already pointed out that a 'workers' government' of this kind would not be able to unleash the forces of communist reconstruction; and since after this revolution the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois masses, together with the peasantry, would, unlike the case of Russia after the October revolution, still represent a tremendous force, the failure of reconstruction would only too easily bring reaction back into the saddle, and the proletarian masses would have to renew their exertions to abolish the system.

It is even a matter of doubt whether this policy of attenuated world revolution can achieve its aim, rather than reinforce the bourgeoisie like any other politics of opportunism. It is not the way forward for the most radical opposition to form a prior alliance with the moderates with a view to sharing power, instead of driving the revolution on by uncompromising struggle; it so weakens the overall fighting strength of the masses that the overthrow of the prevailing system is delayed and made harder.

The real forces of revolution lie elsewhere than in the tactics of

parties and the policies of governments. For all the negotiations, there can be no real peace between the world of imperialism and that of communism: while Krassin was negotiating in London, the Red Armies were smashing the might of Poland and reaching the frontiers of Germany and Hungary. This has brought the war to Central Europe; and the class contradictions which have reached an intolerable level here, the total internal economic collapse which renders revolution inevitable, the misery of the masses, the fury of armed reaction, will all make civil war flare up in these countries. But when the masses are set in motion here, their revolution will not allow itself to be channelled within the limits prescribed for it by the opportunistic politics of clever leaders; it must be more radical and more profound than in Russia, because the resistance to be overcome is much greater. The decisions of the Moscow congress are of less moment than the wild, chaotic, elemental forces which will surge up from the hearts of three ravaged peoples and lend new impetus to the world revolution.

## **The Organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle\***

### **1. The Factory Organisation: the General Union of Workers**

The greatest weakness of the German revolution and the world revolution and one of the principal causes of the defeats which they have suffered is the fact that they are not being conducted according to scientific, that is to say historical-materialist, tactics. When the tactics were decided upon, the conditions of production and class relations of Germany, Western Europe and North America were not given primary consideration, and often none at all.

The Russians, Lenin, Zinoviev and Radek among others, together with the entire Third International, are to blame for this.

All that they could say was: 'Imitate Russia'.

In these highly developed capitalist states, with their bank capital and developed industry, imitate a backward agrarian state!

And it happened!!!

And others, equally foolishly, cried 'Just set up a union and do away with parties'.

As if we were living in the United States, so backward in conscious political development!

No wonder we only encounter defeat, and that the world revolution cannot get started.

For how can we achieve victory without tactics based on class relations, on historical materialism?

In the text that follows I shall demonstrate on the basis of historical materialism, that is to say by reference to the conditions of production and the class relations of Western Europe and North America, that a communist party like the KAPD and tactics like those of the KAPD are necessary in Western Europe and North America.

\* This text was first published by the KAPD in Berlin in 1921.

For only the tactics of the KAPD are determined by the conditions of production and the class relations of Western Europe and North America, and all others, those of the VKPD and the Third International, for example, are not based on these factors and can therefore never succeed.\*

It is only when tactics are based on scientific, historical-materialist foundations that they can bring progress.

It is only then that they can gradually unite all true revolutionaries.

It is only then that the schisms can be overcome.

The first factor upon which the proletariat must build is that throughout a large part of Europe, capitalism is bankrupt. And capitalism threatens the proletariat with destruction or the most wretched slavery. But the proletariat can and must destroy capitalism. If the revolution is victorious here, then capitalism will also become untenable in England and North America, and world communism will be achieved!

The entire tactics of the proletariat must therefore be directed towards revolution. Everything that the proletariat does must further the revolution. What tactics must the proletariat follow in order to bring the revolution to a victorious conclusion?

\* The greatness of Lenin lies not least in his having derived the Russian revolution and its tactics entirely from the conditions of production and the class relations prevailing in Russia, in particular the agrarian conditions, and that long before the revolution itself.

It is therefore to be regretted that he and all the Russians and the entire Third International with him completely disregarded the conditions of production and class relations prevailing in Western Europe and the United States in fixing tactics for the latter continents.

There is no trace of historical materialism in the 21 conditions of Moscow. The class relations of Western Europe, so different from those of Russia, are not even mentioned!

The tactics of Russia are merely being aped, and what was correct in Russia is being imposed on Western Europe and North America.

With catastrophic results, of course. The German proletariat is already bleeding to death, parties like the VKPD are already being split by the Russian tactics, which have no basis in the reality of Western Europe.

The Russian tactics of dictatorship by party and leadership cannot possibly be correct here. For the Russian proletariat was tiny, and faced by a feeble capitalism. The world war had armed it. The possessor classes confronting it were divided. Countless millions of peasants assisted the proletariat. This meant that a small party, the Bolsheviks, was able to achieve victory there.

In Western Europe, especially England and Germany, and in the United States, a mighty proletariat confronts a mighty capitalism. It is practically unarmed. And big capital, bank capital, unites all the possessor classes, even the petty-bourgeois and the small farmers, against communism. Whereas Russian capitalism was new and only shallowly-rooted in traditional modes of production, the capitalism of Western Europe has for many centuries been firmly anchored in the material and more especially the ideological world of the entire population.

These straightforward conditions of production and class relations, apparent to everybody, mean that a small party or its leadership cannot exercise dictatorship here during and after the revolution. The adversary is much too powerful and the proletariat too numerous for that. In Germany, for example, all the capitalist classes are united against communism, which is nevertheless very powerful! And the proletariat makes up at least three-fifths of the population, between thirty and forty millions. A small party or leadership clique cannot rule over this mighty proletariat: neither during nor after the revolution.

Who must rule here, during and after the revolution? Who must exercise dictatorship?

The class itself, the proletariat. At least the great majority of it.

And the same applies in England, in the United States and throughout Western Europe.

It follows from the class relations. Our theory, historical materialism, which has never yet deceived us, tells us so. And everyone, even the most unsophisticated worker can see it. It is the truth.

And I will now say openly, clearly and forcefully what has until now been expressed only in moderate language, what the

consequences of the Russian tactics, after the March action in Germany and the collapse of the VKPD, no longer allow us to state with moderation: *if the Russian tactics of dictatorship by party and leadership are still pursued here after all the disastrous consequences that they have already had here, then it will no longer be stupidity, but a crime; a crime against the revolution.*

If Radek, Zinoviev, Lenin and other Russians and members of the International still persist in defending and advocating the dictatorship of party and leadership in Germany, England, Western Europe and North America, then we must say to them – hands off. The revolutionary workers of Western Europe, and in the first instance those of Germany and England, will decide for themselves and follow their own lead.

It is not the dictatorship of party and leadership that is necessary here, but the dictatorship of the class, of the great majority of the class.

We cannot repeat too often that this is determined by the might of the adversary, the great numbers of the proletariat and the terrible struggle that we must conduct on an increasing scale, a thousand times more terrible than in Russia.

So what does it mean to say that the class must exercise dictatorship itself?

In the first place, that the great majority of the proletariat must become conscious communists, militants clear as to their objectives. But that is not alone sufficient! An unorganised rabble cannot exercise dictatorship. There must be an organisation.

Thus, an organisation of the great majority of the proletariat, consisting of conscious communists and experienced militants.

That is what we need here in Germany, England, Western Europe, North America. That is what historical-materialist considerations, what the class relations demand here.

Of course, it is very difficult to create an organisation of this kind. To destroy the trade unions and set up an organisation of this kind in their place is a difficult and wearisome task. But is revolution here not difficult? Do you think that anything can be achieved here with neat, easy expedients?

The problem facing us here is not to overthrow a feeble, divided capitalism with the help of untold millions of peasants, but to uproot capitalism in its homelands, England and France, a capitalism that is centuries old and tremendously powerful, not to mention the wonderfully organised capitalism of Germany and North America.

If you think that this is a slight task, just follow the Russian example, the Russian tactics: if not, look for another way and take it!

This is what differentiates us from Russia, where the class relations, the participation of twenty or thirty million poor peasants, meant that the dictatorship of party and leadership was necessary, with all its consequences of unquestioning obedience and extreme centralisation.

An organisation of millions, of many, many millions of conscious communists is what we require; without them we cannot achieve victory.

This is the task facing us.

This, comrades, means that the real work, the real struggle, is only just beginning. All that went before, from 1848 to 1917, from Marx to the Russian revolution, was merely preparation. The real thing is only just beginning.

The proletariat, the entire proletariat of Western Europe and North America, or at least the great majority of it, must now rise up, rise up to a tremendous peak of mental and moral strength.

For it is here, in Western Europe and the United States, that the real proletarian revolution will take place. Not like the Russian revolution, only partly proletarian, predominantly peasant-democratic, but a truly proletarian revolution.

The entire proletariat must rise up to a tremendous peak: not just a leadership clique, not even just a party, but the great majority of the proletariat.

The time has at last come, for the masses themselves, the proletarians.

The period from 1848 to 1917, the period of evolution, from Marx to Lenin, was the period of leaders, of the few. In parliament and in wage-struggles the leaders played the principal role, they were

the principal force. Intellectuals and theoreticians too. For there had to be negotiations, and that is the business of leaders. The way forward had to be found, and that is the business of theoreticians. But now the masses themselves, the proletariat itself, are taking the stage. Here in this part of the world. It must act itself, man for man, woman for woman. Action will be decisive: action on their part. Thus the significance of leaders is diminishing. The proletariat, working men and women, are becoming just as important as the old leaders. They are becoming just as important as the leaders, the theoreticians, the intellectuals. They are surpassing them in importance.

The proletarian, proletarians, will raise themselves to heights of power beside which the grandeur of all previous bourgeois revolutions will pale.

This must happen, for victory is imperative, and without it victory is not possible. That is why they will raise themselves to such heights.

They are already doing so.

The proletariat, the great majority of it, must become good communists, militants clear as to their objectives. And this great majority must have an organisation that enables it to achieve victory. How are we to attain this goal? By what means? What organisation will serve this purpose?

Once again, it is the conditions of production and class relations of our Western European and North American (not Russian) developed capitalist society, with its trusts, its bank capital and its imperialism, that will provide us with the answer!

Never, let it be added in parenthesis, was historical materialism, that mighty weapon left us by Marx and Engels, of greater importance to us than it is now. The theory of surplus-value and class struggle no longer needs proving in times when the world is bankrupt because the workers are no longer producing value, in times when the classes are locked in armed combat. Yet historical materialism can still show us the way, every day and every hour, in Western Europe and North America. It will lead us to victory.

The economic system, the conditions of production in our society, provide us with the answer when we ask what organisation we need.

They say that the trade unions cannot accomplish the task. For in the first place they are old-fashioned weapons dating from the period of evolution.

And secondly, they do not make the proletariat, proletarians, the millions and millions of workers, into the uninhibited militants, the conscious communists that the proletariat needs. For the entire structure of these organisations, which were the right ones for the period of peaceful development, makes the workers into the slaves of a clique of leaders and of trade-union relations. Uninhibited, courageous militants are still stifled in the trade unions, they cannot exist in them.

For these reasons it was the representatives of the workers who *necessarily* obtained complete power in those times of world economic expansion. For only they were able and obliged to *negotiate* in parliament and with the employers. This gave them complete power. It meant that all organisations, parties and trade unions, were structured to suit them, to secure their authority. This had to happen in the period of evolution. And it was good that this was the case. But matters are different in the period of revolution! What was formerly good now becomes bad. And even *before* the revolution, the trade unions could no longer even conduct the struggle against the trusts and the state! Even then they were obsolete weapons, fit to be thrown in the lumber-room, as far as Western Europe and North America were concerned. Now they are powerless against the trusts and the state, the white guards, the Stinnes and Orgeschcs.<sup>1</sup>

So historical materialism shows that the trade unions are not the organisations which the proletariat needs to achieve victory. What are, then?

The conditions of production, which always bear within themselves the solution, the deliverance, not only give a negative answer, but also a positive one. And this is as follows: *it is no longer trades but factories which exercise power and enjoy strength in the*

*new society of today. And which therefore confer strength on the proletariat when it organises itself within them.*

In the modern world of Western Europe and North America, with its trusts, its bank capital and its imperialism, capital is no longer organised by trades, but by the factory unit. Although it used to be organised by trades not so long ago – all the electrical works together, all the glass factories together, all the chemical firms together – this is no longer the case.

The organisation of Stinnes and the like is, as Rathenau says, no longer merely horizontal, but also vertical. What does this mean?

Various different sectors of production are all organised together. Mines, metallurgical factories, machine-tool works, power stations, railways, shipyards and docks are all integrated. And this is no longer done in terms of trades. Large sectors of the same profession are left out, outside the combine, ignored. Only the *factories* that are required are taken. The strength of capitalism now lies in the factories.\* The conditions of production demonstrate this. This is particularly the case in the bankrupt German state and in bankrupt countries in general. There, capital is forming a new state behind the bankrupt one. In the factories, in the enormous new complexes of factories. This is what capital is basing itself upon now. It hopes to survive in this way, although its state is bankrupt. This indicates to the proletariat the means which it must use.

But the revolution itself teaches us this. Was it trade-unionists who did the fighting? Did the proletariat go into battle organised according to their trade unions? In 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921? No, a thousand times no. They fought in the factories and organised by factories.

This has a historical foundation, a historical-materialist foundation.

The proletariat stands, works, lives together in the factories. And *here and now* the factories are so gigantic that each represents a regiment *just by itself*.

\* This tendency was already in evidence before the war, but has now developed enormously.

All these considerations prove to anyone capable of thought that the factory organisation is *the* organisation for the revolution in Western Europe and North America.

But the real reason, the one that arises from the conditions of production, is this: *in the factories the proletarian himself counts for something*. He is a militant there because he is a worker there. He can express himself as a free person there, as a free militant. He can be active in discussion and in struggle there every day and every minute of the day. Because the revolution begins in the factories he can engage in active struggle there, in armed struggle. In the factories, therefore, every proletarian and hence the entire proletariat can become lucid communists, complete revolutionaries. And this they cannot do in the trade union. Yet it is what is needed.

While the trade union stifles the militant, stifles the free person in every proletarian, as it must with its organisational structure and invulnerable cliques of leaders, factory organisation arouses the militant, the free man in every proletarian. And enables him to liberate himself from the despotic leaders. Because it is first and foremost he himself who fights in his own factory! And can, if necessary, settle accounts with his leaders there. So, because factory organisation is the organisation of the most modern form of capitalism, because capitalism in its bankruptcy particularly organises itself by factories and seeks to found a renewed existence upon them, because the revolution itself teaches us that it must be made on the basis of the factories, and last and most important, because it is only in the factory organisations that the entire proletariat can only become conscious communists, real militants fighting for the revolution, factory organisation is the sole form of organisation appropriate for the revolution.

This is the answer which theory gives us, the theory that is the only way to attain the truth of practice.

It goes without saying that the factory organisations of a locality, a municipality, a district, a region must unite. It will also be useful to make further sub-divisions according to industries. We need not go into these details here. Nor do we need to go into the

consideration that soviets will readily arise out of these factory organisations.\*

So, destruction of the trade unions, these seed-beds of slavery, and in their stead the establishment of factory organisations, industrial federations based upon these, and taking in the whole, a union like the General Workers' Union of Germany, the AAUD, and finally the unification of the unions of every country in an international league – this is the way to revolution, to victory.

## **2. The Communist Political Party**

Now that we have identified the organisation which is to replace the trade unions and take in the whole proletariat, or at least the greater part of it, making them conscious militants and lucid communists and hence so strengthening the proletariat that it can conquer power, the question poses itself as to whether this organisation is sufficient, whether a political Communist Party is also necessary.

This question too must be investigated with the greatest rigour. For the whole revolution depends just as much upon the answer we give to it as upon what organisation can make the great majority of the proletariat into conscious militants.

And again we must derive our answer from the conditions of production and the class relations if we are to arrive at the truth. It is only upon this basis, and not through indulging in subjective sentiments, likes and dislikes as the anarchists, syndicalists and their kind do, or through imitating the Russian revolution as the Russians and the Third International urge us, that we can arrive at it.

But now it is not primarily the strength and solidity of bank capital, of imperialism, of the bourgeois classes that we must consider, as we did with the first question, but the condition of the proletariat itself. For the issue as to whether the proletarian masses

\* On this question, and on the question of the union in general, one should read the pamphlet *Die Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union*, published by the Greater Berlin economic area organisation of the AAUD, Berlin, 1921.

organised in the factory organisation are capable of revolution relates to the quality of the proletariat itself.

Is the condition, the class condition of the proletariat, of the great majority of it, such that an organisation based upon factories, industrial federations and a union is sufficient for the development of communist consciousness and liberation, for revolution and victory?

Let the revolutionary worker ask himself this question!

Let him consider the class condition of the proletariat, which he knows at first hand. Let him think of the education, the housing, the nutrition, the life of the worker. Every worker, if he were to answer objectively and without prejudice, would certainly reply – No, the factory organisation is not sufficient for the great majority of the proletariat to become conscious, for it to achieve freedom and victory.

For the great majority of the proletariat is badly fed, badly housed, over-worked and has no free time for self-education. It is badly brought up, very poorly informed, and is in such a state of mental dependence from birth onwards, and has been so as a class for centuries, that not only does it not see the road to liberation, it does not dare to think of it.

Nobody can be in any doubt about this.

This also means that even if the majority of the proletariat were to organise itself in factory organisations, these weaknesses would still affect a large part of this majority. For a long time.

What would – and will – be the consequences of this for the factory organisation and the section of the proletariat organised in it?

This proletarian class condition will have many very harmful effects upon the factory organisation. Many dangers.

Firstly: the class situation of the great majority of the proletariat means that they urgently need small improvements and reforms and defence against the conditions of life deteriorating. Their life is so impoverished that they will always desire these and fight for them, even during the revolution. They will now and then temporarily abandon the revolution for their sake. They will even use their factory organisation, their union, to gain them. Opportunism

and reformism threaten the factory organisation and union and the section of the proletariat organised in them.

The factory organisation and the union is therefore always subject to the danger of the revolution being sabotaged for the sake of securing small improvements, for the sake of conquering illusory power, for the sake of increasing the membership by taking in confused elements, etc. etc.

It is therefore beyond question that even many members of the union, like many of the anarchists and syndicalists, do not want the communist party, because it puts the revolution before reforms.

Secondly, there is a great danger of individualism in the factory organisations. Out of ignorance, out of egoism, and so on, the individual, for example the leader within the factory, will put himself, his own interests as leader, before the revolution. A particular factory may do the same thing, or a particular locality or district. The unity that is essential to revolution will vanish. This is already to be seen in sections of the union.

A third danger also threatens, that of utopianism. The section of the proletariat that is organised in the union overestimates its power through being insufficiently acquainted with reality. Important sections of the work-force, the miners, imagine that they, by themselves, can achieve the revolution which in Western Europe and North America can only be achieved by the entire proletariat.

And finally – and this is the most powerful reason why factory organisations and union are not sufficient – large sections of the proletariat are not sufficiently well-informed. They are not sufficiently acquainted with economics and politics, with national and international political and economic events, their connection with and significance for the revolution. They cannot be acquainted with these because of their class situation. Therefore, they do not know the right time to act. They act when they ought not to and do not act when they ought to. They will often make mistakes.

All these weaknesses in the proletariat are consequences of its class situation. Our tactics *must* reckon with them. If they do not do so, they will lead to the most terrible defeats.

As far as a large section of the proletariat is concerned, they cannot be remedied while capitalism survives.

How can we overcome these drawbacks of the factory organisation, which is to take in the great majority of the proletariat, how can we guard against the lack of knowledge in one section of the proletariat?

There is one answer.

For not *all* proletarians are insufficiently well-informed. And not all are opportunists, individualists and utopians, especially those who are well-informed. In the German proletariat particularly, there are many who are genuine revolutionaries not only in sentiment, but who also have a broad and deep understanding of politics and economics. Marx and Engels, Mehring, Bebel, Luxemburg and many others did not live among them for nothing. For this reason Marx's dictum that the German proletariat is near to a proletarian revolution, a genuinely proletarian revolution, still holds good.

The class relations, the mighty upsurge of capitalism have, over the last 70 years, put this section of the proletariat in a position to make such progress. They have held back another large section. The division into union and party is thus a natural consequence of the conditions of production, of the effect of capitalism upon the proletariat, which has been differentiated by it.

To unite this section of the proletariat that has large and profound understanding within one organisation, to make this organisation profoundly conscious and active in a revolutionary sense, to put it in the service of the revolution, only of the revolution, of the whole proletariat, only of the whole proletariat, of the factory organisation and the union – this is the way to overcome or relieve all the weaknesses outlined above to which the factory organisation is subject.

And this organisation is the communist political party, if it is the genuinely revolutionary communist party, the true party, if it has truly scientific tactics based on the class relations of Western Europe and North America.

For *it* is familiar with economic and political factors, both on a national and an international level. *It* is not opportunistic, nor

individualistic, nor utopian. *It* is revolutionary, not only in heart, but also in mind. It can therefore take the lead in word and deed. It takes the lead in both if it is the true party.

This is not of course to say that the same broad understanding and good qualities are not present in one section of the factory organisation, of the union, as in the party. All party members are after all members of the union as well. It only means that these elements can always be outvoted in the union by other sections which are not so advanced. The best elements can easily become isolated and atomised in the union and thus exercise little power. They only gain power and expand it by being organised together.\*

Those who reject all that we have said about the proletariat and the factory organisation either do not know the proletariat, or do not take matters seriously.

Only the party can be 'pure'. Because of the class condition, the class situation of the proletariat.

It alone can consist of genuinely revolutionary, completely lucid elements.

It is the only proletarian organisation of which this is true. Because of the class condition to which capitalism reduces the workers. And if it has the correct tactics, based upon the class relations, it will remain 'pure'.

The factory organisation endows its members with the most general understanding of the revolution, e.g. the nature and significance of the workers' councils (soviets) and of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The party comprises the proletarians whose understanding is much broader and deeper.

If it is the factory organisation, the union, which is able to raise the mass of the proletariat to heroic fighters clearly aware of the revolution and its means and objectives (precisely because it is a *factory* organisation and not a trade union), it is the party which regroups those of them whose minds are clearest, and who are

\* It has been suggested that instead of parties, fractions should be formed within the union. This would lead to chaos and condemn the union to impotence.

therefore the most courageous and best of all, the elite of the proletariat.

This section of the proletariat, this party, foresees the whole struggle, locates and establishes tactics, exercises persuasion over the remainder of the proletariat, and in the first instance the union; it seeks revolution alone, regards everything from this perspective, always puts the general cause of revolution above all other interests both in the national and the international struggle.

We will state once more, because it is a matter of such importance, that in Western Europe and North America it is not the ruler, the tyrant, the dictator of the proletariat as in Russia. We will point out once again that historical-materialist factors rule this out.

The most one could say is that it is the brain of the proletariat, its eye, its steersman. But even this image is not quite correct. For it makes the party a *part* of the whole. And here it is not, nor does it seek to be. Here it seeks to be the whole itself, here in Western Europe and North America it seeks to inspire the entire proletariat, to make the whole like itself.

Here it seeks to create a united entity consisting of itself, the factory organisation and the proletariat. I shall shortly return to this.

What should a party of this kind be like, a party which serves the proletariat by word and deed in the revolution?

In the first place, it should not be a parliamentary party. For parliamentarianism was a good weapon in the period of evolution (1860–1910 or even a few years earlier), when the proletariat's cause was being managed by leaders. Now that the proletariat must act for itself, its disadvantages far outweigh its advantages.\*

For here the weakness of the proletariat lies in the fact that it believes others can act on its behalf and that it does not then need to act itself. Parliamentarianism increases this weakness.

Secondly, the party should not seek dictatorship for itself, but for the class, for the proletariat as a whole, for the great majority of it – I demonstrated this at the beginning of this pamphlet, but I will return to it in greater detail at this juncture. For it is a matter of prime

\* I refer the reader to my *Letter to Comrade Lenin*, in which I prove this.

importance in Western Europe and North America, just as important as factory organisation. And it cannot therefore be repeated too often.

The party should not seek dictatorship by the party – or by the leadership, which is what it comes down to – but the dictatorship of the class. This follows from the class relations.

The proletariat's adversary, capitalism, is mighty in these countries. An advanced, highly industrialised structure of bank capital and imperialism. A capital that has put down material and ideological roots and grown up over the course of centuries. Subjugating the entire population materially and ideologically. And uniting all the bourgeois classes, including the petty-bourgeoisie and small farmers.

And beside them, a proletariat almost infinite in numbers. Three to five-sevenths of the population. More than forty million. In England, and soon in the United States, even more in relative terms. And in the whole of Western Europe an enormous number.

Now let the layman, the simple worker, consider: in all these countries there has up to now been only a small number of proletarians who have profound insight, rigorously consistent thinking, the greatest, most self-sacrificing courage and revolutionary consistency in their actions.

This too no one will deny.

And so in all these countries, the communist party must be small. Smaller in one place, larger in another, but everywhere small in proportion to the proletariat.

Nor is this the dream, the chimera, the fantasy of a 'left-wing' worker!

It follows directly from the class condition, which, as you all know, prevents a very large number of proletarians from gaining broad and deep understanding.

Therefore, a small party everywhere.\*

\* The opportunism of the Third International is also evident in its desire to form mass communist parties. It is obliged to pursue this by the very fact that it rejects factory organisation and that its cell tactics are failing to conquer the trade unions,

Can this one small party simultaneously rule this mighty adversary, massively armed capitalism, and the mighty proletariat? Can it be the dictator, the despotic ruler, or both, of adversary and proletariat? The very numbers involved rule it out.

Imagine a German party with 500,000 really *completely* lucid, heroic communists, the elite of the proletariat.

These would face twenty million in the bourgeois classes. Is it to be thought they can achieve victory unless there stands beside them a factory organisation, a union, with at least ten million members, who would make up at least twenty-five million with their dependents? Is it to be thought that it could achieve victory if it was the dictator, the tyrant of this factory organisation, of these twenty-five million? Those who think so do not know Western Europe. It is not Russia we are considering.

It is true that a tiny party achieved victory there. But there were twenty-five million turn-coats in the adversary's camp there, the poor peasants. Where are they here?

And anybody who knows the proletariat of Western Europe and North America knows that dictatorship by a party is impossible for other reasons!

The adversary is too mighty! The proletariat is too big for a small party to be able to rule both.

Therefore, it is not the party, but the class itself, the great majority of the class which must exercise dictatorship.

Historical materialism teaches us this.

And now that you have clearly seen that anti-parliamentarianism, factory organisation and class dictatorship are the tactics which necessarily follow from the conditions of production and class relations of Western Europe and North

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so that it can only gain organised masses within the party. The March action showed what the consequences of this are. I have pointed out sufficiently often that a small party was only able to control its adversaries and the proletariat in Russia because it had the assistance of the poor peasants. But there too we can now see how terrible the consequences are if the whole proletarian class does not exercise dictatorship. Just consider Kronstadt! For ultimately it is only the proletarians, and not the peasants who are a sure source of support.

America, workers, that these are the scientific tactics, the sure and correct ones, compare the tactics of the Third International, the tactics of Lenin, Radek, Zinoviev and all the Russians and of all the other 'right-wing' leaders.

They want cells and trade unions, although these are completely out-dated and stifle the free spirit of the workers, they want parliament which stupefies the workers and keeps them aloof from the struggle, and which is thus counter-revolutionary. They want the dictatorship of party and leaders, which would not only be bad and damaging here, but which is also downright impossible.

Their tactics are unscientific, they are at odds with the real conditions, and *must* therefore lead to failure.

Compare these two courses, workers, and you will choose the right one.\*

And compare the idiocies of the anarchists, syndicalists and those members of the union who don't want a party.†

Can they deny that the class condition of the proletariat enables only a small section of the proletariat to develop broad and deep understanding? Can they deny that large sections within the factory organisation will therefore always be opportunistic, individualistic, utopian and insufficiently developed? No. And that therefore the factory organisation can never make and lead the revolution alone? No.

And they still reject the party, the organisation of those proletarians who have broad and deep understanding?

They still reject the only correct tactics based on the class relations and historical materialism.

Why?

Because their own understanding is not sufficiently profound. Because they themselves are not historical materialists. Because they

\* The fact that the Russians, Lenin for example, are so wrong in their judgement comes from their not knowing Western Europe sufficiently well. Their thinking may well be historical-materialist, but they are unable to apply historical materialism in this case because they are not familiar with the conditions.

† Like the East Saxony districts of the union, like Otto Rühle and Pfemfert.

themselves belong, like the anarchists and syndicalists, to that section of the proletariat which does not have sufficient insight.

Just as the Russians, Radek, Lenin, Zinoviev and the Second Congress of the Third International with their tactics of parliament and cells, their dictatorship of leaders and party, prove that they do not represent the conditions of Western Europe and Northern America, so, by rejecting the party, the syndicalists, anarchists, and people like Rühle prove that they cannot make their judgement in accordance with conditions they know, but only on the basis of personal sentiments.

We must therefore engage in the fiercest struggle against both the Third International and the Russians, such as Lenin, Zinoviev and Radek, and the syndicalists, anarchists and the like. Neither possess a tactic based on the class relations of Western Europe and North America.

This, then, is the schema we arrive at: on the one hand, factory organisation and union, taking in the great majority of the proletariat; on the other, the communist political party, a party which is not parliamentary and not dictatorial.

Let us examine the way in which these interact to form a single entity, how they can assure the proletariat itself of dictatorship.

### **3. The Unity of General Union of Workers and Communist Party**

This is our strategy for Western Europe and North America, then: a union built up on factory organisations and taking in all workers, and a party made up of the most lucid and energetic section of the proletariat.

But a major difficulty now presents itself.

We have said that the factory organisation is not sufficiently strong to lead the revolution alone and achieve victory. It is subject to many weaknesses.

And on the other hand we have said that the party cannot exercise dictatorship. It is too small in relation to the adversary and to the proletariat. This appears to be a terrible and insurmountable

difficulty. For we then have no single organisation capable of making and leading the revolution and achieving victory!

Our opponents are exploiting this apparent difficulty in order to prove to us that we do not know how to attain victory, how to attain communism.

This is the criticism made, for example, by Zinoviev in his comments on the 21 conditions (see *International* 11 and 12), where, in his polemic against syndicalism, the IWW in the United States, etc. he includes us (or rather pretends not to know that the 'left-wingers' are something quite different to the syndicalists, the IWW, etc.\*)

But this difficulty is an illusion.

For what neither union nor party can achieve singly can be achieved by both together if they unite.

It is true: the factory organisation, the union, cannot achieve victory alone. And no more can the party. But both together can do so.

For the factory organisation gradually turns proletarians into conscious communists, militants clear as to their objectives, precisely because it is the organisation in the factories.

Certainly, one section will remain confused and necessarily so, because of the impoverished class condition of the proletariat. Even a majority within the union will not attain the *fullest* clarity, genuinely deep and broad understanding of economic and political factors.

But this is where the party comes in. This section of the proletariat, although not *very* large, does have deep and broad understanding and advises and helps the other section. And the party.

The union needs the party. The party needs the union. The members of the one are members of the other. Both are therefore

\* The syndicalists and members of the union who reject the party do not in fact know how communism is to be attained. For the syndicalists, the IWW, the factory organisation alone, can never achieve it, for the very reason that they reject the party.

connected in the most intimate manner. And both with a single objective – the revolution and communism. And both recognising the same means – the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the whole class.

But how is the latter to be achieved? When we have said ourselves that the majority of the proletariat does not have any understanding, does not possess sufficient strength!

*This will become possible through the process of development, through struggle.*

This will become possible through the revolution itself.

The union will take in an increasingly large section of the proletariat, and all the clearest and best elements will gradually join the party.

When union and party then train their members in the struggle, each in its own fashion, each according to its capacities, these members will attain ever greater heights. Of strength of mind and deed.

And when the factory organisation, the union, eventually takes in the great majority of the proletariat, as the trade unions do now, and a very large number of its members have become lucid, conscious communists, and unity with the party has become complete, the union will be synonymous with the proletariat, it will be the proletariat. And since union and party form one entity, the proletariat and the party will form one entity.

And then the union, that is to say the proletariat, will have attained such heights and the unity of proletariat and party will be so complete that the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the class itself, will be possible.

Then the dictatorship of the class will be achieved through the unity of party and union. Then too, leaders and soviets will arise from union and party, that is to say from the proletariat itself. Then the objective of the entire struggle here in Western Europe and North America will be attained, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat, without which historical-materialist considerations of the class conditions obtaining here rule out any victory, any communism. Then no dictatorship by party or leaders will be necessary or possible

any longer. This, then, workers of Germany and England, of Western Europe and North America, is our plan, the plan of the 'left-wingers', of the opposition within the Third International.

This, workers of Germany and England, of Western Europe and North America and of the world, is what the 'left' is fighting for.

*These are its means: firstly, regroupment of all workers, of the great majority of the proletariat in the union; secondly, regroupment of the most conscious workers in the party; thirdly, unity of union and party.*

*And this is its objective: the dictatorship of the class, of the proletariat itself.*

Does this appeal to you, workers of Western Europe and North America? Does it perhaps appeal to you more than the dictatorship of the party advocated by the Russians and the Third International (and which was necessary in Russia)?

It makes little difference whether or not it appeals to you, comrades. For what we are saying must necessarily apply. The class relations of Western Europe and North America make it necessary.

One more comment: should the party have *supreme* power? Or should the union perhaps be so strong and solid that *it* is predominant? We cannot tell. It very much depends on the course the revolution takes. The question is idle and tedious. All that we can do is to further both and the unity of both. These then, are the perfectly clear, integrated, comprehensive tactics of the 'left-wingers', the clear plan of the way to revolution which every proletarian can understand.

Factory organisation or union together with party! The unity of both! And through both and the unity of both, the dictatorship of the class!

There can be no clearer tactics, no clearer plan.

And so when Zinoviev and the Third International ask us 'left-wingers' (in his exposition of the 21 conditions) who we think will be responsible for economic administration, feeding and educating the populace, etc. during the period of transition – tasks which in their opinion only the party can accomplish – we reply that the factory organisation and the party together will carry this out in Western

Europe and North America. That means, for those who have followed our argument, the proletariat. And when they ask us who other than the party will establish the red army, we reply: the union and the party together, that is to say the proletariat. And when they ask us who other than the party will overcome the counter-revolution, we reply that in Western Europe and North America it will be the union and the party, that is to say the proletariat. And when they ask us how iron discipline and absolute centralism will be possible here if the party is not dictator, we reply that the union and the party together will certainly ensure centralisation and discipline, but not in the form you have them. The class relations dictate that this should be so. By the numbers involved alone, for 70 per cent of the population are proletarian here, and only 7 per cent in Russia! Anybody who cannot comprehend that discipline and centralisation will therefore be different here is a dunce.

And when they ask us what is the overall plan for the organisation of the revolution and the way to communism, and mock and insult us because they believe we have no such plan, we reply that it is their fault if they do not understand us. They see everything in *such* obscurity that they believe only the Russian way is possible. But we have a clear plan and a clear way forward: unity of party and union – that is to say the proletariat – and dictatorship by the proletariat. We will add just one thing more for the benefit of our Russian friends.

Now that the proletariat in Kronstadt has risen up against you,<sup>2</sup> the communist party, now that you have had to declare a state of emergency in Petrograd against the proletariat (things which, like all your tactics, were necessary in the conditions you face), has the thought still not occurred to you, even now, that dictatorship by the proletariat really is preferable to dictatorship by the party? Or that it would perhaps really be preferable if class- and not party-dictatorship were to develop in Western Europe and North America? Or that perhaps the 'left-wingers' here are in the right?

Perhaps this idea has occurred to you; but even if it has, you have still not completely understood the issue. For the dictatorship of the class is not only preferable here, it is absolutely necessary.

This can best be understood in terms of the factors already mentioned: in Russia you were still able to suppress the counter-revolution when a section of the proletariat rose up against you in Kronstadt and Petrograd, because it is weak in Russia; but if a section of the proletariat were to rise up against us under the conditions prevailing here, the counter-revolution would be victorious, for it is powerful here.

For this reason too class dictatorship is necessary here, absolutely necessary. And party-dictatorship impossible.

The 'left' therefore not only has a good and clear plan, it has the only one possible and necessary. A plan that is the opposite of yours, which means nothing but harm for the revolution in Western Europe and North America.

And on this point we will conclude with a word on the Russian tactics for Germany, for Western Europe, to the German, English, the Western European, the North American, the world proletariat.

Workers of Germany and England, of Western Europe and North America, you were recently able to witness the consequences of the tactics espoused by the Russians and the Third International and those of the 'left-wingers' in Germany in March 1921. Of the Third International, which uses parliamentarianism and cell tactics, and the 'left', which is anti-parliamentarian and advocates factory organisation. The Third International, which seeks dictatorship by the party, the 'left', which seeks the dictatorship of the class. The consequences of the tactics espoused by Moscow, by Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek and the Third International, those tactics of party-dictatorship, etc. were a putsch ordered from above, a terrible defeat, the fiasco of cell tactics and parliamentarianism, betrayal by one section of the leadership (Levi), the downfall of a communist party (the VKPD), a weakening of communism.

The consequences of the tactics of the 'left' – although everything did not go entirely as planned – were the unity and solidarity of the communist party, the reinforcement of this party and of the union: an advance for communism.

We say to you: the tactics of the 'left' have not only been

demonstrated as the best in terms of theory, in terms of historical materialism, but in practice too. And they have proved the best in practice for the very reason that their theoretical basis is sounder.

Factory organisations with the union built up upon them, a party like the KAPD that is anti-parliamentarian and not dictatorial, the unity of both; and both pursuing and developing the class-dictatorship of the proletariat, by word and deed, by theory and struggle – theory and practice show clearly that this is the way to victory.

The course espoused by Moscow, by the VKPD and the Third International, is clearly the way to defeat, to downfall.

Workers of Germany, England, Western Europe and North America! Victory is only assured you if you unite on scientific tactics, that is to say tactics in conformity with historical materialism, with the class conditions! Only these scientific tactics can bring you unity.

Workers of Germany, England, Western Europe and North America, unite in the KAPD or in parties like the KAPD, and in unions like the General Union of German Workers, the AAUD!

# References

## Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics

1. Karl Kautsky, 'Die neue Taktik', *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXX/II, p.694.
2. *ibid.*, p.655.
3. *ibid.*, pp.655–656.
4. In the article referred to, Pannekoek counters Kautsky's claim that society will cease to function if the state is destroyed by posing a situation in which, 'by some wave of a magic wand, every vestige of state power has disappeared': according to Kautsky, the proletariat would still be 'completely incapable of building its world of socialist freedom' for want of a state with which to do so. 'Is it not obvious', Pannekoek continues, 'that a proletariat which has succeeded in building such exemplary organisations, in the face of every obstacle and despite the fiercest repression, will find it a simple matter to have apparatus capable of directing and administering public life set up within forty-eight hours?' Turning to Kautsky's assertion that the intention to conquer state power rather than destroy it was what had hitherto distinguished social democracy from anarchism, Pannekoek argues that the ruling class will not voluntarily grant the universal equal suffrage essential to the Social-Democratic Party's traditional tactic of parliamentary struggle; it 'must be *constrained* by the force of actions which so paralyse and jeopardise the state organisation upon which it normally relies for protection in emergencies that giving in seems the wisest course if worse dangers are to be avoided. But it will first try every means at its disposal to halt the proletariat's offensive and avoid this outcome. . . . *Destruction of the powers at the state's command is therefore not a prior goal, but an inevitable consequence of the struggle.*' And 'as the organisation of state power degenerates and its strength ebbs away, so the new form of social organisation, the self-created democratic organisation of proletarian struggle, develops into a greater and greater power in society, taking over the functions intrinsic to the general regulation of production.' (Anton Pannekoek, 'Die Eroberung der Herrschaft', first published in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, vol. 19, no. 210; reprinted in Bock, *op. cit.*, n.d., pp.69–72.)
5. *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. XXVIII/II, p.374.
6. *ibid.*, vol. XXX/I, p.116.
7. *ibid.*, vol. XXX/II, pp.695–696.
8. *ibid.*, p.695.

9. Pannekoek is referring to the national railway strike of August 1911, cited by Kautsky, which was resolved after an intervention by Lloyd George in the national interest.

### **The Origins of Nationalism in the Proletariat**

1. It is Victor Adler who is meant, the leader of the Austrian Social Democratic Party in parliament from 1905.

2. France and England gained representation in the Egyptian cabinet by virtue of the loans with which the Suez Canal was financed; Britain used a revolt against this influence in 1881–82 as an excuse to establish a 'condominium' with the Egyptian monarchy. The latter was in practice subordinated to the British Consul-General, Lord Cromer.

In 1880–81 the independent Boer colony of the Transvaal repulsed a British attempt to annex it. After the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, full citizenship was refused to British immigrants, whose claims were backed up by the British government. The Transvaal joined forces with the Orange Free State against Britain, and after defeat in the Boer war, was annexed by the latter in 1900.

The late nineteenth century saw competition between the European powers and Japan for spheres of influence in China. Britain, France, Russia and Japan seized trading privileges, ports and provinces – Burma, Annam (Indo-China), the Amur province, the Ryukyu islands. Germany made a late entry into the rush for trading centres. In 1900–01 a European expeditionary force put down the Boxer rebellion against foreign influence and exacted a high price in war indemnities. After the Russo–Japanese war of 1905, the two countries shared out Manchuria between themselves.

### **World Revolution and Communist Tactics**

1. The tribunist S. J. Rutgers attended the First Congress of the Comintern and returned to Amsterdam in late 1919 to establish the Western European Auxiliary Bureau of the Third International there. He may well have been the author of the left-orientated article on parliamentary and trade-union tactics in the sole issue of the Bureau's *Bulletin*, which resulted in its funds being abruptly frozen by Moscow.

2. Pannekoek is here confusing the titles of two texts written by Radek while in prison: *The Development of the German Revolution and the Tasks of the Communist Party*, written before the Heidelberg congress, and *The Development of the World Revolution and the Tactics of the Communist*

*Parties in the Struggle for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, written after it. The latter is meant.

3. The following paragraph is quoted up to 'village communism' by Gorter in his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*.

4. The conference in question was convened to set up the Auxiliary Bureau.

5. The first trade-union organisations in the late 1860s in the Ruhr were the work of Catholic priests. In the late seventies, however, Bismarck dropped his campaign against Catholicism and its political representative, the Zentrum (the forerunner of the CDU), for the sake of a united front against the Social-Democratic Party.

6. This expression had been used to justify the collaboration with the socialists in the Commune of Hungary which the former Hungarian Communist Party leaders controlling *Kommunismus* blamed for its collapse in August 1919. In '*Left-Wing Communism*' Lenin urges the British Communists to campaign for the Labour Party where they have no candidate of their own; they will thus 'support Henderson as the rope supports a hanged man', and the impending establishment of a government of Hendersons will hasten the latter's political demise. (Peking edition, pp.90–91.)

7. The remainder of this paragraph and the two following are quoted by Gorter in the *Open Letter*.

8. Karl Renner was the leader of the revisionist wing of the Austrian Social Democratic Party; Otto Bauer was Austrian Foreign Secretary from November 1918 to July 1919.

9. Ebert, Haase and Dittmann were members of the Council of People's Commissioners given supreme authority by the November revolution.

10. Karl Legien was President of the General Commission of Trade Unions from 1890 and of its successor, the ADGB (Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund), from its formation in 1919; Gustav Bauer, another trade-union leader, became Minister of Labour in 1919 and subsequently Chancellor.

11. Respectively socialist and trade union leaders.

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1. Hugo Stinnes was the industrialist who signed the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft' agreement with Legien in November 1918. 'Orgesch' was an armed, strike-breaking fascist organisation.

2. The KAPD felt obliged to explain publicly that although Gorter understood the motives of the Kronstadt insurgents, he did not side with them.