

# **The Essential Pannekoek**

Anton Pannekoek

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# **Introduction**

Anton Pannekoek's life span coincided with what was almost the whole history of the modern labour movement; he experienced its rise as a movement of social protest, its transformation into a movement of social reform, and its eclipse as an independent class movement in the contemporary world. But Pannekoek also experienced its revolutionary potentialities in the spontaneous upheavals which, from time to time, interrupted the even flow of social evolution. He entered the labour movement a Marxist and he died a Marxist, still convinced that if there is a future, it will be a socialist future.

As have many prominent Dutch socialists, Pannekoek came from the middle class and his interest in socialism, as he once remarked, was due to a scientific bent strong enough to embrace both society and nature. To him, Marxism was the extension of science to social problems, and the humanisation of society. His great interest in social science was entirely compatible with his interest in natural science; he became not only one of the leading theoreticians of the radical labour movement but also an astronomer and mathematician of world renown.

This unifying attitude regarding natural and social science and philosophy determined the character of most of Pannekoek's work. One of his earliest publications, *Marxism and Darwinism*, elucidates the relationship between the two theories; one of his last, *Anthropogenesis*, deals with the origin of man. "The scientific importance of Marxism as well as of Darwinism," he wrote, "consists in their following out the theory of evolution, the one upon the domain of the organic world, the other upon the domain of society." What was so important in Darwin's work was the recognition that "under certain circumstances some animal-kinds will necessarily develop into other animal-kinds." There was a "mechanism," a "natural law," which explained the evolutionary process. That Darwin identified this "natural law" with a struggle for existence analogous to capitalist competition did not affect his theory, nor did capitalist competition become therewith a "natural law."

It was Marx who formulated the propelling force for social development. "Historical materialism" referred to society; and though the world consists of both nature and society – as expressed in the need for man to eat in order to live – the laws of social development are not "laws of nature". And, of course, all "laws," whether of nature or society, are not absolute. But they are reliable enough, as verified by experience, to be considered "absolute" for purposes of human practise. At any rate, they deny sheer arbitrariness and free choice and relate to observed rules and regularities which allow for expectations that form the rationale for human activities.

With Marx Pannekoek held that it is "the production of the material necessities of life which forms the main structure of society and determines the political relations and social struggles." It is by way of class struggle that decisive social changes have been brought about and these changes have led from a less to a more productive level of social production. Socialism, too, implies the further development of the social forces of production, which are now hampered by the prevailing class relations. And this can only be done by a labouring population able to base its expectations on the emergence of a classless society. In known history, stages of human and social existence are recognisable through changing tools and forms of production that alter the productivity of social labour. The "origin" of this process is lost in pre-history, but it is reasonable to assume that it is to be found in man's struggle for existence in a natural setting which enabled and forced him to develop a capacity for work and social organisation. Since Friedrich Engels wrote *The Role of Labour in the Transformation of Ape into Man*, a whole literature has been built around the question of tools and human evolution.

In Anthropogenesis, Pannekoek returned to problems raised in his early Marxism and Darwinism. Just as there are “mechanisms” that account for social development and natural evolution, so there must be a “mechanism” that expels the rise of man in the animal world. Society, mutual aid, and even the use of “tools” are characteristic of other species besides man; what is specific to man is language, reason, and the making of tools. It is the last, the making of tools, which in all probability accounts for the simultaneous development of language and thought. Because the use of tools interposes itself between an organism and the outer world, between stimulus and action, it compels action, and hence thinking, to make a detour, from sense impressions by way of the tool, to the object.

Speech would be impossible without human thinking. The human mind has the capacity for abstract thought, of thinking in concepts. While mental life for both man and animal starts from sensations, which combine into images, the human mind differentiates between perceptions and actions by way of thought, just as the tool intervenes between man and that which he seeks to attain. The break between perceptions and actions, and the retention of past perceptions, allows for consciousness and thought, which establishes the inter connections of perceptions and formulates theories applicable to practical actions. Natural science is a living proof of the close connection that exists between tools and thinking. Because the tool is a separate and dead object which can be replaced when damaged, can be changed for a better one and differentiated into a multiplicity of forms for various uses, it assured man’s extraordinary and rapid development; its use, in turn, assured the development of his brain. Labour, then, is the making and the “essence” of man, however much the worker may be despised and alienated. Work and the making of tools lifted man out of the animal world to the plane of social actions in order to cope with life’s necessities.

The change from animal to man must have been a very long process. But the change from primitive to modern man is relatively short. What distinguishes primitive from modern man is not a different brain capacity but a difference in the uses of this capacity. Where social production stagnates, society stagnates; where the productivity of labour develops slowly, social change is also tardy. In modern society social production developed rapidly, creating new and destroying old class relationships. Not the natural struggle for existence but the social struggle for one or another concept of social organisation has determined social development.

From its very beginning, socialism has been both theory and practise. It is thus not restricted to those who are thought to benefit by the transformation from capitalism to socialism. Being concerned with the classless society and the ending of social strife, and by attracting intelligent men from all layers of society, socialism demonstrated its possible realisation in advance. Already as a young student of the natural sciences, specialising in astronomy, Pannekoek entered the Sociaal Democratische Arbeiderspartij (SDAP) and found himself, at once, in its left wing, on the side of Herman Gorter and Henriette Roland-Holst.

This party had been preceded by the Sociaal-Democratische Bond (SDP) which under the influence of Dometa Nieuwenhuis dissociated itself from the Second International. Anti-militarism was its foremost concern and Nieuwenhuis advocated the use of the General Strike for the prevention of war. He could not get a majority for his proposals and he detected, quite early, the trend towards class collaboration within the International. He opposed the exclusion of the Anarchists from the International and his experiences as a member of Parliament led him to reject parliamentarism as a weapon of social emancipation. The “anarchist-syndicalist” tendencies, represented by Nieuwenhuis, split the organisation, and the new socialist party, more akin to the

“model” German Social-Democracy, came into being. However, the radical ideology of the old party entered the traditions of the Dutch socialist movement.

This traditional radicalism found expression in the new party’s monthly, *De Nieuwe Tijd*, particularly in the contributions of Gorter and Pannekoek who fought the growing opportunism of the party leaders. In 1909 the left wing group around Gorter was expelled and established a new organisation, the Sozial-Demokratische Partij. Pannekoek had meanwhile gone to Germany. He lectured in the party schools of the German Sozial-Demokratische Partei, wrote for its theoretical publications and for various other papers, especially the *Bremer Burgerzeitung*. He associated himself with Gorter’s new organisation which, years later, under the leadership of van Revesteyn, Wijnkoop, and Ceton became the Moscow oriented Communist Partij.

Though in the tradition of the “libertarian socialism” of Nieuwenhuis, Pannekoek’s opposition to reformism and social-democratic “revisionism” was a Marxist opposition to the “official Marxism” in both its “orthodox” and “revisionist” forms. In its “orthodox” form, Marxism served as an ideology that covered up a non-Marxian theory and practise. But Pannekoek’s defence of Marxism was not that of the doctrinaire; more than anyone else he recognised that Marxism is not a dogma but a method of thinking about social issues in the actual process of social transformation. Not only were certain aspects of Marxist theory superseded by the development of Marxism itself, but some of its theses, brought forth under definite conditions, would lose their validity when conditions changed.

The First World War brought Pannekoek back to Holland. Prior to the war, together with Radek, Paul Frohlich and Johann Knief, he had been active in Bremen. The Bremen group of left-radicals, the International Communists, later amalgamated with the Spartakus Bund, thus laying the foundation for the Communist Party of Germany. Anti-war groups in Germany found their leaders in Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring; anti-war sentiment in Holland centred around Herman Gorter, Anton Pannekoek, and Henrietta Roland-Holst. In Zimmerwald and Kienthal these groups joined Lenin and his followers in condemning the imperialist war and advocating proletarian actions for either peace or revolution. The Russian Revolution of 1917, hailed as a possible beginning of a world-revolutionary movement, was supported by both Dutch and German radicals despite previous basic differences between them and the Leninists.

While still in prison, Rosa Luxemburg expressed misgivings about the authoritarian tendencies of bolshevism. She feared for the socialist content of the Russian Revolution unless it should find a rectifying support in a proletarian revolution in the West. Her position of critical support towards the bolshevik regime was shared by Gorter and Pannekoek. They worked nevertheless in the new Communist Party and towards the establishment of a new International. In their views, however, this International was to be new not only in name but also in outlook, and with regard to both the socialist goal and the way to reach it. The social-democratic concept of socialism is state socialism, to be won by way of democratic-parliamentary procedures. Universal suffrage and trade unionism were the instruments to accomplish a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism. Lenin and the bolsheviks did not believe in a peaceful transformation and advocated the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. But their concept of socialism was still that of social-democracy, and instrumentalities to this end still included parliamentarism and trade unionism.

However, Czarism was not overthrown by democratic processes and trade union activities. The Organisation of the Revolution was that of spontaneously-evolving soviets, of workers’ and soldiers’ councils, which soon gave way, however, to the bolshevik dictatorship. Just as Lenin was ready to make use of the soviet movement, so was he ready to utilise any other form of

activity, including parliamentarism and trade unionism, to gain his end – dictatorial power for his party camouflaged as the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Having reached his goal in Russia, he tried to consolidate his regime with the help of revolutionary movements in Western Europe and, should this fail, by trying to gain sufficient influence in the Western labour movement to secure at least its indirect support. Because of the immediate needs of the bolshevik regime, as well as the political ideas of its leaders, the Communist International was not the beginning of a new labour movement but merely an attempt to gain control of the old movement and use it to secure the bolshevik regime in Russia.

The social patriotism of the Western labour organisations and their policy of class collaboration during the war convinced the revolutionary workers of Western Europe that these organisations could not be used for revolutionary purposes. They had become institutions bound to the capitalist system and had to be destroyed together with capitalism. However unavoidable and necessary for the early development of socialism and the struggle for immediate needs, parliamentarism and trade unionism were no longer instruments of class struggle. When they did enter the basic social conflict, it was on the side of capital. For Pannekoek this was not a question of bad leadership, to be solved by a better one, but of changed social conditions wherein parliamentarism and trade unionism played no longer an emancipatory role. The capitalist crisis in the wake of the war posed the question of revolution and the old labour movement could not be turned into a revolutionary force since socialism has no room for trade unions or formal bourgeois democracy.

Wherever, during the war, workers fought for immediate demands they had to do so against the trade unions, as in the mass-strikes in Holland, Germany, Austria and Scotland. They organised their activities by way of shop committees, shop stewards or workers’ councils, independently of existing trade unions. In every truly revolutionary situation, in Russia in 1905 and again in 1917, as well as in the Germany and Austria of 1918, workers’ and soldiers’ councils (soviets) arose spontaneously and attempted to organise economic and political life by extending the council system on a national scale. The rule of workers’ councils is the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the councils are elected at the point of production, thus leaving unrepresented all social layers not associated with production. In itself, this may not lead to socialism, and, in fact, the German workers’ councils voted themselves out of existence by supporting the National Assembly. Yet, proletarian self-determination requires a social organisation which leaves the decision-making power over production and distribution in the hands of the workers.

In this council movement, Pannekoek recognised the beginnings of a new revolutionary labour movement which, at the same time, was the beginning of a socialist reorganisation of society. This movement could arise and maintain itself only in opposition to the old labour movement. Its principles attracted the most militant sector of the rebellious proletariat, much to the chagrin of Lenin who could not conceive of a movement not under the control of a party, or the state, and who was busy emasculating the soviets in Russia. But neither could he agree to an international communist movement not under the absolute control of his own party. At first by way of intrigue, and then openly, after 1920, the bolsheviks tried to get the communist movement away from its anti-parliamentary and anti-trade union course, under the pretext that it was necessary not to lose contact with the masses which still adhered to the old organisations. Lenin’s “Left-Wing” Communism : An Infantile Disorder was directed first of all against Gorter and Pannekoek, the spokesmen of the communist council movement.

The Heidelberg Convention in 1919 split the German Communist Party into a Leninist minority and a majority adhering to the the principles of anti-parliamentarism and anti-trade unionism on

which the party had originally been based. But there was now a new dividing question, namely, that of party or class dictatorship. The non-Leninist communists adopted the name, Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD), and a similar organisation was later founded in Holland. Party communists opposed council communists and Pannekoek sided with the latter. The council communists attended the Second Congress of the Third International in the capacity of sympathisers. The conditions of admission to the International – complete subordination of the various national organisations to the will of the Russian Party – divorced the new council movement from the Communist International altogether.

The activities of the Communist International against the “ultra left” were the first direct Russian interventions in the life of communist organisations in other countries. The pattern of control never changed and subordinated, eventually, the whole world communist movement to the specific needs of Russia and the bolshevik state. Although the Russian dominated movement, as Pannekoek and Gorter had predicted, never “captured” the Western trade unions, nor dominated the old socialist organisations by divorcing their followers from their leaders, they did destroy the independence and radical character of the emerging new communist labour movement. With the enormous prestige of a successful political revolution on their side, and with the failure of the German revolution, they could not fail to win a large majority in the communist movement to the principles of Leninism. The ideas and the movement of council communism declined steadily and practically disappeared altogether in the fascist reign of terror and the Second World War.

While Lenin’s fight against the “ultra left” was the first indication of the “counter revolutionary” tendencies of bolshevism, Pannekoek’s and Gorter’s struggle against the Leninist corruption of the new labour movement was the beginning of anti-bolshevism from a proletarian point of view. And this, of course, is the only consistent anti-bolshevism there is. Bourgeois “anti-bolshevism” is the current ideology of imperialist capital competition, which waxes and wanes according to changing national power relations. The Weimar Republic, for instance, fought bolshevism on the one hand and on the other made secret deals with the Red Army and open business deals with bolshevism in order to bolster its own political and economic position within the world competitive process. There was the Hitler-Stalin pact and the invasion of Russia. The Western allies of yesterday are the cold-war enemies of today, to mention only the most obvious of “inconsistencies” which, in fact, are the “politics” of capitalism, determined as they are, by nothing but the profit and power principles.

Anti-bolshevism must presuppose anti-capitalism since bolshevik state capitalism is merely another type of capitalism. This was not as obvious, of course, in 1920 as it is now. It required experience with Russian bolshevism to learn how socialism cannot be realised. The transfer of control of the means of production from private owners to the state and the centralistic and antagonistic determination of production and distribution still leaves intact capital labour relations as a relation between exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled. In its development, it merely leads to a more modern form of capitalism where capital is directly – and not indirectly, as it was previously – the collective property of a politically main tained ruling class. It is in this direction that all capitalist systems move, thus reducing capitalist “anti-bolshevism” to a mere imperialist struggle for world control

In retrospect it is easy to see that the differences between Pannekoek and Lenin could not be resolved by way of argument. In 1920, however, it was still possible to hope that the Western working class would take an independent course not towards a modified capitalism but towards its abolition. Answering Lenin’s “Left-wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder, Gorter still tried

to convince the bolsheviks of the “errors” of their ways, by pointing to the differences in socio economic conditions between Russia and the West, and to the fact that the “tactics” which brought bolshevism to power in Russia could not possibly apply to a proletarian revolution in the West. The further development of bolshevism revealed, that the “bourgeois” elements in Leninism were due not to a “faulty theory,” but had their source in the character of the Russian Revolution itself, which had been conceived and was carried out as a state capitalist revolution sustained by a pseudo-Marxian ideology.

In numerous articles in anti-bolshevik communist journals, and until the end of his life, Pannekoek elucidated upon the character of bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. Just as he did in his earlier criticism of Social Democracy, so here, too, he did not accuse the bolsheviks of a “betrayal” of working-class principles. He pointed out that the Russian Revolution, though an important episode in the development of the working-class movement, aspired only to a system of production which could be Called state socialism, or state capitalism, which are one and the same thing. It did not betray its own goal any more than trade unions “betray” trade unionism. Just as there cannot be any other type of trade unionism than the existing one, so one cannot expect state capitalism to be something other than itself.

The Russian Revolution, however, had been fought under the banner of Marxism, and the bolshevik state is almost generally considered a Marxist regime. Marxism, and soon Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, remained the ideology of Russian state capitalism. To show what the “Marxism” of Leninism really implied, Pannekoek undertook a critical examination of its philosophical basis, published under the title *Lenin as Philosopher*, in 1938.

Lenin’s philosophical ideas appeared in his work *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, in Russian in 1908 and in German and English translations in 1927. Around 1904 certain Russian socialists, Bogdanov in particular, had taken an interest in modern Western natural philosophy, especially in the ideas of Ernst Mach, and tried to combine these with Marxism. They gained some influence within the Russian socialist party and Lenin set out to destroy this influence by attacking its apparent philosophical source.

Though not in a philosophical sense, Marx had called his system of thought materialism. It referred to the material base of all social existence and change and grew out of his rejection of both the philosophical materialism of Feuerbach and the philosophical idealism of Hegel. For bourgeois materialism, nature was objectively given reality and man was determined by natural laws. This direct confrontation of individual man and external nature, and the inability to see society and social labour as an indivisible aspect of the whole of reality, distinguished middle-class materialism from Historical Materialism.

Early bourgeois materialism, or natural philosophy, had held that through sense experience and the intellectual activity derived therefrom, it would be possible to gain absolute, valid knowledge of physical reality – thought to be made up of matter. In an attempt to carry the materialist representation of the objective world to the process of knowledge itself, Mach and the positivists denied the objective reality of matter, since physical concepts must be constructed from sense experience and thus retain their subjectivity. This disturbed Lenin greatly, because for him, knowledge was only what reflects objective truth, truth, that is, about matter, In Mach’s influence in socialist circles, he saw a corruption of Marxian materialism. The subjective element in Mach’s theory of knowledge became, in Lenin’s mind, an idealist aberration and a deliberate attempt to revive religious obscurantism.

It was true, of course, that the critical progress of science found idealistic interpreters who would give comfort to the religionists. Some Marxists began to defend the materialism of the once revolutionary bourgeoisie against the new idealism – and the new science as well – of the established capitalist class. To Lenin this seemed particularly important as the Russian revolutionary movement, still on the verge of the bourgeois revolution, waged its ideological struggle to a large extent with the scientific and philosophical arguments of the early Western bourgeoisie.

By confronting Lenin's attack on "Empiriocriticism" with its real scientific content, Pannekoek not only revealed Lenin's biased and distorted exposition of the ideas of Mach and Avenarius, but also his inability to criticise their work from a Marxian point of view. Lenin attacked Mach not from the point of view of historical materialism, but from that of an earlier and scientifically less developed bourgeois materialism. In this use of middle-class materialism in defence of "Marxism" Pannekoek saw an additional indication of the half-bourgeois, half-proletarian character of bolshevism and of the Russian Revolution itself. It went together with the state capitalist concept of "socialism", with the authoritarian attitudes towards spontaneity and Organisation, with the out-dated and unrealisable principle of national self-determination, and with Lenin's conviction that only the middle-class intelligentsia is able to develop a revolutionary consciousness and is thus destined to lead the masses. The combination of bourgeois materialism and revolutionary Marxism which characterised Lenin's philosophy reappeared with the victorious bolshevism as the combination of neo-capitalist practise and socialist ideology.

However the Russian Revolution was a progressive event of enormous significance comparable to the French Revolution. It also revealed that a capitalist system of production is not restricted to the private property relations which dominated its laissez-faire period. With the subsiding feeble wave of revolutionary activities in the wake of the First World War, capitalism re-established itself, despite the prevailing crisis conditions, by way of increasing state interventions in its economy. In the weaker capitalist nations this took the form of fascism and led to the intensification of imperialist policies which, finally, led to the Second World War. Even more than the First, the Second World War showed clearly that the existing labour movement was no longer a class movement but part and parcel of contemporary capitalism.

In Occupied Holland, during the Second World War, Pannekoek began his work on Workers' Councils, which he completed in 1947. It was a summing-up of his life experience with the theory and practise of the international labour movement and the development and transformation of capitalism in various nations and as a whole. This history of capitalism, and of the struggle against capitalism, ends with the triumph of a revived, though changed, capitalism after the Second World War, and with the utter subjugation of working-class interests to the competitive needs of the two rival capitalist systems preparing for a new world war. While in the West, the still existing labour organisations aspire, at best, to no more than the replacement of monopoly by state-capitalism, the so-called communist world movement hopes for a world revolution after the model of the Russian Revolution. In either case, socialism is confounded with public ownership where the state is master of production and workers are still subjected to a ruling class.

The collapse of the capitalism of old was also the collapse of the old labour movement. What this movement considered to be socialism turns out to be a harsher form of capitalism. But unlike the ruling class, which adapts itself quickly to changed conditions, the working class, by still adhering to traditional ideas and activities, finds itself in a powerless and apparently hopeless situation. And as economic changes only gradually change ideas, it may still take considerable time before a new labour movement – fitted to the new conditions – will arise. For labour's task

is still the same, that is, the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the realisation of socialism. And this can be brought about only when the workers organise themselves and society in such a way as to assure a planned social production and distribution determined by the producers themselves. When such a labour movement arises, it will recognise its origins in the ideas of council communism and in those of one of its most consistent proponents – Anton Pannekoek.

– Paul Mattick (1962)

## **Two Sorts of Reforms (1908)**

The question of the relationship between reform and revolution has played a preponderant role in all debates these last few years. We saw this at the congresses of Nuremberg and Toulouse.

People seek to oppose reform to revolution. Intransigent comrades, always preoccupied with revolution, are accused of neglecting reform. Opposed to them is the concept that says that reforms systematically and methodically realized in current society lead to socialism without a violent rupture being necessary.

Contempt for reform is more anarchist than socialist. It is just as little justified as the reformist concept. In fact revolution cannot be opposed to reform because it is composed, in the final instance, of reforms, but socialist reforms.

Why do we seek to conquer power if it's not to accomplish decisive social reforms in a socialist direction? It's possible that some anarchist or bourgeois brains have conceived the idea of the destruction of the old society and the introduction of a new mode of production with the assistance of a decree. But we socialists know that a new mode of production cannot be improvised by a magic spell; it can only proceed from the old via a series of reforms. But *our* reforms will be of a completely different kind from those of even the most radical bourgeois. The declaration of these reforms will make tremble the bourgeois reformists who never stop talking in congresses about social reforms, complaining of their difficulty. On the other hand, proletarian hearts will leap for joy. It's only when we will have conquered power that we can carry out the complete task. Once master of this power, and no longer needing to take into account capitalist interests, the proletariat will have to destroy all of the miseries of our regime up to their roots. Then we will advance rapidly, while now every step must be painfully conquered and defended, and sometimes the conquered positions are lost again. That will be the era of true reform, in comparison with which the greatest bourgeois reforms will be nothing but poorly done work.

After having conquered power the proletariat can have one sole goal: the suppression of its poverty by the suppression of the causes that give rise to it. It will suppress the exploitation of the popular masses by socializing monopolies and trusts. It will put an end to the exploitation of children, and will consecrate large amounts of resources to the physical and intellectual education of the children of the people. It will suppress unemployment by furnishing productive labor to all the unemployed. It will find the resources to carry out its work of reform in the accumulated colossal riches. It will ensure and develop finally conquered freedom by the complete realization of democracy and autonomy.

The social revolution is nothing but this social reform. In realizing this program the proletariat revolutionizes the mode of production, for capitalism can only subsist on the misery of the proletariat. Once political power has been conquered by the proletariat and unemployment has been suppressed, it will be easy for union organizations to considerably raise salaries and gradually improve working conditions, up to the disappearance of profit. Exploitation will become so difficult that the capitalists will be forced to renounce it. The workers will take their place and will organize production by doing without parasites. The positive work of the revolution will begin. Proletarian social reform directly leads to the complete realization of socialism.

What distinguishes revolution from what is today called social reform? Its depth. The revolution is a series of profound and decisive reforms. Where does this decisive character come from? It comes from the class that accomplishes them. Today it is the bourgeoisie, or even the nobility, that holds power. All that these classes do they naturally do in their own interests. It's in their self-interest that they accord the workers a few ameliorations. As soon as they see that reforms don't succeed in putting down the people they begin to concoct new laws of an oppressive

character. In Germany these are laws against the freedom of assembly, against cooperatives, sick funds, etc. After the revolution the proletariat will act in its own interest in making the machine of state work for it. The difference between revolution and social reform consequently resides in the class holding power.

Those who believe that we will manage to gradually realize socialism by social reform within the current regime misunderstand the class antagonisms that determine reforms. Current social reform, having as a goal the preservation of the capitalist system, finds itself in opposition to the proletarian reform of tomorrow, which will have the contrary goal: the suppression of the system.

The organic connection that exists today between reform and revolution is completely different. In fighting for reform the working class develops and makes itself strong. It ends by conquering political power. This is the unity of reform and revolution. It's only in this special sense that it can be said that from today on we work every day for the revolution.

## **The New Middle Class (1909)**

The middle class is the one which stands between the highest and the lowest strata of society. Above it is the class of great capitalists; below it the proletariat, the class of wage-workers. It constitutes the social group with medium incomes. Accordingly, it is not divided with equal sharpness from both of the other two classes. From the great capitalist the small bourgeois is distinguished only by a difference of degree; he has a smaller amount of capital, a more modest business. Therefore the question as to who belongs to this small bourgeois class is difficult to answer. Every capitalist who suffers from the competition of still greater capitalists denounces those above him and cries out for help on behalf of the middle class.

From the proletariat, on the contrary, the small bourgeois is divided by a difference in kind, in economic function. Be his business and his income ever so small, he is independent. He lives by virtue of his ownership of the means of production, like any other capitalist, and not from the sale of his labor power, like a proletarian. He belongs to the class that undertakes enterprises, that must possess some capital in order to carry them on; often he employs laborers himself. From the wage-working class he is, therefore, sharply differentiated.

In former times this class of small capitalists constituted the main body of the industrial population. Social development, however, has gradually brought about its destruction. The motive power of this development was competition. In the struggle for existence the greatest capitalists, the ones financially and technically best fitted to survive, crowded out the poorer and more backward ones. This process has gone on to such an extent that at present industrial production is carried on almost exclusively on a large scale; in industry small production survives only in the form of repair work or special artistic activities. Of the members of the earlier middle class a small number have worked themselves up to the rank of great capitalists; the great majority have lost their independence and sunk down into the proletariat. For the present generation the industrial middle class has only a historical existence.

The class that I referred to in my first paragraph is the commercial middle class. This social stratum we ourselves have seen, and still see, decaying before our eyes. It is made up of small merchants, shopkeepers, etc. Only during the last decades have the great capitalists gone into the retail business; only recently have they begun to establish branch concerns and mail-order houses, thus either driving out the small concerns or forcing them into a trust. If during recent times there has been great lamentation over the disappearance of the middle class we must keep in mind that it is only the commercial middle class that is in question. The industrial middle class long ago went down and the agrarian middle class became subordinate to capitalism without losing the forms of independence.

In this account of the decline of the middle class we have the theory of Socialism in a nutshell. The social development which resulted in this phenomenon made of Socialism a possibility and a necessity. So long as the great mass of the people were independent producers Socialism could exist only as the utopia of individual theorists or little groups of enthusiasts; it could not be the practical program of a great class. Independent producers do not need Socialism; they do not even want to hear of it. They own their means of production and these are to them the guarantee of a livelihood. Even the sad position into which they are forced by competition with the great capitalists can hardly render them favourable to Socialism. It makes them only the more eager to become great capitalists themselves. They may wish, occasionally, to limit the freedom of competition — perhaps under the name of Socialism; but they do not want to give up their own independence or freedom of competition. So long, therefore, as there exists a strong middle class it acts as a protecting wall for the capitalists against the attacks of the workers. If the workers

demand the socialization of the means of production, they find in this middle class just as bitter an opponent as in the capitalists themselves.

The decay of the middle class signifies the concentration of capital and the growth of the proletariat. Capital faces, therefore, an ever-increasing army of opponents and is supported by a constantly decreasing number of defenders. For the proletariat Socialism is a necessity; it constitutes the only means of protecting labor against robbery by a horde of useless parasites, the only bulwark against want and poverty. As the great mass of the population comes more and more to consist of proletarians, Socialism, in addition to being a necessity, comes more and more to be a possibility; for the bodyguard of private property grows constantly weaker and becomes powerless against the constantly mounting forces of the proletariat.

It goes without saying, therefore, that the bourgeoisie views with alarm the disappearance of the middle class. The new development which inspires the proletariat with hope and confidence fills the ruling class with fear for its future. The faster the proletariat, its enemy increases in numbers, the faster the owning class decreases, the more certainly the bourgeoisie sees the approach of its doom. What is to be done?

A ruling class cannot voluntarily give up its own predominance; for this predominance appears to it the sole foundation of the world order. It must defend this predominance; and this it can do only so long as it has hope and self-confidence. But actual conditions cannot give self-confidence to the capitalist class; therefore it creates for itself a hope that has no support in reality. If this class were ever to see clearly the principles of social science, it would lose all faith in its own possibilities; it would see itself as an aging despot with millions of persecuted victims marching in upon him from all directions and shouting his crimes into his ears. Fearfully he shuts himself in, closes his eyes to the reality and orders his hirelings to invent fables to dispel the awful truth. And this is exactly the way of the bourgeoisie. In order not to see the truth, it has appointed professors to soothe its troubled spirit with fables. Pretty fables they are, which glorify its overlordship, which dazzle its eyes with visions of an eternal life and scatter its doubts and dreams as so many nightmares. Concentration of capital? Capital is all the time being democratized through the increasing distribution of stocks and bonds. Growth of the proletariat? The proletariat is at the same time growing more orderly, more tractable. Decay of the middle class? Nonsense; a new middle class is rising to take the place of the old.

It is this doctrine of the new middle class that I wish to discuss in some detail in the present paper. To this new class belong, in the first place, the professors. Their function is to comfort the bourgeoisie with theories as to the future of society, and it is among them that this fable of the new middle class found its origin. In Germany there were Schmoller, Wagner, Masargh and a host of others who devoted themselves to the labor of elaborating it. They explained that the Socialist doctrine as to the disappearance of the middle class was of small importance. Every table of statistics showed that medium incomes remained almost exactly as numerous as in former times. In the places of the disappearing independent producers there were appearing other groups of the population. Industry on a large scale demanded an immense army of intermediating functionaries: overseers, skilled workers, engineers, managers of departments, bosses, etc. They formed a complete hierarchy of officials; they were the officers and subalterns of the industry army, an army in which the great capitalists are the generals and the workingmen the common soldiers. Members of the so-called "free" vocations, physicians, lawyers, authors, etc., belonged also to this class. A new class, then, constantly increasing in numbers, was said to be taking the place formerly occupied by the old middle class.

This observation in itself is correct, though not at all new. All that there is new about it is its exposition with a view to disproving the Socialist theories of classes. It was expressed clearly, e. g., by Schmoller at an Evangelical Social Congress held at Leipsic as far back as 1897. The audience burst into joyful enthusiasm at the good news, and declared in a resolution: "The congress notes with pleasure the reassuring and scientifically grounded conviction of the speaker that the economic development of modern times does not necessarily lead to the destruction of a class so useful to the welfare of society as the middle class." And another professor declared: "He has filled us with optimism for the future. If it is not true that the middle class and the small bourgeoisie are disappearing, we shall not be forced to alter the fundamental principles of capitalist society."

The fact that science is merely the servant of capitalism could not be more clearly expressed than in such statements. Why is this declaration that the middle class is not decaying hailed as reassuring? Why does it create content and optimism? Is it because through it the workers will attain better conditions, be less exploited? No. Just the opposite. If this statement is true, the worker will be kept forever in slavery by a permanent army of enemies; what appears to prevent his liberation is pronounced reassuring and optimistic. Not the discovery of truth, but the reassurance of an increasingly superfluous class of parasites is the object of this science. No wonder that it comes into conflict with the truth. It fails, not only in its denial of Socialist teaching, but in its reassurance of the capitalist class. The comfort that it gives is nothing more than self-deception.

The Socialist doctrine as to the concentration of capital does not imply the disappearance of medium incomes. It has nothing to do with relative incomes; it deals, on the contrary, with social classes and their economic functions. For our theory society consists, not of poor, well-to-do and rich, of those who own nothing, little, or much; but rather of classes, each one of which plays a separate part in production. A merely external, superficial classification according to incomes has always been a means whereby bourgeois writers have confused actual social conditions and produced unclearness instead of clearness. The Socialist theory restores clearness and scientific exactness by concentrating attention upon the natural divisions of society. This method has made it possible to formulate the law of social development; production on a large scale constantly replaces production on a small scale. Socialists maintain, not that medium incomes, but rather small, independent producers, tend more and more to disappear. This generalization the professors do not attack; everyone acquainted with social conditions, every journalist, every government official, every petty bourgeois, every capitalist knows that it is correct. In the very declaration that the middle class is being rescued by a new, rising class it is specifically acknowledged that the former is disappearing.

But this new middle class has a character altogether different from that of the old one. That it stands between capitalists and laborers and subsists on a medium income constitutes its only resemblance to the small bourgeoisie of former times. But this was the least essential characteristic of the small bourgeois class. In its essential character, in its economic function, the new middle class differs absolutely from the old.

The members of the new middle class are not self-supporting, independent industrial units; they are in the service of others, those who possess the capital necessary to the undertaking of enterprises. Economically considered, the old middle class consisted of capitalists, even if they were small capitalists; the new consists of proletarians, even if they are highly paid proletarians. The old middle class lived by virtue of its possession of the means of production; the new makes

its livelihood through the sale of its labor power. The economic character of the latter class is not at all modified by the fact that this labor power is of a highly developed quality; that, therefore, it receives comparatively high wages; no more is it modified by the fact that this labor power is chiefly of an intellectual sort, that it depends more on the brain than on the muscles. In modern industry the chemist and the engineer are dealt with as mere wage-workers; their intellectual powers are worked to the limit of exhaustion just like the physical powers of the common laborer.

With the statement of this fact the professorial talk about the new middle class stands revealed in all its foolishness; it is a fable, a piece of self-deception. As a protection against the desire of the proletariat for expropriation the new middle class can never take the place of the old. The independent small capitalists of former times felt themselves interested in the maintenance of private property in the means of production because they were themselves owners of means of production. The new middle class has not the slightest interest in keeping for others a privilege in which they themselves have no part. To them it is all one whether they stand in the service of an individual manufacturer, a stock company, or a public organization, like the community or state. They no longer dream of sometime carrying on an independent business; they know that they must remain all their lives in the position of subordinates. The socialization of the means of production would not change their position except as it would improve it by liberating them from the caprice of the individual capitalist.

It has often been remarked by bourgeois writers that the new middle class has a much more certain position than the old one and, therefore, less ground for discontent. The fact that stock companies destroy the small business men is a charge that cannot be allowed to count against its many advantages; it is really insignificant in view of the fact that the small business men, after being ruined, are given positions in the service of the company, where, as a rule, their life is much freer from care than it was in the first place. (Hemburg.) Strange, then, that they struggled so long, sacrificed their wealth and exerted their strength to the utmost, to maintain themselves in their old positions while all the time such an alluring berth was inviting them! What these apologists of the capitalist system carefully conceal is the great difference between present dependence and former independence. The middle class man of former times no doubt felt the pressure of want, of competition; but the new middle class man must obey a strange master, who may at any moment arbitrarily discharge him.

Now it is certainly true that those who serve the modern capitalist as skilled technical workers or company officials are not tortured by the cares which weighed down the spirit of the small bourgeois of former days. Often, also, their incomes are greater. But so far as the maintenance of the capitalist system is concerned they are worthless. Not personal discontent, but class interest, is the motive power of social revolution. In many cases even the industrial wage-worker of today is in a better position than the independent small farmer. Nevertheless the farmers, by virtue of the possession of their little pieces of ground, have an interest in the maintenance of the system of private ownership, while the wage-worker demands its destruction. The same is true of the middle class: the oppressed, discontented small capitalists, despite the disadvantages of their position, were props of capitalism; and this the better situated, care-free modern trust employes can never be.

This fact means nothing more than that the professorial phrases, intended to reassure the bourgeoisie with the notion of this new middle class and so hide from them the tremendous transformation which has taken place, have turned out to be pure trickery, without even the remotest resemblance to science. The statement that the new class occupies the same position in

the class-struggle as did the small bourgeoisie of the past has proved to be a worthless deception. But as to the real position of this new class, its actual function in our social organism, I have thus far hardly touched upon it [1].

The new intellectual middle class has one thing in common with the rest of the proletariat: it consists of the propertyless, of those who sell their labor power, and therefore has no interest in the maintenance of capitalism. It has, moreover, in common with the workers, the fact that it is modern and progressive, that through the operation of the actual social forces it grows constantly stronger, more numerous, more important. It is, therefore, not a reactionary class, as was the old small bourgeoisie; it does not yearn for the good old pre-capitalistic days. It looks forward, not backward.

But this does not mean that the intellectuals are to be placed side by side with the wage-workers in every respect, that like the industrial proletariat they are predisposed to become recruits of Socialism. To be sure, in the economic sense of the term, they are proletarians; but they form a very special group of wage-workers, a group that is socially so sharply divided from the real proletarians that they form a special class with a special position in the class-struggle.

In the first place, their higher pay is a matter of importance. They know nothing of actual poverty, of misery, of hunger. Their needs may exceed their incomes and so bring about a discomfort that gives real meaning to the expression "gilded poverty"; still immediate need does not compel them, as it does the real proletarians, to attack the capitalist system. Their position may rouse discontent, but that of the workers is unendurable. For them Socialism has many advantages; for the workers it is an absolute necessity.

In addition to this, it must be remembered that this body of intellectuals and highly-paid industrial employes divides itself into a large number of widely varying strata. These strata are determined chiefly by differences in income and position. We begin at the top with heads of departments, superintendents, managers, etc., and go on down to bosses and office employes. From these it is but a step to the highest paid workers. Thus, so far as income and position are concerned, there is really a gradual descent from capitalist to proletarian. The higher strata have a definitely capitalistic character; the lower ones are more proletarian, but there is no sharp dividing line. On account of these divisions the members of this new middle class lack the unity of spirit which makes co-operation easy for the proletariat.

The state of affairs just described hinders them in their struggle to improve their position. It is to their interest, as it is to that of other workers, to sell their labor power at the highest possible price. Workingmen bring this about through joining forces in unions; as individuals they are defenceless against the capitalists, but united they are strong. No doubt this upper class of employes could do more to coerce the capitalists if they formed themselves into a great union. But this is infinitely more difficult for them than for workingmen. In the first place they are divided into numberless grades and ranks, ranged one above the other; they do not meet as comrades, and so cannot develop the spirit of solidarity. Each individual does not make it a matter of personal pride to improve the condition of his entire class; the important thing is rather that he personally struggle up into the next higher rank. In order to do this it is first of all necessary not to call down on himself the disfavor of the master class by opposing it in an industrial struggle. Thus mutual envy of the upper and lower ranks prevents co-operative action. A strong bond of solidarity cannot be developed. It results from this condition that employes of the class in question do not co-operate in large bodies; they make their efforts separately, or only a few together, and this makes cowards of them; they do not feel in themselves the power which the workingmen draw

from consciousness of numbers. And then, too, they have more to fear from the displeasure of the masters; a dismissal for them is a much more serious matter. The worker stands always on the verge of starvation and so unemployment has few terrors for him. The high class employe, on the contrary, has a comparatively agreeable life, and a new position is difficult to find.

For all these reasons this class of intellectuals and higher employes is prevented from instituting a fight along union lines for the improvement of their position. Only in the lower ranks, where great numbers labor under the same conditions and the way to promotion is difficult, are there any signs of a union movement. In Germany two groups of employes of this class have lately made a beginning. One of these groups consists of foremen in coal mines. These men constitute a very high class of labor, for in addition to superintending industry they have oversight of arrangements designed to insure sanitary conditions and safety from accidents. Special conditions have fairly forced them to organize. The millionaire operators, in their greed of profits, have neglected safety devices to an extent that makes catastrophes inevitable. Something had to be done. Thus far the organization is still weak and timid, but it is a beginning. The other group is made up of machinists and engineers. It has spread all over Germany, has become so important, in fact, as to be made a point of attack by the capitalists. A number of ruthless employers demanded that their men desert the organization, and when they refused to comply discharged them. For the present the union has been able to do nothing for these victims except to support them; but even in this it has taken up the cudgels against the capitalist class.

For the cause of Socialism we can count on this new middle class even less than for the labor union struggle. For one thing, they are set over the workers as superintendents, overseers, bosses, etc. In these capacities they are expected to speed up the workers, to get the utmost out of them. So, representing the interest of capital in relation to labor, they naturally assume a position a bitter enmity to the proletariat and find it almost impossible to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in the struggle for a single goal.

In addition, a set of ideas, particularly notions of themselves and their position, tends to ally them to the capitalists. Most of them come from bourgeois, or at least small capitalist, circles and bring with them all the prejudices which stand opposed to Socialism. Among the workers such prejudices are uprooted by their new environment, but among these higher, intellectual employes they are actually strengthened. Small producers had, for example, as the first article of their faith, the idea that each one could struggle upward in competitive strife only by virtue of his own energy; as a complement to this teaching stood the notion that Socialism would put an end to personal initiative. This individualistic conception of things is, as I have remarked, strengthened in the intellectuals by their new environment; among these very technical and often high placed employes the most efficient sometimes find it possible to climb into the most important positions.

All the regular bourgeois prejudices strike deepest root in this class, further, because its members are nourished on the study of unscientific theories. They regard as scientific truth that which existed among the small bourgeois as subjective, unreasoned opinion. They have great notions of their own education and refinement, feel themselves elevated far above "the masses"; it naturally never occurs to them that the ideals of these masses may be scientifically correct and that the "science" of their professors may be false. As theorizers, seeing the world always as a mass of abstractions, laboring always with their minds, knowing nothing of little of material activities, they are fairly convinced that minds control the world. This notion shuts them out from the understanding of Socialist theory. When they see the masses of laborers and hear of Socialism they think of a crude "levelling down" which would put an end to their own social and economic

advantages. In contrast to the workers they think of themselves as persons who have something to lose, and forget, therefore, the fact that they are being exploited by the capitalists.

Take this altogether and the result is that a hundred causes separate this new middle class from Socialism. Its members have no independent interest which could lead them to an energetic defense of capitalism. But their interest in Socialism is equally slight. They constitute an intermediate class, without definite class ideals, and therefore they bring into the political struggle an element which is unsteady and incalculable.

In great social disturbances, general strikes, e. g., they may sometimes stand by the workers and so increase their strength; they will be the more likely to do this in cases in which such a policy is directed against reaction. On other occasions they may side with the capitalists. Those of them in the lower strata will make common cause with a "reasonable" Socialism, such as is represented by the Revisionists. But the power which will overthrow capitalism can never come from anywhere outside the great mass of proletarian.

**Marxist Theory and Revolutionary  
Tactics (1912)**

# 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 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: “Pan-nekoek sees my thinking as pure Revisionism.”

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.

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## 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.” 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 lumpenproletariat, 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.”

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 de-

terminated 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. 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.”

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."

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 than 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."

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”, 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. 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." 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.

## **Class Struggle and Nation (1912)**

# Introduction

Not being Austrian, perhaps I should apologize for writing on the national question. If it were a purely Austrian issue, anyone who is not intimately acquainted with the practical situation and who is not obliged to be acquainted with it through everyday practice would not get involved in examining it. But this question is acquiring increasing importance for other countries as well. And thanks to the writings of the Austrian theoreticians, and especially to Otto Bauer's valuable work, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*[1], it is no longer an exclusive preserve of Austrian practice and has become a question of general socialist theory. Currently, this question, the way it has been addressed and its implications cannot but arouse lively interest in every socialist who considers theory to be the guiding thread of our practice; at the present time one can also make judgments and engage in criticism outside the realm of specifically Austrian conditions. Since we shall have to combat certain of Bauer's conclusions in the following pages, we shall say in advance that this by no means diminishes the value of his work; its importance does not reside in having established definitive and irrefutable results in this domain, but in laying the groundwork for further debate and discussion on this question.

This discussion seems to be especially timely at this juncture. The separatist crisis puts the national question on the agenda in the party and obliges us to re-examine these questions, and to subject our point of view to thorough scrutiny. And maybe a debate concerning theoretical basics would not be totally useless here; with this study we hope to make our contribution in this debate to our Austrian comrades. The fact that comrade Strasser, in his study *Worker and Nation*, has arrived at the same conclusions as we have, by a completely different route, on the basis of Austrian conditions (guided of course by the same basic Marxist conception), has played a determinant role in the decision to publish this pamphlet. Our labors may therefore complement one another in regard to this question.

# **I. The Nation and its Transformations**

# The Bourgeois Conception and the Socialist Conception

Socialism is a new scientific conception of the human world which is fundamentally distinct from all bourgeois conceptions. The bourgeois manner of representing things considers the different formations and institutions of the human world either as products of nature, praising or condemning them depending on whether or not they contradict or conform to “eternal human nature”, or as products of chance or arbitrary human decisions which can be altered at will by means of artificial violence. Social democracy, on the other hand, considers the same phenomena to be naturally-arising products of the development of human society. While nature undergoes practically no change—the genesis of animal species and their differentiation took place over very long periods—human society is subject to constant and fast-paced development. This is because its basis, labor for survival, has constantly had to assume new forms as its tools have been perfected; economic life is thrown into turmoil and this gives rise to new ways of seeing and new ideas, new laws, and new political institutions. It is therefore in relation to this point that the opposition between the bourgeois and socialist conceptions resides: for the former, a naturally immutable character and at the same time, the arbitrary; for the latter, an incessant process of becoming and transformation in accordance with laws established via the economy, upon the basis of labor.

This also applies to the nation. The bourgeois conception sees in the diversity of nations natural differences among men; nations are groupings constituted by the community of race, of origin, and of language. But at the same time it also believes that it can, by means of coercive political measures, oppress nations in one place, and extend its domain at the expense of other nations somewhere else. Social democracy considers nations to be human groups which have formed units as a consequence of their shared history. Historical development has produced nations within its limits and in its own way; it also produces change in the meaning and essence of the nation in general with the passage of time and changing economic conditions. It is only on the basis of economic conditions that one can understand the history and development of the nation and the national principle.

From the socialist point of view, it is Otto Bauer who has supplied, in his work *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, the most profound analysis; his exposition constitutes the indispensable point of departure for the further examination and discussion of the national question. In this work, the socialist point of view is formulated as follows: “The nation is thus no longer for us a fixed thing, but a process of becoming, determined in its essence by the conditions under which the people struggle for their livelihood and for the preservation of their kind” (p. 107). And a little further on: “the *materialist conception of history* can comprehend the nation as the never-completed product of a constantly occurring process, the ultimate driving force of which is constituted by the conditions governing the struggle of humans with nature, the transformation of the human forces of production, and the changes in the relations governing human

labor. This conception renders the nation as the historical within us” (p. 108). National character is “solidified history”.

## The Nation as Community of Fate

Bauer most correctly defines the nation as “*the totality of human beings bound together by a community of fate into a community of character*” (p.117). This formula has frequently but mistakenly been attacked, since it is perfectly correct. The misunderstanding resides in the fact that similarity and community are always confused. Community of fate does not mean submission to an identical fate, but the shared experience of a single fate undergoing constant changes, in a continuous reciprocity. The peasants of China, India and Egypt resemble one another in the similarity of their economic conditions; they have the same class character but there is not a trace of community between them. The petit-bourgeois, the shop-keepers, the workers, the noble landowners, and the peasants of England, however, although they display many differences in character due to their different class positions, nonetheless still constitute a community; a history lived in common, the reciprocal influence they exercise upon one another, albeit in the form of struggles, all of this taking place through the medium of a common language, makes them a community of character, a nation. At the same time, the mental content of this community, its common culture, is transmitted from generation to generation thanks to the written word.

This is by no means meant to imply that all characters within a nation are similar. To the contrary, there can be great differences of character within a nation, depending on one's class or place of residence. The German peasant and the German industrialist, the Bavarian and the Oldenburger, display manifest differences in character; they nonetheless still form part of the German nation. Nor does this imply that there are no communities of character other than nations. We are not, of course, referring to special organizations, limited in time, such as joint-stock companies or trade unions. But *every human organization which comprises an enduring unity, inherited from generation to generation, constitutes a community of character engendered by a community of fate.*

The religious communities offer another example. They are also “solidified history”. They are not just groups of people who share the same religion and who come together for a religious purpose. This is because they are, so to speak, born in their churches and rarely pass from one church to another. In principle, however, the religious community includes all those who are connected socially in one way or another by origin, their village or their class; the community of interests and conditions of existence simultaneously created a community of basic mental representations which assumed a religious form. It also created the bond of reciprocal duties, of loyalty and protection, between the organization and its members. The community of religion was the expression of social belonging in primitive tribal communities and in the Church of the Middle Ages. The religious communities born during the Reformation, the Protestant Churches and sects, were organizations of class struggle against the dominant Church, and against each other; they thus correspond to a certain extent to our contemporary political parties. As a result, the different religious faiths expressed living, real, deeply-felt interests; one could convert from one religion to another in much the same way that one can quit one party and join another in our time. Later, these organizations petrified into communities of faith in which only the top stratum, the clergy, maintained relations within its own ambit which set it above the entire Church. The

community of interests disappeared; within each Church, there arose, with social development, numerous classes and class contradictions. The religious organization became more and more an empty shell, and the profession of faith, an abstract formula lacking any social content. It was replaced by other organizations which were living associations of interests. Hence the religious community constitutes a grouping whose community of fate increasingly belongs to the past, and is progressively dissolving. *Religion, too, is a precipitate of what is historical in us.*

The nation, then, is not *the only* community of character which has arisen from a community of fate, but only one of its forms, and sometimes it is hard to distinguish it from the others without ambiguity. It would serve no purpose to attempt to discover which human units of organization could be defined as nations, especially in ancient times. Primitive tribal units, great or small, were communities of character and of fate in which characteristics, customs, culture and language were passed on from generation to generation. The same is true of the village communes or the peasant regions of the Middle Ages. Otto Bauer discovers in the Middle Ages, in the era of the Hohenstauffens, the "German nation" in the political and cultural community of the German nobility. On the other hand, the medieval Church possessed numerous traits which made it a kind of nation; it was the community of the European peoples, with a common history and common mental representations, and they even had a common language, the Latin of the Church, which allowed educated people to mutually influence one another, the dominant intellectual force of all of Europe, and united them in a community of culture. Only in the last years of the Middle Ages did nations in the modern sense of the term slowly arise, each with its own national language, national unity and culture.

*A common language* is, insofar as it forms a living bond between men, *the most important attribute* of the nation; *but this does not justify identifying nations with human groups speaking the same language.* The English and the Americans are, despite the fact that they speak the same language, two nations with different histories, two different communities of fate which present strikingly divergent national characteristics. It is also incorrect to reckon the German Swiss as part of a common German nation which would embrace all German-speaking peoples. No matter how many cultural elements have been allowed to be exchanged between them by means of an identical written language, fate has separated the Swiss and the Germans for several centuries. The fact that the former are free citizens of a democratic republic and the latter have lived successively under the tyranny of petty princes, foreign rule, and the weight of the new German police state, had to confer upon each group, even if they read the same authors, a very different character and one cannot speak of a community of fate and of character in this case. The political aspect is yet more evident among the Dutch; the rapid economic development of the maritime provinces, which surrounded themselves on the landward side with a wall of dependent provinces, and then became a powerful mercantile State, a political entity, made Low German a separate modern written language, but only for a small segment separated from the mass of those who spoke Low German; all the others have been excluded from this language by political barriers and have adopted, as residents of Germany who have been subject to a common history, the High German written language and culture. If the Austrian Germans continue to emphasize their German qualities despite their long history of separate development and the fact that they have not shared in the most important of the most recent historical experiences of the Germans of the Empire, this is essentially due to their embattled position in relation to Austria's other nationalities.

# The Peasant Nation and the Modern Nation

The peasants have often been described as being stalwart guardians of nationality. Otto Bauer, however, also calls them the tenants of the nation who do not participate in national culture. This contradiction starkly reveals that what is “national” in the peasantry is a very different thing than what constitutes the modern nation. Modern nationality does of course descend from peasant nationality but differs from it in a fundamental way.

In the ancient natural economy of the peasants, the economic unit was reduced to its smallest scale; the operative interest did not extend beyond the borders of the village or the valley. Each district constituted a community which barely maintained relations with its nearest neighbors, a community that had its own history, its own customs, its own dialect and its own character. Some of them were connected by ties of kinship with the villages of neighboring districts, but they did not have much influence on one another. The peasant clings powerfully to the specificity of his community. To the extent that his economy has nothing to do with the outside world, to the extent that his seeds and his crops are only in exceptional cases affected by the vicissitudes of political events, all the influences of the outside world pass over him without a trace. He is in any case unconcerned and remains passive; such events do not penetrate his innermost being. The only thing which can modify man’s nature is that which he actively grasps, which obliges him to transform himself and in which he participates out of self-interest. This is why the peasant preserves his particularism against all the influences of the outside world and remains “without history” as long as his economy is self-sufficient. From the moment that he is dragged into the gears of capitalism and established in other conditions—he becomes bourgeois or a worker, the peasant begins to depend on the world market and makes contact with the rest of the world—from the moment that he has new interests, the indestructible character of his old particularism is lost. He is integrated into the modern nation; he becomes a member of a much more extensive community of fate, a nation in the modern sense.

The peasantry is often spoken of as if the preceding generations already belonged to the same nation as their descendants under capitalism. The term “nations without history” implies a concept according to which the Czechs, Slovenes, Poles, Ukrainians and Russians have always been so many different and particular nations but that somehow they have long remained dormant as such. In fact, one cannot speak of the Slovenes, for example, except as a certain number of groups and districts with related dialects, without these groups ever having constituted a real unity or a community. What the name faithfully conveys is the fact that, as a general rule, dialect decides which nations are to be claimed by the descendants of its original speakers. In the final analysis, however, it is the real developments which decide whether the Slovenes and the Serbs, or the Russians and the Ukrainians, must become one national community with one written language and one common culture, or two separate nations. It is not language which is decisive but the political-economic process of development. By identifying language as the decisive factor one could just as well say that the peasantry of Lower Saxony is the faithful guardian of German nationality, and also of Dutch nationality, depending on which side of the border it inhabits; it only

preserves its own village or provincial particularity; it would be just as foolish to say that the peasant of the Ardennes tenaciously preserves a Belgian, Walloon or French nationality when he clings to the dialect and the customs of his valley, or to say that a Carinthian peasant of the precapitalist era belonged to the Slovene nation. The Slovene nation *only made its appearance* with the modern bourgeois classes which formed a specific nation, and the peasant would not willingly have become a part of it unless he was linked to that community by real self-interest.

Modern nations are integral products of bourgeois society; they appeared with commodity production, that is, with capitalism, and its agents are the bourgeois classes. Bourgeois production and circulation of commodities need vast economic units, large territories whose inhabitants are united in a community with a unified State administration. As capitalism develops it incessantly reinforces the central State power; the State becomes more cohesive and is sharply defined in relation to other States. The State is the combat organization of the bourgeoisie. Insofar as the bourgeois economy rests upon competition, in the struggle against others of the same kind, the organizations which are formed by the bourgeoisie must necessarily fight among themselves; the more powerful the State, the greater the benefits to which its bourgeoisie aspire. Language has not been a crucial factor except in the effort to draw the boundaries of these States; regions with related dialects have been forced into political mergers where other factors do not intervene, because political unity, the new community of fate, requires a single language as a means of intercourse. The written language used for general concourse is created from one of these dialects; it is thus, in a sense, an *artificial* creation. So Otto Bauer is right when he says: "I create a common language together with those individuals with whom I most closely interact; and I interact most closely with those individuals with whom I share a common language" (p. 101). This is how those nation States which are both State and nation arose.[2] They did not become political entities simply because they already constituted national communities; it was their new economic interests and economic necessity which was the basis of men's joining together into such solid groupings; but whether these States or others emerged—if, for example, southern Germany and northern France did not together form a political entity but this was instead the case with southern and northern Germany—is due principally to the ancient kinship of dialect.

The spread of the nation State, and its capitalist evolution, have brought about a situation where an extreme diversity of classes and populations coexist within it; this is why it sometimes seems dubious to define the nation State as a community of fate and of character, because classes and populations do not act directly upon one another. But the community of fate of the German peasants and big capitalists, of the Bavarians and the people of Oldenburg, consists in the fact that all are members of the German Empire, within whose borders they wage their economic and political struggles, within which they endure the same policies, where they must take a position regarding the same laws and thus have an effect upon one another; this is why they constitute a real community despite all the diversity of this community.

The same is not true of those States which emerged as dynastic entities under absolutism, without the direct collaboration of their bourgeois classes, and which consequently, through conquest, came to include populations speaking many different languages. When the penetration of capitalism begins to make headway in one of these States, various nations arise within the same State, which becomes a multinational State, like Austria. The cause of the appearance of new nations alongside the old resides once again in the fact that *competition is the basis for the existence of the bourgeois classes*. When the modern classes arose from a purely peasant population group, when large masses were installed in the cities as industrial workers, soon to be followed by small

merchants, intellectuals and factory owners, the latter were then compelled to undertake efforts on their own behalf to secure the business of these masses who all spoke the same language, placing the accent on their nationality. The nation, as a cohesive community, constitutes for those elements that form part of it a market, a customer base, a domain of exploitation where they have an advantage over their competitors from other nations. To form a community with modern classes, they must elaborate a common written language which is necessary as a means of communication and becomes the language of culture and of literature. The permanent contact between the classes of bourgeois society and State power, which had hitherto only known German as the official language of communication, obliges them to fight for the recognition of their languages, their schools and their administrative apparatuses, in which fight the class having the most material interest is the national intelligentsia. Since the State must represent the interests of the bourgeoisie and must give it material support, each national bourgeoisie must secure as much influence over the State as possible. To win this influence it must fight against the bourgeoisie of other nations; the more successfully it rallies the whole nation around it in this struggle, the more power it exercises. As long as the leading role of the bourgeoisie is based upon the essence of the economy and is acknowledged as something which is self-evident, the bourgeoisie can count on the other classes which feel bound to it on this point by an identity of interests.

In this respect as well the nation is utterly a product of capitalist development, and is even a necessary product. Wherever capitalism penetrates, it must necessarily appear as the community of fate of the bourgeois classes. The national struggles within such a State are not the consequence of any kind of oppression, or of legal backwardness, it is the natural expression of competition as the basic precondition for the bourgeois economy; the (bourgeois) struggle of each against all is the indispensable precondition for the abrupt separation of the various nations from one another.

# Tradition and the Human Mind

In man, nationality is indeed part of his nature, but primarily of his mental nature. Inherited physical traits eventually allow the various peoples to be distinguished from one another, but this does not serve to separate them, nor, even less so, does it make them enter into conflict with one another. Peoples distinguish themselves as communities of culture, a culture transmitted by a common language; in a nation's culture, which can be defined as mental in nature, is inscribed the whole history of its life. National character is not composed of physical traits, but of the totality of its customs, its concepts and its forms of thought over time. If one wishes to grasp the essence of a nation, it is above all necessary to get a clear view of how man's mental aspect is constituted under the influence of his living conditions.

Every move that man makes must first pass through his head. The direct motor force of all his actions resides in his mind. It can consist of habits, drives and unconscious instincts which are the expressions of always similar repetitions of the same vital necessities in the same external living conditions. It could also enter into man's consciousness as thoughts, ideas, motivations or principles. Where do they come from? Here, the bourgeois conception sees the influence of a higher supernatural world which penetrates us, the expression of an eternal moral principle within us, or else the spontaneous products of the mind itself. Marxist theory, however, historical materialism, explains that *everything which is mental in man is the product of the material world around him*. This entire real world penetrates every part of the mind through the sensory organs and leaves its mark: our vital needs, our experience, everything we see and hear, that which others communicate to us as their thought appears as if we had actually observed it ourselves.[3] Consequently, any influence from an unreal, merely postulated supernatural world is excluded. Everything in the mind has come from the external world which we designate with the name of the material world, which is not meant to imply that material constituted of physical matter which can be measured, but everything which really exists, including thought. But in this context mind does not play the role which is sometimes attributed to it by a narrow mechanistic conception, that of a passive mirror that reflects the external world, an inanimate receiver that absorbs and preserves everything thrown at it. *Mind is active, it acts, and it modifies everything that penetrates it from the outside in order to make something new*. And it was Dietzgen who has most clearly demonstrated how it does so. The external world flows before the mind like an endless river, always changing; the mind registers its influences, it merges them, it adds them to what it had previously possessed and combines these elements. From the river of infinitely varied phenomena, it forms solid and consistent concepts in which the reality in motion is somehow frozen and fixed and loses its fugitive aspect. The concept of "fish" involves a multitude of observations of animals that swim, that of "good" innumerable stances in relation to different actions, that of "capitalism" a whole lifetime of frequently very painful experiences. Every thought, every conviction, every idea, every conclusion, such as, for example, the generalization that trees do not have leaves in the winter, that work is hard and disagreeable, that whoever gives me a job is my benefactor, that the capitalist is my enemy, that there is strength in organization, that it is good

to fight for one's nation, are the summaries of part of the living world, of a multiform experience in a concise, abrupt and, one could say, rigid and lifeless formula. The greater and the more complete the experience which serves as documentation, the more deep-rooted and solid the thought and conviction, the more true it is. But all experience is limited, the world is constantly changing, new experiences are ceaselessly being added to the old, they are integrated into the old ideas or enter into contradiction with them. This is why man has to restructure his ideas and abandon some of them as mistaken—such as that of the capitalist benefactor—and confer a new meaning to certain concepts—such as the concept of “fish”, from which the whales had to be separated—and create new concepts for new phenomena—like that of imperialism—and find other causal relations for some concepts—the intolerable character of labor is a result of capitalism—and evaluate them in a different manner—the national struggle is harmful to the workers—in short, man must ceaselessly begin all over again. All of his mental activity and development consists in the endless restructuring of concepts, ideas, judgments and principles in order to keep them as consistent as possible with his ever-richer experience of reality. This takes place consciously in the development of science.

The meanings of Bauer's definitions of the nation as that which is historical in us, and of national character as solidified history, are thus placed in their proper context. A common material reality produces a common way of thinking in the minds of the members of a community. The specific nature of the economic organization they jointly compose determines their thoughts, their customs and their concepts; it produces a coherent system of ideas in them, *an ideology* which they share and which forms part of their material living conditions. Life in common has penetrated their minds; common struggles for freedom against foreign enemies, common class struggles at home. It is narrated in history books and is transmitted to the youth as national memory. What was desired, hoped for and wanted was clearly highlighted and expressed by the poets and thinkers and these thoughts of the nation, the mental sediment of their material experience, was preserved in the form of literature for future generations. Constant mutual intellectual influence consolidates and reinforces this process; extracting from the thought of each compatriot what they all have in common, what is essential and characteristic of the whole, that is, what is national, constitutes the cultural patrimony of the nation. What lives in the mind of a nation, its national culture, is the abstract synthesis of its common experience, its material existence as an economic organization.

Therefore, all of man's mental qualities are products of reality, but not only of *current* reality; the whole past also subsists there in a stronger or weaker form. Mind is slow in relation to matter; it ceaselessly absorbs external influences while its old existence slowly sinks into Lethe's waters of oblivion. *Thus, the adaptation of the content of the mind to a constantly renewed reality is only incremental.* Past and present both determine its content, but in different ways. The living reality which is constantly exercising its influence on the mind is embedded within it and impressed upon it in an increasingly more effective manner. But that which no longer feeds off of the present reality, no longer lives except in the past and can still be preserved for a long time, above all by the relations men maintain among themselves, by indoctrination and artificial propaganda, but to the extent that these residues are deprived of the material terrain that gave them life, they necessarily slowly disappear. This is how they acquire a traditional character. A *tradition* is also part of reality which lives in the minds of men, acts upon the other parts and for that reason frequently disposes of a considerable and potent force. But *it is a natural mental reality whose material roots are sunk in the past.* This is how religion became, for the modern proletariat, an

ideology of a purely traditional nature; it may still have a powerful influence on its action, but this power only has roots in the past, in the importance that the community of religion possessed in other times; it is no longer nourished by contemporary reality, in its exploitation by capital, in its struggle against capital. For this reason the process leading to its extinction among the proletariat will not stop. To the contrary, contemporary reality is increasingly cultivating class consciousness which is consequently occupying a larger place in the proletariat's mind, and which is increasingly determining its action.

## Our Task

I have framed the task assigned by our study. History has given rise to nations with their limitations and their specific characteristics. But they are not yet finished and complete definitive facts with which one must contend. History is still following its course. Each day it continues to build upon and modify what the previous days built. It is not enough, then, to confirm that the nation is that which is historical in us, solidified history. *If it were nothing but petrified history*, it would be of a purely traditional nature, like religion. But for our practice, and for our tactics, the question of whether or not it is something more than this assumes the utmost importance. Of course, one must deal with it in any case, as with any great mental power in man; but the question of whether nationalist ideology only presents itself as a power of the past, or whether it sinks its roots into today's world, are two completely different things. For us, the most important and decisive question is the following: how does *present-day reality* act upon the nation and everything national? In what sense are they being modified today? The reality in question here is *highly-developed capitalism and the proletarian class struggle*.

This, then, is our position in regard to Bauer's study: in other times, the nation played no role at all in the theory and practice of social democracy. There was no reason to take it into consideration; in most countries it is of no use to the class struggle to pay any attention to the national question. Obligated to do so by Austria's situation Bauer has filled this gap. He has demonstrated that the nation is neither the product of the imagination of a few literati nor is it the artificial product of nationalist propaganda; with the tool of Marxism he has shown that it has sunk its material roots into history and he has explained the necessity and the power of national ideas by the rise of capitalism. And the nation stands revealed as a powerful reality with which we must come to terms in our struggle; he gives us the key to understand the modern history of Austria, and we must thus answer the following question: what is the influence of the nation and nationalism on the class struggle, how must it be assessed in the class struggle? This is the basis and the guiding thread of the works of Bauer and the other Austrian Marxists. But with this approach, the task is only half-finished. For the nation is not simply a self-contained and complete phenomenon whose effect on the class struggle must be ascertained: it is itself in turn subjected to the influence of contemporary forces, among which the proletariat's revolutionary struggle for emancipation is increasingly tending to become a factor of the first order. *What effect, then, does the class struggle, the rise of the proletariat, for its part exercise upon the nation?* Bauer has not examined this question, or he has done so in an insufficient manner; the study of this issue leads, in many cases, to judgments and conclusions which diverge from those he provided.

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## **II. The Nation and the Proletariat**

## Class Antagonism

The current reality which most intensely determines man's mentality and existence is *capitalism*. But it does not affect all men in the same way; it is one thing for the capitalist and another for the proletarian. For the members of the bourgeois class, capitalism is the world of the production of wealth and competition; more well-being, an increase in the mass of capital from which they try to extract the maximum possible profit in an individualistic struggle with their peers and which opens up for them the road to luxury and the enjoyment of a refined culture, this is what the process of production provides for them. For the workers, it is the hard labor of endless slavery, permanent insecurity in their living conditions, eternal poverty, without the hope of ever getting anything but a poverty wage. Consequently, capitalism must exercise very different effects on the minds of the bourgeoisie and the minds of the members of the exploited class. The nation is an economic entity, a community of labor, even between workers and capitalists. Capital and labor are both necessary and must come together so that capitalist production can exist. It is a community of labor of a particular nature; in this community, capital and labor appear as antagonistic poles; they constitute a community of labor in the same way that predators and prey constitute a community of life.

The nation is a community of character which has arisen from a community of fate. But with the development of capitalism, it is the *difference of fates* which is increasingly dominant in considering the bourgeoisie and the proletariat within any particular people. To explain what he means by the community of fate, Bauer speaks (p. 101) of the "relations constituted by the fact that both [the English worker and the English bourgeois] live in the same city, that both read the same posters and the same newspapers, take part in the same political and sporting events, by the fact that on occasion they speak with one another or, at least, both speak with the various intermediaries between capitalists and workers". Now, the "fate" of men does not consist in reading the same billboards, but in *great and important experiences* which are totally different for each class. The whole world knows what the English Prime Minister Disraeli said about the two nations living alongside one another in our modern society without really understanding it. Did he not intend to say that no community of fate links the two classes?[4]

Of course, one does not have to take this statement literally in its modern sense. The community of fate of the past still exercises its influence on today's community of character. As long as the proletariat does not have a clear consciousness of the particularity of its own experience, as long as its class consciousness has not been awakened or is only slightly stirred, it remains the prisoner of traditional thinking, its thought is nourished on the leftovers of the bourgeoisie, it surely constitutes with the latter a kind of community of culture in the same way that the servants in the kitchen are the guests of their masters. The peculiarities of English history make this mental community all the more powerful in England, while it is extremely weak in Germany. In all the young nations where capitalism is just making its appearance, the mentality of the working class is dominated by the traditions of the previous peasant and petit-bourgeois era. Only

little by little, with the awakening of class consciousness and class struggle under the impact of new antagonisms, will the community of character shared by the two classes disappear.

There will undoubtedly still be relations between the two classes. But they are limited to rules and regulations of the factory and to carrying out work orders, so that the community of language is not even necessary, as the use of foreign-born workers speaking various languages proves. The more conscious of their situation and of exploitation the workers become, the more frequently they fight against the employers to improve their working conditions, the more that the relations between the two classes are transformed into enmity and conflict. There is just as little community between them as between two peoples who are constantly engaged in frontier skirmishes. The more aware of social development the workers become, and the more socialism appears to them as the necessary goal of their struggle, the more they feel the rule of the capitalist class as *foreign rule*, and with this expression one becomes aware of just how much the community of character has dissipated.

Bauer defines national character as the “difference in orientations of the will, the fact that the same stimulus produces different reactions, that the same external circumstances provoke different decisions” (p. 100). Could one imagine more antagonistic orientations than those of the will of the bourgeoisie and the will of the proletariat? The names of Bismarck, Lassalle, 1848, stimulate feelings which are not just different but even opposed in the German workers and the German bourgeoisie. The German workers of the Empire who belong to the German nation judge almost everything that happens in Germany in a different and opposed way to that of the bourgeoisie. All the other classes rejoice together over anything that contributes to the greatness and the foreign reach of their national State, while the proletariat combats every measure which leads to such results. The bourgeois classes speak of war against other States in order to increase their own power, while the proletariat thinks of a way to prevent war or discovers an occasion for its own liberation in the defeat of its own government.

This is why one cannot speak of the nation as an entity except prior to the full unfolding within it of the class struggle, since it is only in that case that the working class still follows in the footsteps of the bourgeoisie. *The class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat results in the progressive disappearance of their national community of fate and of character.* The constitutive forces of the nation must therefore be separately examined in each of the two classes.

## The Will to Form a Nation

Bauer is completely correct when he views the differences in orientation of the will as the essential element in differences of national character. Where all wills are oriented in the same way, a coherent mass is formed; where events and influences from the outside world provoke different and opposed determinations, rupture and separation result. The differences of wills have separated the nations from one another; but whose will is involved here? That of the rising bourgeoisie. As a result of the preceding proofs concerning the genesis of modern nations, its will to form a nation is the most important constitutive force.

What is it that makes the Czech nation a specific community in relation to the German nation? That which is acquired by life in common, the content of the community of fate which continues to practically influence the national character, is extremely weak. The content of its culture is almost totally taken from the modern nations which preceded it, above all the German nation; this is why Bauer says (p. 105): "It is not completely incorrect to say that the Czechs are Czech-speaking Germans..." One might also add some peasant traditions rounded off with reminiscences of Huss, Ziska and the battle of White Mountain,[5] exhumed from the past and without any practical meaning today. How could a "national culture" have been erected upon the basis of a particular language? Because the bourgeoisie *needs* separation, because it *wants* to constitute a nation in relation to the Germans. It wants to do so because it needs to do so, because capitalist competition obliges it to monopolize to the greatest possible extent a territory of markets and exploitation. The conflict of interests with the other capitalists creates the nation wherever the necessary element exists, a specific language. Bauer and Renner clearly demonstrate in their expositions of the genesis of modern nations that the will of the rising bourgeois classes created the nations. Not as a conscious or arbitrary will, but as wanting at the same time as being compelled, the necessary consequence of economic factors. *The "nations" involved in the political struggle, which are fighting among themselves for influence over the State, for power in the State* (Bauer, pp. 218–243), *are nothing but organizations of the bourgeois classes, of the petit-bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie, the intellectuals—classes whose existence is based upon competition—and here the proletarians and the peasants play a secondary role.*

The proletariat has nothing to do with this necessity of competition of the bourgeois classes, with their will to constitute a nation. For it, the nation does not mean the privilege of securing a customer base, positions, or opportunities for work. The capitalists immediately learned to import foreign workers who do not speak German or Czech. By mentioning this capitalist practice it is not our basic intention to expose nationalist hypocrisy, but above all to make the workers understand that under the rule of capitalism the nation can never be synonymous with a labor monopoly for them. And only infrequently does one hear among backward workers, such as the American trade unionists of the old school, of a desire to restrict immigration. The nation can also temporarily assume its own significance for the proletariat. When capitalism penetrates an agrarian region, the landlords then belong to a more developed capitalist nation, and the workers leave the peasantry for the other nation. National feeling can then be for the workers an initial means

of becoming aware of their community of interests against the foreign capitalists. National antagonism is in this case the primitive form of class antagonism, just as in Rhineland-Westphalia, during the era of the *Kulturkampf*, the religious antagonism between the Catholic workers and their liberal employers was the primitive form of class antagonism. But from the moment when a nation is sufficiently developed to have a proper bourgeoisie which takes responsibility for exploitation, proletarian nationalism is uprooted. In the struggle for better living conditions, for intellectual development, for culture, for a more dignified existence, the other classes in their nation are the sworn enemies of the workers while their foreign language-speaking class comrades are their friends and allies. The class struggle creates an international community of interests. *Thus, for the proletariat, one cannot speak of a will to become a separate nation based on economic interests, on its material situation.*

## The Community of Culture

Bauer discovers another nation-building force in the class struggle. Not in the economic content of the class struggle, but in its cultural effects. He defines the politics of the modern working class as a *national-evolutionary politics* (p. 135) that will unite the entire people in a nation. This has to be more than just a primitive and popular way of expressing our goals in the language of nationalism, with the intention of making them accessible to those workers who have gotten mixed up with nationalist ideology and who have not yet become aware of the great revolutionary importance of socialism. So Bauer adds: "But because the proletariat necessarily struggles for possession of the cultural wealth that its work creates and makes possible, the effect of this politics is necessarily that of calling the entire people to take part in the national community of culture and thereby to make the totality of the people into a nation."

At first glance this seems to be completely correct. As long as the workers, crushed by capitalist exploitation, are immersed in physical misery and vegetate without hope or intellectual activity, they do not participate in the culture of the bourgeois classes, a culture which is based on the labor of the workers. They form part of the nation in the same way as livestock, they constitute nothing but property, and they are nothing more than second-class citizens in the nation. It is the class struggle which brings them to life; it is by way of the class struggle that they get free time, higher wages and therefore the opportunity to engage in intellectual development. Through socialism, their energy is awakened, their minds are stimulated; they begin to read, first of all socialist pamphlets and political newspapers, but soon the aspiration and the need to complete their intellectual training leads them to tackle literary, historical and scientific works: the party's educational committees even devote special efforts to introducing them to classical literature. In this manner they accede to the community of culture of the bourgeois classes of their nation. And when the worker can freely and without coercion devote himself to his intellectual development under socialism, which shall free him from the endless slavery of labor—unlike his present situation where he can only appropriate in scarce moments of leisure, and then only with difficulty, small fragments of culture—only then will the worker be able to absorb the entire national culture and become, in the fullest sense of the word, a member of the nation.

But one important point is overlooked in these reflections. A community of culture between the workers and the bourgeoisie can only exist superficially, apparently and sporadically. The workers can to some extent, of course, read the same books as the bourgeoisie, the same classics and the same works of natural history, but this produces no community of culture. Because the basis of their thought and their world-view is so different from that of the bourgeoisie, the workers *derive something very different from their reading* than does the bourgeoisie. As pointed out above, national culture does not exist in a vacuum; it is the expression of the material history of the life of those classes whose rise created the nation. What we find expressed in Schiller and Goethe are not abstractions of the aesthetic imagination, but the feelings and ideals of the bourgeoisie in its youth, its aspiration to freedom and the rights of man, its own way of perceiving the world and its problems. Today's class-conscious worker has other feelings, other ideals and

another world-view. When he is reading and comes across William Tell's individualism or the eternal, indomitable and ethereal rights of man, the mentality which is thus expressed is not his mentality, which owes its maturity to a more profound understanding of society and which knows that the rights of man can only be conquered through the struggle of a mass organization. He is not insensitive to the beauty of ancient literature; it is precisely his historical judgment which allows him to understand the ideals of past generations on the basis of their economic systems. He is capable of feeling their power, and is thus capable of appreciating the beauty of the works in which they have found their most perfect expression. This is because the beautiful is that which approaches and represents in the most perfect way possible the universality, the essence and the most profound substance of a reality.

To this one must add that, in many respects, the feelings of the bourgeois revolutionary era produced a powerful echo in the bourgeoisie; but what is found as an echo in the bourgeoisie of that era, is precisely what is lacking in the modern bourgeoisie. This is all the more true in regard to radical and proletarian literature. As for what made the proletariat so enthusiastic about the works of Heine and Freiligrath[6], the bourgeoisie does not want to know anything. The way the two classes read the literature which is available to both, is totally different; their social and political ideals are diametrically opposed, their world-views have nothing in common. This is to a certain extent even truer of their views of history. In history, what the bourgeoisie considers to be the most sublime memories of the nation arouse nothing but hatred, aversion or indifference in the proletariat. Here nothing points to their possessing a shared culture. Only the physical and natural sciences are admired and honored by both classes. Their content is identical for both. But how different from the attitude of the bourgeois classes, is that of the worker who has recognized these sciences as the basis of his absolute rule over nature and over his destiny in the future socialist society. *For the worker, this view of nature, this concept of history and this literary sentiment, are not elements of a national culture in which he participates, they are elements of his socialist culture.*

The most essential intellectual content, the determinant thoughts, and the real culture of the social democrats do not have their roots in Schiller or Goethe, but in Marx and Engels. And this culture, which has arisen from a lucid socialist understanding of history and the future of society, the socialist ideal of a free and classless humanity, and the proletarian communitarian ethic, and which for those very reasons is in all of its characteristic features opposed to bourgeois culture, is international. This culture, despite its various manifestations among different peoples—since the proletarians' perspectives vary according to their conditions of existence and the form assumed by their economies—and despite the fact that it is powerfully influenced by the historical background of each nation, especially where the class struggle is underdeveloped, is everywhere the same. Its form, the language in which it is expressed, is different, but all the other differences, even the national ones, are progressively reduced by the development of the class struggle and the growth of socialism. Indeed, the gap between the culture of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat is constantly expanding. It is therefore inaccurate to say that the proletariat is fighting for the ownership of the national cultural goods which it produces with its labor. It does not fight to appropriate the cultural goods of the bourgeoisie; it fights for control over production and to establish its own socialist culture upon that foundation. What we call the cultural effects of the class struggle, the workers' acquisition of self-consciousness, of knowledge and the desire to learn, of higher intellectual standards, has nothing to do with a bourgeois national culture, but represents the growth of socialist culture. This culture is a product of the struggle, a struggle

which is waged against the whole bourgeois world. And just as we see the new humanity developing in the proletariat, proud and sure of victory, freed from the vile slavery of the past, comprised of brave combatants, capable of an unprejudiced and complete understanding of the course of events, united by the strongest bonds of solidarity in a solid unit, so from now on the spirit of the new humanity, socialist culture, weak at first, confused and mixed with bourgeois traditions, will be awakened in this proletariat, and will then become clearer, purer, more beautiful and richer.

This is obviously not intended to imply that bourgeois culture will not also continue to rule for a long time and exercise a powerful influence on the minds of the workers. Too many influences from that world affect the proletariat, with or without its consent; not only school, church, and bourgeois press, but all the fine arts and scientific works impregnated by bourgeois thought. But more and more frequently, and in an ever-more comprehensive fashion, life itself and their own experience triumphs over the bourgeois world-view in the minds of the workers. And this is how it must be. Because the more the bourgeois world-view takes possession of the workers, the less capable of fighting they become; under its influence, the workers are full of respect for the ruling powers, they are inculcated with the ideological thought of the latter, their lucid class consciousness is obscured, they turn on their own kind from this or that nation, they are scattered and *are therefore weakened in the struggle and deprived of their self-confidence*. Our goal demands a proud human species, self-conscious, bold in both thought and action. And this is why the very requirements of the struggle are freeing the workers from these paralyzing influences of bourgeois culture.

*It is, then, inaccurate to say that the workers are, by means of their struggle, gaining access to a "national community of culture". It is the politics of the proletariat, the international politics of the class struggle, which is engendering a new international and socialist culture in the proletariat.*

## The Community of Class Struggle

Bauer opposes the nation as a *community of fate* to the class, in which the *similarity* of fates has developed similar character traits. But the working class is not just a group of men who have experienced the same fate and thus have the same character. *The class struggle welds the proletariat into a community of fate.* The fate lived in common is the struggle waged *in common* against *the same* enemy.

In the trade union struggle, workers of different nationalities see themselves confronted by the same employer. They must wage their struggle as a compact unit; they know its vicissitudes and effects in the most intimate kind of community of fate. They have brought their national differences with them from their various countries, mixed with the primitive individualism of the peasants or the petit-bourgeoisie, perhaps also a little national consciousness, combined with other bourgeois traditions. But all of these differences are traditions of the past opposed to the present need to resist as a compact mass, and opposed to the living community of combat of the present day. *Only* one difference has any practical significance here: that of *language*; all explanations, all proposals, all information must be communicated to everyone in their own language. In the great American strikes (the steelworkers strike at McKee's Rocks or the textile workers strike at Lawrence, for example), the strikers—a disjointed conglomeration of the most varied nationalities: French, Italians, Poles, Turks, Syrians, etc.—formed separate language sections whose committees always held joint meetings and simultaneously communicated proposals to each section in its own language, thus preserving the unity of the whole, which proves that, despite the inherent difficulties of the language barrier, a close-knit community of proletarian struggle can be achieved. Wanting to proceed here to an organizational separation between that which unites life and struggle, the real interests of those involved—and such a separation is what separatism implies—is so contrary to reality that its success can only be temporary.

This is not only true for the workers in one factory. In order to wage their struggle successfully, the workers of the whole country must unite in one trade union; and all of its members must consider the advancement of each local group as their own struggle. This is all the more necessary when, in the course of events, the trade union struggle assumes harsher forms. The employers unite in cartels and employers' associations; the latter do not distinguish between Czech or German employers, as they group together all the employers in the whole State, and sometimes even extend beyond the borders of the State. All the workers of the same trade living in the same State go on strike and suffer the lock-outs in common and consequently form a community of lived fate, and this is of the utmost importance, trumping all national differences. And in the recent sailors' movement for higher wages which in the summer of 1911 confronted an international association of ship-owners, one could already see an international community of fate arising as a tangible reality.

The same thing happens in the political struggle. In the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels, one may read the following: "Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country

must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.”[7] In this passage it is clear that the word “national” is not used in its Austrian sense, but arises from the context of the situation in Western Europe where State and nation are synonymous. This passage only means that the English workers cannot wage the class struggle against the French bourgeoisie, nor can the French workers wage the class struggle against the English bourgeoisie, but that the English bourgeoisie and the power of the English State can be attacked and defeated only by the English proletariat. In Austria, State and nation are separate entities. The nation naturally arises as a community of interests of the bourgeois classes. *But it is the State which is the real solid organization of the bourgeoisie for protecting its interests.* The State protects property, it takes care of administration, puts the fleet and the army in order, collects the taxes and keeps the masses under control. The “nations”, or, more precisely: the active organizations which use the nation’s name, that is, the bourgeois parties, have no other purpose than to fight for the conquest of a fitting share of influence over the State, for participation in State power. For the big bourgeoisie, whose economic interests embrace the whole State and even other countries, and which needs direct privileges, customs duties, State purchases and protection overseas, it is its natural community of interests, rather than the nation, which defines the State and its limitations. The apparent independence which State power has managed to preserve for so long thanks to the conflicts between nations cannot obscure the fact that that it has also been an instrument at the service of big capital.

This is why the center of gravity of the political struggle of the working class is shifting towards the State. As long as the struggle for political power still remains a secondary issue, and agitation, propaganda and the struggle of ideas—which naturally must be expressed in every language—are still the highest priority, the proletarian armies will continue to be separated nationally for the political struggle. In this first stage of the socialist movement, the most important task is to free the proletarians from the ideological influence of the petit bourgeoisie, to snatch them away from the bourgeois parties and inculcate them with class consciousness. The bourgeois parties, separated by national boundaries, then become the enemies to be fought. The State appears to be a legislative power from which laws can be demanded for the protection of the proletariat; the conquest of influence over the State in favor of proletarian interests is presented to the barely-conscious proletarians as the first goal of proletarian action. And the final goal, the struggle for socialism, is presented as a struggle *for* State power, *against* the bourgeois parties.

But when the socialist party attains the status of an important factor in parliament, our task changes. In parliament, where all essential political questions are settled, the proletariat is confronted by the representatives of the bourgeois classes of the entire State. The essential political struggle, to which educational work is increasingly subjected and into which it is increasingly integrated, unfolds on the terrain of the State. It is the same for all the State’s workers, regardless of their nationalities. The community of struggle extends to the entire proletariat of the State, a proletariat for whom the common struggle against the same enemy, against all of the bourgeois parties and their governments in all nations, becomes a common fate. *It is not the nation, but the State which determines for the proletariat the borders of the community of fate constituted by the parliamentary political struggle.* As long as socialist propaganda remains the most important activity for the Austrian and Russian Ruthenians,[8] the two national groups will be closely linked. But from the moment when developments reach a point where the real political struggle is waged against State power—the bourgeois majority and its government—they must go their separate ways, and fight in different places with sometimes completely different methods. The former intervene in Vienna in the Reichsrat together with Tyrolean and Czech workers, while

the latter now carry on the fight under clandestine conditions, or in the streets of Kiev against the Czar's government and its Cossacks. Their community of fate is sundered.

All of this is all the more clearly manifested as the proletariat becomes more powerful and its struggle occupies a larger and larger share of the field of history. State power, along with all the potent means at its disposal, is the fief of the owning classes; the proletariat cannot free itself, it cannot defeat capitalism unless it first defeats this powerful organization. The conquest of political hegemony is not a struggle for State power; it is a struggle against State power. The social revolution which shall issue into socialism consists essentially of defeating State power with the power of the proletarian organization. This is why it must be carried out by the proletariat of the entire State. One could say that this *common liberation struggle against a common enemy is the most important experience in the entire history of the life of the proletariat from its first awakening until its victory. This makes the working class of the same State, rather than the same nation, a community of fate.* Only in Western Europe, where State and nation more or less coincide, does the struggle waged on the terrain of the nation-state for political hegemony give rise within the proletariat to communities of fate which coincide with nations.

But even in this case the international character of the proletariat develops rapidly. The workers of different countries exchange theory and practice, methods of struggle and concepts, and they consider these topics to be matters common to all. This was certainly the case with the rising bourgeoisie; in their economic and philosophical concepts, the English, French and Germans were mutually and profoundly influenced by their exchange of ideas. But no community resulted from this exchange because their economic antagonism led them to organize into mutually hostile nations; it was precisely the French bourgeoisie's conquest of the bourgeois freedom long enjoyed by the English bourgeoisie which provoked the bitter Napoleonic Wars. Such conflicts of interest are utterly lacking in the proletariat and for that reason the reciprocal intellectual influence exercised by the working classes of the various countries can act without constraint in forming an international community of culture. But their community is not limited to this aspect. The struggles, the victories and the defeats in one country have profound impacts on the class struggle in other countries. The struggles waged by our class comrades in other countries against their bourgeoisie are *our affairs* not only on the terrain of ideas, but also *on the material plane*; they form part of our own fight and we feel them as such. The Austrian workers, for whom the Russian Revolution was a decisive episode in their own struggle for universal suffrage, know this quite well.[9] The proletariat of the whole world perceives itself as *a single army*, as a great association which is only obliged for practical reasons to split into numerous battalions which must fight the enemy separately, since the bourgeoisie is organized into States and there are as a result numerous fortresses to reduce. This is also the way the press informs us of struggles in foreign countries: the English Dock Strikes, the Belgian elections, and the demonstrations on the streets of Budapest are all of interest to our great class organization. In this manner the international class struggle becomes the *common experience* of the workers of all countries.

## The Nation in the State of the Future

This conception of the proletariat already reflects the conditions of the future social order, in which men will no longer know State antagonisms. Through the overthrow of the rigid State organizations of the bourgeoisie by the organizational power of the proletarian masses, the State disappears as a coercive power and as the terrain of domination which is so sharply demarcated in relation to foreign States. Political organizations take on a new function: “The government of persons gives way to the administration of things,” Engels said in his *Anti-Dühring*.<sup>[10]</sup> For the conscious regulation of production, you need organization, executive organs and administrative activity; but the extremely strict centralization such as that practiced by today’s State is neither necessary nor can it possibly be employed in pursuit of that goal. Such centralization will give way to full decentralization and self-administration. According to the size of each sector of production, the organizations will cover larger or smaller areas; while bread, for example, will be produced on a local scale, steel production and the operation of railroad networks require State-sized economic entities. There will be production units of the most various sizes, from the workshop and the municipality to the State, and even, for certain industries, all of humanity. Those naturally-occurring human groups, nations—will they not then take the place of the vanished States as organizational units? This will undoubtedly be the case, for the simple practical reason, that they are *communities of the same language* and all of man’s relations are mediated through language.

But Bauer confers a totally different meaning upon the nations of the future: “The fact that socialism will make the nation autonomous, will make its destiny a product of the nation’s conscious will, will result in an increasing differentiation between the nations of the socialist society, a clearer expression of their specificities, a clearer distinction between their respective characters” (p. 96). Some nations, of course, receive the content of their culture and their ideas in various ways from other nations, but they only accept them in the context of their own national cultures. “For this reason, the autonomy of the national community of culture within socialism necessarily means, despite the diminishing of differences between the material contents of their cultures, a growing differentiation between the intellectual cultures of the nations” (p. 98)... Thus “the nation based on the community of education carries within it the tendency for unity; all its children are subject to the same education, all its members work together in the national workshops, participate in the creation of the collective will of the nation, and enjoy with each other the cultural wealth of the nation. Socialism thus carries within itself the guarantee of the unity of the nation.” (p. 98). Capitalism already displays the tendency to reinforce the national differences of the masses and to provide the nation with a stronger inner coherence. “However, it is only a socialist society that will see this tendency to triumph. Through differences in national education and customs, socialist society will distinguish peoples from one another to the same extent that the educated classes of the different nations are distinguished from one another today. There may well exist limited communities of character within the socialist nation; but autonomous cultural communities will not be able to exist within the nation, because every local community will be

subject to the influence of the culture of the nation of the nation as a whole and will engage in cultural interaction, in the exchange of ideas with the entire nation” (p. 117).

The conception which is expressed in these sentences is nothing but the ideological transposition of the Austrian present into a socialist future. It confers upon the nations under socialism a role which is currently played by the States, that is, an increasing isolation from the outside and an internal leveling of all differences; among the many levels of economic and administrative units, it gives the nations a privileged rank, similar to that which falls to the State in the conception of our adversaries, who loudly complain about the “omnipotence of the State” under socialism, and here Bauer even speaks of “national workshops”. In any event, while socialist writings always refer to the workshops and means of production of the “community” in opposition to private property, without precisely delineating the dimensions of the community, here the nation is considered as the only community of men, autonomous in respect to other nations, undifferentiated within its borders.

Such a conception is only possible if one totally abandons the material terrain from which the mutual relations and ideas of men have arisen and only insists on the mental forces as determinant factors. National differences thereby totally lose the economic roots which today give them such an extraordinary vigor. The socialist mode of production does not develop oppositions of interest between nations, as is the case with the bourgeois mode of production. The economic unit is neither the State nor the nation, but the world. This mode of production is much more than a network of national productive units connected to one another by an intelligent policy of communications and by international conventions, as Bauer describes it on pages 413–414; it is an *organization of world production in one unit* and the common affair of all humanity. In this world community of which the proletariat’s internationalism is henceforth a beginning, one can no more discuss the autonomy of the German nation, to take an example, than one could speak of the autonomy of Bavaria, or of the City of Prague or the Poldi Steelworks. All partially manage their own affairs and all depend upon the whole, as parts of that whole. The whole notion of autonomy comes from the capitalist era, when the conditions of domination led to their opposite, that is, freedom in respect to a particular form of domination.

This material basis of the collectivity, *organized world production, transforms the future of humanity into a single community of destiny*. For the great achievements which are hoped for, the scientific and technological conquest of the entire earth and its transformation into a magnificent home for a race of masters [*ein Geschlecht von Herrenmenschen*], happy and proud of their victory, who have become rulers of nature and its forces, for such great achievements—which we can hardly even imagine today—the borders of States and peoples are too narrow and restrictive. *The community of fate will unite all of humanity in an intellectual and cultural community*. Linguistic diversity will be no obstacle, since every human community which maintains real communication with another human community will create a common language. Without attempting here to examine the question of a universal language, we shall only point out that today it is easy to learn various languages once one has advanced beyond the level of primary instruction. This is why it is useless to examine the question of to what degree the current linguistic boundaries and differences are of a permanent nature. What Bauer says about the nation in the last sentence quoted above therefore applies to all of humanity: although restricted communities of character will subsist within humanity, there cannot be independent communities of culture because every local (and national) community, without exception, will find itself, under the influence of the

culture of all of humanity, in cultural communication, in an exchange of ideas, with humanity in its entirety.

# The Transformations of the Nation

Our investigation has demonstrated that under the rule of advanced capitalism, which is accompanied by class struggle, the proletariat cannot be a nation-building force. It does not form a community of fate with the bourgeois classes, nor does it share a community of material interests, nor a community which could possibly be that of intellectual culture. The rudiments of such a community, which were sketched at the very beginning of capitalism, will necessarily disappear with the further development of the class struggle. While powerful economic forces generate national isolation, national antagonism and the whole nationalist ideology in the bourgeois classes, these features are absent among the proletariat. They are replaced by the class struggle, which gives the lives of the proletarians their essential content, and creates an international community of fate and of character in which nations as linguistic groups have no practical significance. And since the proletariat is humanity in the process of becoming, this community constitutes the dawn of the economic and cultural community of all of humanity under socialism.

We must therefore respond in the affirmative to the question we posed above: *For the proletariat, national phenomena are of no more significance than traditions. Their material roots are buried in the past and cannot be nourished by the experiences of the proletariat.* Thus, for the proletariat the nation plays a role which is similar to that of religion. We acknowledge their differences, despite their kinship. The material roots of religious antagonisms are lost in the distant past and the people of our time know almost nothing about them. For this reason these antagonisms are totally disconnected from all material interests and seem to be purely abstract disputes about supernatural questions. On the other hand, the material roots of national antagonisms are all around us, in the modern bourgeois world with which we are in constant contact, and this is why they preserve all the freshness and vigor of youth and are all the more influential the more capable we are of directly feeling the interests they express; but, due to the fact that their roots are not so deep, they lack the resistance of an ideology petrified by the passage of centuries, a resistance which is so hard to overcome.

Our investigation therefore leads us to a completely different conception than Bauer's. The latter imagines, contrary to bourgeois nationalism, a continuous transformation of the nation towards new forms and new types. So the German nation has assumed, throughout its history, continually changing appearances from the proto-German to the future member of the socialist society. Under these changing forms, however, the nation remains the same, and even if certain nations must disappear and others arise, the nation will always be the basic structure of society. According to our findings, however, the nation is just a temporary and transitory structure in the history of the evolution of humanity, one of numerous forms of organization which follow one another in succession or exist side by side: tribes, peoples, empires, churches, village communities, States. Among these forms, the nation, in its particular nature, is a product of bourgeois society and will disappear with the latter. A desire to discover the nation in all past and future communities is as artificial as the determination to interpret, after the fashion of the bourgeois economists, the whole panoply of past and future economic forms as various forms of capitalism,

and to conceive world evolution as the evolution of capitalism, which would proceed from the “capital” of the savage, his bow and arrows, to the “capital” of socialist society.

This is the weak point of the basic underlying idea of Bauer’s work, as we pointed out above. When he says that the nation is not a fixed object but a process of becoming, he implies that the nation as such is permanent and eternal. For Bauer, the nation is “the never-finished product of an eternally-occurring process”. *For us, the nation is an episode in the process of human evolution, a process which develops towards the infinite.* For Bauer the nation constitutes the permanent fundamental element of humanity. His theory is *a reflection on the whole history of humanity from the perspective of the nation.* Economic forms change, classes emerge and pass away, but these are only changes of the nation, within the nation. The nation remains the primary element upon which the classes and their transformations simply confer a changing content. This is why Bauer expresses the ideas and the goals of socialism in the language of nationalism and speaks of the nation where others have used the terms people and humanity: the “nation”, due to the private ownership of the means of labor, has lost control over its destiny; the “nation” has not consciously determined its destiny, the capitalists have; the “nation” of the future will become the architect of its own destiny; we have already referred to his mention of national workshops. So Bauer is led to describe as national-evolutionary and national-conservative the two opposed trends in politics: that of socialism, oriented towards the future, and that of capitalism, which is trying to preserve the existing economic order. Following the example cited above, one could just as well call this kind of socialism the socialism of capitalist-evolutionary politics.

Bauer’s way of approaching the national question is a specifically Austrian theory, and is a doctrine of the evolution of humanity which could only have arisen in Austria, where national questions totally dominate public life. It is a confirmation of the fact that, and this is not meant to stigmatize him, a researcher who so successfully masters the method of the Marxist conception of history in turn becomes, by succumbing to the influence of his surroundings, a proof of that theory.

It is only such influence which has placed him in such circumstances that he can make our scientific understanding advance to such a point. Along with the fact that we are not logical thinking machines but human beings who are living in a world which obliges us to have a full knowledge of the problems which the practice of the struggle pose for us, by relying on experience and reflection.

But it seems to us that the different conclusions also involve different basic philosophical concepts. In what way have all our criticisms of Bauer’s conceptions always converged? In a different evaluation of material and intellectual forces. While Bauer bases himself on the indestructible power of mental phenomena, of ideology as an independent force, we always put the accent on its dependence on economic conditions. It is tempting to consider this deviation from Marxist materialism in the light of the fact that Bauer has on various occasions represented himself as a defender of Kant’s philosophy and figures among the Kantians. In this manner, his work is a double confirmation of the fact that Marxism is a precious and indispensable scientific method.

Only Marxism has allowed him to enunciate numerous noteworthy results which enrich our understanding; it is precisely at those points which are in some respect lacking that his method is most distant from the materialist conceptions of Marxism.

### **III. Socialist Tactics**

## Nationalist Demands

Socialist tactics are based on the science of social development. The way a working class assumes responsibility for pursuing its own interests is determined by its conception of the future evolution of its conditions. Its tactics must not yield to the influence of every desire and every goal which arise among the oppressed proletariat, or by every idea that dominates the latter's mentality; if these are in contradiction with the effective development they are unrealizable, so all the energy and all the work devoted to them are in vain and can even be harmful. This was the case with all the movements and attempts to stop the triumphant march of big industry and to reintroduce the old order of the guilds. The militant proletariat has rejected all of that; guided by its understanding of the inevitable nature of capitalist development, it has put forth its socialist goal. The leading idea of our tactics is to favor that which will inevitably realize this goal. For this reason it is of paramount importance to establish, not what role nationalism is playing in this or that proletariat at this moment, but what will its long-term role be in the proletariat under the influence of the rise of the class struggle. Our conceptions of the future meaning of nationalism for the working class are the conceptions which must determine our tactical positions in relation to the national question.

Bauer's conceptions concerning the nation's future constitute the theoretical basis of the *tactics of national opportunism*. The opportunistic tactic itself presents the very outline of the basic premise of his work, which considers nationality as the sole powerful and permanent result of historical development in its entirety. If the nation constitutes, and not just today but on an ever expanding scale in conjunction with the growth of the workers movement, and under socialism totally does so, the natural unifying and dividing principle of humanity, then it would be useless to want to fight against the power of the national idea in the proletariat. Then it would be necessary for us to champion nationalist demands and we would have to make every effort to convince the patriotic workers that socialism is the best and the only real nationalism.

Tactics would be completely different if one were to adopt the conviction that nationalism is nothing but bourgeois ideology which does not have material roots in the proletariat and which will therefore disappear as the class struggle develops. In this case, nationalism is not only a passing episode in the proletariat, but also constitutes, like all bourgeois ideology, *an obstacle for the class struggle whose harmful influence must be eliminated as much as possible*. Its elimination is part of the timeline of evolution itself. Nationalist slogans and goals distract the workers from their specifically proletarian goals. They divide the workers of different nations; they provoke the mutual hostility of the workers and thus destroy the necessary unity of the proletariat. They line up the workers and the bourgeoisie shoulder to shoulder in one front, thus obscuring the workers' class consciousness and transforming the workers into the executors of bourgeois policy. National struggles prevent the assertion of social questions and proletarian interests in politics and condemn this important means of struggle of the proletariat to sterility. All of this is encouraged by socialist propaganda when the latter presents nationalist slogans to the workers as valid, regardless of the very goal of their struggle, and when it utilizes the

language of nationalism in the description of our socialist goals. It is indispensable that class feeling and class struggle should be deeply rooted in the minds of the workers; then they will progressively become aware of the unreality and futility of nationalist slogans for their class.

This is why the nation-State as a goal in itself, such as the re-establishment of an independent national State in Poland, has no place in socialist propaganda. This is not because a national State belonging to the proletariat is of no interest for socialist propaganda purposes. It is a result of the fact that nationalist demands of this kind cause the hatred of exploitation and oppression to easily take the form of nationalist hatred of foreign oppressors, as in the case of the foreign rule exercised by Russia, which protects the Polish capitalists, and is prejudicial to the acquisition of a lucid class consciousness. The re-establishment of an independent Poland is utopian in the capitalist era. This also applies to the solution of the Polish question proposed by Bauer: national autonomy for the Poles within the Russian Empire. However desirable or necessary this goal may be for the Polish proletariat, as long as capitalism reigns the real course of development will not be determined by what the proletariat believes it needs, but by what the ruling class wants. If, however, the proletariat is strong enough to impose its will, the value of such autonomy is then infinitely minuscule compared with the real value of the proletariat's class demands, which lead to socialism. The struggle of the Polish proletariat against the political power under which it really suffers—the Russian, Prussian or Austrian government, as the case may be—is condemned to sterility if it assumes the form of a nationalist struggle; only as a class struggle will it achieve its goal. The only goal which can be achieved and which for this reason is imposed as a goal is that of the conquest, in conjunction with the other workers of these States, of capitalist political power and the struggle for the advent of socialism. Hence under socialism the goal of an independent Poland no longer makes sense since in that case nothing would prevent all Polish-speaking individuals from being free to unite in an administrative unit.

These different views are evident in the respective positions of the two Polish Socialist Parties.[11] Bauer insists that both are justified, since each of them embodies one facet of the nature of the Polish workers: the P.P.S., nationalist feeling, the SDKPiL, the international class struggle. This is correct, but incomplete. We do not content ourselves with the very objective historical method which proves that all phenomena or tendencies can be explained by and derived from natural causes. We must add that one facet of this nature is reinforced during the course of development, while another declines. The principle of one of the two parties is based on the future, that of the other is based on the past; one constitutes the great force of progress, the other is a compulsory tradition. This is why the two parties do not represent the same thing for us; as Marxists who base our principles on the real science of evolution and as revolutionary social democrats who seek what is ours in the class struggle, we must support one party and help it in its struggle against the other.

We spoke above of the lack of value of nationalist slogans for proletariat. But is it not true that certain nationalist demands are also of great importance for the workers, and should the workers not fight for them alongside the bourgeoisie? Is it not true, for example, that national schools, in which the children of the proletariat can receive instruction in their own language, possess a certain value? *For us, such demands constitute proletarian demands rather than nationalist demands.* Czech nationalist demands are directed against the Germans, while the Germans oppose them. If, however, the Czech workers were to interest themselves in Czech schools, a Czech administrative language, etc., because these things allow them to enhance their opportunities for education and to increase their independence in respect to the employers and the authorities, these issues

would also be of interest to the German workers, who have every interest in seeing their class comrades acquire as much force as possible for the class struggle. Therefore, not only the Czech social democrats, but their German comrades as well must demand schools for the Czech minority, and it is of the little importance to the representatives of the proletariat how powerful the German or the Czech "nation" is, that is, how powerful the German or the Czech bourgeoisie is within the State, which will be strengthened or weakened by this development. The interest of the proletariat must always prevail. If the bourgeoisie, for nationalist reasons, were to formulate an identical demand, in practice it will be pursuing something totally different since its goals are not the same. In the schools of the Czech minority, the workers will encourage the teaching of the German language because this would help their children in their struggle for existence, but the Czech bourgeoisie will try to prevent them from learning German. The workers demand the most extensive diversity of languages employed in administrative bodies, the nationalists want to suppress foreign languages. *It is only in appearance, then, that the linguistic and cultural demands of the workers and those of the nationalists coincide. Proletarian demands are those demands which are common to the proletariat of all nations.*

# Ideology and Class Struggle

The Marxist tactic of social democracy is based upon the recognition of the real class interests of the workers. It cannot be led astray by ideologies, even when the latter seem to be rooted in men's minds. As a result of its Marxist mode of comprehension, it knows that those ideas and ideologies which apparently do not have material bases, are by no means supernatural nor are they invested with a spiritual existence disconnected from the corporeal, but are the traditional and established expressions of past class interests. This is why we are certain *that in the face of the enormous density of class interests and real current needs*, even if there is little awareness of them, *no ideology rooted in the past, however powerful it may be, can resist for long*. This basic concept also determines the form assumed by our struggle against that ideology's power.

Those who consider ideas to be autonomous powers in the minds of men, which spontaneously appear or are manifested thanks to a strange spiritual influence, can choose one of two ways to win men over to their new goals: they can either directly fight the old ideologies, demonstrating their erroneous nature by means of abstract theoretical considerations and in that way attempt to nullify their power over men; or they can try to enlist ideology in their cause by presenting their new goals as the consequence and the realization of old ideas. Let us take the example of religion.

Religion is the most powerful among the ideologies of the past which dominate the proletariat and are used in an attempt to lead it astray from the united class struggle. Confused social democrats, who have witnessed the construction of this powerful obstacle to socialism, have tried to fight religion directly and to prove the erroneous nature of religious doctrines—in the same way previously attempted by bourgeois nationalism—in order to shatter their influence. Or, on the other hand, they have tried to present socialism as an improved Christianity, as the true realization of religious doctrine, and thus to convert Christian believers to socialism. But these two methods have failed wherever they have been tried; theoretical attacks against religion have not succeeded at all and have reinforced prejudice against socialism; similarly, no one has been convinced by ridiculous social democratic attempts to cloak socialism in Christian attributes, because the tradition to which men are firmly attached is not just Christianity in general, but a particular Christian doctrine. It was obvious that both of these attempts were destined to fail. Since the theoretical considerations and debates which accompanied these attempts focus the mind on abstract religious questions, they detour it away from real life and reinforce ideological thinking. In general, faith cannot be attacked with theoretical proofs; only when its basis—the old conditions of existence—has disappeared and a new conception of the world occurs to man, will doubts arise concerning doctrines and ancient dogmas. Only the new reality, which more and more clearly penetrates the mind, can overthrow a faith handed down from generation to generation; it is, of course, necessary that men's consciousness should clearly come to grips with this reality. *It is only through contact with reality that the mind frees itself from the power of inherited ideas.*

This is why Marxist social democracy would not even in its wildest dreams think of fighting religion with theoretical arguments, or of trying to use religion for its own purposes. Both such approaches would help to artificially preserve received abstract ideas, instead of allowing them to slowly dissipate. *Our tactic consists in making the workers more aware of their real class interests, showing them the reality of this society and its life in order to orient their minds more towards the real world of today. Then the old ideas, which no longer find any nourishment in the reality of proletariat life, yield without being directly attacked.* What men think of theoretical problems is no concern of ours as long as they struggle together with us for the new economic order of socialism. This is why social democracy never speaks or debates about the existence of God or religious controversies; it only speaks of capitalism, exploitation, class interests, and the need for the workers to collectively wage the class struggle. In this way the mind is steered away from secondary ideas of the past in order to focus on present-day reality; these ideas of the past are thus deprived of their power to lead the workers astray from the class struggle and the defense of their class interests.

Of course, this cannot be achieved all at once. That which remains petrified within the mind can only be slowly eroded and dissolved under the impact of new forces. How many years passed before large numbers of the Christian workers of Rhineland-Westphalia abandoned the *Zentrum*[12] for social democracy! But the social democracy did not allow itself to be led astray; it did not try to accelerate the conversion of the Christian workers by means of concessions to their religious prejudices; it was not impatient with the scarcity of its successes, nor did it allow itself to be seduced by anti-religious propaganda. It did not lose faith in the victory of reality over tradition, it clung firmly to principle, it opted for no tactical deviations which would give the illusion of a quicker route to success; it always opposed ideology with the class struggle. And now the fruits of its tactic continue to ripen.

It is the same with regard to nationalism, with the sole difference that in dealing with the latter, due to the fact that it is a more recent and less petrified ideology, we are less prepared to avoid the error of fighting on the abstract theoretical plane as well as the error of compromise. *In this case as well it suffices for us to put the accent on the class struggle and to awaken class feeling in order to turn attention away from national problems.* In this case, too, all our propaganda could appear to be useless against the power of nationalist ideology;[13] most of all, it could seem that nationalism is making the most progress among the workers of the young nations. Thus, the Christian trade unions of the Rhineland made their greatest gains at the same time as the Social Democracy; this could be compared to the phenomenon of national separatism, which is a part of the workers movement that concedes more importance to a bourgeois ideology than to the principle of class struggle. But insofar as such movements are in practice capable only of following in the wake of the bourgeoisie and thus of arousing the feeling of the working class against them, they will progressively lose their power.

We would therefore have gone completely off the rails if we wanted to win the working masses over to socialism by being more nationalist than they are, by yielding to this phenomenon. This *nationalist opportunism* could, at the very most, allow these masses to be won over externally, in appearance, for the party, *but this does not win them over to our cause, to socialist ideas*; bourgeois conceptions will continue to rule their minds as before. And when the decisive moment arrives when they must choose between national and proletarian interests, *the internal weakness of this workers movement* will become apparent, as is currently taking place in the separatist crisis. How can we rally the masses under our banner if we allow them to flock to the banner of nationalism?

Our principle of class struggle can only prevail when the other principles that manipulate and divide men are rendered ineffective; but if our propaganda enhances the reputation of those other principles, we subvert our own cause.

As a result of what has been set forth above, it would be a complete error to want to fight nationalist feelings and slogans. In those cases where the latter are deeply-rooted in people's heads, they cannot be eliminated by theoretical arguments but only by a more powerful reality, which is allowed to act upon the people's minds. If one begins to speak about this topic, the mind of the listener is immediately oriented towards the terrain of nationalism and can think only in terms of nationalism. It is therefore better not to speak of it at all, not to get mixed up in it. To all the nationalist slogans and arguments, the response will be: exploitation, surplus value, bourgeoisie, class rule, class struggle. If they speak of their demands for national schools, we shall call attention to the insufficiency of the teaching dispensed to the children of the workers, who learn no more than what is necessary for their subsequent life of back-breaking toil at the service of capital. If they speak of street signs and administrative posts, we will speak of the misery which compels the proletarians to emigrate. If they speak of the unity of the nation, we will speak of exploitation and class oppression. If they speak of the greatness of the nation, we will speak of the solidarity of the proletariat of the whole world. Only when the great reality of today's world—capitalist development, exploitation, the class struggle and its final goal, socialism—has entirely impregnated the minds of the workers, will the little bourgeois ideals of nationalism fade away and disappear. *The class struggle and propaganda for socialism comprise the sole effective means of breaking the power of nationalism.*

## Separatism and Party Organization

In Austria after the Wimberg Congress, the social democratic party was divided by nationalities, each national workers party being autonomous and collaborating with the others on a federalist basis.[14] This separation of the proletariat by nationalities did not cause major inconveniences and was frequently considered to be the natural organizational principle for the workers movement in a country which is so profoundly divided by nationalities. But when this separation ceased to be restricted to the political organization and was applied to the trade unions under the name of separatism, the danger suddenly became palpable. The absurdity of a situation where the workers in the same workshop are organized in different trade unions and thus stand in the way of the common struggle against the employer is evident. These workers constitute a community of interests; they can only fight and win as a cohesive mass and therefore must be members of a single organization. The separatists, by introducing the separation of workers by nationalities into the trade union, shatter the power of the workers in the same way the Christian trade union schismatics did and significantly contribute to obstructing the rise of the proletariat.

The separatists know this and can see it as well as we do. What, then, impels them to take this hostile stance towards the workers despite the fact that their cause was condemned by an overwhelming majority at the International Congress at Copenhagen?[15] First of all, the fact that they consider the national principle to be infinitely superior to the material interests of the workers and the socialist principle. In this case, however, they make reference to the rulings of another international Congress, the Stuttgart Congress (1907), according to which *the party and the trade unions of a country must be intimately linked in a constant community of labor and struggle*. [16] How is this possible when the party is articulated by nationality and the trade union movement is at the same time internationally centralized throughout the State? Where will the Czech social democracy find a trade union movement with which it can be intimately linked, if it does not create its own Czech trade union movement?

To proceed, as have many German-speaking social democrats in Austria, by referring to the total disparity of political and trade union struggles as an essential argument in the theoretical struggle against separatism, is to literally choose the weakest position. There is, of course, no other way out if they want to simultaneously defend international unity in the trade unions and separation by nationalities in the party. But this argument does not produce the sought-after results.

This attitude is derived from the situation which prevailed at the beginning of the workers movement when both party and trade union had to assert themselves slowly while fighting against the prejudices of the working masses and when each of them was trying to find its own way: at that time it seemed that the trade unions were only for improving the immediate material conditions, while the party carries out the struggle for the future society, for general ideals and elevated ideas. In reality, both are fighting for immediate improvements and both are helping to build the power of the proletariat which will make the advent of socialism possible. It is just that, insofar as the political struggle is a general struggle against the entire bourgeoisie, the most

distant consequences and the most profound bases of the socialist world-view must be taken into account, while in the trade union struggle, in which contemporary issues and immediate interests come to the fore, reference to general principles is not necessary, and could even be harmful to momentary unity. But in reality it is the same working class interests which determine the two forms of struggle; it is just that in the party they are somewhat more enveloped in the form of ideas and principles. But as the movement grows, and the closer the party and the trade union approach one another, the more they are compelled to fight in common. The great trade union struggles become mass movements whose enormous political importance makes the whole of social existence tremble. On the other hand, political struggles assume the dimensions of mass actions which demand the active collaboration of the trade unions. The Stuttgart resolution makes this necessity even more clear. Thus, every attempt to defeat separatism by positing the total disparity of trade union and political movements is in conflict with reality.

The error of separatism, then, lies not in wanting the same organization for the party and the trade unions, but in destroying the trade union to accomplish this goal. *The root of the contradiction is not found in the unity of the trade union movement, but in the division of the political party.* Separatism in the trade union movement is merely the unavoidable consequence of the autonomy of the party's national organizations; since it subordinates the class struggle to the national principle, it is even the ultimate consequence of the theory which considers nations to be the natural products of humanity and sees socialism in the light of the national principle, as the realization of the nation. *This is why one cannot really overcome separatism unless, on all fronts, in tactics, in agitation, in the consciousness of all the comrades, the class struggle rules as the sole proletarian principle* compared to which all national differences are of no importance. The unification of the socialist parties is the only way to resolve the contradiction which has given birth to the separatist crisis and all the harm it has done to the workers movement.

In the section above entitled "The Community of Class Struggle" it was demonstrated how the class struggle develops on the terrain of the State and unifies the workers of all the State's nationalities. It was also confirmed that during the early days of the socialist party, the center of gravity was still located in the nations. This explains historical developments since then: from the moment that it began to reach the masses through its propaganda, the party split up into separate units on the national level which had to adapt to their respective environments, to the situation and specific ways of thinking of each nation, and for that very reason were more or less contaminated by nationalist ideas. The entire workers movement during its ascendant phase was stuffed full of bourgeois ideas which it can only slowly rid itself of in the course of development, through the practice of struggle and increasing theoretical understanding. This bourgeois influence on the workers movement, which in other countries has assumed the form of revisionism or anarchism, necessarily took the form of nationalism in Austria, not only because nationalism is the most powerful bourgeois ideology, but also because in Austria nationalism is opposed to the State and the bureaucracy. National autonomy in the party is not only the result of an erroneous yet avoidable resolution of this or that party congress, but is also a natural form of development, created incrementally by the historical situation itself.

But when the conquest of universal suffrage created the terrain for the parliamentary struggle of the modern capitalist State, and the proletariat became an important political force, this situation could not last. Then one could see if the autonomous parties still really comprised one single party (*Gesamtpartei*). It was no longer possible to be satisfied with platonic declarations about their unity; henceforth a more solidly-grounded unity was needed, so that the socialist fractions

of the various national parties would submit in practice and in deed to a common will. The political movement has not passed this test; in some of its component parts, nationalism still has such deep roots that they feel closer to the bourgeois parties of their nations than to the other socialist fractions. This explains a contradiction which is only apparent: the single party collapsed at the precise moment when the new conditions of the political struggle required a real single party, the solid unity of the whole Austrian proletariat; the slack bonds connecting the national groups broke when these groups were confronted by the pressing need to transform themselves into a solid unity. But it was at the same time evident that this absence of the single party could only be temporary. *The separatist crisis must necessarily lead to the appearance of a new single party that will be the compact political organization of the whole Austrian working class.*

The autonomous national parties are forms from the past which no longer correspond to the new conditions of struggle. The political struggle is the same for all nations and is conducted in one single parliament in Vienna; there, the Czech social democrats do not fight against the Czech bourgeoisie but, together with all the other workers deputies, they fight against the entire Austrian bourgeoisie. To this assertion it has been objected that electoral campaigns are conducted within each nation separately: the adversaries are therefore not the State and its bureaucracy, but the bourgeois parties of each nation. This is correct; but the electoral campaign is not, so to speak, any more than an extension of the parliamentary struggle. *It is not the words, but the deeds of our adversaries, which constitute the material of the electoral campaign, and these deeds are perpetrated in the Reichsrat; they form part of the activity of the Austrian parliament. This is why the electoral campaign coaxes the workers out of their little national worlds; it directs their attention to a much greater institution of domination, a powerful organization of coercion of the capitalist class, which rules their lives.*

The State, which in other times seemed weak and defenseless against the nation, is increasingly asserting its power as a consequence of the development of large-scale capitalism. The growth of *imperialism*, which drags the Danubian monarchy in its wake, puts increasingly more potent instruments of power into the hands of the State for the purposes of international policy, imposes greater military pressure and tax burdens on the masses, contains the opposition of the national bourgeois parties and completely ignores the workers' sociopolitical demands. Imperialism had to provide a powerful impulse to the joint class struggle of the workers; in comparison with their struggles, which shake the entire world, which set capital and labor against each other in a bitter conflict, the goals of national disputes lose all meaning. And it is not to be totally ruled out that the common changes to which the workers are exposed by international politics, above all the danger of war, will unite the now-divided working masses for a common struggle more quickly than is generally thought.

It is true that, as a result of linguistic differences, propaganda and education must be conducted separately in each particular nation. The practice of the class struggle must acknowledge nations as groups distinguished by different languages; this applies to the party as well as the trade union movement. *As organizations for struggle, both the party and the trade union must be organized in a unitary manner on an international scale. For purposes of propaganda, explanation, and educational efforts which are also of common concern, they need national organizations and structures.*

# National Autonomy

Even though we do not get involved in the slogans and watchwords of nationalism and continue to use the slogans of socialism, this does not mean that we are pursuing a kind of ostrich policy in regard to national questions. These are, after all, real questions which are of concern to men and which they want to solve. We are trying to get the workers to become conscious of the fact that, for them, it is not these questions, but exploitation and the class struggle, which are the most vital and important questions which cast their shadows over everything. But this does not make the other questions disappear and we have to show that we are capable of resolving them. Social democracy does not just simply leave men with the promise of the future State, it also presents in its program of immediate demands the solution it proposes for every one of those questions which constitute the focal points of contemporary struggles. We are not merely attempting to unite the Christian workers with all the others in the common class struggle, without taking religion into consideration, but, in our programmatic proposal, *Proclamation Concerning the Private Character of Religion*, we are also showing them the means to preserve their religious interests more effectively than through religious struggles and disputes. In opposition to the power struggles of the Churches, struggles which are inherent in their character as organizations of domination, we propose the principle of self-determination and freedom for all men to practice their faith without risk of being harmed by others for doing so. This programmatic proposal does not supply the solution for any particular question, but contains a blanket solution insofar as it provides a basis upon which the various questions can be settled at will. By removing all public coercion, all necessity for self-defense and dispute is simultaneously removed. Religious questions are eliminated from politics and left to organizations that will be created by men of their own free will.

Our position in regard to national questions is similar. *The social democratic program of national autonomy offers the practical solution which will deprive struggles between nations of their **raison d'être**.* By means of the employment of the personal principle instead of the territorial principle, nations will be recognized as organizations which will be responsible for the care of all the cultural interests of the national community within the borders of the State. Each nation thus obtains the legal power to regulate its affairs autonomously even where it is in the minority. In this way no nation finds itself faced with the permanent obligation of conquering and preserving this power in the struggle to exercise influence over the State. This will definitively put an end to the struggles between nations which, through endless obstructions, paralyze all parliamentary activity and prevent social questions from being addressed. When the bourgeois parties engage in a free-for-all, without advancing a single step, and find themselves to be helpless before the question of how to get out of this chaos, the social democracy has shown the practical way which permits the satisfaction of justified national desires, without for that reason necessitating mutual harm.

This is not to say that this program has any chance of being implemented. All of us are convinced that our programmatic proclamation of the private character of religion, along with the

greater part of our immediate demands, will not be brought to fruition by the capitalist State. Under capitalism, religion is not, as people have been made to believe, a matter of personal belief—if it were, the promoters of religion would have had to adopt and implement our program—but is instead a means of rule in the hands of the owning class. And that class will not renounce the use of that means. A similar idea is found in our national program, which seeks to transform the popular conception of nations into a reality. Nations are not just groups of men who have the same cultural interests and who, for that reason, want to live in peace with other nations; they are combat organizations of the bourgeoisie which are used to gain power within the State. Every national bourgeoisie hopes to extend the territory where it exercises its rule at the expense of its adversaries; it is therefore totally erroneous to think that the bourgeoisie could through its own initiative put an end to these exhausting struggles, just as it is utterly out of the question that the capitalist world powers will usher in an epoch of eternal world peace, through a sensible settlement of their differences. For in Austria, the situation is such that a higher body is available which is capable of intervening: the State, the ruling bureaucracy. It is hoped that the central power of the State will be engaged to resolve national differences, because the latter threaten to tear the State apart and impede the regular functioning of the State machinery; but the State has learned how to coexist with national struggles, and has gone so far as to make use of them to reinforce the power of the government against the parliament, so that it is no longer at all necessary to do away with them. And, what is even more important: the realization of national autonomy, such as the social democracy demands, is based upon democratic self-administration. And this quite justifiably strikes terror into the hearts of the feudal and clerical elements of big business and the militarists who rule Austria.

But does the bourgeoisie really have an interest in putting an end to national struggles? Not at all, it has the greatest interest in not putting an end to them, especially since the class struggle has reached a high point. Just like religious antagonisms, *national antagonisms constitute excellent means to divide the proletariat, to divert its attention from the class struggle with the aid of ideological slogans and to prevent its class unity.* The instinctive aspirations of the bourgeois classes to block the proletariat's lucid and powerful efforts towards unification form an increasingly larger part of bourgeois policy. In countries like England, Holland, the United States, and even Germany (where the conservative party of the *Junkers* is an exceptional case of a sharply-defined class party), we observe that the struggles between the two major bourgeois parties—generally between a “liberal” party and a “conservative” or “religious” party—are becoming more embittered, and the war-cries more strident, at the same time that their real conflicts of interest diminish and their antagonism consists of ideological slogans handed down from the past. Anyone with a schematic conception of Marxism who wants to see the parties as merely the representatives of the interests of bourgeois groups, is faced with an enigma here: when one would expect that they would fuse into a reactionary mass to confront the threat of the proletariat, it seems, to the contrary, that the gap between them grows deeper and wider. The very simple explanation of this phenomenon is that they have instinctively understood that it is impossible to crush the proletariat with force alone and that it is infinitely more important to confuse and divide the proletariat with ideological slogans. This is why the national struggles of Austria's various bourgeoisies *flare up all the more violently the less reason there is for their existence.* The more closely these gentlemen cooperate to share State power, the more furiously they attack one another in public debates over issues relating to nationalist trifles. In the past, each bourgeoisie strove to group the proletariat of its nation into a compact body in order to mount a more effective bat-

tle against its adversaries. Today, the opposite is taking place: the struggle against the national enemy must serve to unite the proletariat behind the bourgeois parties and thus impede its international unity. The role played in other countries by the battle-cry, "With us for Christianity!", "With us for freedom of conscience!", by means of which it was hoped that the workers' attention would be diverted from social questions, this role will be increasingly assumed by national battle-cries in Austria. It is in relation to social questions that their class unity and their class antagonism against the bourgeoisie will be asserted.

We do not expect that the practical solution to national disputes we have put forth will ever be implemented, precisely because these struggles will no longer have any point. When Bauer says that "national power politics and proletarian class politics are logically difficult to reconcile; psychologically, one excludes the other: national contradictions can disperse the forces of the proletariat at any moment; the national struggle renders the class struggle impossible. The centralist-atomist constitution, which makes the national power struggle inevitable, is therefore intolerable for the proletariat" (p. 252), he is perhaps partly correct, to the extent that he helps to provide a basis for our program's demands. If, however, he means that the national struggle must first cease so that the class struggle could then take place, he is wrong. It is precisely the fact that we are striving to make national struggles disappear which leads the bourgeoisie to maintain their existence. But this is not how we will be stopped. *The proletarian army is only dispersed by national antagonisms as long as socialist class consciousness is weak.* It is after all true that, in the final accounting, the class struggle far surpasses the national question. *The baleful power of nationalism will in fact be broken not by our proposal for national autonomy, whose realization does not depend upon us, but solely by the strengthening of class consciousness.*

It would therefore be incorrect to concentrate all our forces on a "positive national policy" and to stake everything on this one card, the implementation of our national program as a precondition for the development of the class struggle. This programmatic demand, like most of our practical demands, only serves to show how easily we could resolve these questions if only we had power, and to illustrate, in the light of the rationality of our solutions, the irrationality of the bourgeois slogans. As long as the bourgeoisie rules, our rational solution will probably remain just a piece of paper. Our politics and our agitation can only be directed towards the necessity of always and exclusively carrying out the class struggle, to awaken class consciousness so that the workers, thanks to a clear understanding of reality, will become inaccessible to the slogans of nationalism.

Anton Pannekoek  
Reichenberg, 1912

## Notes:

[1] See *Les Marxistes et la question nationale*, pp. 233-272, as well as Arduin the PPS-Levitsa-would merge with the SDKPiL to form the Polish Communist Party. [12] Th

# **War Against War (1913)**

# I.

DURING the closing months of the year 1912 the war against war has dominated the thought and action of European Socialism. Geographical and historical conditions give to war an extremely important role in the social evolution of Europe. In America there exists one great political unit in which immigrants from all lands amalgamate into a single mass; therefore America offers the best conditions for a gigantic development of capitalism and the class struggle.

But old Europe, with its hundreds of millions crowded into a small area, is divided into small nations; on account of the traditions of past centuries, when everything was still on a small scale, these nations stand to one another in the relation of foreigners, different in traditions, speech, customs, and political life. Each of them has developed into a capitalist state, with a government organized in the interest of its own bourgeoisie. This capitalistic development necessitated struggles against the survivals of feudalism and absolutistic monarchal power, but also struggles of each nation against the others; for in the restricted area available each found itself opposed by the others. In all of these conflicts there persisted an element of ancient barbarism and traditional dynastic interests. Thus it has come about that to the evil of division into small political units has been added the greater evil of militarism, which, through compulsory military service and heavy taxes, squanders much of the productive power of the nations and increases the strength of the governments as against the people.

The recent development of capitalism has increased these differences. While bourgeois idealists have been dreaming of the United States of Europe the facts of actual development have gone in the opposite direction. The imperialist policy has made each of the important European nations the center of a world empire. The cause of this state of affairs is the export of capital. The accumulation of capital outgrows the possibilities of the home-land; it seeks new fields of investment, where it becomes the foundation of new industries, which, in turn, bring about an increase in the demand for home products.

This phase of evolution requires the political domination of the new industrial region or, at least, an adequate influence over its government. Every government attempts, therefore, to take possession of the largest possible areas of foreign territory or to increase to the utmost its influence over foreign governments. To this end power and respect are necessary, and these are attainable only through military and naval equipment. Governments have thus become the representatives of big business. They find their support, however in the whole body of the bourgeois class, most of the members of which, without having any direct interest in the results of imperialism, feel a concern in whatever promises higher profits for capitalism as a whole.

Thus the various nations of Europe stand opposed to each other like gigantic camps of contending armies. They have divided themselves into two groups about the mightiest of the rivals, England and Germany. On the one side stands the Triple Alliance, made up of Germany, Austria and Italy, three nations poor in colonies. On the other stands Triple Entente of the three nations which control the largest colonial regions, England, France, and Russia. As a result of the present division of colonial possessions the members of the former group are naturally the instigators of

any struggle looking toward a redistribution, and the members of the latter are the defenders of the *status quo*.

Especially in Germany, which has developed into a great industrial power in the same class as England and the United States, there is a tremendous impulse in the direction of territorial expansion. The German government has been arming itself for fifteen years; it has now a mighty fleet which compels England to add constantly more vessels to its navy. Austria and Italy are beginning to imitate Germany. At the same time armies are increased and placed on a war footing. Throughout the world German capital and German political influence attempt to gain entrance. In China the Shantung railway is built and Kiastchou is held as a military station; in Asia Minor the railway from Constantinople to Bagdad is built; in Central Africa an attempt is made to enlarge German colonial possessions. Everywhere, however, England stands guard, jealous and suspicious of every German advance. This is the explanation for the enmity which the German bourgeoisie feels toward England.

The conflict between England and Germany is most acute in Asiatic Turkey. England has long had an eye on Mesopotamia, the ancient Babylonia, the cradle of human civilization, the biblical Garden of Eden, which now lies barren and waste but can be transformed into a fruitful land. But German capital, supported by the Turkish government, pushes on toward this territory along the line of the Bagdad railway. If this line is finally completed to the Persian Gulf, the shortest route to India will lie in the hands of Germany and her friends, and the English dream of uniting India, Egypt, Mesopotamia, southern Persia in a great English empire will have gone up in smoke. On this account England sought to prevent the construction of the Bagdad line and to undermine the Turkish government.

The break-down of Turkish power will involve a readjustment of all the interests involved, including those of the United States and other countries. Herein lies a constant danger of war between various European nations.

But it is to the west of the Bosphorus that the danger of a great international conflict has first become imminent. The agrarian nations of the Balkan region, which had hitherto been regarded by Austria as the national sphere for her expansion, began to develop their own capitalist systems; the familiar class lines appeared and a strong national feeling developed. Hence there arose the necessity of nationalities large enough to permit of commercial development and the desire for the possession of seaports. This, in brief, is the cause of the present war, in which Turkey has been nearly forced out of Europe.

Austria, disappointed in the prospect of territories to the east scents new dangers in the results of the conflict. She fears especially the effect of a strong, independent Servian government on the Serbs at present under Austrian rule. Therefore a great war fever has swept over Austria and the Austrian government has made the most strenuous opposition to Servia's efforts to secure a port on the Adriatic. This situation contained the threat of a conflict of the great powers. Russia and Austria began immediately to mobilize their troops. This was the time for the proletariat of Europe to arise and assert its influence.

## II.

The international policy of Socialism has not always been opposed to war. Marx and Engels repeatedly (in 1843 and 1853) urged the nations of western Europe to declare war against Russia in opposition to the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie. In this Marx and Engels represented the interests of the working-class and of democracy. Throughout the nineteenth century Russia was the protector of the reactionary governments against the revolutionary peoples. So long as Russia maintained its position it could restore the absolutism which had been conquered by the German revolutionists in 1848; in order to secure the results of the revolution, Marx, called upon the German bourgeoisie to take up arms against Russia. But the bourgeoisie did not answer this call to arms; it feared Russia less than the political power of the German people. Even later the influence of Russia remained an element in the situation of the rising working-class of western Europe. It was on this account that Bebel declared himself ready to shoulder a musket in a war against Russia.

But since this time conditions have changed. The liberation and increasing poverty of the Russian peasants, together with the development of capitalist industry, led, after the Russo-Japanese war, to a revolution which broke the military power of Russia for a long time to come. Russia can no longer play the part of guardian over the governments of Europe. It has become, like the others, a capitalist state which must reckon with capitalist interests and proletarian opposition. No fear of Russia need turn the working-class from a policy of international peace.

But in the meantime the society of western Europe has undergone a transformation. As capitalism developed, the necessity of being prepared to meet other nations in battle took hold of the imaginations of all classes. Even the working-class came instinctively to believe in the purposes to be attained through warfare. This was the case in Germany in 1870, and history has repeated itself in the Balkans during the past year. Such wars as these are called national; they are supposed to be waged in the interest of the national good. The Socialists, who see deeper and farther than this, were in both instances a negligible element in the situation. But at the present time Socialism has behind it in western Europe great masses of the working-class; in Germany a third of the entire population. In all countries these masses are in opposition to the government and they know that wars between modern governments are not national, but imperialistic. This means that they are conducted in the interest of big business, for the purpose of increasing profits. This conception destroys any enthusiasm which the proletariat might develop for a foreign war.

On the other hand, the workers have every reason for striving to maintain a state of peace. A war in modern Europe would be far more devastating than any which has ever occurred. The armies which stand opposed count their soldiers by the million. And the weapons which they carry are far more murderous than any which have been employed in the past; especially the rifles of modern infantry are calculated to destroy life with a rapidity which has hitherto been unexampled. War in the future will be far more bloody than in the past; a far larger proportion of the forces will be killed or wounded. For those who remain at home, moreover, war will be far

more terrible. Formerly the greater part of the population lived by agriculture, which could be temporarily carried on by women, boys and men too old for military service. Only within the region of actual military operations did the population know the real hardships of war. But through the development of capitalism our social organism has become more complicated and sensitive. Every disturbance which upsets credit or otherwise interferes with production may bring about a crisis. Every war which removes great masses of workers from the field of production, hinders transportation or blockades the harbors; means a crisis, a terrible industrial catastrophe which reaches the smallest village and brings bankruptcy, unemployment, poverty, and starvation in its train. A great European war at the present time would destroy civilization, force the world back to a low plane of industry and in general bring about a condition approaching that of primitive barbarism.

Such a possibility concerns especially the working-class, which is exerting its energies to raise civilization to a higher plane. The proletariat bases its activities on the new order of society; it is bringing into being strong organizations in which the egoism of the bourgeois world is to be replaced by the communistic virtue of solidarity. It is through the cultivation of this virtue that it is gaining the power to conquer capitalism and throw off its domination.

And this organization of the working class is international. Across all national boundaries and all distinctions of race and language the workers join hands; they regard one another as brothers, as comrades, and see in the bourgeois and the government of their own land only enemies. There can be for them nothing more disgusting than the notion of massacring their brothers at the command of their enemies. They do not wish to see their international brotherhood, the growing unity of mankind, destroyed by the capitalistic quarrels of their governments. Therefore they make war against war with all their might. For these reasons the international policy of Socialism must be a policy of active devotion to the cause of peace. "War against war!" is the cry of the proletarians of all lands.

This was clearly expressed by the Congress of Stuttgart in 1907. In the resolution there adopted, after explaining the capitalistic nature of war and the determined opposition of the proletariat to militarism, the representatives of international Socialism declared:

"In case there is danger of war, the working-classes of the countries involved and their parliamentary representatives are in duty bound to oppose the resort to arms by the employment of the means which seem to them most effective, the character of which means will naturally be adapted to the degree of acuteness which has been developed in the class struggle and to the general political situation."

Since this resolution was adopted have the workers more than once been forced to oppose the war policies of their governments. When, finally, the Balkan war broke out the Socialists recognized immediately the danger to European peace. Our journals resolutely opposed the imperialist statesmen and professional chauvinists. In the countries immediately involved there were immediately held great anti-war demonstrations. In Berlin there occurred on November 17 a meeting participated in by 300,000 persons. In Russia a strike demonstration was made. The International Bureau met in Brussels and called a special congress of the international Socialist movement.

This congress met in Basel, where the fine old minster, the chief church building of the place, was placed at its disposal. What an extraordinary spectacle, the red revolutionary hosts of Socialism gathering there in the old church to the swelling tones of the great organ! This would have been impossible in any other land than Switzerland, for everywhere else the bourgeois is committed to the policy of violence and detests the activities of the workers; it was possible

here only because the Swiss bourgeoisie consists for the most part of bond-holders in state enterprises, which could only be injured by an international war. This incident was tantamount to an acknowledgement by the only peace-loving section of the bourgeoisie that the Socialist proletariat is at present the only group which has the power to prevent an international conflict.

The proletariat stood before all the world as the standard bearer of civilization. And for the working-class of the world the Congress of Basel was the visible demonstration of their international unity. Previous international congresses had made possible the exchange of ideas and the attainment of mutual understanding; they left the practical struggles of the proletariat to be carried on by the national organizations within the national boundary lines. Here the international policy became for the first time the most vital problem of the working class. Therefore the Congress of Basel was more important than any similar gathering which preceded it. Formerly internationalism was but a feeling which dominated the heart; now it became an important political fact.

The work of the congress consisted of the resolution accepted without opposition and the speeches which were made in connection with it. The resolution reaffirms the statement made at Stuttgart that the workers will attempt to prevent war with all the effective weapons at their disposal. And the addresses delivered by the representatives of the various nations left no doubt as to the determination of the working class.

“Not only in words,” said Jaurès, “but in the deepest passion of our natures, we declare: We are prepared to make the utmost sacrifice.”

And Victor Adler, speaking in the name of the working class of Austria, which now bears the brunt of the struggle against war, said:

“All the power of the proletariat, all the means of each individual worker, must be concentrated in this struggle.”

“In the use of the means determined by our conditions, by our political and industrial organizations,” declared Haase in the name of the German Social Democracy. “We will devote our utmost power to the securing of that which we all desire to have secured, the world peace and our common future.”

With regard to the declaration of policy contained in the resolution there can be little difference of opinion. Oppose one another as we may as to the wisdom of the separate demands which are made, in devotion to the general principle we are all united; everywhere peace and friendship shall be maintained between peoples; all oppression of nation by nation shall be opposed; and for every people the fullest measure of self-government shall be demanded. In making these demands, expressive as they are of the desire of the workers for peace on earth as against the oppression and violence characteristic of the ruling class, the Congress of Basel set up for the masses of the people everywhere a great torch which shall illumine for them the path to the new world.

### III. The Congress of Basel

The Congress of Basel was a demonstration of the proletarian opposition to war, but such a demonstration cannot prevent war. As was said by Vaillant, the veteran of the Commune, "The international congress has finished its work; but the real struggle has just begun." What will be the plan of campaign of this battle? What weapons will be used? In what manner can the workers of the world prevent a war? These questions were not answered at Basel. As at Stuttgart, it was definitely declared that in each country the means employed are to be adapted to the conditions. In order to avoid even the appearance of a lack of unity, discussion of methods was avoided. The Congress contented itself with drawing the attention of governments and peoples to what has hitherto been achieved, our international unity and our unanimous opposition to war; it did not suggest any definite line of action. It showed to all the world the goal toward which we are bound, but failed to mark out the way which is to lead to it. The finding of the way has been left to the workers themselves.

Fortunately, our future line of march is not entirely unknown. In the actual practice of the labor movement, it has already been discovered. Both theoretically and practically the working-class has concerned itself with the methods to be employed in this phase of its struggle.

There are Socialists for whom political struggle and parliamentary struggle are identical. For them the entire political struggle of the working-class consists of political campaigns and speeches in parliamentary assemblies. The narrowness of this view has been demonstrated again and again. Wherever the right of franchise is a limited one, the representation of the proletariat necessarily remains in the minority; the task of the workers is, then, the conquest of a democratic electoral law. This is possible only by means of political activity of the masses outside of the halls of parliament, what we have to come to call mass action. The same is true of the struggle against war. This is a political conflict of the greatest importance, but it cannot be carried on inside the parliamentary halls. There the representatives of the workers can voice their protest, but they are in the minority against the bourgeois majority which supports the government. And the diplomatic negotiations upon which depend the great issues of war and peace are not carried on in the open before the representatives of the people; these matters, so vital to the nations' life, are debated behind closed doors by a small coterie of ministers. In order to prevent war the proletariat must bring to bear a sufficient weight of public opinion to compel the government to keep the peace. This can be done only through mass action.

The mere existence of a Socialist proletariat constitutes a strong influence for peace. In view of the great influence exerted over the masses of people by a revolutionary party any government conceives at last a secret dread of war. For an unsuccessful conflict with a foreign power may always bring in its train revolutionary uprisings and the danger of complete downfall of the existing government. This fear of the proletariat has done much toward maintaining peace in Europe during the past forty years. But this gives the workers no excuse for deceiving themselves with a sense of security. The forces of international competition which make for war grow constantly stronger. And because the bourgeoisie, as the ruling class, is accustomed to command and have

the working-class obey, and because it knows that it has under its control a strong governmental machine, it feels certain of its ability to drive the masses of the people into a conflict with a foreign power which it points out as the enemy. On this account the workers must bestir themselves, must take the initiative. No one will take account of the desires of those who simply hold their peace. But if the masses of the workers make energetic protest and declare with all possible emphasis that they will not have war, then the government will be forced to proceed with caution. No government would dare at the present time to undertake a war against the energetically proclaimed desire of the great masses of the people.

This the workers have instinctively felt as they have been carrying on mass meetings and street demonstrations. These activities do more, however, than express the will of the participants. As a method of propaganda and agitation their effect is wide-spread. They attract the attention of those who have hitherto remained indifferent and waken hope and confidence in those who have remained aloof from the struggle. They draw increasing numbers into the struggle and so heighten the courage and enthusiasm of the entire proletariat. And the very fact that the government recognizes the effect of these demonstrations is reason enough for its fear of them and its tendency to give way before them.

But it is evident that in case bourgeoisie and government had definitely decided upon a war, such demonstrations as these would not suffice to compel them to relinquish their purpose. Such means as these could not force the will of the proletariat upon the government; they are effective only in case the forces making for war are not great. In the presence of them, governments will not declare war to satisfy a mere whim or to gain an unimportant advantage. They know how much is involved and whenever possible attempt to get on without war. If they do decide to declare war, it is because very important capitalistic interests are to be served. But the development of big business in the direction of new fields of investment is so persistent, so peremptory that they sometimes compel governments to go to war and plunge the entire bourgeoisie into a war fever. When this happens the influence for peace proceeding from mass-meetings and street demonstrations remains ineffective. Against the peace agitation of the proletariat a wave of fanatic nationalism is set in motion. Street demonstrations may be forbidden. Patriotism serves as an excuse for the suppression of any opposition, and the mobilizing of troops places the most active elements of the proletariat under military law. Under these circumstances, what is to be done?

It is at this point that the conflict really becomes serious. Then the workers must resort to more effective means than the ordinary ones. Concerning the exact form of the struggle, however, it is impossible to go beyond conjectures. At Copenhagen Keir Hardie and Vaillant proposed as the ultimate weapons to be used against war a strike of those employed on railways and in arsenals and ammunition factories. This form of tactics is adapted to the French and English conditions. In England the great mass of the working-class is indifferent to war, for to the English war means a naval conflict or a land campaign carried on by professional, hired troops. On the other hand, military operations would be dependent upon the groups of workers employed in the arming of troops and the carrying on of transportation. In France the situation is substantially the same, for small capitalists and farmers make up the bulk of the population. On this account the proposition of Hardie and Vaillant is a perfectly natural one for them to make. But the fallacy involved in it lies in the fact that it places upon a comparatively small group the burden which belongs to an entire class. Any such group might be easily overcome by the superior forces of the government; popular opinion would approve of any violent means utilized against it. Not by

means of such rather mechanical devices can a war be prevented, but only through action of the entire working-class. The struggle against war is a political struggle of class against class; it can be carried on successfully only when the entire proletariat exerts its whole strength against that of the government and the bourgeoisie.

The strongest weapon of the working class is the strike; the political mass strike is the great weapon of the revolution, the one most adapted to the conditions of the workers. Its tremendous power has been repeatedly demonstrated, especially in Belgium in 1893 and in Russia in 1905. Concerning the question as to whether it can be employed against war, and how it can best be used, there is great difference of opinion. In the countries of Western Europe where great meetings and street demonstrations are commonplaces, Socialists have discovered that a protest strike for a limited time is the least exhibition of power that will make an impression. On the other hand, the leaders of German Socialism have little patience with the proposal to use the mass-strike as a means of preventing war. In part their opposition is due to the fear of precipitating unnecessary conflicts which might lead the government to such ruthless suppression of the labor movement as would set it back and postpone for many years the victory which it confidently expects. But another important element in the situation is the fact that the German labor movement leads the world in organization and power of numbers. Whereas a weak movement feels obliged to use immediately its strongest weapon, a strong movement may achieve the same result by the simple pressure of its mass. In addition, it must be remembered that street demonstrations, the right to make which has only recently been wrung from the police power, have in Germany a much greater influence than in other countries.

This does not mean that a political strike against war is impossible in Germany. It is not the desire of the leaders which gives the ultimate decision, but rather the force of circumstances, the masses may be compelled to act in a manner quite unforeseen, and in that case the leaders will be carried along despite their predilections and prejudices. In case the danger of war becomes really imminent, this will unquestionably take place. Such a socialistically trained working-class as that of Germany will not allow itself to be dragged into a war at the command of the ruling class. The greater the danger, the more the working-class will be roused, the more energetically will it defend itself with any and all weapons.

Hitherto this has never been necessary; in every case the danger of war has passed away after a period of greater or less excitement. Germany has been the greatest trouble-maker in Europe, yet the fact that the workers have not been prevented from making their demonstrations shows that the government has not seriously and definitely planned for war. But the danger constantly recurs, and constantly in more threatening form. So, what is now but theory must eventually become practice. Then the conflict concerning war will become one of the most important features of the class-struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. In this conflict for peace the workers will be compelled to use their sharpest weapons and to perfect their fighting power for employment against the whole strength of the ruling class. Thus the development of imperialism is calling into being the revolutionary force which will put an end to capitalism.

A new epoch in world history is beginning. Hitherto wars have been a necessary element in the development of the race; under capitalism they have been inevitable. The ruling classes simply had the masses at their disposal and without opposition were able to lead them into war in the interests of capital. Now, for the first time, a new power has appeared as a force in world history, the power of the self-conscious workers. Thus far the working-class has not been strong enough to overcome the bourgeoisie. But against the militarism of the competing

capitalistic governments they now heroically declare their determination to have peace. And this war against war means the beginning of the process of revolution which is to lead from capitalism to Socialism.

## **Socialisation (Part I) (1920)**

## I

During the first months that followed the German Revolution of November, 1918, there arose a cry of "Socialisation." It was the expression of the will of the masses to give to the revolution a social meaning, and not to let it stop at reshuffling of persons, or at a simple transformation of the political system. Kautsky warned the public against a too rapid socialisation, for which society would not yet be ripe. The miners put forward socialisation as one of their strike aims—as did recently the British miners. A commission to study the question of socialisation was formed, but secret councils and the Government sabotaged its decision. For the Majority Socialist Government, socialisation is only a phrase, a means of deceiving the workers; everyone knows that it has long ago abandoned all the former aims and principles of Socialism. But the Independents have remained the faithful guardians of the old Socialist doctrine; they believe in it sincerely, as far as the programme of socialisation is concerned. It is therefore interesting to study this programme, in order to characterise the radical tendency which exists in the social-democracy of all countries, side by side with the governmental Socialists or opposition to them.

When the workers demand socialisation, they are, beyond any doubt, thinking of Socialism, of its Socialist form of Society, of the suppression of capitalist exploitation. We shall see if it has the same meaning for the social-democratic chiefs of to-day. Marx never spoke of socialisation: he spoke of the expropriation of the expropriators.

Of the two principal transformations introduced by Socialism in production—the suppression of exploitation and the organisation of the economic system—the first is the most significant, the most important for the proletariat. One can conceive the organisation of production on a capitalist basis; it leads to State Socialism, to a more complete enslavement and exploitation of the proletariat by the power of the centralised State. The suppression of exploitation with the dispersion of production was the ideal of the primitive co-operators and of the anarchists; but where the suppression of exploitation has been accomplished, as in Communist Russia, it is necessary immediately to occupy ourselves with the organisation of production.

It is at this point that the Social-Democrats put forward general watchwords, preparatory to practical measures of legislation, from which we can see, in the clearest possible way, what socialisation means to them. Such was the case at Vienna, where reign the "Marxists" Renner and Otto Bauer. We take from a lecture given by Bauer on April 24<sup>th</sup>, at a meeting of Trade Union leaders, the arguments by which he sought to recommend his plans to these working class representatives. In order, he said, completely to socialise large industry, in order to get rid of the capitalists, expropriation is first of all necessary. "We take their enterprises from them," and the organisation of the new form of administration must follow. "Expropriation must not take place without compensation, for we should be obliged to confiscate all capital, including war bonds. The savings banks would then go bankrupt, the small peasants and the employees would lose their savings, and international complications would arise. It is therefore impossible to realise a mere confiscation of capitalist property." The capitalist would therefore be compensated; an arbitral court would determine the amount of compensation, which "ought to be fixed according to the permanent value, and ought not to consider war profits" The compensation would be paid in State loan bonds, which would bear an annual interest of four per cent.

Of course, he concludes, this does not yet mean complete socialisation, because the former capitalist still receives the interest on his enterprise as an annual income. "To suppress this gradually is a problem of fiscal legislation, and, eventually, of the transformation of the rights of

inheritance"; after some generations, revenues not produced by labour would completely disappear.

To throw light on the principles which lie at the bottom of these plans of socialisation put forward by the Social-Democrats, we must consider more closely the essence of capitalist property and of economic expropriation.

## II

Money, in its capacity as capital, has the power of multiplying itself continually by means of surplus-value. Whoever transforms his money into capital and invests it in production receives his share of the total surplus-value produced by the world-proletariat.

The source of surplus-value is the exploitation of the proletariat: labour-power is paid less than the value it produces.

Money and property have thus, in the capitalist system, not merely quite a new meaning, but they have also become a new standard. In the petit-bourgeois world, money is the measure of the value of the labour-time necessary for the production of a commodity. In its capacity as capital, money is the measure of surplus-value, of the profit which can be realised by the means of production. Although it may have involved no labour, a price will be paid for piece of land corresponding to its rent capitalised. It is the same with a large enterprise. If its foundation has cost, let us say, 100,000 francs (a hundred shares of 1,000 francs each) and it produces a dividend of 10 per cent., a share will not be sold at 1,000 francs, but at about 2,000 francs: for 1,000 francs at 5 per cent. bring in the same revenue as that share. Its capitalist value is 2,000 francs, for it is fixed by the revenue; and the capitalist value of the whole enterprise is 200,000 francs, although it may only have cost 100,000francs.

We know that the great banks, on the formation of a new enterprise, put this difference in their pockets in advance, as "promoter's profits," by issuing (in the case under consideration) shares for 200,000 francs.

On the other hand, if the profits from this enterprise fall—for example, through the successful competition of still larger enterprises—more and more, until it can only produce a dividend of 1 per cent., its capitalist value falls to 10,000 francs. If the profit disappears entirely, the capitalist value of the enterprise falls to zero, and only the material value of the stock can still be realised.

Capitalist property signifies first of all, then, not the right to dispose of commodities, but the right to receive revenue without working for it, to receive surplus-value. Its form is the share, the paper on which this right is inscribed. The enterprise, the factory, is only the instrument by which surplus value is produced; property itself is the right to surplus value. The suppression of exploitation, the suppression of this right, is in consequence the suppression of capitalist value, the confiscation of capital. We can now understand the method of Otto Bauer: to confuse under the same heading this form of capital and the few pence saved by the little man—who is thinking primarily of safeguarding his property, and not of receiving a revenue without working for it—and in this way to make the Trade Union official's shudder at an attack on exploitation.

The suppression of capitalist property and the suppression of exploitation are not, therefore, cause and effect, means and end; they are one and the same thing. Capitalist property does not exist except by exploitation, and its value is fixed by surplus-value. Let surplus-value disappear in one way or another, let the worker receive the full product of his labour, and capitalist property will disappear at the same time. If the proletariat improves its conditions of labour in such a way that enterprises will no longer bring any profit to capital, their capitalist value will fall to zero; the factories can become very useful to society, but they will have lost their value for

the capitalists. Money, then, loses the power of producing more money, of producing surplus value, because the workers no longer allow themselves to be exploited. This is the expropriation of which Marx was thinking. Capitalist property will be suppressed because capital will have no value, will not produce any profit. This economic expropriation, by which property loses its value and is consequently destroyed, although the right of free disposition remains, is the opposite of the legal expropriation often carried out in the capitalist world, by which the right of free disposition is suppressed, while property is allowed to remain in the form of compensation.

## **Socialisation (Part II) (1920)**

It goes without saying that legal expropriation will also take place during the transition from capitalism to Socialism. The political power of the proletariat will take all the measures that are necessary for the suppression of exploitation. It will not content itself with limiting the former employers right of free exploitation by regularising wages, hours of labour; and prices; it will suppress it altogether. The economic basis of these measures is thus defined. It is not confiscation of all property; as the terrified petit-bourgeoisie think, but the suppression of all right to surplus-value, to a revenue not produced by labour. ) It is the legal expression of the political fact that the proletariat is master, and that it will not let itself be exploited any longer.

### III

Socialisation according to the recipe of Bauer is legal expropriation without an economic expropriation—a thing that any capitalist government might propose. The capitalist value of enterprises will be paid to employers in the form of compensation, and they will henceforward receive, in the form of interest on bonds, what they formerly received in the form of profits. The remark that war profits will not enter into consideration shows that the normal profit will be taken as a standard. This socialisation replaces private capitalism by State capitalism; the State assumes the task of sweating profits out of the workers and handing it over to the capitalists. For the workers, very little will have been changed: as before, they will have to create a revenue for the capitalists without any labour on the part of the latter. Exploitation remains exactly the same as before.

If such a proposal had been made in the time of capitalist prosperity, it would have been acceptable for the proletariat; the amount of surplus-value accruing to the capitalists being fixed, every new increase of productivity through organisation and technical progress would benefit the proletariat. But the capitalist class did not think of it because it claimed these advantages for itself.

To-day, conditions are different, and surplus-value is in danger. The economic chaos, the loss of stocks, and of raw material, the heavy tribute to the capitalism of the Entente, give ground for anticipating a diminution capitalist profits. The revolt of the working class masses, the beginning of the proletarian revolution, which render doubtful the fate of all exploitation, have further complicated the situation. Socialisation now comes, just at the right moment, to guarantee capital its profits in the form of State interest. A Communist Government, like the Russian, guarantees immediately the results of the new-found power and liberty of the proletariat by refusing to capital all rights of further exploitation. A Social Democratic Government guarantees the existence of the former proletarian slavery by perpetuating the old tribute paid by the workers to capital just at the moment when it ought to disappear. Socialisation in these circumstances is only the legal expression of the political fact that the proletariat is only an apparent master, and is ready calmly to let itself go on being exploited. Just as the “Socialist” government is only the continuation of the former capitalist government under the banner of Socialism, “socialisation” is only the continuation also of the former capitalist exploitation under the guise of Socialism.

If we, enquire how it is that intelligent politicians and former Marxists can arrive at ideas like these, the well known political character of the tendency which has become embodied in the Independent Socialist Party will give us our reply. It was radical in name, it paid lip service to the class war, but it feared every form of vigorous struggle. This was already the case before the war, when Kautsky, Haase, and their friends opposed themselves to the radical extreme left as a “Marxist centre.” To day the same thing is happening. They wish to bring the workers Socialism. But they fear a struggle against the capitalist class. They see very well that a true suppression

of all capitalist profits, confiscation of capital as it has been realised by Communism in Russia, involves the capitalist class in a violent struggle; for it is a question of its very existence, of its life or death as a class. They consider the proletariat to be too weak for this struggle, and consequently seek to achieve their object by roundabout paths, by making it attractive for the capitalist class. Politically, the plans for socialisation are an attempt to lead the proletariat to the Socialist goal, without touching the capitalist class at its vital spot, without provoking its violent anger; and in this way to avoid a violent class struggle.

The intention would be praiseworthy if only it could be. But if one considers all that would be necessary to make up the capitalist tribute—interest for the former capitalist proprietors of the means of production, interest on the war loans, the tribute to the capitalism of the Entente—we shall see that all this could not be realised, even were the proletariat to accept intensive toil, and worse conditions of life. In view of the present destruction of economic life and of the physical forces of the masses, the immediate suppression of all parasitism is a pressing necessity for the relief of society. But even if we do not take into account this abnormal state of misery, and if we only consider socialisation is one of the first steps of the proletarian revolution, as a first step towards Socialism, its impossibility is apparent so long as the proletariat has not yet acquired all its powers. When the workers wake up and strive for liberty and independence they put forward demands for the improvement of their conditions of labour and existence.

These improvements will immediately decrease profits. The Socialist State may cry for them: “Work harder!”; the opposite will nevertheless happen.

When the capitalist yoke no longer bears down with an iron grip upon the workers, the inhuman tension of exploitation will relax and labour will become, less intense, will become more human. The dividends, the profits of undertakings will fall. Without socialisation, the private capitalist would have to bear the loss but when the State has to pay them interest, it is the Socialist State which has guaranteed them their profits despite the beginning of the working-class revolution, and which will bear the loss. There will remain to it the choice, either of opposing the workers demands; of breaking strikes, of becoming a violent government on the side of capital, and against the proletariat, or else to collapse in an unavoidable bankruptcy. The capitalist class will again proclaim its triumph, for the impossibility of “socialisation” will have been practically demonstrated.

This will be the result of the clever attempt to arrive at a form of Socialism by avoiding the class struggle. Socialisation which is devised to spare the profits of the capitalist class cannot be a path to Socialism. There is no other way but to suppress exploitation and with this object to carry on an unrelenting class struggle.

**Social Democracy and Communism  
(1927)**

# 1 The Road Followed by the Workers Movement

The world war brought not just a violent revolution in all economic and political relations; it also completely transformed socialism. Those who grew up with German social democracy and participated in its ranks in the workers class struggle, will be confused by all its new features, and will ask themselves if everything they had learned and accomplished until now was false, and if they must therefore learn and follow the new theories. The answer is: it was not false, but incomplete. Socialism is not an immutable theory. As the world changes, men's theoretical understanding grows, and along with new relations, new methods to achieve our goal also emerge. This can be seen by casting our glance back upon the development of socialism over the last century.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, utopian socialism reigned. Broad-minded thinkers deeply sensitive to the unbearable nature of capitalism sketched the outlines of a better society, in which labor would be organized cooperatively. A new perspective emerged when Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto in 1847. Here, for the first time, the principal points of the socialism of the future clearly stood out: it was from capitalism itself that the force capable of transforming society would emerge, and this force would give birth to a socialist society. This force is the class struggle of the proletariat. The poor, scorned, ignorant workers will be in the forefront of those who will carry out this transformation, as they take up the struggle against the bourgeoisie, gaining in the process power and ability and organizing themselves as a class; by way of a revolution, the proletariat will conquer political power and carry out a comprehensive economic transformation.

It must also be emphasized that Marx and Engels never called this whole undertaking "socialism", nor did they call themselves "socialists". Engels expressed the reason for this quite clearly: in that era, various bourgeois currents were characterized under the name of socialism, currents which, due to a feeling of identification with the proletariat or other motives, wanted to overthrow the capitalist order; quite frequently, their goals were even reactionary. Communism, on the other hand, was a proletarian movement. The workers groups which attacked the capitalist system called themselves communists. It was from the Communist League that the Manifesto emerged, which pointed out to the proletariat the goal and the direction of its struggle.

In 1848 the bourgeois revolutions broke out, clearing the way for the development of capitalism in central Europe, and facilitating the transformation of the small traditional statelets into more powerful Nation-States. Industry expanded at a record pace during the 1850s and 1860s, and amidst the ensuing prosperity all the revolutionary movements collapsed so completely that even the word communism was forgotten. Later, during the 1860s, when the workers movement reemerged in England, France and Germany within a more fully-developed capitalism, it had a much broader base than the previous communist sects, but its goals were much more limited and short-term in nature: improvement of the immediate situation of the workers, legal recognition of

trade unions, democratic reforms. In Germany, Lassalle led agitation in favor of State-supported producers' cooperatives; in his view, the State should act as the architect of social policy in favor of the working class, and in order to compel the State to assume this role, the working class would have to avail itself of democracy—the power of the masses over the State. It is therefore understandable that the Party founded by Lassalle laid claim to the significant name of social democracy: this name expressed the Party's goal, that is, democracy with a social purpose.

Little by little, however, the Party outgrew its initial narrow objectives. Germany's unrestrained capitalist development, the war for the formation of the German Empire, the pact between the bourgeoisie and the militarist landowners, the anti-socialist law, the reactionary customs and taxation policies—all of these things drove the working class forward, making it the vanguard of the rest of European workers movement, which adopted its name and its policies. Practice honed its spirit for understanding Marx's doctrine, which was made accessible to socialists by the numerous popularized versions written by Kautsky and their political applications. In this manner they came to once again recognize the principles and goals of the old communism: the Communist Manifesto was their programmatic work, Marxism was their theory, the class struggle their tactic, the conquest of political power by the proletariat—the social revolution—their goal.

There was, however, one difference: the character of the new Marxism, the spirit of the whole movement, was unlike that of the old communism. The social democracy was growing within an environment characterized by a powerful burst of capitalist expansion. It was not, at first, compelled to consider a violent transformation. For this reason, the revolution was postponed into the distant future and the social democracy was satisfied with the tasks of propaganda and organization in preparation for the postponed revolution, and contented itself for the time being with struggles for immediate improvements. Its theory asserted that the revolution had to come as the necessary result of economic development, forgetting that action, the spontaneous activity of the masses, was necessary to bring this about. It thus became a kind of economic fatalism. The social democracy and the rapidly growing trade unions which it dominated became members of the capitalist society; they became the growing opposition and resistance of the working masses, as the institutions which prevented the total impoverishment of the masses under the pressure of capital. Thanks to the general franchise, they even became a strong opposition within the bourgeois parliament. Their basic character was, despite their theory, reformist, and in relation to day-to-day issues, palliative and minimalist instead of revolutionary. The principal cause of this development lay in proletarian prosperity, which granted the proletarian masses a certain degree of essential security, dampening the expression of revolutionary views.

During the last decade these tendencies have been reinforced. The workers movement achieved what was possible in such circumstances: a powerful Party, with a million members and garnering one-third of the vote, and alongside it a trade union movement concentrating in its ranks the majority of organized labor. It then clashed with an even more powerful barrier, against which the old methods were not so effective: the potent organization of big capital into syndicates, cartels and trusts, as well as the policies of finance capital, heavy industry and militarism, all of which were forms of imperialism that were controlled by forces outside parliament. But this workers movement was not capable of a total tactical reorientation and renewal, as long as its own powerful organizations were arrayed against it, organizations which were considered to be ends in themselves and were eager for recognition. The voice of this tendency was the bureaucracy, the numerous army of officials, leaders, parliamentarians, secretaries and editors,

who comprised a group of their own with their own interests. Their aim was to gradually change the nature of the Party's activities while keeping the old name. The conquest of political power by the proletariat became, for them, the conquest of a parliamentary majority by their Party, that is, the replacement of the ruling politicians and State bureaucracy by themselves, the social democratic politicians and the trade union and Party bureaucracies. The advent of socialism was now supposed to arrive by way of new legislation in favor of the proletariat. And it was not just among the revisionists that this position found favor. Kautsky, too, the political theoretician of the radicals, said during a debate that the social democracy wanted to staff the State, with all of its departments and ministries, merely in order to put other people, from the social democracy, in the place of the ministers currently occupying those posts.

The World War also led to the outbreak of a crisis in the workers movement. The social democracy, generally, put itself at the service of imperialism under the formula of "defense of the fatherland"; the trade union and Party bureaucracies worked hand in hand with the State bureaucracy and business to make the proletariat expend its strength, its blood and its life to the utmost extremes. This signified the collapse of the social democracy as a Party of proletarian revolution. Now, despite the fierce repression, a growing opposition has emerged in all countries, and the old banner of the class struggle, of Marxism and of the revolution is raised again. But under what name should this banner be raised? It would be completely justified to reclaim the old formulas of social democracy, which the social democratic parties have left in the lurch. But the very name "socialist" has now lost all of its meaning and power, since the differences between the socialists and the bourgeoisie have almost entirely disappeared. In order for the class struggle to move forward, the first and most important matter to attend to is to fight against the social democracy, which has led the proletariat into the abyss of poverty, submission, war, annihilation and powerlessness. Should the new fighters accept such infamous and shameful names? A new name was necessary, but what name was more appropriate than any other to declare its role as the principle bearer of the old original class struggle? In every country the same thought arose: reclaim the name of communism.

Once again, as in the time of Marx, communism as a revolutionary and proletarian movement confronts socialism as a reformist and bourgeois movement. And the new communism is not just a new edition of the theory of radical social democracy. As a result of the world crisis, it has gained new depth, which totally differentiates it from the old theory. In what follows, we shall elucidate the differences between the two theories.

## 2 Class Struggle and Socialization

During its best days, social democracy established as its principle the class struggle against the bourgeoisie, and as its goal, the realization of socialism as soon as it could conquer political power. Now that social democracy has abandoned that principle and that goal, both of them have been taken up again by communism.

When the war broke out, social democracy abandoned the fight against the bourgeoisie. Kautsky asserted that the class struggle was only applicable to peacetime, while during wartime class solidarity against the enemy nation must take its place. In support of this assertion he pulled from out of his sleeve the lie of the “defensive war”, with which the masses were deceived at the start of hostilities. The leaders of the SPD majority and the Independents differed on this point only because the former collaborated enthusiastically with the war policy of the bourgeoisie while the latter patiently endured it, because they did not dare to lead the struggle themselves. After the defeat of German militarism in November 1918, the same pattern was repeated. The social democratic leaders joined the government alongside the bourgeois parties and tried to persuade the workers that this constituted the political power of the proletariat. But they did not use their power over the Councils and government ministries to realize socialism, but to reestablish capitalism. Besides this, one must add that the colossal power of Capital, which is the principle enemy and exploiter of the proletariat, is now embodied in Entente Capital, which now rules the world. The German bourgeoisie, reduced to impotence, can only exist as a peon and agent of Entente imperialism and is responsible for crushing the German workers and exploiting them on behalf of Entente Capital. The social democrats, as the political representatives of this bourgeoisie, and who now form the German government, have the task of carrying out the orders of the Entente and requesting its aid and support.

For their part, the Independents, who during the war restrained the workers in their struggle against the powerful German imperialism, have seen that after the war their task consists—with, for example, their praise for the League of Nations and Wilson and their propaganda in favor of the Versailles Peace Treaty—in restraining the workers in their struggle against the arrogance of world capitalism.

In the previous period, when social democracy denounced and opposed war, the good faith of its leaders could have been taken for granted, and one could have also thought that their elevation to the highest posts in the government would have signified the political power of the proletariat, since, as representatives of the workers, they had framed legislation for the realization of, or at least the first steps towards socialism. But every worker knows that—despite the occasional proclamation—they now have nothing at all to do with such things. Is it agreed that these gentlemen, once they have satisfied the aims of their greed, have no other desires or goals; that the social democracy was therefore nothing to them but a lot of hot air? Perhaps to some degree. But there are also other more important reasons which explain their behavior.

The social democracy has said that, in the current circumstances, after the terrible economic collapse, it is no longer by any means possible to realize socialism. And here we find an important

distinction between the positions of communism and social democracy. The social democrats say that socialism is only possible in a society of abundance, of increasing prosperity. The communists say that in such periods capitalism is most secure, because then the masses do not think about revolution. The social democrats say: first, production must be reestablished, to avoid a total catastrophe and to keep the masses from dying of hunger. The communists say: now, when the economy has hit rock bottom, is the perfect time to reestablish it upon socialist foundations. The social democrats say that even the most basic recovery of production requires the continuation of the old capitalist mode of production, in conformance with which all institutions are structured and thanks to which a devastating class struggle against the bourgeoisie will be avoided. The communists say: a recovery of the capitalist economic foundations is completely impossible; the world is sinking ever deeper into bankruptcy before our eyes, into a degree of poverty which makes a break with the bourgeoisie necessary, as the bourgeoisie is blocking the only possible road to reconstruction. So the social democrats want to first reestablish capitalism, avoiding the class struggle; the communists want to build socialism from scratch right now, with the class struggle as their guide.

What, then, is this all about? The social labor process is the production of all the goods needed for life. But the satisfaction of human needs is not the goal of capitalist production; its goal is surplus value, profit. All capitalist activities are directed towards profit, and only for that purpose are the workers allowed to work in their factories to manufacture goods in their countries, goods which are required to satisfy our needs. Now, this whole labor process is paralyzed and destroyed. Profits, of course, are still being made, even enormous profits, but this is taking place via the tortuous detours of capital flight, parasitism, plunder, the black market and speculation. If the regular source of profit is to be reestablished for the bourgeoisie, then production, the labor process, must be restarted. Is this possible?

Insofar as it is a question of labor, of production, this cannot be so difficult. The working class masses are there, ready to work. As for food, enough is produced in Germany. As for raw materials, such as coal and iron, these are in relatively short supply in comparison to the great mass of highly-skilled industrial workers; but this could easily be compensated for, thanks to trade with the less industrialized, but raw materials-rich countries of Eastern Europe. Thus, the recovery of production does not pose a superhuman problem. But capitalist production means that part of the product goes to the capitalist without the capitalist having to work for it.

The bourgeois legal order is the means which makes it possible for these capitalists to reap this profit as if it were a natural process, thanks to its property rights. By means of these rights, capital has "claims" to its profit. The same thing happened before the war. But the war has enormously increased the profit claims of capital. The State debt today is numbered almost in the billions, whereas before the war it was just in the millions. This means that the owners of those titles to public State debt expect to receive, without working, all their billions in interest payments from the labor of the whole population, in the form of taxes. Furthermore, in Germany's case one must add to this sum the war indemnities owed to the Entente, which add up to a total sum of 200 or 300 billion, more than half the gross national product. This means that, out of the total sum of production, more than half must be paid to the capitalists of the Entente on account of war indemnities. Besides this, there is the German bourgeoisie itself, which wants to extract the greatest possible profit in order to accumulate new capital. So, what will be left for the workers? The worker, in spite of all of this, needs to live; but it is clear that under these circumstances his

upkeep will be reduced to a minimum, while all of capital's profits can only be produced thanks to more intensive labor, a longer working day and more refined methods of exploitation.

Capitalist production now implies such a high degree of exploitation that it will make life intolerable and almost impossible for the workers. The reestablishment of production is not in itself so very difficult; it requires capable and determined organization, as well as the enthusiastic collaboration of the entire proletariat. But the reestablishment of production under such tremendous pressure and under conditions of such systematic exploitation, which only gives the workers the minimum needed to sustain life, is practically impossible. The first attempt to implement such a policy must fail due to the resistance and the refusal of the workers themselves, on the part of those whom it would dispossess of any prospects of meeting their essential life-needs, leading to the gradual destruction of the whole economy. Germany provides an example of such a scenario.

Already during the war the communists recognized the impossibility of paying the enormous war debt and its interest, and put forth the demand that the war debts and indemnities should be cancelled. But that is not all. Should the private debts incurred during the war also be cancelled? There is little difference between capital which has been borrowed during the war to build artillery pieces and the stock issues of a factory making armor or artillery shells. In this case one cannot distinguish between the various kinds of capital, nor can one admit the claims of one kind to its profit while rejecting the others. All profits constitute for capital a claim on production, which hinders reconstruction. For an economy in such a precarious situation, the tremendous burden of the costs of the war is not the only weight it must bear; all its other claimants must also be entered on the scales. This is why communism, which as a matter of principle rejects all capital's claims to profit, is the only practically feasible principle. The economy must be practically rebuilt from scratch, without any regard for capital's profit.

The rejection of capital's right to profit was always, however, an axiom of social democracy as well. How does social democracy approach this problem now? It is fighting for "socialization", that is, for the expropriation of industry by the State, and the indemnification of the industrialists. This means that, once more—and this time even through the mediation of the State—part of the product of labor must be paid to these capitalists for not working. In this way, the exploitation of the workers by capital remains the same as before. Two things were always essential characteristics of socialism: the elimination of exploitation and the social regulation of production. The first is the most important goal for the proletariat; the second is the most rational method for increasing production, by way of its technical organization. But in the "socialization" plans being prepared by social democracy exploitation continues to exist, and the de-privatization of industry only leads to State capitalism (or State socialism), which turns the capitalist owners into shareholders of the State. The "socialization" currently sought by the social democrats is therefore a lie for the proletariat, to whom only the external façade of socialism is displayed, while in fact exploitation is kept alive. The foundation of this position is undoubtedly the fear of a harsh conflict with the bourgeoisie, at a time when the proletariat is growing more confident, but is still not in possession of all the forces required for the revolutionary struggle. In practice, however, what this really amounts to is an attempt to put capitalism back on its feet, upon new foundations. Naturally, this attempt must fail, since the impoverished economy cannot afford such gifts to capital.

The social democrats of both tendencies, then, maintain the exploitation of the workers by capital; one policy leaves capitalism to its own development, the other stimulates and regulates this exploitation through the intermediary of the State. Both, for the worker, have just this one

solution: Work, work, work hard, with all your strength! Because the reconstruction of the capitalist economy is only possible if the proletariat exerts itself to satisfy the demands of the most extreme degree of exploitation.

### 3 Mass Action and Revolution

Even before the war the difference between social democracy and communism was already evident, although not under that name. This difference involved the tactics of the struggle. Under the name of “left radicals”, an opposition arose at that time within social democracy (from which the predecessors of today’s communists emerged), which defended mass action against the “radicals” and the revisionists. In this dispute it became clear that the radical spokesmen, especially Kautsky, defended a position opposed to revolutionary action, both theoretically as well as tactically.

The parliamentary and trade union struggle had brought the workers—in a vigorously expanding capitalism—some economic improvements, while simultaneously building a powerful barrier against capitalism’s permanent tendencies towards pauperization of the working class. Over the last decade, however, this barrier slowly gave way, in spite of the workers’ strong and expanding organization: imperialism reinforced the power of the capitalists and militarism, weakened parliament, put the trade unions on the defensive and began to prepare for the world war. It was clear that the old methods of struggle no longer worked. The masses were instinctively aware of this; in every country they participated in actions which were often opposed by their leaders, launched large-scale trade union struggles, carried out transport strikes which paralyzed the economy, or took part in political demonstrations. The outbreak of proletarian revolt frequently erupted in such a way as to shatter the self-confidence of the bourgeoisie, which was compelled to make concessions; or the movements were often enough quenched by means of massacres.

The social democratic leaders also tried to use these actions for their own political objectives; they acknowledged the usefulness of political strikes for particular goals, but only on condition that they be reduced to pre-arranged limits, on condition that they begin and end when the leaders give the order, and that they always remain subordinated to the tactics determined by the leaders. Thus, it often happens that such strikes take place today, too, but usually without too much success. The tempestuous violence of the elemental uprising of the masses is paralyzed by a policy of compromise.

The element of class action that immediately creates panic in the ruling bourgeoisie—the fear that the workers movement might take on a revolutionary character—disappeared from these “disciplined” mass actions, since every precaution had been taken to ensure their harmlessness.

The revolutionary Marxists—today’s communists—then made an assessment of the limited character of the ideology of the social democratic leadership. They saw that, throughout history, the masses, the classes themselves, had been the motor force of and the impulse behind every action. Revolutions never arose from the prudent decisions of recognized leaders. When the circumstances and the situation became intolerable, the masses suddenly rose, overthrew the old authorities, and the new class or a fraction of that class took power and molded the State or society in accordance with its needs. It was only during the last 50 years of peaceful capitalist development that the illusion emerged and flourished that leaders, as individual subjects, direct the course of history in accordance with their enlightened intelligence. Parliamentarians and the

staff attached to the State executive offices believe that their deeds, actions and decisions determine the course of events; the masses who follow them must only take action when they are called upon to do so, ratifying the words of their spokesmen and then quickly disappearing from the political stage. The masses have to play a simple passive role, that of choosing their leaders, and it is the latter that provide the decisive impulse to the course of development.

But if this belief is inadequate for the understanding of the past revolutions of history, it is yet more inadequate for understanding the present situation, in the light of the profound difference between the bourgeois revolution and the proletarian revolution. In the bourgeois revolution, the popular masses of workers and petit bourgeoisie only rise once (as in Paris in February of 1848), or intermittently, as in the great French Revolution, in order to overthrow the old royalty or a new power which has gotten out of control such as that of the Girondins. Once their work was done they gave way to new men, the representatives of the bourgeoisie, who formed a new government, and proceeded to reconfigure and reconstruct the State institutions, the constitution and the laws. The power of the proletarian masses was needed to destroy the old regime, but not to construct the new one, because the new regime was the organization of a new class power.

It was in accordance with this model that the radical social democrats conceived the proletarian revolution, which—unlike the reformists—they believed to be necessary. A great popular uprising must put an end to the old military-absolutist rule and bring the social democrats to power, who would take care of everything else, building socialism by means of new legislation. This is how they conceive of the proletarian revolution. But the proletarian revolution is something completely different. The proletarian revolution is the liberation of the masses from all class power and all exploitation. This means that they must themselves take history into their own hands, in order to make themselves masters of their own labor. Starting with the old human species, limited to slave labor, which only thinks of itself and sees no further than the walls of its factory, they must create new men, proud, ready to fight, with an independent spirit, suffused with solidarity, not allowing themselves to be deceived by the clever lies of bourgeois theories, regulating the labor process on their own. This change cannot take place as a result of a single revolutionary act, but will require a long process, in which the workers, through necessity and bitter disillusionments, occasional victories and repeated defeats, slowly build up the necessary force to attain the cohesive unity and the maturity for freedom and power. This process of struggle is the proletarian revolution.

How long this process will take will vary from country to country and according to the particular circumstances, and will depend above all on the power of resistance of each ruling class. The fact that it took a relatively short period of time in Russia was due to the fact that the bourgeoisie there was weak and that, thanks to the latter's alliance with the landed nobility, the peasants were impelled to take the side of the workers. The bourgeoisie's axis of power is the violence of the State, the violent organization of force with all the means at its disposal: law, school, police, judiciary, army and bureaucracy, which hold in their hands the control over all sectors of public life. The revolution is the struggle of the proletariat against this power apparatus of the ruling class; the proletariat can only win its freedom if it opposes the organization of the enemy with a stronger and more cohesive organization of its own. The bourgeoisie and State power try to keep the workers impotent, dispersed and intimidated, in order to interrupt the growth of their unity through violence and lies, and to demoralize them concerning the power of their own actions. Against these efforts, mass action arises from the ranks of the workers multitudes, action leading to the paralysis and breakdown of State organizations. As long as the latter remain intact, the

proletariat is not victorious, because those organizations will constantly operate against the proletariat. Therefore, its struggle—if the world does not want to come to an end in capitalism—must finally do away with the State machinery, which must be destroyed and rendered harmless by the powerful actions of the proletariat.

Kautsky had already opposed this conception before the war. According to him, the proletariat must not adopt this tactic, which would lead it to destroy the State in an outburst of violence, since it would need the State apparatus for its own purposes. All the ministries of the existing State, once in the power of the proletariat, will continue to be necessary in order to implement the laws passed on behalf of the workers. The goal of the proletariat must not be the destruction of the State, but its conquest. The question of how to create the organization of the power of the victorious proletariat—whether it will be a continuation of the bourgeois State, as Kautsky believed, or a completely new organization—is thus posed. But the social democratic theories, as they have been formulated and propagandized by Kautsky over the last thirty years, only spoke of economics and capitalism, from which socialism would have to “necessarily” emerge; “how” all of this is to happen was never elaborated and thus the question of the relation between the State and revolution was not addressed at the time. It was to find its answer only later. In any event, the opposition between the social democratic and communist theories was already clear in regard to the question of revolution.

For the social democrats, the proletarian revolution is a single act, a popular movement that destroys the old power and puts the social democrats in the driver’s seat of the State, in the government posts. The downfall of the Hohenzollerns in Germany on November 7, 1918 is in their eyes a pure proletarian revolution, which only achieved victory thanks to the special circumstance that the old compulsion was done away with as a result of the war. For the communists, this revolt could only signify the beginning of a proletarian revolution which, by overthrowing the old compulsion, cleared the way for the workers to finish off the old order and construct their class organization. As it turned out, the workers allowed themselves to be led by social democracy and helped rebuild the State’s power after it had been paralyzed: they are still in the midst of an epoch of difficult struggles.

For Kautsky and his friends, Germany is an authentic social democratic republic where the workers, while not in power, at least collaborate in the government—Noske and his apparatus of repression are only esthetic blemishes. They must not, of course, think that they have arrived at socialism just yet. Kautsky has constantly repeated that, according to the Marxist conception, the social revolution will not take place all at once, but is a long historical process: capitalism is not yet mature enough for the economic revolution. By this he means to say, among other things, that, although the proletarian revolution has taken place, the proletarians must allow themselves to be exploited as before and a few big industries must only slowly be nationalized. Or, to put it in plain English: instead of the old ministers, the social democrats have occupied the highest positions in the State; but capitalism is still the same along with its exploitation.

This is the practical meaning of the social democratic claim, according to which, after a proletarian revolutionary uprising, struck at one blow, a much longer process of socialization and of social revolution must be undertaken. Against this conception, communism asserts that the proletarian revolution, the seizure of power by the proletariat, is a very slow process of mass struggle, through which the proletariat will rise to power and isolate the State machinery. At the apex of this struggle, when the workers take power, exploitation will be quickly ended, the suppression of all claims to profit without labor will be proclaimed, and the first steps towards the

new juridical basis for the reconstruction of the economy as a consciously-organized, goal-driven mechanism will be taken.

## 4 Democracy and Parliamentarism

Social democratic doctrine never concerned itself with the problem of discovering the political forms its power would assume after having reached its goal. The beginning of the proletarian revolution has provided the practical answer to this question, thanks to the events themselves. This practice of the first stages of the revolution has enormously increased our ability to understand the essence and the future path of the revolution; it has enormously clarified our intuitions and contributed new perspectives on a matter which was previously vaguely outlined in a distant haze. These new intuitions constitute the most important difference between social democracy and communism. If communism, in the points discussed above, signifies faithfulness to and the correct extension of the best social democratic theories, now, thanks to its new perspectives, it rises above the old theories of socialism. In this theory of communism, Marxism undergoes an important extension and enrichment.

Up until now, only a few people were aware of the fact that radical social democracy had become so profoundly estranged from Marx's views in its concept of the State and revolution—which, furthermore, no one had even taken the trouble to discuss. Among the few exceptions, Lenin stands out. Only the victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917, and their dissolution of the National Assembly shortly afterwards, showed the socialists of Western Europe that a new principle was making its debut in Russia. And in Lenin's book, *The State and Revolution*, which was written in the summer of 1917—although it only became available in Western Europe in the following year—one finds the foundations of the socialist theory of the State considered in the light of Marx's views.

The opposition between social democracy and the socialism we are now considering is often expressed in the slogan, "Democracy or Dictatorship". But the communists also consider their system to be a form of democracy. When the social democrats speak of democracy, they are referring to democracy as it is applied in parliamentarism; the communists oppose parliamentary or bourgeois democracy. What do they mean by these terms?

Democracy means popular government, people's self-government. The popular masses themselves must administer their own affairs and determine them. Is this actually the case? The whole world knows the answer is no. The State apparatus rules and regulates everything; it governs the people, who are its subjects. In reality, the State apparatus is composed of the mass of officials and military personnel. Of course, in relation to all matters which affect the entire community, officials are necessary for carrying out administrative functions; but in our State, the servants of the people have become their masters. Social democracy is of the opinion that parliamentary democracy, due to the fact that it is the form of democracy where the people elect their government, is in a position—if the right people are elected—to make popular self-government a reality.

What really happens is clearly demonstrated by the experience of the new German republic. There can be no doubt that the masses of workers do not want to see the return of a triumphant capitalism. Even so, while in the elections there was no limitation of democracy, there was no

military terrorism, and all the institutions of the reaction were powerless, despite all this the result was the reestablishment of the old oppression and exploitation, the preservation of capitalism. The communists had already warned of this and foresaw that, by way of parliamentary democracy, the liberation of the workers from their exploitation by capital would not be possible.

The popular masses express their power in elections. On election day, the masses are sovereign; they can impose their will by electing their representatives. On this one day, they are the masters. But woe to them if they do not choose the right representatives! During the entire term after the election, they are powerless. Once elected, the deputies and parliamentarians can decide everything. This democracy is not a government of the people themselves, but a government of parliamentarians, who are almost totally independent of the masses. To make them more responsive to a greater extent one could make proposals, such as, for example, holding new elections every year, or, even more radical, the right of recall (compulsory new elections at the request of a certain number of the eligible voters); naturally, however, no one is making such proposals. Of course, the parliamentarians cannot do just as they please, since four years later they will have to run for office again. But during that time they manipulate the masses, accustoming them to such general formulas and such demagogic phrases, in such a way that the masses are rendered absolutely incapable of exercising any kind of critical judgment. Do the voters, on election day, really choose appropriate representatives, who will carry out in their name the mandates for which they were elected? No; they only choose from among various persons previously selected by the political parties who have been made familiar to them in the party newspapers.

But let us assume that a large number of people are elected by the masses as the representatives of their true intentions and are sent to parliament. They meet there, but soon realize that the parliament does not govern; it only has the mission of passing the laws, but does not implement them. In the bourgeois State there is a separation of powers between making and executing the laws. The parliament possesses only the first power, while it is the second power which is really determinate; the real power, that of implementing the laws, is in the hands of the bureaucracy and the departments of the State, at whose summit is the government executive as the highest authority. This means that, in the democratic countries, the government personnel, the ministers, are designated by the parliamentary majority. In reality, however, they are not elected, they are nominated, behind closed doors with a lot of skullduggery and wheeling and dealing, by the leaders of the parties with a parliamentary majority. Even if there were to be an aspect of popular will manifested in the parliament, this would still not hold true in the government.

In the personnel staffing the government offices, the popular will is to be found only—and there, in a weakened form mixed with other influences—alongside bureaucratism, which directly rules and dominates the people. But even the ministers are almost powerless against the organizations of the bureaucracy, who are nominally subordinate to them. The bureaucracy pulls all the strings and does all the work, not the ministers. It is the bureaucrats who remain in office and are still there when the next batch of elected politicians arrives in office. They rely on the ministers to defend them in parliament and to authorize funding for them, but if the ministers cross them, they will make life impossible for them.

This is the whole meaning of the social democratic concept of the workers being able to take power and overthrow capitalism by means of the normal rule of general suffrage. Do they really think they can make anyone believe that all of these functionaries, office workers, department administrators, confidential advisors, judges and officials high and low, will be capable of carrying out any sort of change on behalf of the freedom of the proletariat at the behest of the likes

of Ebert and Scheidemann, or Dittmann and Ledebour? The bureaucracy, at the highest levels, belongs to the same class as the exploiters of the workers, and in its middle layers as well as in its lowest ranks its members all enjoy a secure and privileged position compared to the rest of the population. This is why they feel solidarity with the ruling layers which belong to the bourgeoisie, and are linked to them by a thousand invisible ties of education, family relationships and personal connections.

Perhaps the social democratic leaders have come to believe that, by taking the place of the previous government ministers, they could pave the way to socialism by passing new laws. In reality, however, nothing has changed in the State apparatus and the system of power as a result of this change of government personnel. And the fact that these gentlemen do not want to admit that this is indeed the case is proven by the fact that their only concern has been to occupy the government posts, believing that, with this change of personnel, the revolution is over. This is made equally clear by the fact that the modern organizations created by the proletariat have, under their leadership, a statist character and smell about them, like the State but on a smaller scale: the former servants, now officials, have promoted themselves to masters; they have created a dense bureaucracy, with its own interests, which displays—in an even more accentuated form—the character of the bourgeois parliaments at the commanding heights of their respective parties and groups, which only express the impotence of the masses of their memberships.

Are we therefore saying that the use of parliament and the struggle for democracy is a false tactic of social democracy? We all know that, under the rule of a powerful and still unchallenged capitalism, the parliamentary struggle can be a means of arousing and awakening class consciousness, and has indeed done so, and even Liebknecht used it that way during the war. But it is for that very reason that the specific character of democratic parliamentarism cannot be ignored. It has calmed the combative spirit of the masses, it has inculcated them with the false belief that they were in control of the situation and squelched any thoughts of rebellion which may have arisen among them. It performed invaluable services for capitalism, allowing it to develop peacefully and without turmoil. Naturally, capitalism had to adopt the especially harmful formula of deceit and demagogy in the parliamentary struggle, in order to fulfill its aim of driving the population to insanity. And now the parliamentary democracy is performing a yet greater service for capitalism, as it is enrolling the workers organizations in the effort to save capitalism.

Capitalism has been quite considerably weakened, materially and morally, during the world war, and will only be able to survive if the workers themselves once again help it to get back on its feet. The social democratic labor leaders are elected as government ministers, because only the authority inherited from their party and the mirage of the promise of socialism could keep the workers pacified, until the old State order could be sufficiently reinforced. This is the role and the purpose of democracy, of parliamentary democracy, in this period in which it is not a question of the advent of socialism, but of its prevention. Democracy cannot free the workers, it can only plunge them deeper into slavery, diverting their attention from the genuine path to freedom; it does not facilitate but blocks the revolution, reinforcing the bourgeoisie's capacity for resistance and making the struggle for socialism a more difficult, costly and time-consuming task for the proletariat.

## 5 Proletarian Democracy, or the Council System

Social democracy believed that the conquest of political power by the proletariat had to take the form of a seizure of the power of the State apparatus by the workers party. This was why socialism had to leave the State apparatus intact, to place it at the service of the working class. Marxists, including Kautsky, also shared this belief.

Marx and Engels viewed the State as the violent machinery of oppression created by the ruling class and then perfected and further developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the proletariat's revolt grew stronger. Marx thought that the task of the proletariat consisted in the destruction of this State apparatus and the creation of completely new administrative organs. He was well aware of the fact that the State exercises many functions which, at first sight, benefit the general interest—public safety, the regulation of trade, education, administration—but he also knew that all of these activities were subordinated to the overriding goal of securing the interests of capital, of assuring its power. This is why he never succumbed to the fantasy that this machinery of repression could ever become an organ of popular liberation, while preserving its other functions. The proletariat must provide itself with its own instrument of liberation.

It seemed that this instrument could not be identified prior to its actual appearance; only practice could unveil it. This became possible for the first time in the Paris Commune of 1871, when the proletariat conquered State power. In the Commune, the citizens and workers of Paris elected a parliament after the old model, but this parliament was immediately transformed into something quite unlike our parliament. Its purpose was not to entertain the people with fine words while allowing a small clique of businessmen and capitalists to preserve their private property; the men who met in the new parliament had to publicly regulate and administer everything on behalf of the people. What had been a parliamentary corporation was transformed into a corporation of labor; it formed committees which were responsible for framing new legislation. In this manner, the bureaucracy as a special class, independent of and ruling over the people, disappeared, thereby abolishing the separation of legislative and executive powers. Those persons who occupied the highest posts over the people were at the same time elected by and representatives of the people themselves who put them in office, and could at any time be removed from office by their electors.

The short life of the Paris Commune did not permit a complete development of this new concept; it arose, so to speak, instinctively, within the feverish struggle for existence. It was Marx's brilliant perspicacity that caused it to be recognized as the embryonic form of the future forms of the State power of the proletariat. A new and important step was taken in 1905 in Russia, with the establishment of councils, or soviets, as organs of expression of the fighting proletariat. These organs did not conquer political power, although the Saint Petersburg central workers council assumed the leadership of the struggle, and exercised considerable power. When the new revolution broke out in 1917, the soviets were once again constructed, this time as organs of proletarian

power. With the German November Revolution the proletariat took political control of the country and provided the second historical example of proletarian State power. It was in the Russian example, however, that the political forms and principles the proletariat needs to achieve socialism were most clearly presented. These are the principles of communism as opposed to those of social democracy.

The first principle is that of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx repeatedly maintained that the proletariat, immediately after taking power, must establish its dictatorship. By dictatorship he meant workers power to the exclusion of the other classes. This assertion provoked many protests: justice prohibits such a dictatorship, which privileges certain groups above others which are denied their rights, and instead requires democracy and equality before the law for everyone. But this is not at all the case: each class understands justice and rights to mean what is good or bad for it; the exploiter complains of injustice when he is put to work. In other times, when the proud aristocrat or the rich and arrogant bourgeois scornfully looked down with repugnance upon the idea of political equality and political rights for the slaves who toiled in the worst, most downtrodden and degrading jobs, in those times it was a sign full of meaning for the honor of the men who were beginning to rebel, when in their status as proletarians they rose up against the status quo and said: we have the same rights as you.

The democratic principle was the first display of the emergence of the class consciousness of the working class, which did not yet dare to say: I was nothing, but I want to be everything. If the community of all the workers wants to rule and make all the decisions about public affairs, and to be responsible for everything, then will I have to hear about "natural" or heaven-sent rights from all the criminals, thieves, pickpockets, all those who eat at the expense of their fellow men, the war profiteers, black market speculators, landowners, moneylenders, rentiers, all those who live off the labor of others without doing any work themselves? If it is true that each person has a natural right to participate in politics, it is no less true that the whole world has a natural right to live and not to die from hunger. And, if to assure the latter, the former must be curtailed, then no one should feel that their democratic sensibilities have been violated.

Communism is not based on any particular abstract right, but on the needs of the social order. The proletariat has the task of organizing social production in a socialist manner and regulating labor in a new way. But then it clashes with the powerful resistance of the ruling class. The latter will do everything within its power to prevent or impede the advent of the new order: this is why the ruling class must be excluded from exercising any political influence whatsoever. If one class wants to go forward, and the other wants to go backward, the car will not leave the station; any attempt at cooperation will bring society to a standstill. During the first phase of capitalism, when it needed to fortify its position as a newly-risen class, the bourgeoisie built its dictatorship upon the foundation of property qualifications for voter eligibility. Later it was compelled to change to democracy, granting the appearance of equal rights to the workers, which pacified them; but this democratic form did not affect the authentic class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but only disguised it, even if it gave the growing proletariat the opportunity to assemble and to recognize its class interests.

After the initial victory of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie retained many means of power, of both a material and a spiritual nature, at its disposal, which will obviously be employed in an effort to impede the progress of the new order, and may be able to paralyze it, if full political freedom is conceded to the bourgeoisie. It will therefore be necessary to shackle this class with the strongest measures of compulsion, and to mercilessly punish, as a grave crime against the

vital interests of the people, any attempt to restrain or to impede the new organization of the economy.

It may seem that the exclusion of a particular class always has something of the unjust and arbitrary about it. From the point of view of the parliamentary system, this may be so. But, given the special organization of the proletarian State, the council system automatically, so to speak, causes all exploiters and parasites to be self-excluded from participation in the regulation of society.

The council system constitutes the second principle of the communist order. In the council system, political organization is built upon the economic process of labor. Parliamentarism rests upon the individual in his quality as a citizen of the State. This had its historical justification, since bourgeois society was originally composed of producers who were equal in respect to one another, each one of whom produced his commodities himself and together formed, through the sum of all their little transactions, the production process as a whole. But in modern society, with its giant industrial complexes and its class antagonisms, this basis is becoming increasingly obsolete. From this point of view, the theoreticians of French syndicalism (Lagardelle, for example) were correct in their harsh critique of parliamentarism. Parliamentary theory views each man primarily as a citizen of the State, and as such, individuals thereby come to be abstract entities, all of them equal. But in practice, the real, concrete man is a worker. His activity is the practical content of his life, and the activities of all men together form the social labor process as a whole.

It is neither the State nor politics, but society and labor, which constitute the great living community of man. In order to unite men in groups, parliamentary political practice divides the State into electoral districts; but the men who are assigned to these districts, workers, landlords, street peddlers, manufacturers, landowners, members of every class and every trade, haphazardly lumped together due to the purely accidental fact of their place of residence, can by no means arrive at a communitarian representation of their common interest and will, because they have nothing in common. The natural groups are production groups, the workers of a factory, who take part in the same activity, the peasants in a village, and, on a larger scale, the classes.

It is of course true that certain political parties recruit people principally from certain classes, whom they represent, although incompletely. Belonging to a party is primarily a matter of political convictions rather than one's class: a large part of the proletariat has always sought its political representatives from other parties besides social democracy.

The new society makes labor and its organization the conscious focus and foundation of all political life, where "political" refers to the outward arrangement of economic life. Under capitalism, this is expressed in an occult fashion, but in the future society it will take on an open and evident expression. People themselves act directly within their work groups. The workers in a factory elect one of their comrades as a representative of their will, who remains in continual contact with them, and can at any time be replaced by another. The delegates are responsible for decisions concerning everything within their competence and hold meetings whose composition varies according to whether the agenda is about matters relating to a particular profession, or a particular district, and so forth. It is from among these delegates that the central directive bodies arise in each area.

Within such institutions there is no room for any kind of representation for the bourgeoisie; whoever does not work as a member of a production group is automatically barred from the possibility of being part of the decision-making process, without needing to be excluded by formal voting arrangements. On the other hand, the former bourgeois who collaborates in the new soci-

ety according to his abilities, as the manager of a factory, for example, can make his voice heard in the factory assemblies and will have the same decision-making power as any other worker. The professions concerned with general cultural functions such as teachers or doctors, form their own councils, which make decisions in their respective fields of education and health in conjunction with the representatives of the workers in these fields, which are thus managed and regulated by all. In every domain of society, the means employed is self-management and organization from below, to mobilize all the forces of the people for the great objective; at the summit, these forces of the people are joined together in a central governing body, which guarantees their proper utilization.

The council system is a state organization without the bureaucracy of permanent officials which makes the State an alien power separate from the people. The council system realizes Friedrich Engels' assertion that government over people will give way to administration over things. Official posts (which are always necessary for administration) which are not especially crucial will be accessible to anyone who has undergone an elementary training program. The higher administration is in the hands of elected delegates, subject to immediate recall, who are paid the same wage as a worker. It could happen that during the transition period this principle may not be totally and consistently implemented, since the necessary abilities will not be found in every delegate all the time; but when the bourgeois press deliberately goes to grotesque lengths in its praise for the abilities of today's bureaucratic system, it is worth recalling the fact that, in November 1918, the workers and soldiers councils successfully carried out formidable tasks before which the State and military bureaucracies quailed.

Since the councils combine the tasks of management and execution, and since the delegates themselves must carry out the decisions they make, there is no place for bureaucrats or career politicians, both of which are denizens of the institutions of bourgeois State power. The goal of every political party, that is, of every organization of professional politicians, is to be able to take the State machinery into its hands; this goal is foreign to the Communist Party. The purpose of the latter is not the conquest of power for itself, but to show the goal and the way forward to the fighting proletariat, by means of the dissemination of communist principles, towards the end of establishing the system of workers councils.

On this point, finally, social democracy and communism are opposed with respect to their immediate practical aims: the first seeks the reorganization of the old bourgeois State; the second, a new political system.

**A Life of Struggle – Farewell to  
Hermann Gorter (1927)**

In the person of Hermann Gorter, the revolutionary proletariat has just lost one of its most faithful friends and one of its most notable comrades in arms. He figured among the greatest experts in Marxist theory and was one of the very few who, through conflicts and splits, remained invariably devoted to revolutionary communism.

Gorter was born on November 26, 1864, the son of a well-known writer; upon completing his studies in the humanities, he was appointed institute professor of secondary education. While still young he composed *Mei* ("May"), a work of poetry which had an explosive impact on the world of letters in Holland and was immediately considered a masterpiece. The decade of the 1880s was a veritable literary golden age; a whole constellation of writers and poets arose during that period. Rebelling against the formal tradition which had been erected into a canon of beauty, truth and the expression of feeling, this school made the earth shake beneath the feet of Dutch language and letters. In the 1890s, however, the well progressively ran dry: everyone went their own ways. Gorter, too, had to watch in amazement as the movement of the "eighties" was struck down by sterility. He immersed himself in the great works of literature: the Greeks of antiquity, the Italians of the Middle Ages, the English of the early modern era, in an effort to discover the source of their power. He applied himself to philosophy, he translated Spinoza, he studied Kant, but this did not give him any answers or new impulses. He then turned to the writings of Marx, and found what he was looking for: a clear understanding of social development as the basis for men's spiritual production. Whenever a new class has erupted in history, whenever its efforts have borne fruit, one witnesses a new energy, a new feeling of power, and a new enthusiasm lead to a flowering in letters; and this was certainly the case with the movement of which Gorter himself was part; an intellectual buoyancy accompanied the take-off of capitalist development in Holland. But Marx also showed him the limitations of the bourgeois development which had taken place, he taught him to understand the class struggle. And from that point on Gorter dedicated himself body and soul to the cause of the fighting proletariat. In a series of articles entitled *Critique of the Literary Movement of the 1880s in Holland* (1899–1900) he drew up a balance sheet of his past in order to set forth the self-understanding which he had acquired during that period. Towards the end of his life he turned once again to these questions, examining the masterpieces of world literature in the light of social evolution, but was unfortunately unable to bring his labors to a conclusion.

Gorter joined the social democratic workers party of Holland during the late 1890s. The clear simplicity with which he expounded its principles soon made him one of the most popular orators of this rapidly growing movement. He also published some excellent propaganda pamphlets. Later, however, he entered into open conflict with the party leaders who, with the growth of the movement, had increasingly gravitated towards reformism. Together with Van der Goes and Henriette Roland-Holst, he founded the journal *De Nieuwe Tijd* ("The New Era"), an organ of Marxist theory and principled critique. In regard to every one of the crucial questions which were the most important issues of the day—the agrarian question, education, the rail workers strike, elections—he was in the front ranks of those combating opportunism. He was nonetheless a member of the party's leadership for a while, but finally his entire group was reduced to a minority faction by the reformist politicians and was denounced as a threat to the party (1906). These confrontations (similar to those that were coming to a head in every country) led him to focus his attention on forging close contacts with German social democracy. Although he only rarely contributed articles to *Neue Zeit* ("New Era"), the theoretical organ of German social democracy, Gorter established friendly relations with Kautsky, relations which later cooled when

the two men went their separate ways but were never completely quenched. Nor was this the only time that, as a result of their open minds and broad outlooks, as well as because of the rigorous objectivity of their militant activities, friends gained in the common struggle remained friends later, although the course of the workers movement had turned them into political adversaries.

The conflict within the party reached a point of no return during the following year when some younger militants, Wijnkoop and Van Ravensteyn, launched their own attack on the parliamentary practice of the party leaders and began publishing an opposition weekly, *De Tribune*. After an extended period of further debate, they were expelled in 1909 and founded a new party, the Social Democratic Party, which later became the Communist Party. Gorter joined them and became the party's most outstanding leader, although he was constrained to leave to others the job of determining practical policy. He was also physically in a quite weakened state. Gifted with an iron constitution, he was capable of considerable efforts and, at the same time that he was teaching several different classes, he indefatigably dedicated himself to political activity. But when strife broke out in the ranks of the new party, he burned the candle at both ends, sometimes working twenty-four hours a day; as a result he suffered from exhaustion, which served to remind him of the limits of human powers.

Gorter was a poet at heart, that is, a being who perceives directly and with clarity what there is of immensity, of the truly universal in the world, and knows how to express this in a language of total beauty or, to put it another way, in a language of total truth. These years of tireless activity and theoretical studies had the effect of leading him to increasingly transcribe the new socialist concept of the world in terms of immediate feelings. First, he brought out *Ein klein heldendicht* ("A Little Epic Poem"), which describes the awakening of class consciousness in two workers, a man and a woman; it was the epic poem of the proletariat, but in a more restricted framework and in a more peaceful environment. Later, in 1912, *Pan* appeared in its first version (it was to be significantly expanded later), which describes in a symbolic form the emancipation of the human species through the class struggle. Compared to *Mei*, which is a limpid, luminous vision of the world which emerged from the illusions characteristic of carefree youth, *Pan* appears as the epic poem, rich in content, with powerfully contrasted nuances, of the finally mature *Weltanschauung* (World Concept) of conscious man.

Then, after 1914, the black period of his life began; the decline of the revolutionary workers movement affected his profoundly sensitive spirit. Not allowing himself to become dejected, Gorter carried on the fight. He was undoubtedly aware of the fact that the situation could not be otherwise but, like so many of us, he was nonetheless consumed by sadness. When the war broke out, bringing in its wake the collapse of social democracy, he published *Der Imperialismus, der Weltkrieg und die Sozialdemokratie* ("Imperialism, the World War and Social Democracy") where he proved that this collapse had its origin in the reformism of the working class itself. The text was printed in German in Amsterdam; the state of emergency, however, almost totally prevented its circulation in Germany. But even during these moments of maximally accentuated regression he did not lose his faith in the proletariat and its capacity for engendering a new revolutionary movement. And when the Russian Revolution broke out and, one year later, a revolutionary wave swept over Europe, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the movement. In Switzerland, where he was living for reasons of health, he was in permanent contact with the Russian embassy; it was there that he wrote his work *Die Weltrevolution* ("The World Revolution") in 1918. When the staff of the Russian embassy was expelled from Switzerland in November 1918, he left with them for Berlin, where he made contact with the emerging revolutionary movement. From then

on he never ceased to cooperate with the German communist movement; on repeated occasions he clandestinely crossed the border to go to Berlin to participate in conferences and debates.

His presence in Germany was rendered all the more necessary by the fact that the German communist movement, which he supported with heart and soul, was the origin of yet another disappointment even more serious than the one he suffered in the Dutch party, because it was not expected this time, and also because of the fact that the revolution which had begun was destroyed not so much by the blows of an external power as by an internal weakness, a deviation from its own principles. Gorter was one of the first people to discern the danger of opportunism inherent in the Bolsheviks' tactics for western Europe, whose erroneous nature he proved in an Open Letter to Comrade Lenin. After a hazardous journey made all the more risky due to his poor health, he arrived in Russia where, during the course of personal interviews with Lenin and meetings with the Executive Committee of the Third International, he tried to convince them of the errors of their ways. But it did not take long for him to see and to understand why his efforts were in vain: Russia could not become anything but a bourgeois State. From that moment, Gorter offered his services to the KAP. On the occasion of the internal conflicts that tore the KAP apart, he opted for the Essen tendency, to which he contributed a great deal as its spokesman; however, he often had to admit that the Berlin tendency acted in an almost exemplary way in practice and he assisted both fractions. Considering their differences as of secondary importance and their quarrels as obsolete, he made active contributions to efforts to achieve their reunification.

His health seriously deteriorated during these later years. As a consequence of repeated ordeals of overexertion, to which was added the terrible blow of his wife's death in 1916, and due also to the depression he suffered as a result of the disappointing evolution of the workers movement, he was afflicted with chronic bronchial asthma, of a nervous origin, which physically exhausted him. But the power of his spirit raised him to an ever higher state of lucidity and an increasingly broad and penetrating vision of the world. Gorter worked tirelessly to give expression to the new beauty which he felt; he plunged into an in-depth study of Marxism, the great poets of the past, communism and, in his final days, he said that he felt capable of creating an even more perfect work than anything he had written before. But his illness suddenly took a turn for the worse during a visit to Switzerland, and he died during his return to Brussels on September 15, 1927.

Gorter was a force of nature, full of youthful freshness, a being in total harmony both physically as well as morally. During his youth he ardently participated in almost every sport; cricket, tennis and sailing held no secrets from him and, even during his last years, he proved to be an indefatigable walker. Every page of his poetic work is testimony to the depth of his love for Nature. He could plod for hours, in fall and winter, across deserted beaches, absorbed in the infinite beauty of the waves and the strand; in Switzerland he spent entire days exploring mountains, eager for the solitude of snow-covered summits. A classicist and man of letters by his natural gifts, a notable expert in philosophical matters, he was later capable of keeping abreast of the difficult questions of the natural sciences in order to develop his concept of the world from every angle. Such a man necessarily was compelled to subscribe to socialism in order to be in perfect harmony with the world. Henceforth he devoted himself to the working class and to communism. His poetic work, the most complete expression of his being, unfortunately can only be read by workers who understand Dutch. But among the Dutch workers, there are many who profess a fervent admiration for Gorter's poetry. In this recent period of the workers movement, Gorter stands out as a luminous figure, an example of the new humanity in the course of its transformation.

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# **The Personal Act (1933)**

The burning of the Reichstag by Van Der Lubbe, reveals the most divergent positions. In the organs of the communist left such as (Spartacus, De Radencommunist), the burning is approved as an act of a communist revolutionary. To approve and applaud such an act means advocating its repetition. Hence it is necessarily good to fully appreciate its usefulness.

Perhaps the fire's meaning could only be to affect or to weaken the dominant class: the bourgeoisie. Here, there can be no question. The bourgeoisie is not in the least affected by the burning of the Reichstag; its domination is in no manner weakened. On the contrary, for the government, it was the occasion to considerably reinforce its terror against the worker's movement. The indirect consequences must still be emphasized.

But even if such an act affects and weakens the bourgeoisie, the only consequence is to develop for the workers the conviction that only such individual acts can liberate them. The full truth that they must acquire is that only mass action by the working class as a whole can defeat the bourgeoisie. This basic truth of revolutionary communism will, in such a case, be hidden from them. Their independent action as a class will be lost. Instead of concentrating all their forces on propaganda among the working masses, the revolutionary minorities will squander their forces in personal acts which, even when such acts are carried out by a dedicated group with many members, are not capable making the domination of the ruling class falter. With their considerable forces of repression, the bourgeoisie could easily come after such a group. Rarely has there been a revolutionary minority group carrying out actions with more devotion, sacrifice, and energy than the Russian nihilists a half-century ago. At certain moments, it even appeared that by a series of well organized attentats, the nihilists would overthrow Tsarism. But a French detective, engaged to take over the anti-terrorist struggle in place of the incompetent Russian police, succeeded by his personal energy and his entirely western organization in destroying nihilism in only a few years. It was only afterwards that a mass movement developed and finally overthrew Tsarism.

Can such personal acts nevertheless have value as a protest against the abject electoralism, that turns aside the workers from their true fight?

A protest only has value if it arises from conviction, leaves a forceful impression, or develops consciousness. But who believes that a worker defending his interests by voting social democrat or communist, will express doubts about electoralism because someone has burned the Reichstag? This is a completely derisory argument, similar to what the bourgeoisie itself does to rid the workers of their illusions, making the Reichstag completely powerless, deciding to dissolve it, setting aside the decision process. German comrades said that this can only be positive since the confidence of the workers in parliamentarianism will receive a first-rate blow. Without doubt, but doesn't this depict matters in a far too simplistic way? In such a case, democratic illusions will be shed by another route. Then, where there is no right to a generalized vote or where Parliament is weak, the conquest of true democracy is advanced and workers can only then imagine themselves arriving there by their collective action. In fact, systematic propaganda seeking to explain from the start of each event an understanding of the real significance of parliament and class struggle, always remains the main point.

Can the personal act be a signal, giving the final push that sets in motion, by radical example, this immense struggle?

There is a certain current running in history where individual actions, in moments of tension, are like sparks on a powder keg. But the proletarian revolution is nothing like the explosion of a powder keg. Even if the Communist Party strives to convince itself and convince the world that

the revolution can break out at any moment, we know that the proletariat must still form itself in a new manner to fight as a mass. A certain bourgeois romanticism can still be perceived in these visions. In past bourgeois revolutions, the bourgeoisie rose up with the people behind them and found themselves in confrontation against the sovereigns and their arbitrary oppression. An attentat on the person of a king or a minister could be the signal to revolt. The vision today in which a personal act could set the masses in motion reveals itself to be a bourgeois conception of a chief; not the leader of an elected party, but a chief who designates himself and, who by his actions leads the passive masses. The proletarian revolution finds nothing in this outdated romanticism of the leader: a class, impelled by massive social forces, must be the source of all initiative.

But the mass, after all, is composed of individuals, and the actions of the mass contain a certain number of personal actions. Certainly, it is here that we touch on the true value of the personal act. Separated from mass action, the act of an individual who thinks he can realize alone something great is useless. But as part of a mass movement, the personal act has the highest importance. Workers in struggle are not a regiment of marionettes identical in courage but composed of forces of different natures concentrated toward the same goal, their movement irresistible. In this body, the audacity of the bravest finds the time and place to express itself in personal acts of courage, when the clear comprehension of others leads them towards a suitable goal in order not to lose the gains. Likewise, in a rising movement, this interaction of forces and acts is of great value when it is guided by a clear comprehension that animates, at this moment, the workers which is necessary to develop their combativity. But in this case, so much tenacity, audacity, and courage will be called for that it will not be necessary to burn a Parliament.

## **Individual Acts (1933)**

Many divergent positions have been taken up on the burning of the Reichstag by Van Der Lubbe. In the organs of the communist left (Spartacus, Radencommunist) it was approved as the act of a revolutionary communist. To approve and applaud such an act means calling for it to be repeated. That's why it's important to understand what use it had.

Its only meaning could be to hit, to weaken, the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. There can be no question of this here. The bourgeoisie hasn't been at all hurt by the burning of the Reichstag. Its rule hasn't in any way been weakened. On the contrary, the government has seized the opportunity to strengthen considerably its terror against the workers movement. The ultimate consequences of this have yet to be appreciated.

But even if such an act really did hit or weaken the bourgeoisie, the only consequence of this would be to encourage the workers to believe that such individual acts could liberate them. The great truth that they have to learn, that only the mass action of the entire working class can defeat the bourgeoisie, this basic truth of revolutionary communism, would be obscured from them. It would lead them away from autonomous class action. Instead of concentrating all their forces on propaganda within the working masses revolutionary minorities would exhaust their energies in individual acts which, even when carried out by a large and dedicated group, would in no way shake the domination of the ruling class. With its considerable auxiliary forces, the bourgeoisie could easily master such a group. There has rarely been a minority group which carried out such actions with the devotion, sacrifice and energy of the Russian nihilists half-a-century ago. At certain moments it even seemed that, through a series of well-organized individual assassinations, they would succeed in overthrowing Tsarism. But a French policeman, called in to take over the anti-terrorist struggle in place of the incompetent Russian police, succeeded with his Western energy and organization to annihilate nihilism in a few years. It was only afterwards, with the development of the mass movement, that Tsarism was overthrown.

But doesn't such an act have a value as a demonstration against the abject electoralism which serves to derail the workers' struggles? A demonstration has value if it convinces people by giving an impression of strength, or if it develops consciousness. But are we really to believe that a worker who thinks he's defending his interests by voting social democrat or Communist is going to start doubting this because the Reichstag is burned down? All this is completely derisory compared to what the bourgeoisie itself does to undermine the workers' illusions—rendering the Reichstag completely impotent, dissolving it or removing it from the decision-making process.

Some German comrades have said that the act could only be positive because it would strike a blow at the workers' confidence in parliamentarism. Doubtless. But we can still ask whether this is looking at things in a rather simplistic way. Democratic illusions would only be introduced from another source. Where there's no right to vote, where parliament is impotent, the conquest of "real democracy" is put forward and the workers imagine that this is the only thing to fight for. In fact, systematic propaganda which uses each event to develop an understanding of the real meaning of parliament and the class struggle can never be side-stepped and is always the essential thing.

Can't individual acts be the signal which sets in motion a mass struggle by giving a radical example? It's a well known fact in history that the action of an individual in moments of tension can act as a spark to a powder keg. But the proletarian revolution has nothing in common with the explosion of a powder keg. Even if the Communist Party is trying to convince itself and everyone else that the revolution can break out at any moment, we know that the proletariat still has to form itself for new mass combats. These sorts of ideas reveal a certain bourgeois romanticism.

In past bourgeois revolutions, the rising bourgeoisie, and behind it the people, were confronted with the personalities of sovereigns and their arbitrary oppression. An assassination of a king or a minister could be a signal for a revolt. The idea that in the present period an individual act could set the masses in movement is based on the bourgeois concept of the “chief”, not an elected party leader, but a self-appointed chief, whose action mobilizes the passive masses. The proletarian revolution has nothing to do with this out-dated romanticism of the chief. All initiative has to come from the class, pushed forward by massive social forces.

But, after all, the masses are made up of individuals and mass actions contain a whole number of individual actions. Of course, and here we come to the real value of individual acts. Separated from mass action, the act of an individual who thinks he can accomplish great things on his own is useless. But as part of a mass movement, it’s of the greatest importance. The class in struggle isn’t a regiment of identical puppets marching in step and accomplishing great things through the blind force of its own movement. It is on the contrary a mass of multiple personalities, pushed forward by the same will, supporting itself, exhorting itself, giving itself courage. The irresistible strength of such a movement is based on many different strengths all converging towards the same goal. In this context, the most audacious bravery can express itself in individual acts of courage, since it is the clear understanding of all the others which directs these acts towards a real goal, so that the fruits of such acts aren’t lost. In an ascending movement, this interaction of strengths and acts is of the greatest value, when it’s directed by a clear understanding by the workers about what needs to be done and about how to develop their combativity. But in these cases, it takes a lot more tenacity, audaciousness and courage than it takes to burn a parliament!

**Destruction as a Means of Struggle  
(1933)**

The assessment of the burning of the Reichstag in the left communist press once again leads us to raise other questions. Can destruction be a means of struggle for workers?

First of all, it must be said that no one will cry over the disappearance of the Reichstag. It was one of the ugliest buildings in modern Germany, a pompous image of the Empire of 1871. But there are other more beautiful buildings, and museums filled with artistic treasures. When a desperate proletarian destroys something precious in order to take vengeance for capitalist domination, how should we assess this?

From a revolutionary point of view, his gesture appears valueless and from different points of view one could speak of a negative gesture. The bourgeoisie is not the least bit touched by it since it has already continually destroyed so many things where it was a matter of its profits, and it places money-value above all else. Such a gesture especially touches the more limited social strata of artists, amateurs of beautiful things, the best of whom often have anti-capitalist feelings, and some of whom (like William Morris and Herman Gorter) fought at the side of the workers. But in any case, is there any reason to take vengeance on the bourgeoisie? Does the bourgeoisie have the task of bringing socialism instead of capitalism?

It is its role to maintain all the forces of capitalism in place; the destruction of all that is the task of proletarians. It follows that if anybody can be held responsible for the maintenance of capitalism, it is as much the working class itself which has neglected the struggle too much. Lastly, from whom does one remove something by its destruction? From the victorious proletarians who one day will be masters of all of it.

Of course, all revolutionary class struggle, when it takes the form of civil war, will always provoke destruction. In any war it is necessary to destroy the points of support of the enemy. Even if the winner tries to avoid too much destruction, the loser will be tempted to cause useless destruction through pure spite. It is to be expected that towards the end of the fight the decadent bourgeoisie destroys a great deal. On the other hand, for the working class, the class which will slowly take over, destruction will no longer be a means of struggle. On the contrary it will try to pass on a world as rich and intact as possible to its descendents, to future humanity. This is not only the case for the technical means which it can improve and perfect, but especially for the monuments and memories of past generations which cannot be rebuilt.

One might object that a new humanity, the bearers of an unequalled liberty and fraternity, will create things much more beautiful and imposing than those of past centuries. And moreover that newly liberated humanity will wish to cause the remainders of the past, which represented its former state of slavery, to disappear. This is also what the revolutionary bourgeoisie did — or tried to do. For them, all of past history was nothing but the darkness of ignorance and slavery, whereas the revolution was dedicated to reason, knowledge, virtue and freedom. The proletariat, by contrast, considers the history of its forebears quite differently. On the basis of marxism which sees the development of society as a succession of forms of production, it sees a long and hard annexation of humanity on the basis of the development of labour, of tools and of forms of labour towards an ever increasing productivity, first through simple primitive society, then through class societies with their class struggle, until the moment when through communism man becomes the master of his own fate. And in each period of development, the proletariat finds characteristics which are related to its own nature.

In barbarian prehistory: the sentiments of fraternity and the morality of solidarity of primitive communism. In petty-bourgeois manual work: the love of work which was expressed in the beauty of the buildings and the utensils for everyday use which their descendants regard

as incomparable masterworks. In the ascendant bourgeoisie: the proud feeling of liberty which proclaimed the rights of man and was expressed in the greatest works of world literature. In capitalism: the knowledge of nature, the priceless development of natural science which allowed man, through technology, to dominate nature and its own fate.

In the work of all of these periods, these imposing character traits were more or less closely allied to cruelty, superstition and selfishness. It is exactly these vices which we fight, which are an obstacle to us and which we therefore hate. Our conception of history teaches us that these imperfections must be understood as natural stages of growth, as the expression of a struggle for life by men not yet fully human, in an all powerful nature and in a society of which the understanding escaped them.

For liberated humanity the imposing things which they created in spite of everything will remain a symbol of their weakness, but also a memorial of their strength, and worthy of being carefully preserved. Today, it is the bourgeoisie which possesses all of it, but for us it is the property of the collectivity which we will set free to hand on to future generations as intact as possible.

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**The theory of the collapse of  
capitalism (1934)**

The idea that capitalism was in a final, its mortal, crisis dominated the first years after the Russian revolution. When the revolutionary workers' movement in Western Europe abated, the Third International gave up this theory, but it was maintained by the opposition movement, the KAPD, which adopted the theory of the mortal crisis of capitalism as the distinguishing feature between the revolutionary and reformist points of view. The question of the necessity and the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism, and the way in which this is to be understood, is the most important of all questions for the working class and its understanding and tactics. Rosa Luxemburg had already dealt with it in 1912 in her book *The Accumulation of Capital*, where she came to the conclusion that in a pure, closed capitalist system the surplus value needed for accumulation could not be realised and that therefore the constant expansion of capitalism through the trade with non-capitalist countries was necessary. This means that capitalism would collapse, that it would not be able to continue to exist any longer as an economic system, when this expansion was no longer possible. It is this theory, which was challenged as soon as the book was published from different sides, which the KAPD has often referred to. A quite different theory was developed in 1929 by Henryk Grossmann in his work *Das Akkumulations und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des Kapitalistischen Systems* (The Law of Accumulation and Collapse of the Capitalist System). Grossman here deduces that capitalism must collapse for purely economic reasons in the sense that, independently of human intervention, revolutions, etc., it would be impossible for it to continue to exist as an economic system. The severe and lasting crisis which began in 1930 has certainly prepared people's minds for such a theory of mortal crisis. The recently published manifesto of the *United Workers of America* makes Grossman's theory the theoretical basis for a new direction for the workers' movement. It is therefore necessary to examine it critically. But to do this a preliminary explanation of Marx's position on this question and the past discussions connected with it cannot be avoided.

## Marx and Rosa Luxemburg

In the second part of *Capital* Marx dealt with the general conditions of capitalist production as a whole. In the abstract case of pure capitalist production all production is carried on for the market, all products are bought and sold as commodities. The value of the means of production is passed on to the product and a new value is added by labour. This new value is broken down into two parts: the value of the labour power, which is paid as wages and used by the workers to buy means of subsistence, and the remainder, the surplus value, which goes to the capitalist. Where the surplus value is used for means of subsistence and luxury goods then there is simple reproduction; where a part of it is accumulated as new capital there is reproduction on an extended scale.

For the capitalists to find on the market the means of production they need and for the workers to likewise find the means of subsistence they need, a given proportion must exist between the various branches of production. A mathematician would easily express this in algebraic formulae. Marx gives instead numerical examples to express these proportions, making up cases with selected figures, to serve as illustrations. He distinguishes two spheres, two main departments of production: the means of production department (I) and the means of consumption department (II). In each of these departments a given value of the means of production used is transferred to the product without undergoing any change (constant capital,  $c$ ); a given part of the newly added value is used to pay for labour-power (variable capital,  $v$ ), the other part being the surplus value ( $s$ ). If it is assumed for the numerical example that the constant capital is four times greater than the variable capital (a figure which rises with technical progress) and that the surplus value is equal to the variable capital (this ratio is determined by the rate of exploitation), then, in the case of simple reproduction, the following figures satisfy these conditions:

$$\text{I } 4000c + 1000v + 1000s = 6000 \text{ (product)}$$

$$\text{II } 2000c + 500v + 500s = 3000 \text{ (product)}$$

Each of these lines satisfies the conditions. Since  $v+s$ , which are used as means of consumption, are together equal to a half of  $c$ , the value of the means of production, Department II must produce a value equal to a half the value produced in Department I. Then the exact proportion is found: the means of production produced (6000) are just the amount needed for the next turnover period: 4000 $c$  for Department I and 2000 $c$  for Department II; and the means of subsistence produced in Department II (3000) are exactly what must be supplied for the workers (1000+500) and the capitalists (1000+500).

To illustrate in a similar way the case of capital accumulation the part of surplus value going to accumulation must be indicated; this part is added to the capital in the following year (for reasons of simplicity a production period of a year is assumed each time) so that a larger capital is then employed in each department. We will assume in our example that half the surplus value is accumulated (and so used for new  $c$  and new  $v$ ) and that the other half is consumed (consumption,  $k$ ). The calculation of the proportion between Department I and Department II becomes a little

more complicated but can of course still be found. It turns out that, on the assumptions given, this proportion is 11 : 4, as is shown in the following figures:

$$\text{I } 4400c + 1100v + 1100s (= 550k + 550acc (= 440c + 110v)) = 6600$$

$$\text{II } 1600c + 400v + 400s (= 200k + 200acc (= 160c + 40v)) = 2400$$

The capitalists need 4400+1600 for the renewal and 440+160 for the extension of their means of production, and in fact they find 6600 means of production on the market. The capitalists need 550+200 for their consumption, the original workers need 1100+400 and the newly engaged workers 110+40 as means of subsistence; which together is equal to the 2400 in fact produced as means of subsistence. In the following year all the figures are increased by 10 per cent:

$$\text{I } 4840c + 1210v + 1210s (= 605k + 484c + 121v) = 7260$$

$$\text{II } 1760c + 440v + 440s (= 220k + 176c + 44v) = 2640$$

Production can thus continue increasing each year in the same proportion. This is of course a grossly oversimplified example. It could be made more complicated, and thus nearer to reality, if it is assumed that there are different compositions of capital (the ratio c:v) in the two departments, or different rates of accumulation or if the ratio c:v is made to grow gradually, so changing the proportion between Department I and Department II each year. In all these cases the calculation becomes more complicated, but it can always be done, since an unknown figure – the proportion of Department I to Department II – can always be calculated to satisfy the condition that demand and supply coincide.

Examples of this can be found in the literature. In the real world, of course, complete equilibrium over a period is never found; commodities are sold for money and money is only used later to buy something else so that hoards are formed which act as a buffer and a reserve. And commodities remain unsold; and there is trade with non-capitalist areas. But the essential, important point is seen clearly from these reproduction schemes: for production to expand and steadily progress given proportions must exist between the productive sectors; in practice these proportions are approximately realised; they depend on the following factors: the organic composition of capital, the rate of exploitation, and the proportion of surplus value which is accumulated.

Marx did not have the chance to provide a carefully prepared presentation of these examples (see Engels' introduction to the second volume of *Capital*). This is no doubt why Rosa Luxemburg believed that she had discovered an omission here, a problem which Marx had overlooked and so left unsolved and whose solution she had worked out in her book *The Accumulation of Capital* (1912). The problem which seemed to have been left open was who was to buy from each other more and more means of production and means of subsistence this would be a pointless circular movement from which nothing would result. The solution would lie in the appearance of buyers situated outside capitalism, foreign overseas markets whose conquest would therefore be a vital question for capitalism. This would be the economic basis of imperialism.

But from what we have said before it is clear that Rosa Luxemburg has herself made a mistake here. In the schema used as the example it can be clearly seen that all the products are sold within capitalism itself. Not only the part of the value transmitted (4400+1600) but also the 440+160 which contain the surplus value accumulated are brought, in the physical form of means of production, by the capitalists who wish to start the following year with in total 6600 means of production. In the same way, the 110+40 from surplus value is in fact bought by the additional workers. Nor is it pointless: to produce, to sell products to each other, to consume, to produce more is the whole essence of capitalism and so of men's life in this mode of production. There is no unsolved problem here which Marx overlooked.

## Rosa Luxemburg and Otto Bauer

Soon after Rosa Luxemburg's book was published it was criticised from different sides. Thus Otto Bauer wrote a criticism in an article in the *Neue Zeit* (7-14 March 1913). As in all the other criticisms Bauer showed that production and sales do correspond. But his criticism had the special feature that it linked accumulation to population growth. Otto Bauer first assumes a socialist society in which the population grows each year by five per cent; the production of means of subsistence must therefore grow in the same proportion and the means of production must increase, because of technical progress, at a faster rate. The same has to happen under capitalism but here this expansion does not take place through planned regulation, but through the accumulation of capital. Otto Bauer provides as a numerical example a schema which satisfies these conditions in the simplest way: an annual growth of variable capital of five per cent and of constant capital of ten per cent and a rate of exploitation of 100 per cent ( $s = v$ ). These conditions themselves determine the share of surplus value which is consumed and the share which must be accumulated in order to produce the posited growth of capital. No difficult calculations are needed to draw up a schema which produces the exact growth from year to year:

Year 1  $200,000c + 100,000v + 100,000s (= 20,000c + 5,000v + 75,000k)$

Year 2  $220,000c + 105,000v + 105,000s (= 22,000c + 5,250v + 77,750k)$

Year 3  $242,000c + 110,250v + 110,250s (= 24,200c + 5,512v + 80,538k)$

Bauer continues his schema for four years and also calculates the separate figures for Departments I and II. This was sufficient for the purpose of showing that no problem in Rosa Luxemburg's sense existed. But the character of this criticism was itself bound to call forth criticism. Its basic idea is well brought out by Bauer's introduction of population growth in a socialist society. Capitalism thereby appears as an unplanned socialism, as a wild and kicking foal that has not yet been broken in and which only needs to be tamed by the hands of the socialist trainer. Accumulation here serves only to enlarge production as required by population growth, just as capitalism has the general function of providing mankind with means of subsistence; but, because of the lack of planning, both these functions are carried out badly and erratically, sometimes providing too much, sometimes too little, and causing catastrophes. A gentle growth of population of 5 per cent a year might well suit a socialist society in which all mankind was neatly lined up. But for capitalism, as it is and was, this is an inappropriate example. Capitalism's whole history has been a rush forward, a violent expansion far beyond the limits of population growth. The driving force has been the urge to accumulation; the greatest possible amount of surplus value has been invested as new capital and, to set it in motion, more and more sections of the population have been drawn into the process. There was even, and there still is, a large surplus of workers who remain outside or half outside as a reserve, kept ready to serve the need to set in motion the accumulated capital, being drawn in or rejected as required by this need. This essential and basic feature of capitalism was completely ignored in Bauer's analysis.

It was obvious that Rosa Luxemburg would take this as the target for her anti-critique. In answer to the proof that there was no problem of omission in Marx's schemas, she could bring

forward nothing much else than the scoffing declaration that everything can be made to work beautifully in artificial examples. But making population growth the regulator of accumulation was so contrary to the spirit of Marxian teaching that the sub-title of her anti-critique “What the Epigones have done to Marxian Theory” was this time quite suitable. It was not a question here (as it was in Rosa Luxemburg’s own case) of a simple scientific mistake; Bauer’s mistake reflected the practical political point of view of the Social Democrats of that time. They felt themselves to be the future statesmen who would take over from the current ruling politicians and carry through the organisation of production; they therefore did not see capitalism as the complete opposite to the proletarian dictatorship to be established by revolution, but rather as a mode of producing means of subsistence that could be improved and had not yet been brought under control.

## Grossman's reproduction schema

Henryk Grossman linked his reproduction schema to that set out by Otto Bauer. He noticed that it is not possible to continue it indefinitely without it in time coming up against contradictions. This is very easy to see. Otto Bauer assumes a constant capital of 200,000 which grows each year by 10 per cent and a variable capital of 100,000 which grows each year by 5 per cent, with the rate of surplus value being assumed to be 100 per cent, i.e., the surplus value each year is equal to the variable capital. In accordance with the laws of mathematics, a sum which increases each year by 10 per cent doubles itself after 7 years, quadruples itself after 14 years, increases ten times after 23 years and a hundred times after 46 years. Thus the variable capital and the surplus value which in the first year were each equal to half the constant capital are after 46 years only equal to a twentieth of a constant capital which has grown enormously over the same period. The surplus value is therefore far from enough to ensure the 10 per cent annual growth of constant capital.

This does not result just from the rates of growth of 10 and 5 percent chosen by Bauer. For in fact under capitalism surplus value increases less rapidly than capital. It is a well-known fact that, because of this, the rate of profit must continually fall with the development of capitalism. Marx devoted many chapters to this fall in the rate of profit. If the rate of profit falls to 5 per cent the capital can no longer be increased by 10 per cent, for the increase in capital out of accumulated surplus value is necessarily smaller than the surplus value itself. The rate of accumulation evidently thus has the rate of profit as its higher limit (see Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, p. 236, where it is stated that "the rate of accumulation falls with the rate of profit"). The use of a fixed figure — 10 per cent — which was acceptable for a period of a few years as in Bauer, becomes unacceptable when the reproduction schema are continued over a long period.

Yet Grossman, unconcerned, continues Bauer's schema year by year and believes that he is thereby reproducing real capitalism. He then finds the following figures for constant and variable capital, surplus value, the necessary accumulation and the amount remaining for the consumption of the capitalists (the figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand):

c v s accumulation k

Commencement 200 100 100 20+ 5= 25 75  
After 20 years 1222 253 253 122+13=135 118  
After 30 years 3170 412 412 317+21=338 74  
After 34 years 4641 500 500 464+25=489 11  
After 35 years 5106 525 525 510+26=536 -11

After 21 years the share of surplus value remaining for consumption begins to diminish; in the 34<sup>th</sup> it almost disappears and in the 35<sup>th</sup> it is even negative; the Shylock of constant capital pitilessly demands its pound of flesh, it wants to grow at 10 per cent, while the poor capitalists go hungry and keep nothing for their own consumption.

“From the 35<sup>th</sup> year therefore accumulation — on the basis of the existing technical progress — cannot keep up with the pace of population growth. Accumulation would be too small and *there would necessarily arise a reserve army* which would have to grow each year” (Grossmann, p. 126).

In such circumstances the capitalists do not think of continuing production. Or if they do, they don't do so; for, in view of the deficit of 11 in capital accumulation they would have to reduce production. (In fact they would have had to have done so before in view of their consumption expenses). A part of the workers therefore become unemployed; then a part of the capital becomes unused and the surplus value produced decreases; the mass of surplus value falls and a still greater deficit appears in accumulation, with a still greater increase in unemployment. This, then, is the economic collapse of capitalism. Capitalism becomes economically impossible. Thus does Grossmann solve the problem which he had set on page 79:

“How, in what way, can accumulation lead to the collapse of capitalism?”

Here we find presented what in the older Marxist literature was always treated as a stupid misunderstanding of opponents, for which the name ‘the big crash’ was current. Without there being a revolutionary class to overcome and dispossess the bourgeoisie, the end of capitalism comes for purely economic reasons; the machine no longer works, it clogs up, production has become impossible. In Grossmann's words:

“...with the progress of capital accumulation the whole mechanism, despite periodic interruptions, necessarily approaches nearer and nearer to its end...The tendency to collapse then wins the upper hand and makes itself felt absolutely as ‘the final crisis’” (p. 140).

and, in a later passage:

“...from our analysis it is clear that, although on our assumptions objectively necessary and although the moment when it will occur can be precisely calculated, the collapse of capitalism need not therefore result automatically by itself at the awaited moment and therefore need not be waited for purely passively” (p. 601).

In this passage, where it might be thought for a moment that it is going to be a question of the active role of the proletariat as agent of the revolution, Grossmann has in mind only changes in wages and working time which upset the numerical assumptions and the results of the calculation. It is in this sense that he continues:

“It thus appears that the idea of a necessary collapse for objective reasons is not at all in contradiction to the class struggle; that, on the contrary, the collapse, despite its objectively given necessity, can be widely influenced by the living forces of classes in struggle and leaves a certain margin of play for the active intervention of classes. It is for this precise reason that in Marx the whole analysis of the process of reproduction leads to the class struggle” (p.602).

The “it is for this precise reason” is rich, as if the class struggle meant for Marx only the struggle over wage claims and hours of work.

Let us consider a little closer the basis of this collapse. On what is the necessary growth of constant capital by 10 per cent each time based? In the quotation given above it was stated that technical progress (the rate of population growth being given) prescribes a given annual growth of constant capital. So it could then be said, without the detour of the production schema: when the rate of profit becomes less than the rate of growth demanded by technical progress then capitalism must break down. Leaving aside the fact that this has nothing to do with Marx, what is this growth of capital demanded by technology? Technical improvements are introduced, in the context of mutual competition, in order to obtain an extra profit (relative surplus value); the introduction of technical improvements is however limited by the financial resources available. And everybody knows that dozens of inventions and technical improvements are not introduced and are often deliberately suppressed by the entrepreneurs so as not to devalue the existing technical apparatus. The necessity of technical progress does not act as an external force; it works through men, and for them necessity is not valid beyond possibility.

But let us admit that this is correct and that, as a result of technical progress, constant capital has to have a varying proportion, as in the schema: in the 30<sup>th</sup> year 3170:412, in the 34<sup>th</sup> year 4641:500, in the 35<sup>th</sup> year 5106:525, and in the 36<sup>th</sup>, 5616:551. In the 35<sup>th</sup> year the surplus value is only 525,000 and is not enough for 510,000 to be added to constant capital and 26,000 to variable capital. Grossmann lets the constant capital grow by 510,000 and retains only 15,000 as the increase in variable capital – 11,000 too little! He says of this:

“11,509 workers (out of 551,000) remain unemployed; the reserve army begins to form. And because the whole of the working population does not enter the process of production, the whole amount of extra constant capital (510,563) is not needed for the purchase of means of production. If a population of 551,584 uses a constant capital of 5,616,200, then a population of 540,075 would use a constant capital of only 5,499,015. There, therefore, remains an *excess* capital of 117,185 without an investment outlet. Thus the schema shows a perfect example of the situation Marx had in mind when he gave the corresponding part of the third volume of *Capital* the title ‘Excess Capital and Excess Population’ (p. 116)”.

Grossmann has clearly not noticed that these 11,000 become unemployed only because, in a complete arbitrary fashion and without giving any reason, he makes the variable capital bear the whole deficit, while letting the constant capital calmly grow by 10 percent as if nothing was wrong; but when he realises that there are no workers for all these machines, or more correctly that there is no money to pay their wages, he prefers not to install them and so has to let the capital lie unused. It is only through this mistake that he arrives at a “perfect example” of a phenomenon which appears during ordinary capitalist crises. In fact the entrepreneurs can only expand their production to the extent that their capital is enough for both machinery and wages combined. If the total surplus value is too small, this will be divided, in accordance with the assumed technical constraint, proportionately between the elements of capital; the calculation shows that of the 525,319 surplus value, 500,409 must be added to constant capital and 24,910 to variable capital in order to arrive at the correct proportion corresponding to technical progress. Not 11,000 but 1,326 workers are set free and there is no question of excess capital. If the schemes

is continued in this correct way, instead of a catastrophic eruption there is an extremely slow increase in the number of workers laid off.

But how can someone attribute this alleged collapse to Marx and produce, chapter after chapter, dozens of quotations from Marx? All these quotations in fact relate to economic crises, to the alternating cycle of prosperity and depression. While the schema has to serve to show a predetermined final economic collapse after 35 years, we read two pages further on of “the Marxian theory of the economic cycle expounded here” (p. 123).

Grossmann is only able to give the impression that he is presenting a theory of Marx’s by continually scattering in this way throughout his own statements comments which Marx made on periodic crises. But nothing at all is to be found in Marx about a final collapse in line with Grossmann’s schema. It is true that Grossmann quotes a couple of passages which do not deal with crises. Thus he writes on page 263:

“It appears that ‘capitalist production meets in the development of its productive forces a barrier...’ (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 237)”.

But if we open Volume III of *Capital* at page 237 we read there:

“But the main thing about their [i.e., Ricardo and other economists] horror of the falling rate of profit is the feeling that capitalist production meets in the development of its productive forces a barrier... “

which is something quite different. And on page 79 Grossmann gives this quotation from Marx as proof that even the word “collapse” comes from Marx:

“This process would soon bring about the collapse of capitalist production if it were not for counteracting tendencies, which have continuous decentralising effect alongside the centripetal one (*Capital*, Vol. II, p. 241)”.

As Grossmann correctly emphasises, these counteracting tendencies refer to “soon” so that *with* them the process only takes place more slowly. But was Marx talking here of a purely economic collapse? Let us read the passage which precedes in Marx:

“It is this same severance of the conditions of production, on the one hand, from the producers, on the other, that forms the conception of capital. It begins with primitive accumulation, appears as a permanent process in the accumulation and concentration of capital, and expresses itself finally as centralisation of existing capitals in a few hands and a deprivation of many of their capital (to which expropriation is now changed)”.

It is clear that the collapse which thus results is, as so often in Marx, the ending of capitalism by socialism. So there is nothing in the quotations from Marx: a final economic catastrophe can be as little read from them as it can be concluded from the reproduction schema. But can the schema serve to analyse and explain periodic crises? Grossmann seeks to join the two together: “The Marxian theory of collapse is at the same time a theory of crises” — so reads the beginning of Chapter 8 (p. 137). But as proof he only provides a diagram (p. 141) in which a steeply rising

'accumulation line' is divided after 35 years; but here a crisis occurs every 5 or 7 years when in the schema everything is going smoothly. If a more rapid collapse is desired it would be obtained if the annual rate of growth of constant capital was not 10 per cent but much greater. In the ascendant period of the economic cycle there is in fact a much more rapid growth of capital; the volume of production increases by leaps and bounds; but this growth has nothing at all to do with technical progress. Indeed, in these periods variable capital too increases rapidly by leaps. But why there must be a collapse after 5 or 7 years remains obscure. In other words, the real causes which produce the rapid rise and then the collapse of economic activity are of a quite different nature from what is set out in Grossmann's reproduction schema.

Marx speaks of over-accumulation precipitating a crisis, of there being too much accumulated surplus value which is not invested and which depresses profits. But Grossmann's collapse comes about through there being too little accumulated surplus value.

The simultaneous surplus of unused capital and unemployed workers is a typical feature of crises; Grossmann's schema leads to a lack of sufficient capital, which he can only transform into a surplus by committing the mistake mentioned above. So Grossmann's schema cannot demonstrate a final collapse, nor does it correspond to the real phenomena of collapse, crises.

It can also be added that his schema, in conformity with its origin, suffers from the same defect as Bauer's: the real, impetuous pushing forward of capitalism over the world which brings more and more peoples under its domination is here represented by a calm and regular population growth of 5 per cent a year, as if capitalism was confined in a closed national economy.

## Grossman versus Marx

Grossmann prides himself for having for the first time correctly reconstructed Marx's theory in the face of the distortions of the Social Democrats.

“One of these new additions to knowledge”

(he proudly says at the beginning of the introduction),

“is the theory of collapse, set out below, which represents the portal column of Marx's system of economic thought”.

We have seen how little what Grossmann considers to be a theory of collapse has to do with Marx. Nevertheless, on his own personal interpretation, he could well believe himself to be in agreement with Marx. But there are other points where this does not hold. Because he sees his schema as a correct representation of capitalist development, Grossman deduces from it in various places explanations which, as he himself had partly noticed, contradict the views developed in *Capital*.

This is so, first of all, for the industrial reserve army. According to Grossmann's schema, from the 35<sup>th</sup> year a certain number of workers become unemployed and a reserve army forms.

“The formation of the reserve army, viz., the laying off of workers, which we are discussing, must be rigorously distinguished from the laying off of workers due to machines. The elimination of workers by machines which Marx describes in the empirical part of the first volume of *Capital* (Chapter 13) is a technical fact ... (pp. 128–9) ... but the laying off of workers, the formation of the reserve army, which Marx speaks of in the chapter on the accumulation of capital (Chapter 23) is not caused – as has been completely ignored until now in the literature – by the technical fact of the introduction of machines, but by the *lack of investment opportunities*... (p. 130)”.

This amounts basically to saying: if the sparrows fly away, it is not because of the gunshot but because of their timidity. The workers are eliminated by machines; the expansion of production allows them in part to find work again; in this coming and going some of them are passed by or remain outside. Must the fact that they have not yet been re-engaged be regarded as the cause of their unemployment? If Chapter 23 of *Capital* Vol. I is read, it is always elimination by machines that is treated as the cause of the reserve army, which is partially reabsorbed or released anew and reproduces itself as overpopulation, according to the economic situation. Grossmann worries himself for several pages over the proof that it is the economic relation  $c:v$  that operates here, and not the technical relation means of production:labour power; in fact the two are identical. But this formation of the reserve army, which according to Marx occurs everywhere and always from the commencement of capitalism, and in which workers are replaced by machines, is not

identical to the alleged formation of the reserve army according to Grossmann, which starts as a consequence of accumulation after 34 years of technical progress.

It is the same with the export of capital. In long explanations all the Marxist writers — Varga, Bukharin, Nachimson, Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Rosa Luxemburg — are one after the other demolished because they all state the view that the export of capital takes place for a higher profit. As Varga says:

“It is not because it is absolutely impossible to accumulate capital at home that capital is exported...but because there exists the prospect of a higher profit abroad” (quoted by Grossmann, p. 498).

Grossmann attacks this view as incorrect and un-Marxist:

“It is not the higher profit abroad, but the lack of investment opportunities at home that is the ultimate reason for the export of capital” (p. 561).

He then introduces numerous quotations from Marx about overaccumulation and refers to his schema, in which after 35 years the growing mass of capital can no longer be employed at home and so must be exported.

Let us recall that according to the schema, however, there was too little capital in existence for the existing population and that his capital surplus was only an error of calculation. Further, in all the quotations from Marx, Grossmann has forgotten to cite the one where Marx himself speaks of the export of capital:

“If capital is sent abroad, this is not done because it absolutely could not be applied at home, but because it can be employed at a higher rate of profit in a foreign country” (Vol. III, p. 251).

The fall in the rate of profit is one of the most important parts of Marx’s theory of capital; he was the first to state and prove that this tendency to fall, which expresses itself periodically in crises, was the embodiment of the transitory nature of capitalism. With Grossmann it is another phenomenon which comes to the fore: after the 35<sup>th</sup> year workers are laid off en masse and capital is at the same time created in excess. As a result the deficit of surplus value in the following year is more serious, so that yet more labour and capital are left idle; with the fall in the number of workers, the mass of surplus value produced decreases and capitalism sinks still deeper into catastrophe. Has not Grossmann seen the contradiction here with Marx? Indeed he has. Thus, after some introductory remarks, he sets to work in the chapter entitled “The Causes of the Misunderstanding of the Marxian Theory of Accumulation and Collapse”:

“The time is not ripe for a reconstruction of the Marxian theory of collapse (p. 195). The fact that the third chapter of Volume III is, as Engels says in the preface, presented, “as a series of uncompleted mathematical calculations” must be given as an external reason for the misunderstanding”.

Engels was helped in his editing by his friend, the mathematician Samuel Moore:

“But Moore was not an economist...The mode of origin of this part of the work therefore makes it probable even in advance that many opportunities for misunderstanding and error exist here and that these errors could then easily have been carried over also into the chapter dealing with the tendency of the rate of profit to fall...”

(NB: these chapters had already been written by Marx!)

“The probability of error becomes almost certain when we consider that it is a question here of a *single* word which, unfortunately, completely distorts the whole sense of the analysis: the inevitable end of capitalism is attributed to the relative fall in the rate instead of in the mass of profit. Engels or Moore had certainly made a slip of the pen (p. 195)”.

So this is what the reconstruction of Marx’s theory looks like! Another quotation is given in a note which says:

“In the words in brackets. Engels or Marx himself made a slip of the pen; it should read correctly and at the same time a mass of profit which falls in relative value”.

[Translator’s note: Grossmann refers to the passage on p. 214 of Vol. III which reads: “Hence, the same laws produce for the social capital a growing absolute mass of profit, and a falling rate of profit”].

So now it is Marx himself who makes mistakes. And here it concerns a passage where the sense, as given in the text of *Capital*, is unambiguously clear. Marx’s whole analysis, which ends with the passage Grossmann finds necessary to change, is a continuation of a passage where Marx explains:

“...the mass of the surplus value produced by it, and therefore the absolute mass of the profit produced by it, *can*, consequently, increase, and increase progressively, in spite of the progressive drop in the rate of profit. And this not only *can* be so. Aside from temporary fluctuations it *must* be so, on the basis of capitalist production” (Vol. III, p. 213).

Marx then sets out the reasons why the mass of profit must increase and says once again:

“As the process of production and accumulation advances therefore, the mass of available and appropriated surplus labour, and hence the absolute mass of profit appropriated by the social capital *must* grow” (Vol. III, p. 214).

Thus the exact opposite to the onset of the collapse invented by Grossmann. In the following pages this is repeated yet more often; the whole of Chapter 13 consists of a presentation of

“the law that a fall in the rate of profit due to the development of productiveness is accompanied by an increase in the mass of profit...” (Vol. III, p. 221).

So there can remain not the slightest doubt that Marx wanted to say precisely what was printed there and that he had not made a slip of the pen. And when Grossmann writes:

“The collapse cannot therefore result from the fall in the rate of profit. How could a percentage proportion, such as the rate of profit, a pure number, bring about the collapse of a real economic system!” (p. 196).

he thereby shows yet again that he has understood nothing of Marx and that his collapse is in complete contradiction with Marx.

Here is the point at which he could have convinced himself of the instability of his construction. But if he had allowed himself to be taught by Marx here, then his whole theory would have fallen and his book would not have been written.

The fairest way of describing Grossmann’s book is as a patchwork of quotations from Marx, incorrectly applied and stuck together by means of a fabricated theory. Each time a proof is required, a quotation from Marx, which does not deal with the point in question, is introduced, and it is the correctness of Marx’s words which is supposed to give the reader the impression that the theory is correct.

# Historical materialism

The question which in the end merits attention is how can an economist who believes he is correctly reconstructing Marx's views, and who further states with naive self-assurance that he is the first to give a correct interpretation of them, be so completely mistaken and find himself in complete contradiction with Marx. The reason lies in the lack of a historical materialist understanding. For you will not understand Marxian economics at all unless you have made the historical materialist way of thinking your own.

For Marx the development of human society, and so also the economic development of capitalism, is determined by a firm necessity like a law of nature. But this development is at the same time the work of men who play their role in it and where each person determines his own acts with consciousness and purpose — though not with a consciousness of the social whole. To the bourgeois way of seeing things, there is a contradiction here; either what happens depends on human free choice or, if it is governed by fixed laws, then these act as an external, mechanical constraint on men. For Marx all social necessity is accomplished by men; this means that a man's thinking, wanting and acting — although appearing as a free choice in his consciousness — are completely determined by the action of the environment; it is only through the totality of these human acts, determined mainly by social forces, that conformity to laws is achieved in social development.

The social forces which determine development are thus not only purely economic acts, but also the general-political acts determined by them, which provide production with the necessary norms of right. Conformity to law does not reside solely in the action of competition which fixes prices and profits and concentrates capital, but also in the establishment of free competition, of free production by bourgeois revolutions; not only in the movement of wages, in the expansion and contraction of production in prosperity and crisis, in the closing of factories and the laying off of workers, but also in the revolt, the struggle of the workers, the conquest by them of power over society and production in order to establish new norms of right. Economics, as the totality of men working and striving to satisfy their subsistence needs, and politics (in its widest sense), as the action and struggle of these men as classes to satisfy these needs, form a single unified domain of law-governed development. The accumulation of capital, crises, pauperisation, the proletarian revolution, the seizure of power by the working class form together, acting like a natural law, an indivisible unity, the collapse of capitalism.

The bourgeois way of thinking, which does not understand that this is a unity, has always played a great role not only outside but also within the workers' movement. In the old radical Social Democracy the fatalist view was current, understandable in view of the historical circumstances, that the revolution would one day come as a natural necessity and that in the meantime the workers should not try anything dangerous. Reformism questioned the need for a 'violent' revolution and believed that the intelligence of statesmen and leaders would tame capitalism by reform and organisation. Others believed that the proletariat had to be educated to revolutionary virtue by moral preaching. The consciousness was always lacking that this virtue only found

its natural necessity through economic forces, and that the revolution only found its natural necessity through the mental forces of men. Other views have now appeared. On the one hand capitalism has proved itself strong and unassailable against all reformism, all the skills of leaders, all attempts at revolution; all these have appeared ridiculous in the face of its immense strength. But, on the other hand, terrible crises at the same time reveal its internal weakness. Whoever now takes up Marx and studies him is deeply impressed by the irresistible, law-governed nature of the collapse and welcomes these ideas with enthusiasm.

But if his basic way of thinking is bourgeois he cannot conceive this necessity other than as an external force acting on men. Capitalism is for him a mechanical system in which men participate as economic persons, capitalists, buyers, sellers, wage-workers, etc., but otherwise must submit in a purely passive way to what this mechanism imposes on them in view of its internal structure.

This mechanistic conception can also be recognised in Grossmann's statements on wages when he violently attacks Rosa Luxemburg –

“Everywhere one comes across an incredible, barbarous mutilation of the Marxian theory of wages” (p. 585).

– precisely where she quite correctly treats the value of labour-power as a quantity that can be expanded on the basis of the standard of living attained. For Grossmann the value of labour-power is “not an elastic, but a fixed quantity” (p. 586). Acts of human choice such as the workers' struggles can have no influence on it; the only way in which wages can rise is through a higher intensity of labour obliging the replacement of the greater quantity of labour-power expended.

Here it is the same mechanistic view: the mechanism determines economic quantities while struggling and acting men stand outside this relation. Grossmann appeals again to Marx for this, where the latter writes of the value of labour-power:

“Nevertheless, in a given country, at a given period, the average quantity of the means of subsistence necessary for the labourer is practically known” (*Capital*. Vol. I, p. 171);

but Grossmann has unfortunately once again overlooked that in Marx this passage is immediately preceded by:

“In contradiction therefore to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and moral element”.

Starting from his bourgeois way of thinking Grossmann states in his criticism of various Social Democratic views:

“We see: the collapse of capitalism is either denied or based, in a voluntarist way, on extra-economic, political factors. The economic proof of the necessity of the collapse of capitalism has never been produced” (pp. 58–59).

And he cites with approval an opinion of Tugan-Baranovsky that, in order to prove the necessity for the transformation of capitalism into its opposite, a rigid proof of the impossibility for capitalism to continue existing must first be produced. Tugan himself denies this impossibility

and wishes to give socialism an ethical basis. But that Grossmann chooses to call as witness this Russian liberal economist who, as is known, was always completely alien to Marxism, shows to what degree their basic way of thinking is related, despite their opposed practical points of view (see also Grossmann, p. 108). The Marxian view that the collapse of capitalism will be the act of the working class and thus a political act (in the widest sense of this word: general social, which is inseparable from the take-over of economic power) Grossmann can only understand as 'voluntarist', i.e., that it is something that is, governed by men's choice, by free will.

The collapse of capitalism in Marx does depend on the act of will of the working class; but this will is not a free choice, but is itself determined by economic development. The contradictions of the capitalist economy, which repeatedly emerge in unemployment, crises, wars, class struggles, repeatedly determine the will to revolution of the proletariat. Socialism comes not because capitalism collapses economically and men, workers and others, are forced by necessity to create a new organisation, but because capitalism, as it lives and grows, becomes more and more unbearable for the workers and repeatedly pushes them to struggle until the will and strength to overthrow the domination of capitalism and establish a new organisation grows in them, and then capitalism collapses. The working class is not pushed to act because the unbearableness of capitalism is demonstrated to them from the outside, but because they feel it generated within them. Marx's theory, as economics, shows how the above phenomena irresistibly reappear with greater and greater force and, as historical materialism, how they necessarily give rise to the revolutionary will and the revolutionary act.

## The new workers' movement

It is understandable that Grossmann's book should have been given some attention by the spokesmen of the new workers' movement since he attacks the same enemy as them. The new workers' movement has to attack Social Democracy and the Party Communism of the Third International, two branches of the same tree, because they accommodate the working class to capitalism. Grossmann attacks the theoreticians of these currents for having distorted and falsified Marx's teachings, and insists on the necessary collapse of capitalism. His conclusions sound similar to ours, but their sense and essence are completely different. We also are of the opinion that the Social Democratic theorists, good theoretical experts that they often were nevertheless distorted Marx's doctrine; but their mistake was historical, the theoretical precipitate of an early period of the struggle of the proletariat. Grossmann's mistake is that of a bourgeois economist who has never had practical experience of the struggle of the proletariat and who is consequently not in a position to understand the essence of Marxism.

An example of how his conclusions apparently agree with the views of the new workers' movement, but are in essence completely opposed, is to be found in his theory of wages. According to his schema, after 35 years, with the collapse, a rapidly climbing unemployment appears. As a result wages sink well below the value of labour-power, without an effective resistance being possible.

"Here the objective limit of trade union action is given" (p. 599). However familiar this sounds, the basis is quite different. The powerlessness of trade union action, which has been evident for a long time, should not be attributed to an economic collapse, but to a shift in the balance of social power. Everyone knows how the increased power of the employers' combines of concentrated big capital has made the working class relatively powerless. To which is now added the effects of a severe crisis which depresses wages, as happened in every previous crisis.

The purely economic collapse of capitalism which Grossmann constructs does not involve a complete passivity by the proletariat. For, when the collapse takes place the working class must precisely prepare itself to re-establish production on a new basis.

"Thus evolution pushes towards the development and exacerbation of the internal oppositions between capital and labour until the solution which can come only from the struggle between the two classes is brought about" (p. 599).

This final struggle is linked also with the wages struggle because (as was already mentioned above) the catastrophe can be postponed by depressing wages or hastened by raising them. But it is the economic catastrophe that is for Grossmann the really essential factor, the new order being forcibly imposed on men. Certainly, the workers, as the mass of the population, are to supply the preponderant force of the revolution, just as in the bourgeois revolutions of the past where they formed the mass force for action; but, as in hunger revolts in general, this is independent of their revolutionary maturity, of their capacity to take power over society and to hold it. This means

that a revolutionary group, a party with socialist aims, would have to appear as a new governing power in place of the old in order to introduce some kind of planned economy.

The theory of the economic catastrophe is thus ready-made for intellectuals who recognise the untenable character of capitalism and who want a planned economy to be built by capable economists and leaders. And it must be expected that many other such theories will come from these quarters or meet with approval there. The theory of the necessary collapse will also be able to exercise a certain attraction over revolutionary workers. They see the overwhelming majority of the proletarian masses still attached to the old organisations, the old leaders, the old methods, blind to the task which the new development imposes on them, passive and immobile, with no signs of revolutionary energy. The few revolutionaries who understand the new development might well wish on the stupefied masses a good economic catastrophe so that they finally come out of the slumber and enter into action. The theory according to which capitalism has today entered its final crisis also provides a decisive, and simple, refutation of reformism and all Party programmes which give priority to parliamentary work and trade union action — a demonstration of the necessity of revolutionary tactics which is so convenient that it must be greeted sympathetically by revolutionary groups. But the struggle is never so simple or convenient, not even the theoretical struggle for reasons and proofs.

Reformism was a false tactic, which weakened the working class, not only in crises but also in prosperity. Parliamentarism and the trade union tactic did not have to await the present crisis to prove a failure; this has been shown for the last hundred years. It is not due to the economic collapse of capitalism but to the enormous development of its strength, to its expansion over all the Earth, to its exacerbation of political oppositions, to the violent reinforcement of its inner strength, that the proletariat must take mass action, summoning up the strength of the whole class. It is this shift in the relations of power that is the basis for the new direction for the workers' movement.

The workers' movement has not to expect a final catastrophe, but many catastrophes, political — like wars, and economic — like the crises which repeatedly break out, sometimes regularly, sometimes irregularly, but which on the whole, with the growing size of capitalism, become more and more devastating. So the illusions and tendencies to tranquillity of the proletariat will repeatedly collapse, and sharp and deep class struggles will break out. It appears to be a contradiction that the present crisis, deeper and more devastating than any previous one, has not shown signs of the awakening of the proletarian revolution. But the removal of old illusions is its first great task: on the other hand, the illusion of making capitalism bearable by means of reforms obtained through Social Democratic parliamentary politics and trade union action and, on the other, the illusion that capitalism can be overthrown in assault under the leadership of a revolution-bringing Communist Party. The working class itself, as a whole, must conduct the struggle, but, while the bourgeoisie is already building up its power more and more solidly, the working class has yet to make itself familiar with the new forms of struggle. Severe struggles are bound to take place. And should the present crisis abate, new crises and new struggles will arise. In these struggles the working class will develop its strength to struggle, will discover its aims, will train itself, will make itself independent and learn to take into its hands its own destiny, viz., social production itself. In this process the destruction of capitalism is achieved. The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the collapse of capitalism.

## **Party and Class (1936)**

The old labor movement is organized in parties. The belief in parties is the main reason for the impotence of the working class; therefore we avoid forming a new party—not because we are too few, but because a party is an organization that aims to lead and control the working class. In opposition to this, we maintain that the working class can rise to victory only when it independently attacks its problems and decides its own fate. The workers should not blindly accept the slogans of others, nor of our own groups but must think, act, and decide for themselves. This conception is on sharp contradiction to the tradition of the party as the most important means of educating the proletariat. Therefore many, though repudiating the Socialist and Communist parties, resist and oppose us. This is partly due to their traditional concepts; after viewing the class struggle as a struggle of parties, it becomes difficult to consider it as purely the struggle of the working class, as a class struggle. But partly this concept is based on the idea that the party nevertheless plays an essential and important part in the struggle of the proletariat. Let us investigate this latter idea more closely.

Essentially the party is a grouping according to views, conceptions; the classes are groupings according to economic interests. Class membership is determined by one's part in the process of production; party membership is the joining of persons who agree in their conceptions of the social problems. Formerly it was thought that this contradiction would disappear in the class party, the "workers" party. During the rise of Social Democracy it seemed that it would gradually embrace the whole working class, partly as members, partly as supporters. because Marxian theory declared that similar interests beget similar viewpoints and aims, the contradiction between party and class was expected gradually to disappear. History proved otherwise. Social Democracy remained a minority, other working class groups organized against it, sections split away from it, and its own character changed. Its own program was revised or reinterpreted. The evolution of society does not proceed along a smooth, even line, but in conflicts and contradictions.

With the intensification of the workers' struggle, the might of the enemy also increases and besets the workers with renewed doubts and fears as to which road is best. And every doubt brings on splits, contradictions, and fractional battles within the labor movement. It is futile to bewail these conflicts and splits as harmful in dividing and weakening the working class. The working class is not weak because it is split up—it is split up because it is weak. Because the enemy is powerful and the old methods of warfare prove unavailing, the working class must seek new methods. Its task will not become clear as the result of enlightenment from above; it must discover its tasks through hard work, through thought and conflict of opinions. It must find its own way; therefore, the internal struggle. It must relinquish old ideas and illusions and adopt new ones, and because this is difficult, therefore the magnitude and severity of the splits.

Nor can we delude ourselves into believing that this period of party and ideological strife is only temporary and will make way to renewed harmony. True, in the course of the class struggle there are occasions when all forces unite in a great achievable objective and the revolution is carried on with the might of a united working class. But after that, as after every victory, come differences on the question: what next? And even if the working class is victorious, it is always confronted by the most difficult task of subduing the enemy further, of reorganizing production, creating new order. It is impossible that all workers, all strata and groups, with their often still diverse interests should, at this stage, agree on all matters and be ready for united and decisive further action. They will find the true course only after the sharpest controversies and conflicts and only thus achieve clarity.

If, in this situation, persons with the same fundamental conceptions unite for the discussion of practical steps and seek clarification through discussions and propagandize their conclusions, such groups might be called parties, but they would be parties in an entirely different sense from those of today. Action, the actual class struggle, is the task of the working masses themselves, in their entirety, in their real groupings as factory and millhands, or other productive groups, because history and economy have placed them in the position where they must and can fight the working class struggle. It would be insane if the supporters of one party were to go on strike while those of another continue to work. But both tendencies will defend their positions on strike or no strike in the factory meetings, thus affording an opportunity to arrive at a well founded decision. The struggle is so great, the enemy so powerful that only the masses as a whole can achieve a victory—the result of the material and moral power of action, unity and enthusiasm, but also the result of the mental force of thought, of clarity. In this lies the great importance of such parties or groups based on opinions: that they bring clarity in their conflicts, discussions and propaganda. They are the organs of the self-enlightenment of the working class by means of which the workers find their way to freedom.

Of course such parties are not static and unchangeable. Every new situation, every new problem will find minds diverging and uniting in new groups with new programs. They have a fluctuating character and constantly readjust themselves to new situations.

Compared to such groups, the present workers' parties have an entirely different character, for they have a different objective: they want to seize power for themselves. They aim not at being an aid to the working class in its struggle for emancipation but to rule it themselves and proclaim that this constitutes the emancipation of the proletariat. The Social-Democracy which arose in the era of parliamentarism conceived of this rule as a parliamentary government. The Communist Party carried the idea of party rule through to its fullest extreme in the party dictatorship.

Such parties, in distinction to the groups described above, must be rigid structures with clear lines of demarcation through membership cards, statues, party discipline and admission and expulsion procedures. For they are instruments of power—they fight for power, bridle their members by force and constantly seek to extend the scope of their power. It is not their task to develop the initiative of the workers; rather do they aim at training loyal and unquestioning members of their faith. While the working class in its struggle for power and victory needs unlimited intellectual freedom, the party rule must suppress all opinions except its own. In "democratic" parties, the suppression is veiled; in the dictatorship parties, it is open, brutal suppression.

Many workers already realize that the rule of the Socialist or Communist party will be only the concealed form of the rule of the bourgeois class in which the exploitation and suppression of the working class remains. Instead of these parties, they urge the formation of a "revolutionary party" that will really aim at the rule of the workers and the realization of communism. Not a party in the new sense as described above, but a party like those of today, that fight for power as the "vanguard" of the class, as the organization of conscious, revolutionary minorities, that seize power in order to use it for the emancipation of the class.

We claim that there is an internal contradiction in the term: "revolutionary party." Such a party cannot be revolutionary. It is no more revolutionary than were the creators of the Third Reich. When we speak of revolution, we speak of the proletarian revolution, the seizure of power by the working class itself.

The "revolutionary party" is based on the idea that the working class needs a new group of leaders who vanquish the bourgeoisie for the workers and construct a new government—(note

that the working class is not yet considered fit to reorganize and regulate production.) But is not this as it should be? As the working class does not seem capable of revolution, is it not necessary that the revolutionary vanguard, the party, make the revolution for it? And is this not true as long as the masses willingly endure capitalism?

Against this, we raise the question: what force can such a party raise for the revolution? How is it able to defeat the capitalist class? Only if the masses stand behind it. Only if the masses rise and through mass attacks, mass struggle, and mass strikes, overthrow the old regime. Without the action of the masses, there can be no revolution.

Two things can follow. The masses remain in action: they do not go home and leave the government to the new party. They organize their power in factory and workshop and prepare for further conflict in order to defeat capital; through the workers' councils they establish a form union to take over the complete direction of all society—in other words, they prove, they are not as incapable of revolution as it seemed. Of necessity then, conflict will arise with the party which itself wants to take control and which sees only disorder and anarchy in the self-action of the working class. Possibly the workers will develop their movement and sweep out the party. Or, the party, with the help of bourgeois elements defeats the workers. In either case, the party is an obstacle to the revolution because it wants to be more than a means of propaganda and enlightenment; because it feels itself called upon to lead and rule as a party.

On the other hand the masses may follow the party faith and leave it to the full direction of affairs. They follow the slogans from above, have confidence in the new government (as in Germany and Russia) that is to realize communism—and go back home and to work. Immediately the bourgeoisie exerts its whole class power the roots of which are unbroken; its financial forces, its great intellectual resources, and its economic power in factories and great enterprises. Against this the government party is too weak. Only through moderation, concessions and yielding can it maintain that it is insanity for the workers to try to force impossible demands. Thus the party deprived of class power becomes the instrument for maintaining bourgeois power.

We said before that the term “revolutionary party” was contradictory from a proletarian point of view. We can state it otherwise: in the term “revolutionary party,” “revolutionary” always means a bourgeois revolution. Always, when the masses overthrow a government and then allow a new party to take power, we have a bourgeois revolution—the substitution of a ruling caste by a new ruling caste. It was so in Paris in 1830 when the finance bourgeoisie supplanted the landed proprietors, in 1848 when the industrial bourgeoisie took over the reins.

In the Russian revolution the party bureaucracy came to power as the ruling caste. But in Western Europe and America the bourgeoisie is much more powerfully entrenched in plants and banks, so that a party bureaucracy cannot push them aside as easily. The bourgeoisie in these countries can be vanquished only by repeated and united action of the masses in which they seize the mills and factories and build up their council organizations.

Those who speak of “revolutionary parties” draw incomplete, limited conclusions from history. When the Socialist and Communist parties became organs of bourgeois rule for the perpetuation of exploitation, these well-meaning people merely concluded that they would have to do better. They cannot realize that the failure of these parties is due to the fundamental conflict between the self-emancipation of the working class through its own power and the pacifying of the revolution through a new sympathetic ruling clique. They think they are the revolutionary vanguard because they see the masses indifferent and inactive. But the masses are inactive only because they cannot yet comprehend the course of the struggle and the unity of class interests, although

they instinctively sense the great power of the enemy and the immenseness of their task. Once conditions force them into action they will attack the task of self-organization and the conquest of the economic power of capital.

## **Party and Working Class (1936)**

We are only at the very earliest stages of a new workers' movement. The old movement was embodied in parties, and today belief in the party constitutes the most powerful check on the working class' capacity for action. That is why we are not trying to create a new party. This is so, not because our numbers are small — a party of any kind begins with a few people — but because, in our day, a party cannot be other than an organization aimed at directing and dominating the proletariat. To this type of organization we oppose the principle that the working class can effectively come into its own and prevail only by taking its destiny into its own hands. The workers are not to adopt the slogans of any group whatsoever, not even our own groups; they are to think, decide and act for themselves. Therefore, in this transitional period, the natural organs of education and enlightenment are, in our view, work groups, study and discussion circles, which have formed of their own accord and are seeking their own way.

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

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

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

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

d'être of the internal differences and conflicts. It is forced to renounce outmoded ideas and old chimeras, and it is indeed the difficulty of this task that engenders such big divisions.

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

No doubt, if certain people holding the same ideas get together to discuss the prospects for action, to hammer out ideas by discussion, to indulge in propaganda for these attitudes, then it is possible to describe such groups as parties. The name matters little, provided that these parties adopt a role distinct from that which existing parties seek to fulfil. Practical action, that is, concrete class struggle, is a matter for the masses themselves, acting as a whole, within their natural groups, notably the work gangs, which constitute the units of effective combat. It would be wrong to find the militants of one tendency going on strike, while those of another tendency continued to work. In that case, the militants of each tendency should present their viewpoints to the factory floor, so that the workers as a whole are able to reach a decision based on knowledge and facts. Since the war is immense and the enemy's strength enormous, victory must be attained by merging all the forces at the masses' disposal — not only material and moral force with a view to action, unity and enthusiasm, but also the spiritual force born of mental clarity. The importance of these parties or groups resides in the fact that they help to secure this mental clarity through their mutual conflicts, their discussions, their propaganda. It is by means of these organs of self-clarification that the working class can succeed in tracing for itself the road to freedom.

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

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

Unlike the parties described above, these parties are bound to have formations with rigid structures, whose cohesion is assured by means of statutes, disciplinary measures, admission and dismissal procedures. Designed to dominate, they fight for power by orienting the militants toward the instruments of power that they possess and by striving constantly to increase their sphere

of influence. They do not see their task as that of educating the workers to think for themselves; on the contrary, they aim at drilling them, at turning them into faithful and devoted adherents of their doctrines. While the working class needs unlimited freedom of spiritual development to increase its strength and to conquer, the basis of party power is the repression of all opinions that do not conform to the party line. In 'democratic' parties, this result is secured by methods that pay lip service to freedom; in the dictatorial parties, by brutal and avowed repression.

A number of workers are already aware that domination by the Socialist Party or the Communist Party would simply be a camouflaged supremacy of the bourgeois class, and would thus perpetuate exploitation and servitude. But, according to these workers, what should take its place is a 'revolutionary party' that would really aim at creating proletarian power and communist society. There is no question here of a party in the sense we defined above, i.e., of a group whose sole objective is to educate and enlighten, but of a party in the current sense, i.e., a party fighting to secure power and to exercise it with a view to the liberation of the working class, and all this as a vanguard, as an organization of the enlightened revolutionary minority.

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

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

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

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

The first is that the masses persist in action. Far from abandoning the fight in order to allow the new party to govern, they organize their power in the factories and workshops and prepare for new battles, this time with a view to the final defeat of capitalism. By means of workers' councils, they form a community that is increasingly close-knit, and therefore capable of taking on the administration of society as a whole. In a word, the masses prove that they are not as incapable of creating the revolution as was supposed. From this moment, conflict inevitably arises between the masses and the new party, the latter seeking to be the only body to exercise power and convinced that the party should lead the working class, that self-activity among the masses is only a factor of disorder and anarchy. At this point, either the class movement has become strong enough to ignore the party or the party, allied with bourgeois elements, crushes the workers. In either case, the party is shown to be an obstacle to the revolution, because the party seeks to be

something other than an organ of propaganda and of enlightenment, and because it adopts as its specific mission the leadership and government of the masses.

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

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

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

## **Trade Unionism (1936)**

How must the working class fight capitalism in order to win? This is the all important question facing the workers every day. What efficient means of action, what tactics can they use to conquer power and defeat the enemy? No science, no theory, could tell them exactly what to do. But spontaneously and instinctively, by feeling out, by sensing the possibilities, they found their ways of action. And as capitalism grew and conquered the earth and increased its power, the power of the workers also increased. New modes of action, wider and more efficient, came up beside the old ones. It is evident that with changing conditions, the forms of action, the tactics of the class struggle have to change also. Trade unionism is the primary form of labour movement in fixed capitalism. The isolated worker is powerless against the capitalistic employer. To overcome this handicap, the workers organise into unions. The union binds the workers together into common action, with the strike as their weapon. Then the balance of power is relatively equal, or is sometimes even heaviest on the side of the workers, so that the isolated small employer is weak against the mighty union. Hence in developed capitalism trade unions and employers' unions (Associations, Trusts, Corporations, etc.), stand as fighting powers against each other.

Trade unionism first arose in England, where industrial capitalism first developed. Afterward it spread to other countries, as a natural companion of capitalist industry. In the United States there were very special conditions. In the beginning, the abundance of free unoccupied land, open to settlers, made for a shortage of workers in the towns and relatively high wages and good conditions. The American Federation of Labour became a power in the country, and generally was able to uphold a relatively high standard of living for the workers who were organised in its unions.

It is clear that under such conditions the idea of overthrowing capitalism could not for a moment arise in the minds of the workers. Capitalism offered them a sufficient and fairly secure living. They did not feel themselves a separate class whose interests were hostile to the existing order; they were part of it; they were conscious of partaking in all the possibilities of an ascending capitalism in a new continent. There was room for millions of people, coming mostly from Europe. For these increasing millions of farmers, a rapidly increasing industry was necessary, where, with energy and good luck, workmen could rise to become free artisans, small business men, even rich capitalists. It is natural that here a true capitalist spirit prevailed in the working class.

The same was the case in England. Here it was due to England's monopoly of world commerce and big industry, to the lack of competitors on the foreign markets, and to the possession of rich colonies, which brought enormous wealth to England. The capitalist class had no need to fight for its profits and could allow the workers a reasonable living. Of course, at first, fighting was necessary to urge this truth upon them; but then they could allow unions and grant wages in exchange for industrial peace. So here also the working class was imbued with the capitalist spirit.

Now this is entirely in harmony with the innermost character of trade unionism. Trade unionism is an action of the workers, which does not go beyond the limit of capitalism. Its aim is not to replace capitalism by another form of production, but to secure good living conditions within capitalism. Its character is not revolutionary, but conservative.

Certainly, trade union action is class struggle. There is a class antagonism in capitalism — capitalists and workers have opposing interests. Not only on the question of conservation of capitalism, but also within capitalism itself, with regard to the division of the total product. The capitalists attempt to increase their profits, the surplus value, as much as possible, by cutting

down wages and increasing the hours or the intensity of labour. On the other hand, the workers attempt to increase their wages and to shorten their hours of work.

The price of labour power is not a fixed quantity, though it must exceed a certain hunger minimum; and it is not paid by the capitalists of their own free will. Thus this antagonism becomes the object of a contest, the real class struggle. It is the task, the function of the trade unions to carry on this fight.

Trade unionism was the first training school in proletarian virtue, in solidarity as the spirit of organised fighting. It embodied the first form of proletarian organised power. In the early English and American trade unions this virtue often petrified and degenerated into a narrow craft-corporation, a true capitalistic state of mind. It was different, however, where the workers had to fight for their very existence, where the utmost efforts of their unions could hardly uphold their standard of living, where the full force of an energetic, fighting, and expanding capitalism attacked them. There they had to learn the wisdom that only the revolution could definitely save them.

So there comes a disparity between the working class and trade unionism. The working class has to look beyond capitalism. Trade unionism lives entirely within capitalism and cannot look beyond it. Trade unionism can only represent a part, a necessary but narrow part, in the class struggle. And it develops aspects which bring it into conflict with the greater aims of the working class.

With the growth of capitalism and big industry the unions too must grow. They become big corporations with thousands of members, extending over the whole country, with sections in every town and every factory. Officials must be appointed: presidents, secretaries, treasurers, to conduct the affairs, to manage the finances, locally and centrally. They are the leaders, who negotiate with the capitalists and who by this practice have acquired a special skill. The president of a union is a big shot, as big as the capitalist employer himself, and he discusses with him, on equal terms, the interests of his members. The officials are specialists in trade union work, which the members, entirely occupied by their factory work, cannot judge or direct themselves.

So large a corporation as a union is not simply an assembly of single workers; it becomes an organised body, like a living organism, with its own policy, its own character, its own mentality, its own traditions, its own functions. It is a body with its own interests, which are separate from the interests of the working class. It has a will to live and to fight for its existence. If it should come to pass that unions were no longer necessary for the workers, then they would not simply disappear. Their funds, their members, and their officials: all of these are realities that will not disappear at once, but continue their existence as elements of the organisation.

The union officials, the labour leaders, are the bearers of the special union interests. Originally workmen from the shop, they acquire, by long practice at the head of the organisation, a new social character. In each social group, once it is big enough to form a special group, the nature of its work moulds and determines its social character, its mode of thinking and acting. The officials' function is entirely different from that of the workers. They do not work in factories, they are not exploited by capitalists, their existence is not threatened continually by unemployment. They sit in offices, in fairly secure positions. They have to manage corporation affairs and to speak at workers meetings and discuss with employers. Of course, they have to stand for the workers, and to defend their interests and wishes against the capitalists. This is, however, not very different from the position of the lawyer who, appointed secretary of an organisation, will stand for its members and defend their interests to the full of his capacity.

However, there is a difference. Because many of the labour leaders came from the ranks of workers, they have experienced for themselves what wage slavery and exploitation means. They feel as members of the working class and the proletarian spirit often acts as a strong tradition in them. But the new reality of their life continually tends to weaken this tradition. Economically they are not proletarians any more. They sit in conferences with the capitalists, bargaining over wages and hours, pitting interests against interests, just as the opposing interests of the capitalist corporations are weighed one against another. They learn to understand the capitalist's position just as well as the worker's position; they have an eye for "the needs of industry"; they try to mediate. Personal exceptions occur, of course, but as a rule they cannot have that elementary class feeling of the workers, who do not understand and weigh capitalist interests against their own, but will fight for their proper interests. Thus they get into conflict with the workers.

The labour leaders in advanced capitalism are numerous enough to form a special group or class with a special class character and interests. As representatives and leaders of the unions they embody the character and the interests of the unions. The unions are necessary elements of capitalism, so the leaders feel necessary too, as useful citizens in capitalist society. The capitalist function of unions is to regulate class conflicts and to secure industrial peace. So labour leaders see it as their duty as citizens to work for industrial peace and mediate in conflicts. The test of the union lies entirely within capitalism; so labour leaders do not look beyond it. The instinct of self-preservation, the will of the unions to live and to fight for existence, is embodied in the will of the labour leaders to fight for the existence of the unions. Their own existence is indissolubly connected with the existence of the unions. This is not meant in a petty sense, that they only think of their personal jobs when fighting for the unions. It means that primary necessities of life and social functions determine opinions. Their whole life is concentrated in the unions, only here have they a task. So the most necessary organ of society, the only source of security and power is to them the unions; hence they must be preserved and defended by all possible means, even when the realities of capitalist society undermine this position. This happens when capitalism's expansion class conflicts become sharper.

The concentration of capital in powerful concerns and their connection with big finance renders the position of the capitalist employers much stronger than the workers'. Powerful industrial magnates reign as monarchs over large masses of workers; they keep them in absolute subjection and do not allow "their" men to go into unions. Now and then the heavily exploited wage slaves break out in revolt, in a big strike. They hope to enforce better terms, shorter hours, more humane conditions, the right to organise. Union organisers come to aid them. But then the capitalist masters use their social and political power. The strikers are driven from their homes; they are shot by militia or hired thugs; their spokesmen are railroaded into jail; their relief actions are prohibited by court injunctions. The capitalist press denounces their cause as disorder, murder and revolution; public opinion is aroused against them. Then, after months of standing firm and of heroic suffering, exhausted by misery and disappointment, unable to make a dent on the iron-clad capitalist structure, they have to submit and to postpone their claims to more opportune times.

In the trades where unions exist as mighty organisations, their position is weakened by this same concentration of capital. The large funds they had collected for strike support are insignificant in comparison to the money power of their adversaries. A couple of lock-outs may completely drain them. No matter how hard the capitalist employer presses upon the worker by cutting wages and intensifying their hours of labour, the union cannot wage a fight. When con-

tracts have to be renewed, the union feels itself the weaker party. It has to accept the bad terms the capitalists offer; no skill in bargaining avails. But now the trouble with the rank and file members begins. The men want to fight; they will not submit before they have fought; and they have not much to lose by fighting. The leaders, however, have much to lose — the financial power of the union, perhaps its existence. They try to avoid the fight, which they consider hopeless. They have to convince the men that it is better to come to terms. So, in the final analysis, they must act as spokesmen of the employers to force the capitalists' terms upon the workers. It is even worse when the workers insist on fighting in opposition to the decision of the unions. Then the union's power must be used as a weapon to subdue the workers.

So the labour leader has become the slave of his capitalistic task of securing industrial peace — now at the cost of the workers, though he meant to serve them as best he could. He cannot look beyond capitalism, and within the horizon of capitalism with a capitalist outlook, he is right when he thinks that fighting is of no use. To criticise him can only mean that trade unionism stands here at the limit of its power.

Is there another way out then? Could the workers win anything by fighting? Probably they will lose the immediate issue of the fight; but they will gain something else. By not submitting without having fought, they rouse the spirit of revolt against capitalism. They proclaim a new issue. But here the whole working class must join in. To the whole class, to all their fellow workers, they must show that in capitalism there is no future for them, and that only by fighting, not as a trade union, but as a united class, they can win. This means the beginning of a revolutionary struggle. And when their fellow workers understand this lesson, when simultaneous strikes break out in other trades, when a wave of rebellion goes over the country, then in the arrogant hearts of the capitalists there may appear some doubt as to their omnipotence and some willingness to make concessions.

The trade union leader does not understand this point of view, because trade unionism cannot reach beyond capitalism. He opposes this kind of fight. Fighting capitalism in this way means at the same time rebellion against the trade unions. The labor leader stands beside the capitalist in their common fear of the workers' rebellion.

When the trade unions fought against the capitalist class for better working conditions, the capitalist class hated them, but it had not the power to destroy them completely. If the trade unions would try to raise all the forces of the working class in their fight, the capitalist class would persecute them with all its means. They may see their actions repressed as rebellion, their offices destroyed by militia, their leaders thrown in jail and fined, their funds confiscated. On the other hand, if they keep their members from fighting, the capitalist class may consider them as valuable institutions, to be preserved and protected, and their leaders as deserving citizens. So the trade unions find themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea; on the one side persecution, which is a tough thing to bear for people who meant to be peaceful citizens; on the other side, the rebellion of the members, which may undermine the unions. The capitalist class, if it is wise, will recognize that a bit of sham fighting must be allowed to uphold the influence of the labor leaders over the members.

The conflicts arising here are not anyone's fault; they are an inevitable consequence of capitalist development. Capitalism exists, but it is at the same time on the way to ruin. It must be fought as a living thing, and at the same time, as a transitory thing. The workers must wage a steady fight for wages and working conditions, while at the same time communistic ideas, more or less clear and conscious, awaken in their minds. They cling to the unions, feeling that these

are still necessary, trying now and then to transform them into better fighting institutions. But the spirit of trade unionism, which is in its pure form a capitalist spirit, is not in the workers. The divergence between these two tendencies in capitalism and in the class struggle appears now as a rift between the trade union spirit, mainly embodied in their leaders, and the growing revolutionary feeling of the members. This rift becomes apparent in the opposite positions they take on various important social and political questions.

Trade unionism is bound to capitalism; it has its best chances to obtain good wages when capitalism flourishes. So in times of depression it must hope that prosperity will be restored, and it must try to further it. To the workers as a class, the prosperity of capitalism is not at all important. When it is weakened by crisis or depression, they have the best chance to attack it, to strengthen the forces of the revolution, and to take the first steps towards freedom.

Capitalism extends its dominion over foreign continents, seizing their natural treasures in order to make big profits. It conquers colonies, subjugates the primitive population and exploits them, often with horrible cruelties. The working class denounces colonial exploitation and opposes it, but trade unionism often supports colonial politics as a way to capitalist prosperity.

With the enormous increases of capital in modern times, colonies and foreign countries are being used as places in which to invest large sums of capital. They become valuable possessions as markets for big industry and as producers of raw materials. A race for getting colonies, a fierce conflict of interests over the dividing up of the world arises between the great capitalist states. In these politics of imperialism the middle classes are whirled along in a common exaltation of national greatness. Then the trade unions side with the master class, because they consider the prosperity of their own national capitalism to be dependent on its success in the imperialist struggle. For the working class, imperialism means increasing power and brutality of their exploiters.

These conflicts of interests between the national capitalisms explode into wars. World war is the crowning of the policy of imperialism. For the workers, war is not only the destruction of all their feelings of international brotherhood, it also means the most violent exploitation of their class for capitalist profit. The working class, as the most numerous and the most oppressed class of society, has to bear all the horrors of war. The workers have to give not only their labour power, but also their health and their lives.

Trade unions, however, in war must stand upon the side of the capitalist. Its interests are bound up with national capitalism, the victory of which it must wish with all its heart. Hence it assists in arousing strong national feelings and national hatred. It helps the capitalist class to drive the workers into war and to beat down all opposition.

Trade unionism abhors communism. Communism takes away the very basis of its existence. In communism, in the absence of capitalist employers, there is no room for the trade union and labour leaders. It is true that in countries with a strong socialist movement, where the bulk of the workers are socialists, the labour leaders must be socialists too, by origin as well as by environment. But then they are right-wing socialists; and their socialism is restricted to the idea of a commonwealth where instead of greedy capitalists honest labour leaders will manage industrial production.

Trade unionism hates revolution. Revolution upsets all the ordinary relations between capitalists and workers. In its violent clashings, all those careful tariff regulations are swept away; in the strife of its gigantic forces the modest skill of the bargaining labour leaders loses its value. With all its power, trade unionism opposes the ideas of revolution and communism.

This opposition is not without significance. Trade unionism is a power in itself. It has considerable funds at its disposal, as material element of power. It has its spiritual influence, upheld and propagated by its periodical papers as mental element of power. It is a power in the hands of leaders, who make use of it wherever the special interests of trade unions come into conflict with the revolutionary interests of the working class. Trade unionism, though built up by the workers and consisting of workers, has turned into a power over and above the workers, just as government is a power over and above the people.

The forms of trade unionism are different for different countries, owing to the different forms of development in capitalism. Nor do they always remain the same in every country. When they seem to be slowly dying away, the fighting spirit of the workers is sometimes able to transform them, or to build up new types of unionism. Thus in England, in the years 1880–90, the “new unionism” sprang up from the masses of poor dockers and the other badly paid, unskilled workers, bringing a new spirit into the old craft unions. It is a consequence of capitalist development, that in founding new industries and in replacing skilled labour by machine power, it accumulates large bodies of unskilled workers, living in the worst of conditions. Forced at last into a wave of rebellion, into big strikes, they find the way to unity and class consciousness. They mould unionism into a new form, adapted to a more highly developed capitalism. Of course, when afterwards capitalism grows to still mightier forms, the new unionism cannot escape the fate of all unionism, and then it produces the same inner contradictions.

The most notable form sprang up in America, in the “Industrial Workers of the World.” The I.W.W. originated from two forms of capitalist expansion. In the enormous forests and plains of the West, capitalism reaped the natural riches by Wild West methods of fierce and brutal exploitation; and the worker-adventurers responded with as wild and jealous a defence. And in the eastern states new industries were founded upon the exploitation of millions of poor immigrants, coming from countries with a low standard of living and now subjected to sweatshop labour or other most miserable working conditions .

Against the narrow craft spirit of the old unionism, of the A.F. of L., which divided the workers of one industrial plant into a number of separate unions, the I.W.W. put the principle: all workers of one factory, as comrades against one master, must form one union, to act as a strong unity against the employer. Against the multitude of often jealous and bickering trade unions, the I.W.W. raised the slogan: one big union for all the workers. The fight of one group is the cause of all. Solidarity extends over the entire class. Contrary to the haughty disdain of the well-paid old American skilled labour towards the unorganised immigrants, it was these worst-paid proletarians that the I.W.W. led into the fight. They were too poor to pay high fees and build up ordinary trade unions. But when they broke out and revolted in big strikes, it was the I.W.W. who taught them how to fight, who raised relief funds all over the country, and who defended their cause in its papers and before the courts. By a glorious series of big battles it infused the spirit of organisation and self-reliance into the hearts of these masses. Contrary to the trust in the big funds of the old unions, the Industrial Workers put their confidence in the living solidarity and the force of endurance, upheld by a burning enthusiasm. Instead of the heavy stone-masoned buildings of the old unions, they represented the principle of flexible construction, with a fluctuating membership, contracting in time of peace, swelling and growing in the fight itself. Contrary to the conservative capitalist spirit of trade unionism, the Industrial Workers were anti-capitalist and stood for Revolution. Therefore they were persecuted with intense hatred by the whole capital-

ist world. They were thrown into jail and tortured on false accusations; a new crime was even invented on their behalf: that of “criminal syndicalism.”

Industrial unionism alone as a method of fighting the capitalist class is not sufficient to overthrow capitalist society and to conquer the world for the working class. It fights the capitalists as employers on the economic field of production, but it has not the means to overthrow their political stronghold, the state power. Nevertheless, the I.W.W. so far has been the most revolutionary organisation in America. More than any other it contributed to rouse class consciousness and insight, solidarity and unity in the working class, to turn its eyes toward communism, and to prepare its fighting power.

The lesson of all these fights is that against big capitalism, trade unionism cannot win. And if at times it wins, such victories give only temporary relief. And yet, these fights are necessary and must be fought. To the bitter end? — no, to the better end.

The reason is obvious. An isolated group of workers might be equal to a fight against an isolated capitalist employer. But an isolated group of workers against an employer backed by the whole capitalist class is powerless. And such is the case here: the state power, the money power of capitalism, public opinion of the middle class, excited by the capitalist press, all attack the group of fighting workers.

But does the working class back the strikers? The millions of other workers do not consider this fight as their own cause. Certainly they sympathise, and may often collect money for the strikers, and this may give some relief, provided its distribution is not forbidden by a judge’s injunction. But this easygoing sympathy leaves the real fight to the striking group alone. The millions stand aloof, passive. So the fight cannot be won (except in some special cases, when the capitalists, for business reasons, prefer to grant concessions), because the working class does not fight as one undivided unit.

The matter will be different, of course, when the mass of the workers really consider such a contest as directly concerning them; when they find that their own future is at stake. If they go into the fight themselves and extend the strike to other factories, to ever more branches of industry, then the state power, the capitalist power, has to be divided and cannot be used entirely against the separate group of workers. It has to face the collective power of the working class.

Extension of the strike, ever more widely, into, finally, a general strike, has often been advised as a means to avert defeat. But to be sure, this is not to be taken as a truly expedient pattern, accidentally hit upon, and ensuring victory. If such were the case, trade unions certainly would have made use of it repeatedly as regular tactics. It cannot be proclaimed at will by union leaders, as a simple tactical measure. It must come forth from the deepest feelings of the masses, as the expression of their spontaneous initiative, and this is aroused only when the issue of the fight is or grows larger than a simple wage contest of one group. Only then will the workers put all their force, their enthusiasm, their solidarity, their power of endurance into it.

And all these forces they will need. For capitalism also will bring into the field stronger forces than before. It may have been defeated and taken by surprise by the unexpected exhibition of proletarian force and thus have made concessions. But then, afterwards, it will gather new forces out of the deepest roots of its power and proceed to win back its position. So the victory of the workers is neither lasting nor certain. There is no clear and open road to victory; the road itself must be hewn and built through the capitalist jungle at the cost of immense efforts.

But even so, it will mean great progress. A wave of solidarity has gone through the masses, they have felt the immense power of class unity, their self-confidence is raised, they have shaken

off the narrow group egotism. Through their own deeds they have acquired new wisdom: what capitalism means and how they stand as a class against the capitalist class. They have seen a glimpse of their way to freedom.

Thus the narrow field of trade union struggle widens into the broad field of class struggle. But now the workers themselves must change. They have to take a wider view of the world. From their trade, from their work within the factory walls, their mind must widen to encompass society as a whole. Their spirit must rise above the petty things around them. They have to face the state; they enter the realm of politics. The problems of revolution must be dealt with.

# **General Remarks on the Question of Organisation (1938)**

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

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

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

In their program and propaganda, the proletarian revolution was the final result of the class struggle; the victory of the working class over its oppressors was to be the beginning of a communistic or socialist system of production. But so long as capitalism lasted, the practical fight had to centre on immediate needs and the preservation of standards in capitalism. Under parliamentary government parliament is the battlefield where the interests of the different classes of society meet; big and small capitalists, land owners, farmers, artisans, merchants, industrialists,

workers, all have their special interests that are defended by their spokesmen in parliament, all participate in the struggle for power and for their part in the total product. The workers have to take part in this struggle. Socialist or labour parties have the special task of fighting by political means for the immediate needs and interests of the workers within capitalism. In this way they get the votes of the workers and grow in political influence.

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

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

Indeed, fighting conditions have grown worse for the workers. The power of the capitalist class has increased enormously with its capital. The concentration of capital in the hands of a few captains of finance and industry, the coalition of the bosses themselves, confronts the trade unions with a much stronger and often nearly unassailable power. The fierce competition of the capitalists of all countries over markets, raw materials and world power, the necessity of using increasing parts of the surplus value for this competition, for armaments and welfare, the falling rate of profit, compel the capitalists to increase the rate of exploitation, i.e., to lower the working conditions for the workers. Thus the trade unions meet increasing resistance, the old methods of

struggle grow useless. In their bargaining with the bosses the leaders of the organisation have less success; because they know the power of the capitalists, and because they themselves do not want to fight—since in such fights the funds and the whole existence of the organisation might be lost—they must accept what the bosses offer. So their chief task is to assuage the workers' discontent and to defend the proposals of the bosses as important gains. Here also the leaders of the workers' organisations become mediators between the opposing classes. And when the workers do not accept the conditions and strike, the leaders either must oppose them or allow a sham fight, to be broken off as soon as possible.

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

The aim and task of the working class is the abolition of capitalism. Capitalism in its highest development, with its ever deeper economic crises, its imperialism, its armaments, its world wars, threatens the workers with misery and destruction. The proletarian class fight, the resistance and revolt against these conditions, must go on until capitalist domination is overthrown and capitalism is destroyed.

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

There are many who think of the proletarian revolution in terms of the former revolutions of the middle class, as a series of consecutive phases: first, conquest of government and instalment of a new government, then expropriation of the capitalist class by law, and then a new organisation of the process of production. But such events could lead only to some kind of state capitalism. As the proletariat rises to dominance it develops simultaneously its own organisation and the forms of the new economic order. These two developments are inseparable and form the process of social revolution. Working class organisation into a strong body capable of united mass actions already means revolution, because capitalism can rule only unorganised individuals. When these organised masses stand up in mass fights and revolutionary actions, and the existing powers are paralysed and disintegrated, then simultaneously the leading and regulating functions of former governments fall to the workers' organisations. And the immediate task is to carry on

production, to continue the basic process of social life. Since the revolutionary class fight against the bourgeoisie and its organs is inseparable from the seizure of the productive apparatus by the workers and its application to production, the same organisation that unites the class for its fight also acts as the organisation of the new productive process.

It is clear that the organisational forms of trade union and political party, inherited from the period of expanding capitalism, are useless here. They developed into instruments in the hands of leaders unable and unwilling to engage in revolutionary fight. Leaders cannot make revolutions: labour leaders abhor a proletarian revolution. For the revolutionary fights the workers need new forms of organisation in which they keep the powers of action in their own hands. It is pointless to try to construct or to imagine these new forms; they can originate only in the practical fight of the workers themselves. They have already originated there; we have only to look into practice to find its beginnings everywhere that the workers are rebelling against the old powers.

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

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

After the revolution this council organisation disappeared. The proletarian centres of big industry were small islands in an ocean of primitive agricultural society where capitalist development had not yet begun. The task of initiating capitalism fell to the Communist Party. Simultaneously, political power centred in its hands and the soviets were reduced to subordinate organs with only nominal powers.

The old forms of organisation, the trade union and political party and the new form of councils (soviets), belong to different phases in the development of society and have different functions. The first has to secure the position of the working class among the other classes within capitalism and belongs to the period of expanding capitalism. The latter has to secure complete dominance

for the workers, to destroy capitalism and its class divisions, and belongs to the period of declining capitalism. In a rising and prosperous capitalism, council organisation is impossible because the workers are entirely occupied in ameliorating their conditions, which is possible at that time through trade unions and political action. In a decaying crisis-ridden capitalism, these efforts are useless and faith in them can only hamper the increase of self-action by the masses. In such times of heavy tension and growing revolt against misery, when strike movements spread over whole countries and hit at the roots of capitalist power, or when, following wars or political catastrophes, the government authority crumbles and the masses act, the old organisational forms fail against the new forms of self-activity of the masses.

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

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

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

On the other hand, members of parliament are chosen for a fixed number of years; only at the polls are the citizens masters—on this one day when they choose their delegates. Once this day has passed, their power has gone and the delegates are independent, free to act for a term of years according to their own 'conscience,' restricted only by the knowledge that after this period they have to face the voters anew; but then they count on catching their votes in a noisy election campaign, bombing the confused voters with slogans and demagogic phrases. Thus not the voters but the parliamentarians are the real masters who decide politics. And the voters do not even send persons of their own choice as delegates; they are presented to them by the political parties. And then, if we suppose that people could select and send persons of their own choice, these persons would not form the government; in parliamentary democracy the legislative and the executive powers are separated. The real government dominating the people is formed by a bureaucracy of officials so far removed from the people's vote as to be practically independent. That is how it is possible that capitalistic dominance is maintained through general suffrage and parliamentary democracy. This is why in capitalistic countries, where the majority of the people belongs to the working class, this democracy cannot lead to a conquest of political power. For the working class, parliamentary democracy is a sham democracy, whereas council representation is real democracy: the direct rule of the workers over their own affairs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The two forms of organisation are not distinguished in that the one is founded upon a traditional and ideological basis, and the other on the material productive basis of society. Both are founded upon the material basis of the system of production, one on the declining system of the past, the other on the growing system of the future. Right now we are in the period of transition, the time of big capitalism and the beginnings of the proletarian revolution. In big capitalism the old system of production has already been destroyed in its foundations; the large class of independent producers has disappeared. The main part of production is collective work of large groups of workers; but the control and ownership have remained in a few private hands. This contradictory state is maintained by the strong power factors of the capitalists, especially the state power exerted by the governments. The task of the proletarian revolution is to destroy this state power; its real content is the seizure of the means of production by the workers. The process of revolution is an alternation of actions and defeats that builds up the organisation of the proletarian dictatorship, which at the same time is the dissolution, step by step, of the capitalist state power. Hence it is the process of the replacement of the organisation system of the past by the organisation system of the future.

We are only in the beginnings of this revolution. The century of class struggle behind us cannot be considered a beginning as such, but only a preamble. It developed invaluable theoretical knowledge, it found gallant revolutionary words in defiance of the capitalist claim of being a final social system; it awakened the workers from the hopelessness of misery. But its actual fight remained bound within the confines of capitalism, it was action through the medium of leaders and sought only to set easy masters in the place of hard ones. Only a sudden flickering of revolt, such as political or mass strikes breaking out against the will of the politicians, now and then announced the future of self-determined mass action. Every wildcat strike, not taking its leaders

and catchwords from the offices of parties and unions, is an indication of this development, and at the same time a small step in its direction. All the existing powers in the proletarian movement, the socialist and communist parties, the trade unions, all the leaders whose activity is bound to the bourgeois democracy of the past, denounce these mass actions as anarchistic disturbances. Because their field of vision is limited to their old forms of organisation, they cannot see that the spontaneous actions of the workers bear in them the germs of higher forms of organisation. In fascist countries, where bourgeois democracy has been destroyed, such spontaneous mass actions will be the only form of future proletarian revolt. Their tendency will not be a restoration of the former middle class democracy but an advance in the direction of the proletarian democracy, i.e., the dictatorship of the working class.

## **Religion (1947)**

Religion is the oldest and most deeply rooted of the ideologies which still play a role today. Religion has always been the form in which men have expressed the consciousness that their life was dominated by superior and incomprehensible forces. In religion was expressed the idea that there is a deep unity between Man and the world, between Man and nature, and between men and other men. With the evolution of labour, of the various modes of production, and of knowledge about nature, as well as with changes in society and the evolution of the relations between people, religious ideas changed.

Today's religious ideas were mainly formed four centuries ago during the violent class struggle which the period of the Reformation knew. This struggle — a struggle of the rising bourgeoisie and commercial capital against the mediaeval domination by landed property, a struggle of the peasants against their exploitation by the nobles and clergy — also assumed a religious form. At that time nature, like society, was badly understood and the profound sense of submissiveness which resulted led to the idea that a supernatural force ruled both the world and humanity. But the content of this idea varied with the environment, the poverty and the basic needs of the believer: it took one form for the rich and the petty bourgeois, another for the prince and the prelate, and yet another for the proletariat of the towns. Organisation into sects with different beliefs and creeds which expressed the class interests and antagonisms of that time recalls the organisation into political parties in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Changes of belief, the setting up of new churches were forms of passionate social struggle. When in 1752 the Dutch towns rose against Spain and put William of Orange at their head, they did so by abandoning the Catholic and joining the Calvinist church.

The forms and names which the various creeds took — the way in which religion presented itself — then as later, was of course linked to mediaeval and primitive forms of Christianity. But their basic content, their essential character, was determined by the birth of bourgeois society, of commodity-production. The forces which dominated the life of Man were no longer natural forces — for these had already been mastered to a certain extent by the new form of labour which was developing — but were still unknown social forces. The producers were forced to transform the commodities they produced into money. But for a producer to know if he could sell his commodities and how many depended on something beyond his control, on the market and its prices, determined by social production as a whole and competition. However hardworking or capable he was he could just as easily become impoverished and even be eliminated as succeed and become rich. This power which dominated him was the commodity transformed into money and concentrated in the form of capital. He was no longer the master of his fate. "Man proposes, but God disposes." But it was no longer as it had been previously, where it was the inner being which a physical power could raise or bring down which was involved; now it concerned the most minor activities of the mind, of thought, of calculations, of the will, of passion; it was a question of a mental force dominating social activity. This society is a single unit; despite the differences between peoples and races, trade connects its various parts and makes them a homogeneous whole. Consequently there is only one god, a pure all-powerful mind, who reigns over the world and decides the fate of men as he pleases. Thus do the religious ideas of the bourgeois express the basic experience which their world has of the social forces which dominate it.

But the influence of the bourgeois mode of production is just as great on the moral consciousness of men as on their spiritual conceptions. The free producers are independent of each other; it is everyone for himself in unbridled competition. Egoism is the first condition of existence: let someone make a mistake in this implacable struggle of each against all and all against each and

he risks being crushed. The producers nevertheless form a coherent whole: they have need of each other and work to satisfy their mutual needs. They are linked by buying and selling: despite all the struggles they engage in, they form a community. But community means that each member's will is limited by obligatory rules. No regular exchange of commodities could take place if everyone lets himself be guided purely by personal egoism: the mutual exchanges demand conformity to certain rules of behaviour and a knowledge of what is permitted and what is not. Without such norms defining honesty and good faith no lasting trade would be possible. It goes without saying that these rules are not always respected by everybody. On the contrary, if personal interest or the needs of self-preservation demand it, they are violated, to a greater or lesser extent as the case may be. But this is done knowingly and this general norm, considered as an eternal moral imperative, is still kept in mind. This conflict between personal interest and the common social interest, between the act and the rule, is the manifestation in the sphere of ethics of the internal ambiguity of the bourgeois world. The moral law — according to Kant — does not rule because it is obeyed but precisely because it is not. This law is not a practical fact but the internal consciousness of what ought to be done. In bourgeois society the idea predominates that in this world people can only survive by sinning against the rules of morality. And it is indeed a sin which we are talking about for the spiritual forces, whose origin in society is not understood, are felt as divine emanations: the moral law is an order that has come from God. And any offence against this law is an offence against God.

One problem dominates all the religious thought of past centuries: how can the sinner redeem himself before God, how can he obtain his salvation, how can he avoid the punishment he has merited. Later 19<sup>th</sup> century critics posed the following very logical question: why does Man need a remission of his supposed sins since the Creator himself must alone be responsible for what he created? And they justly mocked the strange lucubrations of a clever theology which sought to make all this intelligible. But they forgot the incontestable fact that the idea of sin was at this time very well established and could not have been eradicated from people's minds by arguments. This proves that this notion had a deeply rooted social origin; it drew its strength, both at the time of the Reformation and in the later periods, from the contradictions of the bourgeoisie, i.e. from the contradictions of bourgeois production.

The religious struggles of the century of the Reformation, the ideological form which the class struggle took at that time, were expressed theologically in the discussion about Grace. In the countries of the South where the bourgeoisie was not very strong, where absolute monarchs reigned and where the central power and apparatus of a mediaeval Catholic church was maintained, indeed strengthened through re-organisation, this church declared that salvation could not be obtained without it and required a total submission to the clergy. The bourgeoisie of Western Europe, on the other hand, whose strength was continually growing and who were ready to conquer the new world which was opening up before them, affirmed their freedom by means of the Protestant doctrine which saw Grace as a result of personal faith without having to have recourse to priests. In Germany where the inevitable resistance to the exploitation of Rome coincided with the beginning of an economic decline, this faith took the form of Lutheranism, of a submission to the orders of the princes. The poor peasants, exploited to death, and the proletarians scarcely felt themselves to be God's creatures, but rather victims in this world; they considered themselves charged with a sacred duty: to establish the Kingdom of God, that of equality and justice, on Earth. All these religious differences were embodied in as many theological doctrines which reflected the differences and antagonisms between classes and social groups:

but these religious differences were in fact not understood as this by those involved; they did not perceive their social origin, even though in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during a desperate class struggle, wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions followed one another.

When these struggles died down order was re-established; the differences and antagonisms lost their sharpness; the churches became rigidified into small groups; they became dogmatic; their new members always came from the same families: people entered through birth. In fact the dividing line between the different churches were the results of past struggles and wars, and their stability and cohesion were the result of the tradition and solidarity of their members. But within each small group new class antagonisms developed: the centuries which followed saw rich and poor, landowners and farmers, bourgeois and workers living together in each church. In the period immediately after the Reformation, however, class differences only appeared in the form of beliefs and the struggle for these beliefs. But, for the rich bourgeois, religion was no longer so important; it played a much weaker role for them than for the petty bourgeois and the impoverished and oppressed peasants and they were consequently much more tolerant. Among the latter it took impassioned and fanatical forms (as for example the German Pietists, the Dutch Reformed Church and the English Methodists) which sometimes led to a split in the original church.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the struggle of the bourgeoisie for power sometimes took the form of an ideological struggle against traditional religion. The power of the princes, nobles and clergy was in fact supported by a religious doctrine, by the authority of a church (the Catholic Church in fact) which guaranteed the sacred character of the old institutions. The church, as in France before the 1789 Revolution, was often the biggest landowner; the expropriation of its land and its redistribution to the peasants — a precondition for capitalist exploitation — was a prime source of wealth for the bourgeoisie. They appealed to and favoured the development of the natural sciences since these were the basis of industrial technology and machinery, but they also used them in their ideological struggle. For the laws of nature which were discovered showed that it was impossible to retain the primitive ideas of traditional religion and sacred truths. Thus in using the new knowledge against the old teachings they pursued their then interest, and they sought to remove the vast mass of petty bourgeois and peasants from the influence of the church and to line them up on their side. By making these masses pass from a belief in the church to a belief in science, they undermined the political power of the dominant class and strengthened their own.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the struggle against traditional religion led in all countries to a retreat of obscurantism and to undeniable progress; but in ways which differed according to the particular situation. Where, as in England, a rich bourgeoisie reigned, these showed themselves prudent and tolerant since they did not want to break their links with the nobility and the church and consequently it was the petty bourgeoisie and the workers who waged the most fierce and radical struggle in the spiritual sphere. But where, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie had still to raise itself and met an obstinate resistance (as in Germany) the anti-religious struggle immediately took extreme radical forms. Scientists and intellectuals in general placed themselves in the front line of propagandists: a wave of books and articles aimed at popularising scientific discoveries spread. And it was precisely because the practical, political struggle of the German bourgeoisie was so noticeably weak that the theoretical side had to develop. It did this with very different results ranging from benign and liberal Christianity to the most total atheism.

The struggle waged by the bourgeoisie whether for or against religion remained on the ideological level: that of Truth, of general and abstract concepts. In this form it had nothing to do with social objectives. It goes without saying that the bourgeoisie could hardly have revealed its social objective, that of installing the domination of capitalist exploitation; it had to disguise this behind ideas, ideals, those of a political and abstract legal liberty. Thus the struggle between religion and science remained in appearance on the level of ideas. The most radical opponents of religion, most often from the petty bourgeoisie, called themselves "freethinkers", wishing to show thus that they were free of the dogmas and old teachings of the churches and that they sought the truth, by their own thought, in the most complete of liberties. But the idea that men's thought was determined by society, that religious and anti-religious conceptions were born in fact from the mode of production, could not occur to them, since their own knowledge did not extend beyond the natural sciences. But they were to get a good illustration of this, to experience it live, through the intermediary of the fate of their own doctrine.

For the majority of the bourgeois class in fact atheism was not the best theory. It is possible that in their first enthusiasm they believed that, with the coming of the bourgeois order, an era of general well-being, of universal happiness, would commence and that all the problems of everyday life would be solved and that consequently no supernatural or unknown power could dispose of Man's fate; humanity in solving, thanks to science and its technical applications, the practical problems of material life would at the same time solve problems of theory. But this was only a passing illusion. For, in the end, at the bottom of their subconscious remained the idea that with the struggle of men against each other, with competition, no man was in fact the master of his fate. And it was soon revealed that other new forces were at work in this new world. Periodic commercial and industrial crises, unforeseeable and mysterious catastrophes, brutally interrupted progress. The irresistible growth of industry reduced workers and artisans to the most atrocious poverty: the uprisings of the starving in England already showed the beginning of the organised class struggle. From the depths of these insurgent masses new ideas sprung forth which, like a new "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsim" traced in letters of fire by a prophetic hand, announced to the bourgeoisie their future decline. But the bourgeoisie could not reach a clear, scientific understanding of the true character of society for this would at the same time have revealed their own exploiting and slavist character and would have taught them that their mode of production was transitory. That would have meant that they would have had to sacrifice themselves, with the result that the internal strength to continue the struggle would have been lacking. But the bourgeoisie did feel itself a young enough force to continue to fight to conquer the world and impose its domination on the working masses. A class which feels itself capable of waging a practical struggle cannot do this without the theoretical conviction that it is right and will win; so it constructs a suitable theory and disseminates it. This is why the bourgeoisie had to draw their strength from an instinctive belief that it was not material forces which dominated the world and their own future, but transcendental spiritual forces. Thus the bourgeoisie as a class had to allow religion to survive; the religious way of thinking was completely adapted to their social situation. But this religion was of course quite a different thing from the traditional doctrine of the church. The intolerant and intransigent dogmas were succeeded by more flexible, more rational ideas and the vague feeling that instead of God the avenger, terrifying Jehovah, there reigned in heaven a tolerant and debonair god, sometimes even so vague and so little existing that he transformed himself into a simple moral ideal.

But to the extent that the workers' movement later arose as a threat, the bourgeoisie more and more turned back to religion. Mystical ideas got more and more of a hold on the general thought and output of its spokesmen. Certainly from time to time one saw some signs of rationalism resurging, especially at the time when the big bourgeoisie felt itself strong enough to conquer the universe with its industry and its capital; but, strengthened by violent world crises and destructive wars, the feeling of uncertainty, of anguish in the face of the future, developed in the bourgeoisie and, with this, mystical and religious tendencies grew.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there appeared within the working class a completely different materialist conception, connected with its way of life and class position. It was different from the atheism which had played a role in the struggle of the bourgeoisie. Atheism is opposed to theism, to belief in God; for it, the essential problem is: does there exist a God who rules the world. Materialism does not deal with this problem; it is interested in the forces which really dominate the world: these are material forces, that is real and observable forces. For the forces which dominate the workers are visible and clearly identifiable: they are social forces. As soon as the workers reach an understanding of their class position they realise that their common fate is determined by capitalism; they realise that their exploitation is the result of the necessity for capital to accumulate by making profits; they realise that through the struggle which they wage in increasing numbers they will become capable of overthrowing capital and abolishing exploitation. Their thought moves within the realities of the world; the old question of whether or not there exists a God who rules the world does not arise for them. It is meaningless, just as is the question posed in the Middle Ages of how many angels can dance on a pinhead. Religious questions and problems have no interest for the workers since they play no role in the questions which really move them to act. And because they play no role, religious questions and problems disappear from the consciousness of the workers and finally disappear altogether.

This then is the difference between atheism and materialism. Atheism essentially attacks religion, considering it the main cause of ignorance and oppression, and fights it because it sees in it the most dangerous enemy of progress. Materialism sees religion as a product of social relations and consequently does not interest itself at all in religious questions as such, but in so doing does not any the less undermine religion. Materialism has to deal with religion from the theoretical point of view alone, to show that it is an important historical phenomenon, and thus to understand and explain it. In practice, however, atheism and materialism have existed side by side in the workers' movement. It often happens in fact that a worker brought up in a religious tradition, begins to think on the basis of his personal experience of reality, i.e. in a materialist way, and then notes that his previous beliefs disappear. In this period of doubt and internal contradiction, he has recourse to atheist works and to books popularising science in order to triumph over tradition by coming to understand.

Atheism has only once played an important role: during the Russian revolution. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia was an immense country peopled by uncultivated and poverty-stricken peasants, just freed from serfdom, living in a quite primitive poverty and subjected to the cruel and incompetent despotism of the Tsar and the landed nobility. West European capitalism exploited the country as a sort of colony: the starving peasants had to pay heavy taxes which went to repay the debts contracted by the Tsar for his war policy and his wasteful expenditure. Nevertheless in some large towns were to be found a constantly increasing number of factories managed by foreigners which employed a working class population recruited from the peasantry and deprived of all rights. The struggle against Absolutism and to obtain a more liberal political structure was

waged by small groups of intellectuals who, as in Western Europe, were the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie and fought on their side. But here in Russia, where no powerful bourgeoisie existed, the first struggles — the most well known being those of the Nihilists — were brutally crushed. It was only at the beginning of the century when the workers' movement with its strikes was born that the activities of the intellectuals acquired a solid basis. The revolutionary intellectuals then became the spokesmen, propagandists and educators of the working class. And to this end they turned to the workers' movement of Western Europe and particularly to Social Democracy. They borrowed the ideas and theories of the Social Democrats and in particular the Marxist theory of the class struggle and the economic development of capitalism. They dedicated themselves body and soul to the struggle, carrying out unrelenting propaganda for the workers to organise into the "Bolshevik party" and to thus undermine the Tsarist regime. And when the Tsarist regime collapsed, worn out by two unsuccessful wars, this party took power in 1917 in the course of a workers' and peasants' revolution.

The character of the Bolshevik party, its doctrine, ideas and propaganda were thus ambiguous. They had to accomplish a task which in Western Europe had been the work of the bourgeois revolution: to wage the struggle against royal absolutism, against the domination of the nobles and the church and to clear the way for industrial development and the education of the people. But here the force which had to accomplish this task was the working class which had already shown signs of socialist tendencies going beyond capitalism. But the corresponding socialist doctrine was influenced by ideas connected with the struggle of the nascent bourgeoisie against the princes, nobles and the church. Russian religion had a nature even more ignorantly and primitively bigoted than in western Europe, resting even more on a flowery liturgy and on the worship of images, the miracle-working icons. The spiritual struggle had to be largely directed against this ignorance on which Tsarism rested and to do this recourse had to be had explicitly to atheist and anti-religious propaganda. This is why the writings of the "young Marx," i.e. his works before 1846, dating from a time when their author was one of the leading fighters for a mainly bourgeois German revolution, provided arguments and slogans of prime importance for this struggle.

When, once in power, the Bolsheviks began to organise industry and had to consolidate their domination over the peasant masses, anti-religious and atheist propaganda became even more significant and important. It was an essential part, even the basis, of the intense campaign to educate the people. The illiterate muzhiks were not affected much by arguments drawn from the natural sciences, but the fact that the atheist propagandists were not reduced to dust by lightning seemed to them a sufficient proof to get them to burn the images of the saints and to let the priests die of hunger. The young peasants willingly attended the agricultural and professional schools to acquire the new knowledge. There thus appeared in Russia a new generation, brought up outside of all religion.

Under Bolshevik rule industry, with its central planning and its organisation based on scientific techniques, developed at an impressive speed, despite the difficulty of changing old habits of work, adapting them to the pace of machines. Agriculture too underwent a transformation, imposed by force, which made it a network of big mechanised enterprises. A large bureaucracy of political and technical leaders became master of the State, the means of production and the products. And, despite the name of Communism which is frequently attributed to this regime, and which is in fact false, the working class does not rule industry: it receives low wages which are fixed by higher authorities and is in fact exploited, the surplus value being at the disposal of

the government which applies it to further develop the productive apparatus and for its own use. In this economic system, State capitalism, the bureaucracy plays the role of a new ruling class, a role in many respects the same as that played by the bourgeoisie in Western Europe.

The harsh oppression which this system imposed on the mass of workers and the often fierce struggle which the peasants waged against the setting up of large agricultural enterprises and for the defence of private property led to opposition which, in the absence of political freedom, frequently took ideological forms. In many cases a revival of religion occurred. For, aware of its impotence in the face of the central power, this opposition had to take a form hostile to the official doctrine of the leaders of the regime and, as religious belief was the only means of active opposition and collective protest, this led to a strengthening of former ignorance. And in retaliation this opposition led to campaigns against religion.

Such is the basis of the revival of religion which is often pointed out in Russia. This development proves the groundlessness of the atheist theory which sees religion as the outcome of a tradition resulting from the trickery of the priests which is forcibly imposed upon children, and which should consequently disappear with this practice and with the study of scientific truth. In fact religion rests on a mode of production and cannot disappear until working humanity is free and the master of its labour, of its fate, or when it sees this possibility. It can thus be said, as regards Russia, that to the extent that State capitalism, by permanently developing production, either places the masses before the necessity to take their fate completely into their own hands by a more and more determined struggle for their liberation or, on the other hand, leads to a strengthening of the dictatorship, atheist ideology will either be transformed into conscious materialism or will retreat before a return of religious beliefs.

For the first time in human history there appears a life without religion amongst the working masses; but this is not a question of an aggressive anti-religious attitude, of a struggle against religion as such. Important fractions of the working class in fact remain on the surface and quite formally faithful to churches and religious forms. But in reality they have learned to consider the phenomena of the world and the happenings of life as governed by natural forces, to such an extent that traditional religious ideas and beliefs take second place. This is the reason why the materialist conception, while it progresses in thinking, does not do so in full consciousness, nor in an absolute manner, nor everywhere. Where the workers' labour power is permanently pitted against terrifying natural forces which are not properly dominated as a result of the weakness of capitalism, and which threaten them with death (as is the case for example with miners and fishermen), it is natural that their consciousness remains full of religious ideas and belief. Further, where the church, whose strange collection of political positions is known, chooses the workers' side and puts its strength at their disposal in the struggle against capital as if it were its own cause, for dozens of years the workers feel linked to it, even if the church's position later comes to change. The development of the materialist conception is thus itself subject to variations of historical conditions.

This type of phenomenon first appeared during the ardent struggle which Chartism waged. The English workers, who were the first to do so, had to find their own way, both practically and theoretically. Their struggle coincided with that of the bourgeoisie against landed property; this is why bourgeois radicalism had such an influence on the English workers. It is only the more remarkable that, amidst traditional ideas, there can be found in the Chartist press new radical, atheist, materialist ideas already expressed with considerable force. Certainly a good part of these came from the past being inherited from a radical tradition — rationalist thought.

After 1848, however, when the English bourgeoisie had achieved its aims and had made itself, thanks to its industry and trade, masters of the world, it recuperated for its own account almost the entire traditional doctrine of the Church; and when the working class itself had, thanks to the trade union movement and the winning of the right to vote, taken its place in capitalism and received its share of the profits of monopoly capital — in other words when it in fact accepted capitalism — it adapted its ideas to this new situation. It set about adopting the ideas of the bourgeoisie: its modes of thought were bourgeois, but ones which followed those of the radical petty bourgeoisie. This happened, for example, with its acceptance of religious tradition, of the ruling belief, which most often took the form of adhesion to the petty-bourgeois, non-conformist church (Low Church) as opposed to the official Anglican Church (High Church).

It was quite different in Germany where, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism and the workers' movement were born simultaneously. The accelerated development of large-scale industry and the agreement between the bourgeoisie and the landed proprietors who then held power meant that the workers had to fight these two enemies at the same time; as a result there was a rapid growth of Social-Democracy. The German working class benefited from an important advantage in the formation of its new conception of the world, that of having available the scientific studies of Karl Marx. These uncovered the forces and tendencies of the social development which governed the birth and future decline of the capitalist mode of production and thus showed the working class what were its task and destiny. Marx, in the course of his historical studies, at the same time perfected a method, historical materialism, which not only uncovered the relation of dependence between the course of history and the economic development of society, but which also traced the way which leads to a naturalist conception of all mental phenomena which until then had been tied to religious and mystical theories. Thanks to this method, the materialist ideas of the Social Democratic workers were able to develop without hindrance and to grow stronger. They were expressed in a whole literature. But this did not occur without struggle or discussion. For modes of both religious and atheist thought had been inherited from the bourgeois world. And it often happens that when the bourgeoisie renounces its former fighting positions, these are taken up by the petty bourgeoisie and the workers who do not want to accept this "betrayal of principles" and who continue the old tradition. It was thus with atheism which had come to be considered a basic and radical principle. But atheism only considered the ideological forms without paying attention to the deeper fundamental differences between the bourgeois revolution and the proletarian revolution. It had little influence on Marxist ideas, as was reflected in practice in the programme of the Social Democratic Party where it could be read that religion is a private matter (*Religion ist Privatsache*). This point of view, however, had the result not only of correctly limiting the Party's aims to the economic transformation of the mode of production, but of serving as an open door through which all sorts of opportunist ideas could pour through into propaganda. In the end it became and remained a matter of controversy in the political discussions within the Party.

Later, when in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reformism, connected with prosperity, came to dominate thinking more and more consciously, bourgeois points of view progressively took over in all spheres. The bourgeoisie, its power strengthened, forced the working class to espouse its cause in the struggle for world domination; this is why certainty as to the coming of Socialism waned. This new doubt led to a revival of religious feelings amongst the workers. In Germany the acceptance of the leadership of the bourgeoisie resulted in a receding of independent and materialist ideas. It was the same everywhere.

But as soon as the working class comes to wage its struggle for power, to conquer the factories, to master production, all this will change. This struggle more than ever demands an ever clearer consciousness of the economic aim. Unity of action is more than ever needed. The workforce must form coherent units of action: ideological divergences such as exist in the trade union movement cannot be admitted. The workforce discusses its action as the unit which will carry out the task; if religious divergences were to be admitted the unity of this whole would be threatened and all practical action would become impossible. This is why such divergences must be entirely kept out of the discussions amongst members of a factory. For it is here that the most ardent, the deepest and the most self-aware social struggle develops, which no longer disguises itself under ideological tinsel. A clear consciousness takes hold of the combatants. All deviation from the direction which leads to the objective must be ceaselessly corrected, since it means a weakening and defeat.

It is probable, however, that, even during such a struggle, religion will play a role since it still dominates the thought of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants. The bourgeoisie will try to organise these classes and to range them against the workers. It will first of all appeal to the instinct of property, thus disguising its exploiting interest. But it will also try to give this fight an ideological form and will present it as a clash between belief and unbelief. And this will make the class struggle harsher; it will become more cruel as a blind fanaticism comes to dominate and to replace all discussion on the subject in the interests of these classes. But, here again, the strength of the working class lies in their putting the economic aim to the forefront, viz., the organisation of work by the working and producing classes themselves, thus excluding all domination by the interests of the exploiters. It is thus that all trace of the oppression of former modes of thought will disappear since, with the collective management of production, the basis and condition for a genuine expansion of the thought and cultural life of all will appear. Finally, if the economic necessities force these classes to collaborate with the working class, if their participation in the work of uniting promises them emancipation from all capitalist exploitation, so that the old class relations disappear, it must be expected that a new cultural life which will replace former religious convictions will flourish for them also.

Thus, in all probability, the sources which, in the history of mankind have up until now fed the forces of religion will dry up. No natural power will any longer be able to frighten Man; no natural catastrophe, no storm, no floods, no earthquake or epidemic will be able to put his existence in danger. By ever more accurate predictions, by an ever greater development of the sciences and of an ever more wonderful technology, the dangers will be limited to the maximum: no human life will be wasted. Science and its applications will make mankind the master of natural forces which it will use for its own needs. No powerful or not understood social force will be able to attack or frighten mankind: they will master their fate by organising their work and at the same time master all the mental forces of the will and passion. The anguish of having to go before a supreme judge who will decide the fate of each person for eternity — an anguish which has been responsible for centuries for so many terrors for defenceless mankind — will disappear as soon as co-operation between men and sacrifice for the community are no longer fettered by moral laws. Thus all the functions which religion fulfilled in men's thought and feelings will be filled by other ways of thinking and feeling.

But will not an eternal function of religion remain: to give consolation and certainty in the moments of dying and death? The certainty of being able to ensure one's life by one's work, the disappearance of many of the causes of premature death, poverty, illness and accident have no in-

fluence on the biological fact that every living being has a temporary existence. The significance of this fact, however, and its influence on mankind's ideas is strongly dependent on social relations. Belief in the survival of the mind, of the soul, the psychological basis of all religion (which can already be seen forming among primitive peoples on the basis of dreams), is, in its present form, a product of the bourgeois mode of production. The very strong sentiment of individual personality which has its roots in individual work carried on under one's own responsibility, in the separation from the other's activity, reduces this belief to the need to believe, to be convinced, that the individual, in his real, i.e. mental, essence is eternal. Each individual was isolated — or loosely held by the very lax links which unite the members of any grouping — in the struggle for life. Around each individual there existed, however, a small group, such as the family, a sort of small isolated and independent fortified town at war with other towns. Thus the biological links between couples and between parents and children became the only solid links between men, both on the economic and material level and on the mental. The breaking of these links, whether expectedly or unexpectedly, was in everybody's eyes the greatest of all catastrophes: the worries which the dying had for those they left behind, the loneliness of the latter, which was often aggravated by economic ruin, were only feebly compensated by the presence of parents and friends, who were themselves preoccupied mainly by their own struggle to live. This is why, thanks to a belief in a new meeting in eternity for those who were separating, and to a faith in the providence to which Man had to submit in order to be able to bear the caprices of fate, religion served for centuries as a consolation.

With the establishment of the new mode of production many of the reasons for believing will disappear and particularly those we have just examined. The feeling of individuality will be profoundly changed by the feeling of solidarity which will develop, to which one will dedicate oneself and from which one will derive one's greatest strength. Then, there will no longer be any need for the illusion of believing in the eternal life of the individual or the soul: it is in fact the community to which one belongs which is eternal. Everything which has been produced by Man, everything to which he has dedicated the best of his forces survives within this community. His mental being is eternal insofar as it forms part of the mentality of all mankind and has no need to survive as some spectre separated from it. Links of solidarity, much stronger than those which in the past united the members of the same family will unite all men. There will no longer be any need to worry about the economic consequences of death, nor to concern oneself for the survivors — worries which, formerly, often made dying more distressing. And the pain of having to leave for ever will weaken since the strengthened links of human fraternity will no longer retreat before feelings of isolation and loneliness. Death will lose its frightening character for a generation which will have learned, in the course of a fierce struggle for its freedom, to sacrifice its own life. And the feeling of love for the community which will thenceforth dominate will grow stronger in the community of work in which the free producers will be grouped together. For the fortunate generation in which the new mankind will be born, each individual life will only be the temporary form taken by a social life which will more and more develop.

# **Public Ownership and Common Ownership (1947)**

The acknowledged aim of socialism is to take the means of production out of the hands of the capitalist class and place them into the hands of the workers. This aim is sometimes spoken of as public ownership, sometimes as common ownership of the production apparatus. There is, however, a marked and fundamental difference.

Public ownership is the ownership, i.e. the right of disposal, by a public body representing society, by government, state power or some other political body. The persons forming this body, the politicians, officials, leaders, secretaries, managers, are the direct masters of the production apparatus; they direct and regulate the process of production; they command the workers. Common ownership is the right of disposal by the workers themselves; the working class itself – taken in the widest sense of all that partake in really productive work, including employees, farmers, scientists – is direct master of the production apparatus, managing, directing, and regulating the process of production which is, indeed, their common work.

Under public ownership the workers are not masters of their work; they may be better treated and their wages may be higher than under private ownership; but they are still exploited. Exploitation does not mean simply that the workers do not receive the full produce of their labor; a considerable part must always be spent on the production apparatus and for unproductive though necessary departments of society. Exploitation consists in that others, forming another class, dispose of the produce and its distribution; that they decide what part shall be assigned to the workers as wages, what part they retain for themselves and for other purposes. Under public ownership this belongs to the regulation of the process of production, which is the function of the bureaucracy. Thus in Russia bureaucracy as the ruling class is master of production and produce, and the Russian workers are an exploited class.

In Western countries we know only of public ownership (in some branches) of the capitalist State. Here we may quote the well-known English “socialist” writer G. D. H. Cole, for whom socialism is identical with public ownership. He wrote

“The whole people would be no more able than the whole body of shareholders in a great modern enterprise to manage an industry ... It would be necessary, under socialism as much under large scale capitalism, to entrust the actual management of industrial enterprise to salaried experts, chosen for their specialized knowledge and ability in particular branches of work” (p. 674).

“There is no reason to suppose that socialisation of any industry would mean a great change in its managerial personnel” (p. 676 in *An Outline of Modern Knowledge* ed. By Dr W. Rose, 1931).

In other words: the structure of productive work remains as it is under capitalism; workers subservient to commanding directors. It clearly does not occur to the “socialist” author that “the whole people” chiefly consists of workers, who were quite able, being producing personnels, to manage the industry, that consists of their own work.

As a correction to State-managed production, sometimes workers’ control is demanded. Now, to ask control, supervision, from a superior indicates the submissive mood of helpless objects of exploitation. And then you can control another man’s business; what is your own business you do not want controlled, you do it. Productive work, social production, is the genuine business of the working class. It is the content of their life, their own activity. They themselves can take care if there is no police or State power to keep them off. They have the tools, the machines in their

hands, they use and manage them. They do not need masters to command them, nor finances to control the masters.

Public ownership is the program of “friends” of the workers who for the hard exploitation of private capitalism wish to substitute a milder modernized exploitation. Common ownership is the program of the working class itself, fighting for self liberation.

We do not speak here, of course, of a socialist or communist society in a later stage of development, when production will be organized so far as to be no problem any more, when out of the abundance of produce everybody takes according to his wishes, and the entire concept of “ownership” has disappeared. We speak of the time that the working class has conquered political and social power, and stands before the task of organizing production and distribution under most difficult conditions. The class fight of the workers in the present days and the near future will be strongly determined by their ideas on the immediate aims, whether public or common ownership, to be realized at that time.

If the working class rejects public ownership with its servitude and exploitation, and demands common ownership with its freedom and self-rule, it cannot do so without fulfilling conditions and shouldering duties. Common ownership of the workers implies, first, that the entirety of producers is master of the means of production and works them in a well planned system of social production. It implies secondly that in all shops, factories, enterprises the personnel regulate their own collective work as part of the whole. So they have to create the organs by means of which they direct their own work, as personnel, as well as social production at large. The institute of State and government cannot serve for this purpose because it is essentially an organ of domination, and concentrates the general affairs in the hands of a group of rulers. But under Socialism the general affairs consist in social production; so they are the concern of all, of each personnel, of every worker, to be discussed and decided at every moment by themselves. Their organs must consist of delegates sent out as the bearers of their opinion, and will be continually returning and reporting on the results arrived at in the assemblies of delegates. By means of such delegates that at any moment can be changed and called back the connection of the working masses into smaller and larger groups can be established and organization of production secured.

Such bodies of delegates, for which the name of workers’ councils has come into use, form what may be called the political organization appropriate to a working class liberating itself from exploitation. They cannot be devised beforehand, they must be shaped by the practical activity of the workers themselves when they are needed. Such delegates are no parliamentarians, no rulers, no leaders, but mediators, expert messengers, forming the connection between the separate personnel of the enterprises, combining their separate opinions into one common resolution. Common ownership demands common management of the work as well as common productive activity; it can only be realized if all the workers take part in this self-management of what is the basis and content of social life; and if they go to create the organs that unite their separate wills into one common action.

Since such workers’ councils doubtlessly are to play a considerable role in the future organization of the workers’ fights and aims, they deserve keen attention and study from all who stand for uncompromising fight and freedom for the working class.

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Since such workers’ councils doubtlessly are to play a considerable role in the future organization of the workers’ fights and aims, they deserve keen attention and study from all who stand for uncompromising fight and freedom for the working class.

**Theses On The Fight Of The Working  
Class Against Capitalism (1947)**

**I. Capitalism in one century of growth has enormously increased its power, not only through expansion over the entire earth, but also through development into new forms.** With it the working class has increased in power, in numbers, in massal concentration, in organisation. Its fight against capitalist exploitation, for mastery over the means of production, also is continually developing and has to develop into new forms.

The development of capitalism led to the concentration of power over the chief branches of production in the hands of big monopolistic concerns. They are intimately connected with State Power, and dominate it, they control the main part of the press, they direct public opinion. Middle-class democracy has proved the best camouflage of the political dominance of big capital. At the same time there is a growing tendency in most countries to use the organised power of the State in concentration the management of the key industries in its hands, as beginning of the planned economy. In Germany a State-directed economy united political leadership and capitalist management into one combined exploiting class. In Russia State-capitalism the bureaucracy is collectively master over the means of production, and by dictatorial government keeps the exploited masses in submission.

**II. Socialism, put up as the goal of the workers' fight, is the organisation of production by Government. It means State-socialism, the command of the State-officials over production and the command of managers, scientists, shop-officials in the shop.** In socialist economy this body, forming a well-organised bureaucracy, is the direct master over the process of production. It has the disposal over the total product, determining what part shall be assigned as wages to the workers, and takes the rest for general needs and for itself. The workers under democracy may choose their masters, but they are not themselves master of their work; they receive only part of the produce, assigned to them by others; they are still exploited and have to obey the new master class. The democratic forms, supposed or intended to accompany it, do not alter the fundamental structure of this economic system.

Socialism was proclaimed the goal of the working class when in its first rise it felt powerless, unable by itself to conquer command over the shops, and looking to the State for protection against the capitalist class by means of social reforms. The large political parties embodying these aims, the Social Democratic and the Labour Parties, turned into instruments for regimenting the entire working class into the service of capitalism, in its wars for world power, as well as in peace time home politics. The Labour Government of the British L.P. cannot even be said to be socialistic; but modernizing capitalism. By abolishing its ignominies and backwardness, by introducing State management under preserving State-guaranteed profits for the capitalists, it strengthens capitalist domination and perpetuates the exploitation of the workers.

**III. The goal of the working class is liberation from exploitation. This goal is not reached and cannot be reached by a new directing and governing class substituting the bourgeoisie. It can only be realised by the workers themselves being master over production.**

Mastery of the workers over production means, first, organisation of the work in every shop and enterprise by its personnel. Instead of through command of a manager and his underlings all the regulation are made through decision of the entire body of the workers. This body, comprising all kinds of workers, specialists and scientists, all taking part in the production, in assembly decides everything related to the common work. The role that those who have to do the work

also have to regulate their work and take the responsibility, within the scope of the whole, can be applied to all branches of production. It means, secondly, that the workers create their organs for combining the separate enterprises into an organised entirety of planned production. These organs are the workers' councils

The workers councils are bodies of delegates, sent out by the personnels of the separate shops or sections of big enterprises, carrying the intentions and opinions of the personnel, in order to discuss and take decisions on the common affairs, and to bring back the results to their mandatories. They state and proclaim the necessary regulations, and by uniting the different opinions into one common result, form the connection of the separate units into a well-organised whole. They are no permanent board of leaders, but can be recalled and changed at every moment. Their first germs appeared in the beginning of the Russian and German revolutions (Soviets, Arbitrate). They are to play an increasing role in future working class developments.

**IV. Political parties to the present times have two functions. They aspire, first, at political power, at dominance in the State, to take government into their hands and use its power to put their program into practice. For this purpose they have, secondly, to win the masses of the working people to their programs: by means of their teachings clarifying the insight, or, by their propaganda, simply trying to make of them a herd of followers.**

Working class parties put up as their goal the conquest of political power, thereby to govern in the interest of the workers, and especially to abolish capitalism. They assert themselves as the advance guard of the working class, its most clear-sighted part, capable of leading the uninstructed majority of the class, acting in its name as its representative. They pretend to be able to liberate the workers from exploitation. An exploited class, however, cannot be liberated by simply voting and bringing into power a group of new governors. A political party cannot bring freedom, but, when it wins, only new forms of domination. Freedom can be won by the working masses only through their own organised action, by taking their lot into their own hands, in devoted exertion of all their faculties, by directing and organising their fight and their work themselves by means of their councils.

**For the parties—then remains the second function, to spread insight and knowledge, to study, discuss and formulate social ideas, and by their propaganda to enlighten the minds of the masses. The workers' councils are the organs for practical action and fight of the working class; to the parties falls the task of the bolding up of its spiritual power. Their work forms an indispensable part in the self-liberation of the working class.**

**V. The strongest form of fight against the capitalist class is the strike. Strikes are necessary, ever again, against the capitalists' tendency to increase their profits by lowering wages and increase the hours or the intensity of work.**

The trade unions have been formed as instruments of organised resistance, based on strong solidarity and mutual help. With the growth of big business capitalist power has increased enormously, so that only in special cases the workers are able to withstand the lowering of their working conditions. The Trade Unions grow into instruments of mediation between capitalists and workers; they make treaties with the employers which they try to enforce upon the often unwilling workers. The leaders aspire to become a recognised part of the power apparatus of capital and State dominating the working class; the Unions grow into instruments of monopolist capital, by means of which it dictates its terms to the workers.

**The right of the working class, under these circumstances, ever more takes the form of wild strikes. They are spontaneous, massal outbursts of the long suppressed spirit of resistance. They are direct actions in which the workers take their fight entirely into their own hands, leaving the Unions and their leaders outside.**

The organisation of the fight is accomplished by the strike-committees, delegates of the strikers, chosen and sent out by the personnel's. By means of discussions in these committees the workers establish their unity of action. Extension of the strike to ever larger masses, the only tactics appropriate to wrench concessions from capital, is fundamentally opposed to the Trade Union tactics to restrict the fight and to put an end to it as soon as possible. Such wild strikes in the present times are the only real class fights of the workers against capital. Here they assert their freedom, themselves choosing and directing their actions, not directed by other powers for other interests.

That determines the importance of such class contests for the future. When the wild strikes takes on ever larger extension they find the entire physical power of the State against them. So they assume a revolutionary character. When capitalism turns into an organised world government—though as yet only in the form of two contending powers, threatening mankind with entire devastation—the fight for freedom of the working class takes the form of a fight against State Power. Its strikes assume the character of big political strikes, sometimes universal strikes. Then the strike-committees need acquire general social and political functions, and assume the character of workers' councils. Revolutionary fight for dominance over society is at the same time a fight for mastery over and in the shops. Then the workers' councils, as the organs of fight, grow into organs of production at the same time.

## **Strikes (1948)**

In the workers' movement two chief forms of fight are distinguished, often denoted as the political and the economic field of fight. The former centred about elections for parliamentary or analogous bodies, the latter consisted in strikes for higher wages and better working conditions. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a common opinion among socialists that the former had a fundamental importance, was revolutionary, because it set up the aim of conquering political power, and thereby revolutionising the structure of society, abolishing capitalism and introducing a socialist system. Whereas the latter was only a means of reform, to maintain or improve the standard of life within capitalism, hence accepting this system as the basis of society.

That this distinction could not be entirely right was soon shown by the practice of parliamentarism. Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto*, had already indicated some measures of reform preparing for the future revolution. In later times the socialist parliamentarians were working and struggling continually for reforms; the socialist parties to which they belonged, put up an elaborate program of "immediate demands"; and they could win increasing numbers of voters. First, and most manifestly, in Germany; then in other European countries. The final aim of a socialist revolution gradually receded to the background. What, under the name of fighting for socialism, this political fight really achieved, was to secure for the working class a certain acknowledged place in capitalist society, with certain standards of working and living conditions, of course never really secure, always unstable but existing somehow, always disputed and always in need of defense.

Both these forms of fight, trade-unionism with its strikes as well as parliamentary socialism were now instruments of reform only — for a large part handled by the same persons, union leaders sitting in parliament. And reformist doctrine asserted that by their activity, by accumulated reform in parliament and "industrial democracy" in the shops, they would gradually transform capitalism into socialism.

But capitalism had its own ways. What Marx had expounded in his economic studies, the concentration of capital, came true in a far mightier degree than perhaps its author had surmised. The growth and development of capitalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought about numbers of new social phenomena and economic conditions. Every socialist who stands for uncompromising class fight, has to study these changes attentively, because it is on them that depends how the workers have to act to win victory and freedom; many old conceptions of revolution can now take more distinct shape. This development increased the power of capital enormously, gave to small groups of monopolists dominance over the entire bourgeoisie, and tied State power ever faster to big business. It strengthened in this class the instincts of suppression, manifest in the increase of reactionary and fascist trends. It made the trade unions ever more powerless over against capital, less inclined to fight; their leaders ever more became mediators and even agents of capital, whose job it is to impose the unsatisfactory capital-dictated working conditions upon the unwilling workers. The strikes ever more take the form of wild strikes, breaking out against the will of the union leaders, who then, by seizing the leadership, as soon as possible quell the fight. Whereas in the field of politics all is collaboration and harmony of the classes — in the case of the C. P. accompanied by a semblance of revolutionary talk, such wild strikes become ever more the only real bitter class-fight of the workers against capital.

After the war these tendencies are intensified. Reconstruction, reparation of the devastation or shortness of productive forces, means capitalist reconstruction. Capitalist reconstruction implies more rapid accumulation of capital, more strenuous increase of profits, depression of the standard of life of the workers. State power acquires now an important function in organizing business

life. In the devastated Europe it takes the supreme lead; its officials become the directors of a planned economy, regulating production and consumption. Its special function is to keep the workers down, and stifle all discontent by physical or spiritual means. In America, where it is subjected to big business, this is its chief function. The workers have now over against them the united front of State power and capitalist class, which usually is joined by union leaders and party leaders, who aspire to sit in conference with the managers and bosses and having a vote in fixing wages and working conditions. And, by this capitalist mechanism of increasing prices, the standard of life of the workers goes rapidly downward.

In Europe, in England, Belgium, France, Holland — and in America too, we see wild strikes flaring up, as yet in small groups, without clear consciousness of their social role and without further aims, but showing a splendid spirit of solidarity. They defy their “Labor” government in England, and are hostile to the Communist Party in government, in France and Belgium. The workers begin to feel that State power is now their most important enemy; their strikes are directed against this power as well as against the capitalist masters. Strikes become a political factor; and when strikes break out of such extent that they lay flat entire branches and shake social production to its core, they become first-rate political factors. The strikers themselves may not be aware of it — neither are most socialists — they may have no intention to be revolutionary, but they are. And gradually consciousness will come up of what they are doing intuitively, out of necessity; and it will make the actions more direct and more efficient.

So the roles are gradually reversed. Parliamentary action deteriorates into a mere quarrel of politicians, and serves to fool the people, or at best to patch up dirty old capitalism. At the same time mass strikes of the workers tend to become most serious attacks against State power, that fortress of capitalism, and most efficient factors in increasing the consciousness and social power of the working class. Surely it is still a long way to the end; so long as we see workers going on strike and returning to work simply at the command of an ambitious chief, they are not yet ripe for great actions of self-liberation. But looking backward on the developments and changes in the past half-century we cannot fail to recognize the importance of these genuine proletarian class-fights for our ideas of social revolution. How thereby the propaganda-tasks for socialists are widened, may be considered another time.

## **Letter on Workers Councils (1952)**

I would like to make some critical and complementary remarks about Comrade Kondor's observations on "Bourgeois or Socialist Organisation" in the issue of "Funken" for December 1951. When firstly he criticises the present-day role of the trade unions ( and parties ), he is completely right. With the changes in the economic structure the function of the different social structures must also change. The trade unions were and are indispensable as organs of struggle for the working-class under private capitalism. Under monopoly and state-capitalism, towards which capitalism increasingly develops, they turn into a part of the ruling bureaucratic apparatus, which has to integrate the working class into the whole. As organisations maintained and developed by the workers themselves they are better than any apparatus of compulsion for installing the working class as a section within the social structure as smoothly as possible. In today's transitional period this new character comes to the fore ever more strongly. This realisation shows that it would be wasted effort to repair the old relationship. But at the same time it can be used to give the workers greater freedom in choosing the forms of struggle against capitalism.

The development towards state-capitalism — often propagated under the name Socialism in Western Europe — does not mean the liberation of the working class but greater servitude. What the working class strives for in its struggle, liberty and security, to be master of its own life, is only possible through control of the means of production. State socialism is not control of the means of production by the workers, but control by the organs of the state. If it is democratic at the same time, this means that workers themselves may select their masters. By contrast direct control of production by workers means that the employees direct the enterprises and construct the higher and central organisations from below. This is what is called the system of workers councils. The author is thus perfectly correct when he emphasises this as the new and future principle of organisation of the working class. Organised autonomy of the productive masses stands in sharp contrast to the organisation from above in state socialism. But one must keep the following in mind. "Workers' councils" do not designate a form of organization whose lines are fixed once and for all, and which only requires a subsequent elaboration of the details. It means a principle — the principle of the workers' self-management of enterprises and of production.

This principle can in no way be implemented by a theoretical discussion about the best practical forms it should take. It concerns a practical struggle against the apparatus of capitalist domination. In our day, the slogan of "workers' councils," does not mean assembling fraternally to work in co-operation; it means class struggle — in which fraternity plays its part — it means revolutionary action by the masses against state power. Revolutions cannot, of course, be summoned up at will; they arise spontaneously in moments of crisis, when the situation becomes intolerable. They occur only if this sense of the intolerable lives in the masses, and if at the same time there exists a certain generally accepted consciousness of what ought to be done. It is at this level that propaganda and public discussion play their part. And these actions cannot secure a lasting success unless large sections of the working class have a clear understanding of the nature and goal of their struggle. Hence the necessity for making workers councils a theme for discussion.

So, the idea of workers councils does not involve a program of practical objectives to be realized — either tomorrow or in a few years -, it serves solely as a guide for the long and heavy fight for freedom, which still lies ahead for the working class. Marx once put it in these words: the hour of capitalism has sounded; however he left no doubt about the fact that this hour would mean an entire historical epoch.

# **The Politics Of Gorter (1952)**

In an article in *Revolution Proletarienne* No 50 ( May 1951, page 171 ) in which S. Tas speaks of Herman Gorter, he is described as having “a rather bad politics.” It seems necessary to compensate for this article with some remarks on the positive character of Gorter’s politics.

Gorter became a member of the socialist party where he discovered and studied Marxism. From this he drew the conviction that the proletariat can only gain the management of society through class struggle against the bourgeoisie, and that this is how it will destroy capitalism. He was then of the opinion, like the whole of the radical wing of the party, that good parliamentary politics could be an effective means to organize the working masses, to awaken their class consciousness and, by this means, increase their power in respect of the dominant bourgeoisie. For him the socialists in Parliament ought to have vigorously opposed the bourgeois politicians, the representatives of the dominant class. It would be a misunderstanding to say that this politics sought to transform the world through a single blow. The goal of this politics was to increase the strength of the proletariat so that through a series of engagements it became capable of obtaining power. It was in the politics of the German socialist party that one saw the most clear incarnation of this radical position.

This attitude was opposed by reformism, which sought to achieve reforms that would make capitalism bearable, through compromises with the other parties. In the western countries, because of the much longer and slower development of capitalism, class divisions were marked in a much less acute way than they were in Germany, due to the feverish rise of its industrial capitalism. Thus reformism generally dominated the practical activity of the socialist parties. The struggle of the Dutch Marxists, in which Gorter distinguished himself, was directed against this practise because they were of the opinion that reforms could not be obtained through the cunning of politicians, but only through the power of the working class. Only once were they successful. However they were finally expelled. In other Western countries, this was not even necessary; the reformism of the members of parliament, “good politics”, reigned in absolute mastery. If we now consider the results of this politics, we see that after a half-century of reformism, capitalism is more powerful than ever and society is threatened with annihilation, while the workers must continue to fight for their crumbs of bread.

In Germany, reformism continued to gain influence in practise, although theoretically this was not recognised in the face of the intensity of the class struggle. It was here that the conviction was born, within the Marxists and the most progressive circles of the proletariat, that one could not achieve power by purely parliamentary means. For that one needed the action of the masses, of the workers themselves. The Party passed resolutions on the general strike and we started demonstrations for the right to vote. The extent and strength of these frightened the party chiefs even more than it did the dominant class; they put an end to it for fear of the consequences and all forces were channelled into the elections and parliamentary politics. Only, a minority, “the extreme left,” continued propaganda in favour of mass action. The German bourgeoisie, its power unshaken, could prepare to conquer world power without meeting any obstacles. Naturally, Gorter was at the side of the extreme left, whose politics were as his own

After this the danger of war became ever more menacing. The socialists and pacifists of France and Germany organised a Peace congress at Basle in 1912. Beautiful and solemn speeches were made against the war. Gorter himself went there to provoke a discussion about the practical means of fighting against war. Mandated by a certain number of elements of the left, he had proposed a resolution according to which, in all countries, workers had to discuss the danger of war and consider the possibility of mass action against it. But he was not allowed to speak. The

leadership of the congress refused any discussion about means or methods. It acted, supposedly, so as not to destroy the impression of our imposing unity. Actually it feared the consequences of such mass struggles. The governments, not misled by appearances, now knew that they had no serious resistance awaiting them in the socialist parties. Gorters "bad politics" which wanted to prevent war by all means, had been repulsed, the "good politics" of the party politicians remained dominant, it imposed itself on the proletariat and soon led Europe into the first world war.

In this war the socialist politicians were revealed as being what they always had been fundamentally : nationalist politicians, or in other words bourgeois politicians. In every country they supported their own government, helped it to contain the workers and to stifle any resistance to the war. All this was the good politics of skilful politicians. The "bad politics" of Gorter consisted of attempting in his pamphlets on imperialism and on the world revolution, to inform the workers of the reasons for the war and the need for a revolution after the war.

In 1918 when the war ended, revolution erupted in Germany. Or, to be more exact, on November 6<sup>th</sup> it erupted in Kiel, and three days later the counter-revolution erupted in Berlin; Ebert, the leader of the socialist party, came into government to repress the action of the revolutionary workers, in association with the generals. Naturally Gorter was at the side of Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and the Spartacists... The workers action was cut down by the military, Liebknecht and Rosa were assassinated. Ebert, the model of a socialist politician was victorious; through good politics he brought the bourgeoisie back to power in Germany and was its first president.

In 1917, the Russian Revolution destroyed tsarism and brought the Bolsheviks into power. In every country the workers were stirred up and communist groups were formed. Naturally Gorter was immediately at their side with all his heart. He saw this as the beginning of the world revolution, and in Lenin, its supreme leader; in the strike movements in Russia he saw the beginnings of a new form of independent action by workers, and in the soviets the beginning of a new form of organisation of the revolutionary proletariat. But divergences soon appeared. When the defeat of the Spartacists in Germany prevented a world revolution, Lenin sought to return to the tactics of parliamentarism to win over the left wing of the socialist parties. The majority of German communists vigorously opposed this. They were expelled, and it was against them that Lenin wrote his pamphlet on the "infantile disorder". Lenin's action meant the end of the Russian revolution as a positive factor in the world proletarian revolution. Gorter, as spokesman of the opposition, replied with his "Open letter to Lenin" [1]. Two fundamentally different conceptions were opposed in these two works. Lenin was a great politician, much greater than his socialist contemporaries, because he had greater tasks and objectives. His historical task, as leader of the Bolshevik party, was to raise Russia up from its primitive and agrarian form of production into industrialization, by means of a social and political dictatorship which led to State socialism. And because he only knew capitalism from the outside and not from the inside, he believed it was possible to free the workers of the world by making some the disciplined troops of the "Communist party". From then on they only had to follow the Russian example. Gorter replied that in Russia the revolution had only been able to conquer thanks to the aid of the peasant masses, and that, precisely this aid was missing in the West, where the peasants themselves were property owners. In Russia it was only necessary to get rid of a crumbling Asiatic despotism. In the West the workers were opposed by the formidable power of capitalism. They would only free themselves from it if they themselves raised the levels of revolutionary strength, of class unity, of independence and of intelligence. Thereafter Lenin's politics have logically ended in Stalinism in Russia, they

have divided the proletariat in the West and been rendered impotent by the fanatic and boastful quasi-revolutionism of the communist party. In the years after 1920, Gorter in contact with the small groups of the extreme left, worked to clarify the idea of the organisation of workers councils and thus collaborated in the future renewal of the class struggle of the proletariat. During this time the socialist politicians of the second international, as members of parliament and ministers, were occupied in bailing out a bankrupt capitalism for the bourgeoisie, but nonetheless without halting the crisis or being able to blur class divisions. In this way they prepared the ground for the accession of Hitler and the second world war.

If we take in at a glance the whole of the political history of the last century, we constantly see the opposition of two political methods, which are themselves an expression of the class struggle. Why is one called good and the other bad politics? Politics is the art of dominating men. Skilful politicians endeavour to reform, in other words patch up the old system of antiquated and shaky domination, or, when its fall is inevitable, erect a new system of domination. This is what is called good politics. Others endeavour to help the exploited masses acquire the strength to deliver themselves from exploitation and domination. It is this which in parliamentary terms is called bad politics.

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