

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



The Intellectuals

Anton Pannekoek

12. October 1935

The intellectual middle class, the engineers, scientists, technical employees, etc. are a necessary part of industrial production, quite as indispensable as the workers themselves. Technical progress, in replacing workers by machines, tends to increase their number. Therefore their class interests and their class character must be of increasing importance in the social struggles.

Their growing numbers reflect the growing importance of science and theory in the production of life necessities. In a communist society all will partake of scientific knowledge. In capitalist society it is the privilege and the speciality [sic] of a separate class, the intellectual middle class.

The members of this class, contrary to the old independent middle class of small business men, live by selling their labor power to the capitalists. Their salaries indicate a higher cost of living and a more expensive education than that of the common workers. In the socialist press they are called proletarians; (indeed, they are not owners of instruments of production) who need must join the workers. But it is only their lower ranks that merge gradually into skilled labor; the higher ranks, by origin and standard of living, by relationship, social standing and cul-

Anton Pannekoek
The Intellectuals
12. October 1935

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1935/10/intellectuals.htm>

theanarchistlibrary.org

ture, feel themselves middle class men, who can rise even to the position of a director, and thus be ranked with the big capitalists. Some of them sympathized with social democracy, but the bulk was filled with the capitalist spirit of striving for a better position for themselves only. In Italy and Germany they form the intellectual backbone of fascism.

What are the social ideals of this class?

They realize that capitalism is not eternal; they already perceive the signs of its decline: in economic crisis, in political revolts and revolutions, in social struggles, in world war. It is not the exploitation of labor that annoys them in capitalism; it is the disorder in capitalism, the anarchy in production that provokes their criticism. Where they rule in the factory, the efficiency of labor by means of strict order and conscious regulation is raised to the highest degree. But outside the factory, in society, where capitalists, stock gamblers and politicians rule, they see the worst disorder and inefficiency, a scandalous waste of human labor, and the inevitable consequence: poverty and ruin for the whole of society.

What they want, therefore, is organization of production, conscious [sic] regulation of labor over the whole of society. They feel themselves the spiritual leaders, the class of intellect and knowledge, destined to take over the lead from the incapable hands of the present rulers. In America the ideas of "technocracy" are the first tokens of such a mode of thinking. By a scientific management of the whole of production under a central direction which does away with competition and which divests the individual capitalists from their arbitrary power, the amount of product can be raised to such a height, that there will be abundance for everybody.

This social ideal of the intellectual middle class is a kind of socialism, but it is not necessarily directed against the capitalist class. It does not mean to expropriate them or to take their

Thus the social ideals and aims of the intellectuals and of the working class oppose one another. The intellectual class, when it should try to establish some social order, must call upon old instincts of obedience, upon the slave feelings of a bygone humanity. For its state-socialist aims it will find allies in socialdemocratic and party-communist platforms, in union leaders, in the capitalistic ideas of timid and backward workers, who think communist freedom too high for them, and in the beaten remnants of the capitalist force. Then the working class, finding itself opposed by this block, trying under the banner of "socialism against anarchy" to preserve the domination of a ruling class over the working class, will need all its wisdom and all its unity to find and to fight its way to freedom.

J.H.

their direct hold over the factories, and to organize them by means of their workers' councils into a democratic commonwealth. The intellectual class will try to install a centrally organized state socialism, directed by a leading bureaucracy.

Is not the intellectual class right in this? Is it not necessary that in these most difficult times of fighting and social reconstruction the ignorant masses should be directed by those who have the best brains? Is it not true, that for that period this selected minority class, trained in science, in general and special knowledge, are the natural leaders, till up to the time when new generations have been born?

No, this is not true. The organization of society is not a matter of technics, of scientific knowledge. The technics of production are excellent already. Capitalism has developed the science of the forces of nature and its application to a high level. This is the domain of the superior knowledge of the intellectuals. As technical experts in the process of production they may apply their brains for the benefit of the community.

But social organization has to deal with other things: with social forces and with the knowledge of social forces. It is an organization of men. And here the intellectuals have no special capacities. What they bring along is only the haughty prejudices of the capitalist class. In social insight, in knowledge of the real class relations of society the intellectuals stand below the working class. Because their mind clings to ideas belonging to a passing period. Because outside of their physical machines, in matters of human relationship, they are wont to deal not with the realities of social life itself, but with their spiritual images, conceptions, theories, abstractions.

Social organization does not depend on qualities of the intellect of a minority. It depends on qualities of character of the whole working people. It is the consolidation of the workers into one unity, through strong moral and economic forces, which can not be commended by leaders but must grow up in the masses in their fight for freedom.

profits away from them. On the contrary, in depriving them of their arbitrary power to damage one another, in abolishing the enormous waste, it will raise the productivity of labor to such a degree that the profits will increase considerably. And at the same time it renders possible an increase and securing of the workers' portion, so that all reason for revolt or revolution is taken away.

It is not a socialism of the workers, but a socialism for the workers; a socialism made by others, also for the benefit of the workers. The exploitation of the workers will not cease, it will be made more rational. With equal justice this social system may be called "organized capitalism".

There is, of course, no place for democracy in this system. Democracy means, at least formally, rule of the mass, of the whole people. But this socialism is founded upon the rule, the leadership of the few, of the intellectual minority. In present-day capitalism the technical middle class are leaders and directors of the labor process; they command the workers. They can imagine an ideal society only with this leading and commanding function preserved and extended. The intellectual class does not admit differences founded on noble birth or riches; but it admits differences in brains, in mental capacity and it considers itself as the class of men with the best brains, selected to lead the great masses of the ungifted common people, destined to be common workers.

Hence the political system belonging to this middle class socialism can never be democracy; it must be the dictatorship of a leading bureaucracy. The socialism once proclaimed as their social goal by the vanguard of the working class, was international. Because they saw production as a worldwide unit process and the class struggle of the workers as the common cause of the working class of the whole world. The intellectual class, however, owing to its middle class origin to the close connection with the capitalist class, has a strong national feeling. Moreover, the instrument necessary for the regulation of

production exists as power organ of the state. Its socialist goal therefore means a national state socialism. Its rule is the rule of a state bureaucracy, its system of production is state capitalism. International world unity is a far-away dream to them, not a matter of practical ideals.

Some characteristics of the social ideals of the intellectual class are found in social-democracy, especially in its state-socialist program, though its relation of leaders to masses has a more democratic stamp. In German National Socialism some others of these characteristics are perceptible. The tendencies of a class are never reproduced purely in a political party or a political movement. They are the underlying basis, the underground stream, taking its course and growing after fixed laws, determined by class interests, by needs of social development, by the deepest subconscious feelings which the social conditions produce in a class. They are not adequately represented in the surface phenomena, in the political events, the party platforms, the government's changes, the measures taken, the revolutions, the programmes—because in all these the traditions, the existing power factors, the relative force of contesting or co-operating classes, groups, parties, play a role. But then always anew, the realities hidden beneath the surface break through, upset the old and determine the new ideas and political events. So we have to look into these events for the class forces at work in them, just as for the forces of nature we look into the natural phenomena.

In fascism and national socialism the class spirit of the intellectual middle classes appears in its first germs. We see as yet only a common revolt against democracy, with only a faint and vague desire for an economically constructive policy. Nevertheless, the spiritual force of the national-socialist slogans of the intellectual class was sufficient to carry away numbers of workers who saw in it an organizing power against capitalist disorder.

It is possible that these parties will realise, or try to realise the class ideals of the intellectual class? This class is well-nigh powerless against the capitalist class. The social power of the intellectuals, measured by their number, their class consciousness, their social feeling, is still far below the power which the working class had long ago already attained. The capitalist class in Europe and America is so powerful that it does not need to tolerate any organization or regulation of production beyond its own interests. It is only when capitalism feels itself extremely weakened and endangered, by hard and long crisis, by worker's revolts, by world war, that conditions are different. Then the intellectuals, together with part of the workers, may be called upon to introduce constructive policy, tending towards state capitalistic experiments.

When, however, the working class, rising against the unbearable oppression of monopolistic capitalism, by means of revolutionary movements, should succeed in beating down capitalist power, what will the intellectual class do? Then the position will be reversed; the working class, by its mighty fighting power, carries the other discontented classes along with it, in a common assault on capitalism. Then great parts of the intellectual class will join them, won over by the great socialist and communist ideals, and will consider them as their common cause. In every revolutionary movement in history we see great numbers joining it in a common enthusiasm for aims more radical than their own ideals, thereby making victory more easy. But afterwards it appeared that each of the allies interpreted the slogans and aims in his own way, thus causing dissensions and new fights between the former comrades. The same will doubtlessly be the case in future revolutionary movements.

The slogans: against capitalism, for socialism or communism, will be common [sic] to the revolutionary classes. But for each class they mean a different form of social organization. The working class has to build up production from below, by