

DIE PROLETARISCHE REVOLUTION

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FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Three Texts By
Anton Pannekoek

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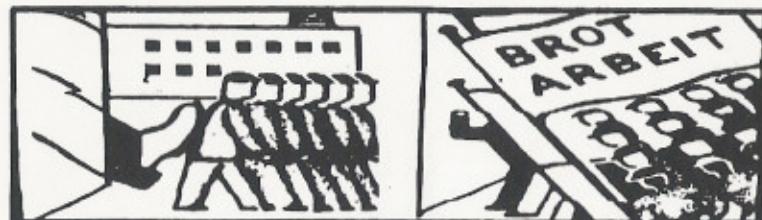
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catastrophe. With the general exhaustion and impoverishment, most severe on the European continent, with the spirit of fierce aggressiveness still mighty, violent class struggles will accompany the unavoidable new adjustments of the system of production.

Then, with private capitalism broken down, the issues will be planned economy, state capitalism, worker's exploitation on the one side; worker's freedom and mastery over production on the other.

The working class is going into this war burdened with the capitalistic tradition of Party leadership and the phantom tradition of a revolution of the Russian kind. the tremendous pressure of this war will drive the workers into spontaneous resistance against their governments and into the beginnings of new forms of real fight. When it happens that Russia enters the field against the Western powers, it will reopen its old box of slogans and make an appeal to the workers for a world revolution against capitalism in an attempt to get the rebellious-minded workers on its side. So Bolshevism would have its chance once more. But this would be no solution for the problems of the workers. when the general misery increases and conflicts between classes become fiercer, the working class must, out of its own necessity, seize the means of production and find ways to free itself from the influence of Bolshevism.

FROM THE BOTTOM UP



**Three Texts By Anton
Pannekoek**

□ Party And Class (1941)

□ Strikes (1948)

**□ Why Past Revolutionary
Movements Have Failed (1940)**

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All this was literature evidently not intended for workers, but for intellectuals, in order to win them over to Russian communism.

The new approach met with some success. The ex-soviet diplomat Alexander Barmine tells in his memoirs how he perceived with surprise in western Europe that just when he and other Bolsheviks began to have their doubts as to the outcome of the Russian revolution, the western middle class intellectuals, misled by the lying praises of the successes of the Five Year Plan, began to feel a sympathetic interest in Communism. The reason is clear: now that Russia was obviously not a worker's state any more, they felt that this state-capitalistic rule of a bureaucracy came nearer to their own ideals of rule by the intelligentsia than did the European and American rule of big finance. Now that a new ruling minority over and above the masses was established in Russia, the Communist Party, its foreign servant had to turn to those classes from which, when private capitalism collapsed, new rulers for exploiting the masses could arise.

Of course, to succeed in this way, they needed a worker's revolution to put down capitalist power. Then they must try to divert it from its own aims and make it an instrument for their party rule. So we see what kind of difficulties the future working class revolution may have to face. It will have to fight not only the bourgeoisie but the enemies of the bourgeoisie as well. It has not only to throw off the yoke of its present masters; it must also keep from those who would try to be its future masters.

VI.

The world has now entered into its new great imperialistic war. Cautious though the warring governments may be in handling the economic and social forces and in trying to prevent hell from breaking loose entirely, they will not be able to hold back a social



to a new class domination. Indeed in Italy and Germany this activity of the Communist Party prepared the way for fascism.

The Communist Parties that belong to the Third International are entirely - materially and mentally - dependent on Russia, are the obedient servants of the rulers of Russia. Hence, when Russia, after 1933, felt that it must line up with France against Germany, all former intransigence was forgotten. The Comintern became the champion of "democracy" and united not only with socialists but even with some capitalist parties into the so-called Popular Front. Gradually its power to attract, through pretending that it represented the old revolutionary traditions, began to disappear; its proletarian following diminished.

But at the same time, its influence on the intellectual middle classes in Europe and America began to grow. A large number of books and reviews in all fields of social thought were issued by more or less camouflaged C.P. publishing houses in England, France and America. Some of them were valuable historical studies or popular compilations; but mostly they were worthless expositions of so-called Leninism.

INTRODUCTION

By all traditional measurements of political "success", Anton Pannekoek - whose life spanned several phases of the 20th century workers movement - was a studied failure. After the wave of revolutionary upsurges in Europe receded in the mid-1920's, Pannekoek and the Council Communists were almost completely marginalized and reduced to the status of tiny propaganda groups existing on the far-flung fringes of the labor movement.

There they attempted to draw out the practical and theoretical lessons of the failures of the old worker's movement and note the outlines of the beginning of a new worker's movement which they then saw arising out of the ashes of the old. These beginnings were expressed in such spontaneous actions as the explosive growth of wildcat strikes in which the direction of the strike was in the complete hands of the workers themselves, not the trade unions or political parties and as a result, were often as equally fought against the attempts of these institutions to control and limit independent action by the workers as much they were fought over economic conditions.

Besides noting these new and often hesitant developments, Pannekoek and the council communists developed a thorough critique on a wide range of other issues facing the labor movement.

The council communists were among the first to explain the failure of the Russian revolution and the growth of Russian state capitalism, which they saw rooted in the historical tasks and limits of capitalist development in that country. In contrast to the anarchists, Pannekoek avoided personal attacks on Lenin, pointing out that regardless of their subjective intentions, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were only playing a

role of completing the tasks of the bourgeois revolution and modernizing an undeveloped pre-capitalist social and economic structure through systematic and concerted centralized state intervention.

When they were initially forced out of the Third International the 'left' communist groupings that preceded council communism still held traditional views on the nature of organization. But eventually the council communists questioned and rejected the role of so-called vanguard revolutionary parties and organizations as part of a broader critique of the widespread trends of bureaucratization in the workers movement and their insistence that there are no short-cuts to the task of workers controlling and mastering conditions through their own activity. As Paul Mattick summed up one aspect of this multi-faceted critique, "The 'consciousness' to rebel against and to change society is not developed by the 'propaganda' of conscious minorities, but by the real and direct propaganda of events; . . . So long as minorities operate within the mass, the mass is not revolutionary, but neither is the minority. Its 'revolutionary conceptions' can still serve only capitalistic functions. If the masses become revolutionary, the distinction between conscious minority and unconscious minority disappears and also the capitalistic function of the apparently 'revolutionary' minority. (1) Or as Pannekoek himself recognized in describing yet another aspect, " Capitalism, Indeed, cannot be annihilated by a change in the commanding persons; but only by the abolition of commanding." (2)

Underlying this analysis was a pragmatic conception of consciousness changing as a consequence of practical contact with problems confronted in the real world and not as a result of abstract reflection preceding action. Accordingly, the council communists were able to offer a fairly convincing explanation for why workers both acquiesced and resisted capitalism. Under normal conditions of capitalist stability, all

Just as in Western Europe the bourgeoisie had risen out of the common people of artisans and peasants, including some aristocrats, by ability, luck and cunning, so the Russian ruling bureaucracy had risen from the working class and the peasants (including former officials) by ability, luck and cunning. The difference is that in the USSR they did not own the means of production individually but collectively; so their mutual competition, too, must go on in other forms. This means a fundamental difference in the economic system; collective, planned production and exploitation instead of individual haphazard production and exploitation; state capitalism instead of private capitalism. For the working masses, however, the difference is slight, not fundamental; once more they are exploited by a middle class. But now this exploitation is intensified by the dictatorial form of government, by the total lack of all those liberties which in the West render fighting against the bourgeoisie possible.

This character of modern Russia determined the character of the fight of the Third International. Alternating red-hot utterances with the flattest parliamentary opportunism, or combining both, the 3rd International tried to win the adherence of the working masses of the West. It exploited the class antagonism of the workers against capitalism to win power for the Party. It caught up all the revolutionary enthusiasm of youth and all the rebellious impulses of the masses, prevented them from developing into a growing proletarian power, and wasted them in worthless political adventures. It hoped thus to get power over the Western bourgeoisie; but it was not able to do so, because understanding of the inner-most character of big capitalism was totally lacking. This capitalism cannot be conquered by an outside force; it can be destroyed only from within, by the proletarian revolution. Class domination can be destroyed only by the initiative and insight of a self-reliant proletarian class: party discipline and obedience of the masses to their leaders can only lead

proletarian revolution and keep them alive fortimes to come.

The beginnings of a proletarian revolution in the West had been killed by the powerful middle class revolution of the East.

V.

Is it correct to call this Russian revolution that destroyed the bourgeoisie and introduced socialism a middle class revolution?

Some years afterwards in the big towns of poverty-stricken Russia special shops with plate glass fronts and exquisite, expensive delicacies appeared, especially for the rich, and luxurious night clubs were opened, frequented by gentlemen and ladies in evening dress - chiefs of departments, high officials, directors of factories and committees. they were stared at in surprise by the poor in the streets, and the disillusioned communists said: "There go the new bourgeoisie." They were wrong. It was not a new bourgeoisie; but it was a new ruling class. When a new ruling class comes up, disappointed revolutionaries always call it by the name of the former ruling class. In the French revolution, the rising capitalists were called "the new aristocracy." Here in Russia the new class firmly seated in the saddle as masters of the production apparatus was the bureaucracy. It had to play in Russia the same role that in the West the middle class, the bourgeoisie, had played: to develop the country by industrialization from primitive conditions to high productivity.



voluntaristic calls for resistance issued by external organizations attempting to insert themselves into the worker's movement as a leadership were essentially idealistic and bound to fall on deaf ears. As long as adapting to existing reality produced predictable rewards, the traditional tactics would be repeatedly turned to again until they failed to deliver the desired aims. And once these formerly successful approaches no longer produced acceptable results, only then would new methods of struggle have the chance to develop out of the failure of the old.

As a result, the council communists saw their role much more modestly: to describe, elaborate and share the insights developed out of living movements and struggles and not to breed new ideologies or sweeping programs. And although Pannekoek and the council communists evolved out of the historic experience of the worker's councils which sprung up in Germany, Russia and elsewhere, they refused to impose the council concept as a timeless rigid model to be adapted regardless of concrete circumstances. To quote Pannekoek, "Workers councils does not designate a form of organization whose lines are fixed once and for all, and which requires only the subsequent elaboration of the details. It is concerned with a principle - the principle of the workers self-management of enterprises and 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." (3)

There is no avoiding the fact that much of Pannekoek's writings were situation-specific. Without a doubt later capitalist development has long passed them by. But as one person commented in an observation made concerning a collection of Pannekoek's earlier works but which excluded Pannekoek's later development, "By excluding these later works, it excludes precisely those works which might be of some use to

us in our struggles, not as a general theory of "what is to be done", but as reflections of past struggles that might help us to gain a little more insight into our current struggles." (4) It is in this spirit that the present collection has been put together.

Notes

- 1) Quoted in Rachleff, P. 209 from an article in "Modern Socialism" (Winter 1941-42)
- 2) Quoted in Bricianer, P. 285 from an article in "Politics", III, 8 Sept. 1946
- 3) Quoted in Bricianer, , P. 289, ibid.
- 4) From an anonymous review of "Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism", ed. by D.A. Smart, in "Echanges" # 16, Nov. 1978

For Further Reading

- Bricianer, Serge, ed. "Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils (Telos Press) 1978.

Selection of excerpts from Pannekoek's writings linked together with running commentary and historical and biographical details.

- Gerber, John "Anton Pannekoek and the Socialism of Workers' Self-Emancipation"

Ph.D Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984. Available in a hard copy reprint from UMI Dissertation Information Service, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI, 48106. Phone: (800) 521-0600. This thesis has been re-worked into an expensive hardback edition published by Nijhoff, an Amsterdam-based publishing house.

fired, naturally turned into defenders of Russian tactics.

When it became apparent that even all this was not sufficient, Lenin himself wrote his well known pamphlet "Left-Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder." Though his arguments showed only his lack of understanding of western conditions, the fact that Lenin, with his still unbroken authority, so openly took sides in the internal differences, had a great influence on a number of western communists. And yet, notwithstanding all this, the majority of the German communist party stuck to the knowledge they had gained through their experience of proletarian struggles. So at their next congress at Heidelberg, Dr. Levi, by some dirty tricks, had first to divide the majority - to exclude one part, and then to outvote the other part - in order to win a formal and apparent victory for the Moscow tactics.

The excluded groups went on for some years disseminating their ideas. But their views were drowned out by the enormous noise of Moscow propaganda, they had no appreciable influence on the political events of the next years. They could only maintain and further develop, by mutual theoretical discussions and some publications, their understanding of the conditions of



potentially perfect production apparatus.

Lenin knew capitalism only from without, as a foreign, robbing, devastating usurer, such as the western financial and colonial capital must have appeared to him in Russia and other Asiatic countries. His idea was that in order to conquer, the Western masses had only to join the anti-capitalistic power established in Russia; they should not obstinately try to seek other ways but were to follow the Russian example. Hence flexible tactics were needed in the west to win the great masses of socialist and union members as soon as possible, to induce them to leave their own leaders and parties that were bound to their national governments, and to join the communist parties, without the necessity of changing their own ideas and convictions. So Moscow tactics followed logically from the basic misunderstanding.

And what had Moscow propagated had by far the greatest weight. It had the authority of a victorious against a defeated (German) revolution. Will you be wiser than your teachers? The moral authority of Russian Communism was so undisputed that even a year later the excluded German opposition asked to be admitted as a sympathizing adherent to the Third International. But besides moral authority, the Russians had the material authority of money behind them. An enormous amount of literature, easily paid for by Moscow subsidies, flooded the western countries: weekly papers, pamphlets, exciting news about successes in Russia, scientific reviews, all explaining Moscow's views. Against this overwhelming offensive of noisy propaganda, the small groups of Western communists, with their lack of financial means, had no chance. So the new and sprouting recognition of the conditions necessary for revolution were beaten down and strangled by Moscow's powerful weapons. Moreover Russian subsidies were used to support a number of salaried party secretaries, who, under threat of being

Gerber, John "Anton Pannekoek and the Quest for an Emancipatory Socialism" (*New Politics*, Vol. II, #1 - Summer 1988) Good introductory article to Pannekoek's life and work.

Rachleff, Peter "Marxism and Council Communism: The Foundation For Revolutionary Theory For Modern Society" (Revisionist Press) 1976. An excellent book-length introduction marred by the publisher's insistence on putting a \$150 price tag on what is basically a type-written manuscript.

PARTY AND CLASS

**From "Modern Socialism", Vol. 1, #2 Winter
1941-42**

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 in 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

initiative, self-reliance, the ejection of dependence on and belief in leaders. But Moscow preached, in ever stronger terms that obedience to the leaders was the chief virtue of the true communist.

Western communists did not immediately realize how fundamental was the contradiction. They saw that Russia, attacked from all sides by counter-revolutionary armies, which were supported by the English and French governments, needed sympathy and assistance from the western working classes; not from small groups that fiercely attacked the old organizations, but from the old mass organizations themselves. They tried to convince Lenin and the Russian leaders that they were ill-informed about the real conditions and the future of the proletarian movement in the West.

In vain, of course. They did not see, at the time, that in reality it was the conflict of two concepts of revolution, the middle class revolution



and the proletarian revolution.

It was only natural that Lenin and his comrades were utterly unable to see that the impending proletarian revolution of the West was quite a different thing from their Russian revolution. Lenin did not know capitalism from within, at its highest development, as a world of enlarging proletarian masses, moving up to the time when they could seize power to lay hands on a

IV.

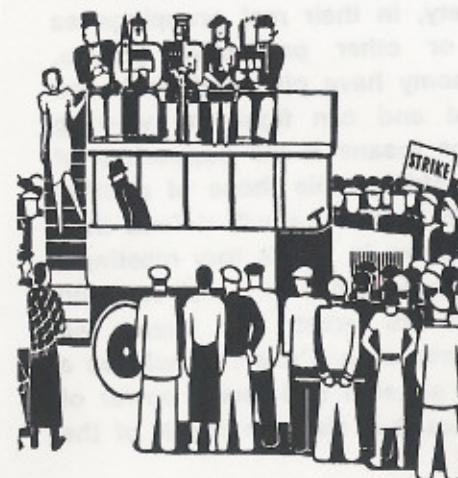
Soon, however, these groups became aware with increasingly painful surprise that under the name of communism other principles and ideas than their own were being propagated from Moscow. They pointed to the Russian Soviets as the worker's new organs for self-rule in production. But gradually it became known that the Russian factories were again ruled by directors appointed from above, and that, the important political position had been seized by the Communist Party. These Western groups promulgated the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in opposition to the parliamentary democracy embodied the principle of self-rule of the working class as the political form of the proletarian revolution.

But the spokesmen and leaders which Moscow sent to Germany and Western Europe proclaimed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was embodied in the dictatorship of the Communist Party.

The Western Communists saw as their chief task the enlightening of workers concerning the role of the socialist party and the unions. They pointed out that in these organizations the actions and decisions of the leaders were substituted for actions and decisions of the workers, and that the leaders were never able to wage a revolutionary fight because a revolution consists in this very self-action of the workers; that the trade union actions and parliamentary practice are good in a young and quiet capitalist world, but are entirely unfit for revolutionary times, where, by diverting the attention of the workers from important aims and goals and directing them to unreal reforms, they work as hostile, reactionary forces; that all the power of these organizations, in the hands of leaders, is used against the revolution. Moscow, however, demanded that communist parties should take part in parliamentary elections as well as in all union work. The Western communists preached independence, development of

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

The Russian revolution, through fear, had aroused the bourgeoisie to greater energy than it had aroused the proletariat through hope. Though, for the moment, the political organization of the bourgeoisie had collapsed, its real material and spiritual power was enormous. The socialist leadership did nothing to weaken this power; they feared the proletarian revolution no less than the bourgeoisie did. They did everything to restore the capitalist order, in which, for the moment, they were ministers and presidents.

This did not mean that the proletarian revolution in Germany was a complete failure. Only the first attack, the first rebellion had failed. The military collapse had not led directly to proletarian rule. The real power of the working class - clear consciousness on the part of the masses of their social position and the necessity for fighting, eager activity in all these hundreds of thousands, enthusiasm, solidarity and strong unity in action, awareness of the supreme aim: to take the means of production in their own hands - had to come up and grow gradually in any case. So much misery and crisis was threatening in the exhausted, shattered and impoverished post-war society that new fights were bound to come.

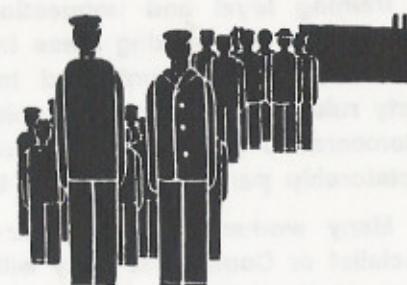
In all capitalist countries, in England, France, America as well as Germany, revolutionary groups arose among the workers in 1919. They published papers and pamphlets, they showed their fellow workers new facts, new conditions and new methods of fighting, and they found a good hearing among the alarmed masses. They pointed to the Russian revolution as their great example, its methods of mass action and its soviet or council form of organization. They organized into communist parties and groups, associating themselves with the Bolshevik, the Russian Communist party. Thus the campaign for world revolution was launched.

When a year later, November 1918, the German empire collapsed, the appeal to world revolution issued by the Russian Bolsheviks was hailed and welcomed by the foremost revolutionary groups in Western Europe. These groups, calling themselves communists, were so strongly impressed by the proletarian character of the revolutionary struggle in Russia that they overlooked the fact that, economically, Russia stood only at the threshold of capitalism, and that the proletarian centers were only small islands in the ocean of primitive peasantry. Moreover they reasoned that when a world revolution came, Russia would be only a world-province - the place where the struggle started - whereas the more advanced countries of big capitalism would soon take the lead and determine the world's real course.



But the first rebellious movement among the German workers was beaten down. It was only an advanced minority that took part; the great mass held aloof, nursing the illusion that quiet and peace were now possible. Against these rebels stood a coalition of the Social-Democratic party, whose leaders occupied the government seats, and the old governing classes, bourgeoisie and army officers. While the former lulled the masses into inactivity, the latter organized armed bands that crushed the rebellious movement and murdered the revolutionary leaders, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

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 worker's 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 part 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, statutes, 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 ödemocraticö 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 örevolutionary partyö 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



and generals in the new national states. These revolutions were middle-class revolutions and as such indicated the beginning of an unlimited development of capitalism and industry.

In Russia this revolution went deeper than anywhere else. Because it de-

stroyed the Czarist world power which for a century had been a dominating power in Europe and the most hated enemy of all democracy and socialism, the Russian revolution led all the revolutionary movements in Europe. Its leader had been associated for many years with the socialist leaders of Western Europe just as the Czar had been the ally of the English and French governments. It is true that the chief social contents of the Russian Revolution - the land seizures by the peasants and the smashing of the autocracy and nobility - show it to be a middle-class revolution and the Bolsheviks themselves accentuated this character by often comparing themselves with the jacobins of the French Revolution.

But the workers in the west, themselves full of traditions of petty bourgeois freedom, did not consider this foreign to them. And the Russian revolution did more than simply rouse their admiration; it showed them an example in methods of action. Its power in decisive moments was the power of spontaneous mass action of the industrial workers in the big towns. Out of these actions the Russian workers also built up that form of organization most appropriate to independent action - the soviets or councils. Thus they became the guides and teachers of the workers in other countries.

Another reason for confusing these different social aims was that at that time the minds of the western workers were entirely occupied by reformist ideas about reforming capitalism into the democratic forms of its beginning and only a few among them realized the meaning of a proletarian revolution.

III.

The world war of 1914-18, with its utter destruction of productive forces, cut deep furrows through the social structure, especially of central and eastern Europe. Emperors disappeared, old out-moded governments were overthrown, social forces from below were loosened, different classes of different peoples, in a series of revolutionary movements, tried to win power and to realize their class aims.

In the highly industrialized countries the class struggle of the workers was already the dominating factor of history. Now these workers had gone through a world war. They learned that capitalism not only lays claim on their working power, but upon their lives too; completely, body and soul, they are owned by capital. The destruction and impoverishment of the productive apparatus, the misery and privation suffered during the war, the disappointment and distress after the peace brought waves of unrest and rebelliousness over all participating countries. Because Germany had lost, the rebellion here of the workers was greatest. In the place of pre-war conservatism, there arose a new spirit in the German workers, compounded of courage, energy, yearnings for freedom and for revolutionary struggle against capitalism. It was only a beginning but it was the first beginning of a proletarian revolution.

In the eastern countries of Europe the class struggle had a different composition. the land owning nobility was dispossessed; the farmers seized the land; a class of small or middle-sized free landowners arose. Former revolutionary conspirators became leaders and ministers

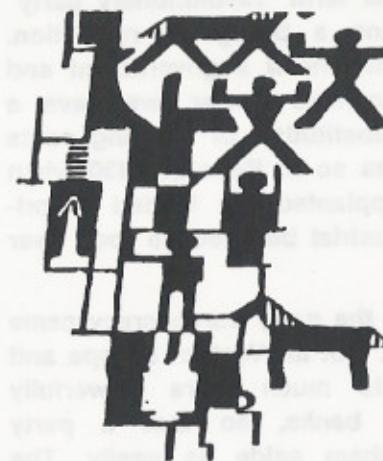
such a party raise for the revolution? How is it able to defeat the capitalist class? Only if the masses stand behind it. Only if the masses rise and through mass attacks, mass struggle, and mass strikes, overthrow the old regime. Without the action of the masses, there can be no revolution.

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 ele-

ments 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



must be quite different. Instead of reckless fighting for personal interests there must be a common action for the interests of the class community. A worker, a single person, is powerless; only as part of his class, as a member of a strongly connected economic group can he get power. Workers individualities are disciplined into line by their habit of working and fighting together. Their minds must be freed from social superstitions and they must see as a commonplace truth that once they are strongly united that they can produce abundance and liberate society from misery and want. This is part of the mental equipment necessary to bring mankind from class exploitation, the misery, the mutual destruction of capitalism into communism itself.

Thus the two kinds of revolution are as widely different as are the beginning and end of capitalism. We can see this clearly now, thirty years later. we can understand too, how at the time they could be considered not only as allies, but were thrown together as two sides of the same great world-revolution. The great day was supposed to be near; the working class, with its large socialist parties and still larger unions, would soon conquer power. And then at the same time, with the power of western capitalism breaking down, all the colonies and eastern countries would be freed from western domination and take up their own national life.

capitalism exploited the farmers in the Eastern and colonial countries and sustained these despotic rulers. the revolutionary groups from these countries found understanding and assistance only from the socialist workers of western Europe. So they called themselves socialists too. the old illusions that middle class revolutions would bring freedom and equality to the entire population were reborn,

In reality there was a deep and fundamental difference between these two kinds of revolutionary aims, the so-called Western and eastern. The proletarian revolution can be the result only of the highest development of capitalism. It puts an end to capitalism. the revolutions in the eastern countries were the consequences of the beginning of capitalism in these countries. Viewed thus, they resemble the middle class revolutions in the Western countries and - with due consideration for the fact that their special character must somewhat differ in different countries-they must be regarded as middle class revolutions. Though there was not such a numerous middle class of artisans, petty bourgeois and wealthy peasants as there was in the French and the English revolutions (because in the East, capitalism came suddenly, with a smaller number of big factories) still the general character is analogous. Here also we have the awakening out of the provincial view of an agrarian village to the consciousness of a nation-wide community and to interest in the whole world; the rising of individualism that frees itself from the old group bonds; the growth of energy to win personal power and wealth; the liberation of the mind from old superstitions, and the desire for knowledge as a means of progress. All this is the mental equipment necessary to bring mankind from the slow life of pre-capitalist conditions into the rapid industrial and economic progress that later on will open the way for communism.

The general character of a proletarian revolution

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.

STRIKES

(From "Western Socialist" January 1948)

In the workers' movement two chief forms of fight are distinguished, often denoted as the political and economic field of fight. The former centered 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 19th 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 revolutionizing the structure of society, abolishing capitalism and introducing a socialist system. Whereas the latter was only a means to 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 parliamentarianism. 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 öimmediate demandsö; and they could win increasing number 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 öindustrial democracyö in the shops, they would gradually transform capitalism into socialism.

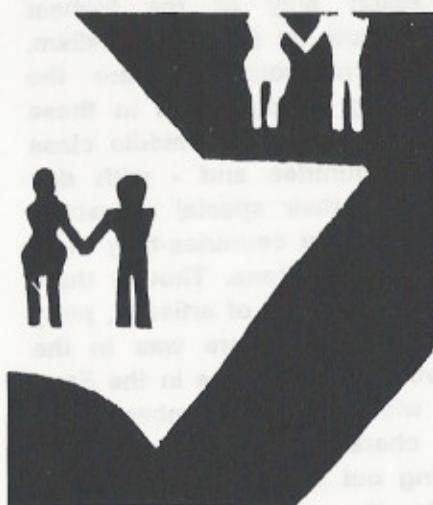
But capitalism had its own ways. What Marx had expounded in his economic studies, the concentration of capital, came true in a far mightier degree than perhaps its author had surmised. the growth and development of capitalism in the 20th century has brought about numbers of new social phenomena and economic 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 now can 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 even faster to big business. It strengthened in the 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,

In other cases this stronger exploitation by European capital was brought about by financial loans of governments, which laid heavy taxes upon the farmers. Railways, introducing the factory products that destroyed the old home industries and carried away raw material and food, were built. this gradually drew the farmers into world commerce and aroused in them the desire to become free producers for the market. Factories were constructed; a class of business men and dealers developed in the towns who felt the

necessity of better government for their interest. Young people, studying at western universities, became the revolutionary spokesmen of these tendencies. they formulated these tendencies in theoretical programs, advocating chiefly national freedom and independence, a responsible democratic government, civil rights and liberties, in order that they

may find their useful place as officials and politicians in a modern state.

This development in the capitalistic world proper took place simultaneously with the development of the workers' movement within the central countries of big capitalism. Here then were two revolutionary movements, not only parallel and simultaneous, but also with many points of contact. they had a common foe, capitalism, that in the form of industrial capitalism exploited the workers, and in the form of colonial and financial



revolutionary movements after 1918 failed. Only by investigating all the forces that were then at work can we get a clear insight into the causes of that failure. So we must turn our attention to what happened twenty years ago in the workers' movement of the world.

II.

The growth of the workers movement was not the only important nor even the most important fact in the history of the past century. Of primary importance was the growth of capitalism itself. It grew not only in intensity - through concentration of capital, the increasing perfection of industrial tecnics, the increase of productivity - but also in extensy. From the first centers of industry and commerce-England, France, America and Germany - capitalism began to invade foreign countries, and now is conquering the whole earth. In former centuries foreign continents were subdued to be exploited as colonies. But at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries we see a higher form of conquest. These continents were assimilated by capitalism; they became themselves capitalistic. This most important process, that went on with increasing rapidity in the last century, meant a fundamental change in their economic structure. In short, there was the basis of a series of world-wide revolutions.

The central countries of developed capitalism, with the middle class - the bourgeoisie - as the ruling class, were formerly surrounded by a fringe of other, less developed countries. Here the social structure was still entirely agrarian and more-or-less feudal; the large plains were cultivated by farmers who were exploited by landowners and stood in continuous, more-or-less open struggle against them and the reining autocrats. In the case of the colonies this internal pressure was intensified through exploitation by European colonial capital that made the landowners and kings its agents.

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 union leaders, who then by seizing the leadership as soon as possible quell the fight. Whereas to the field of politics all is collaboration and harmony of the classes - in thecase of the C.P. accompanied by a semblance of revolutionary talk such wild strikes become evermore 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 in the living 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 now have 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 in 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 more 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 backwards 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 on social revolution. How thereby the propaganda tasks for socialists are widened may be considered another time.

WHY PAST REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS HAVE FAILED

From "Living Marxism" Vol. V, #2 (Fall 1940)

I.

Thirty years ago every socialist was convinced that the approaching war of the great capitalist powers would mean the final catastrophe of capitalism and would be succeeded by the proletarian revolution. Even when the war did break out and the socialist and labor movement collapsed as a revolutionary factor, the hopes of the revolutionary workers ran high. Even then they were sure that the world revolution would follow in the wake of the world war. And indeed it came. Like a bright meteor the Russian revolution flared up and shone all over the earth, and in all the countries the workers rose and began to move.

Only a few years after it became clear that the revolution was decaying, that social convulsions were decreasing, that the capitalist order was gradually being restored. Today the revolutionary workers' movement is at its lowest ebb and capitalism is more powerful than ever. Once again a great war has come, and again the thoughts of workers and communists turn to the question: will it affect the capitalistic system to such a degree that a workers revolution will arise out of it? Will the hope of a successful struggle for freedom of the working class come true this time?

It is clear that we cannot hope to get an answer to this question so long as we do not understand why the