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World Revolution and Communist Tactics

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

I

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

As far as Western Europe is concerned, the development of the revolution is mainly determined by two forces: the collapse of the capitalist economy and the example of Soviet Russia. The reasons why the proletariat was able to achieve victory so quickly and with such relative ease in Russia – the weakness of the bourgeoisie, the alliance with the peasantry, the fact that the revolution took place during the war – need not be elaborated here. The example of a state in which working people are the rulers, where they have abolished capitalism and are engaged in building communism, could not but make a great impression upon the proletariat of the entire world. Of course, this example would not in itself have been sufficient to spur the workers in other countries on to proletarian revolution. The human mind is most strongly influenced by the effects of its own material environment; so that if indigenous capitalism had retained all its old strength, the news from far-away Russia would have made little impression. 'Full of respectful admiration, but in a timid, petty-bourgeois way, without the courage to save themselves, Russia and humanity

as a whole by taking action' – this was how the masses struck Rutgers[1] upon his return to Western Europe from Russia. When the war came to an end, everyone here hoped for a rapid upturn in the economy, and a lying press depicted Russia as a place of chaos and barbarism; and so the masses bided their time. But since then, the opposite has come about: chaos has spread in the traditional home of civilisation, while the new order in Russia is showing increasing strength. Now the masses are stirring here as well.

Economic collapse is the most powerful spur to revolution. Germany and Austria are already completely shattered and pauperised economically, Italy and France are in inexorable decline. England has suffered so badly that it is doubtful whether its government's vigorous attempts at reconstruction can avert collapse, and in America the first threatening signs of crisis are appearing. And in each country, more or less in this same order, unrest is growing in the masses; they are struggling against impoverishment in great strike-movements which hit the economy even harder; these struggles are gradually developing into a conscious revolutionary struggle, and, without being communists by conviction, the masses are more and more following the path which communism shows them, for practical necessity is driving them in that direction.

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

Soviet Russia's unexpected resilience to the onslaughts of reaction has both compelled the Entente to negotiate and also made a new and powerful impression upon the labour parties of the West. The Second International is breaking up; a general movement of the centre groups towards Moscow has set in under the impulsion of the growing revolutionary mood of the masses. These groups have adopted the new name of communists without their former perspectives having greatly altered, and they are transferring the conceptions and methods of the old social democrats into

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

the new international. As a sign that these countries have now become more ripe for revolution, a phenomenon precisely opposite to the original one is now appearing: with their entry into the Third International or declaration in favour of its principles, as in the case of the USP mentioned above, the sharp distinction between communists and social democrats is once again fading. Whatever attempts are made to keep such parties formally outside the Third International in an effort to conserve some firmness of principle, they nevertheless insinuate themselves into the leadership of each country's revolutionary movement, maintaining their influence over the militant masses by paying lip-service to the new slogans. This is how every ruling stratum behaves: rather than allow itself to be cut off from the masses, it becomes 'revolutionary' itself, in order to deflate the revolution as far as possible by its influence. And many communists tend to see only the increased strength thus accruing to us, and not also the increase in vulnerability.

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

II

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

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

When German imperialism collapsed in November 1918, the working class was completely unprepared for the seizure of power. Shattered in mind and spirit by the four years of war and still caught up in social-democratic traditions, it was unable to achieve clear recognition of its task within the first few weeks, when governmental authority had lapsed; the intensive but brief period of communist propaganda could not compensate for this lack. The German bourgeoisie had learnt more from the Russian example than the proletariat; decking itself out in red in order to lull the workers' vigilance, it immediately began to rebuild the organs of its power. The workers' councils voluntarily surrendered their power to the leaders of the Social-

Democratic Party and the democratic parliament. The workers still bearing arms as soldiers disarmed not the bourgeoisie, but themselves; the most active workers' groups were crushed by newly formed white guards, and the bourgeoisie was formed into armed civil militias. With the connivance of the trade-union leaderships, the now defenceless workers were little by little robbed of all the improvements in working conditions won in the course of the revolution. The way to communism was thus blocked with barbed-wire entanglements to secure the survival of capitalism, to enable it to sink ever deeper into chaos, that is.

These experiences gained in the course of the German revolution cannot, of course, be automatically applied to the other countries of Western Europe; the development of the revolution will follow still other courses there. Power will not suddenly fall into the hands of the unprepared masses as a result of politico-military collapse; the proletariat will have to fight hard for it, and will thus have attained a higher degree of maturity when it is won. What happened at fever-pace in Germany after the November revolution is already taking place more quietly in other countries: the bourgeoisie is drawing the consequences of the Russian revolution, making military preparations for civil war and at the same time organising the political deception of the proletariat by means of social democracy. But in spite of these differences, the German revolution shows certain general characteristics and offers certain lessons of general significance. It has made it apparent that the revolution in Western Europe *will* be a slow, arduous process and revealed *what forces are responsible for this*. The slow tempo of revolutionary development in Western Europe, although only relative, has given rise to a clash of conflicting tactical currents. In times of rapid revolutionary development, tactical differences are quickly overcome in action, or else do not become conscious; intensive principled agitation clarifies people's minds, and at the same time the masses flood in and political action overturns old conceptions. When a period of external stagnation sets in, however; when the masses let anything pass without protest and revolutionary slogans no longer seem able to catch the imagination; when difficulties mount up and the adversary seems to rise up more colossal with each engagement; when the Communist Party remains weak and experiences only defeats – then perspectives diverge, new courses of action and new tactical methods are sought. There then emerge two main tendencies, which can be recognised in every country, for all the local variations. The one current seeks to revolutionise and clarify people's minds by word and deed, and to this end tries to pose the new principles in the sharpest possible contrast to the old, received conceptions. The other current attempts to draw the masses still on the sidelines into practical activity, and therefore emphasises points of agreement rather than points of difference in an attempt to avoid as far as is possible anything that might deter them. The first strives for a clear, sharp separation among the masses, the second for unity; the first current may be termed the radical tendency, the second the opportunist one. Given the current situation in Western Europe, with the revolution encountering powerful obstacles on the one hand and the Soviet Union's staunch resistance to the Entente governments' efforts to overthrow it making a powerful impression upon the masses on the other, we can expect a greater influx into the Third International of workers' groups until now undecided; and as a result, opportunism will doubtless become a powerful force in the Communist International.

Opportunism does not necessarily mean a pliant, conciliatory attitude and vocabulary, nor radicalism a more acerbic manner; on the contrary, lack of clear, principled tactics is all too often concealed in rabidly strident language; and indeed, in revolutionary situations, it is characteristic of opportunism to suddenly set all its hopes on the great revolutionary deed. Its essence lies in always considering the immediate

questions, not what lies in the future, and to fix on the superficial aspects of phenomena rather than seeing the determinant deeper bases. When the forces are not immediately adequate for the attainment of a certain goal, it tends to make for that goal by another way, by roundabout means, rather than strengthen those forces. For its goal is immediate success, and to that it sacrifices the conditions for lasting success in the future. It seeks justification in the fact that by forming alliances with other 'progressive' groups and by making concessions to outdated conceptions, it is often possible to gain power or at least split the enemy, the coalition of capitalist classes, and thus bring about conditions more favourable for the struggle. But power in such cases always turns out to be an illusion, personal power exercised by individual leaders and not the power of the proletarian class; this contradiction brings nothing but confusion, corruption and conflict in its wake. Conquest of governmental power not based upon a working class fully prepared to exercise its hegemony would be lost again, or else have to make so many concessions to reactionary forces that it would be inwardly spent. A split in the ranks of the class hostile to us – the much vaunted slogan of reformism – would not affect the unity of the inwardly united bourgeoisie, but would deceive, confuse and weaken the proletariat. Of course it can happen that the communist vanguard of the proletariat is obliged to take over political power before the normal conditions are met; but only what the masses thereby gain in terms of clarity, insight, solidarity and autonomy has lasting value as the foundation of further development towards communism.

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

A revolution can no more be made by a big mass party or coalition of different parties than by a small radical party. It breaks out spontaneously among the masses; action instigated by a party can sometimes trigger it off (a rare occurrence), but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychological factors deep in the unconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics. The function of a revolutionary party lies in propagating clear understanding in advance, so that throughout the masses there will be elements who know what must be done and who are capable of judging the situation for themselves. And in the course of revolution the party has to raise the programme, slogans and directives which the spontaneously acting masses recognise as correct because they find that they express their own aims in their most adequate form and hence achieve greater clarity of purpose; it is thus that the party comes to lead the struggle. So long as the masses remain inactive, this may appear to be an unrewarding tactic; but clarity of principle has an implicit effect on many who at first hold back, and revolution reveals its active power of giving a definite direction to the struggle. If, on the other hand, it has been attempted to assemble a large party by watering down principles, forming alliances and making concessions, then this enables confused elements to gain influence in times of revolution without

the masses being able to see through their inadequacy. Conformity to traditional perspectives is an attempt to gain power without the revolution in ideas that is the precondition of doing so; its effect is therefore to hold back the course of revolution. It is also doomed to failure, for only the most radical thinking can take a hold on the masses once they engage in revolution, while moderation only satisfies them so long as the revolution has yet to be made. A revolution simultaneously involves a profound upheaval in the masses' thinking; it creates the conditions for this, and is itself conditioned by it; leadership in the revolution thus falls to the Communist Party by virtue of the world-transforming power of its unambiguous principles.

In contrast with the strong, sharp emphasis on the new principles – soviet system and dictatorship – which distinguish communism from social democracy, opportunism in the Third International relies as far as possible upon the forms of struggle taken over from the Second International. After the Russian revolution had replaced parliamentary activity with the soviet system and built up the trade-union movement on the basis of the factory, the first impulse in Western Europe was to follow this example. The Communist Party of Germany boycotted the elections for the National Assembly and campaigned for immediate or gradual organisational separation from the trade unions. When the revolution slackened and stagnated in 1919, however, the Central Committee of the KPD introduced a different tactic which amounted to opting for parliamentarianism and supporting the old trade-union confederations against the industrial unions. The main argument behind this is that the Communist Party must not lose the leadership of the masses, who still think entirely in parliamentary terms, who are best reached through electoral campaigns and parliamentary speeches, and who, by entering the trade unions en masse, have increased their membership to seven million. The same thinking is to be seen in England in the attitude of the BSP: they do not want to break with the Labour Party, although it belongs to the Second International, for fear of losing contact with the mass of trade-unionists. These arguments are most sharply formulated and marshalled by our friend Karl Radek, whose *Development of the World Revolution and the Tasks of the Communist Party*, written in prison in Berlin, may be regarded as the programmatic statement of communist opportunism[2]. Here it is argued that the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will be a long drawn-out process, in which communism should use every means of propaganda, in which parliamentary activity and the trade-union movement will remain the principal weapons of the proletariat, with the gradual introduction of workers' control as a new objective.

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

III

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

[2] Pannekoek is here confusing the titles of two texts written by Radek while in prison: *The Development of the German Revolution and the Tasks of the Communist Party*, written before the Heidelberg congress, and *The Development of the World Revolution and the Tactics of the Communist Parties in the Struggle for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, written after it. The latter is meant. [Translator's note.]

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

The German experience brings us face to face with the major problem of the revolution in Western Europe. In these countries, the old bourgeois mode of production and the centuries-old civilisation which has developed with it have completely impressed themselves upon the thoughts and feelings of the popular masses. Hence, the mentality and inner character of the masses here is quite different from that in the countries of the East, who have not experienced the rule of bourgeois culture; and this is what distinguishes the different courses that the revolution has taken in the East and the West. In England, France, Holland, Italy, Germany and Scandinavia, there has been a powerful burgher class based on petty-bourgeois and primitive capitalist production since the Middle Ages; as feudalism declined, there also grew up in the countryside an equally powerful independent peasant class, in which the individual was also master in his own small business. Bourgeois sensibilities developed into a solid national culture on this foundation, particularly in the maritime countries of England and France, which took the lead in capitalist development. In the nineteenth century, the subjection of the whole economy to capital and the inclusion of the most outlying farms into the capitalist world-trade system enhanced and refined this national culture, and the psychological propaganda of press, school and church drummed it firmly into the heads of the masses, both those whom capital proletarianised and attracted into the cities and those it left on the land. This is true not only of the homelands of capitalism, but also, albeit in different forms, of America and Australia, where Europeans founded new states, and of the countries of Central Europe, Germany, Austria, Italy, which had until then stagnated, but where the new surge of capitalist development was able to connect with an old, backward, small-peasant economy and a petty-bourgeois culture. But when capitalism pressed into the countries of Eastern Europe, it encountered very different material conditions and traditions. Here, in Russia, Poland, Hungary, even in Germany east of the Elbe, there was no strong bourgeois class which had long dominated the life of the spirit; the latter was determined by primitive agricultural conditions, with large-scale landed property, patriarchal feudalism and village communism. Here, therefore, the masses related to communism in a more primitive, simple, open way, as receptive as blank paper. Western European social democrats often expressed derisive astonishment that the 'ignorant' Russians could claim to be the vanguard of the new world of labour. Referring to these social democrats, an English delegate at the communist conference in Amsterdam[4] pointed up the difference quite correctly: the Russians may be more ignorant, but the English workers are stuffed so full of prejudices that it is harder to propagate communism among them. These 'prejudices' are only the superficial, external aspect of the bourgeois mentality which saturates the majority of the proletariat of England, Western Europe and America.

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

[4] The conference in question was convened to set up the Auxiliary Bureau. [Translator's note.]

The entire content of this mentality is so many-sided and complex in its opposition to the proletarian, communist worldview that it can scarcely be summarised in a few sentences. Its primary characteristic is individualism, which has its origins in earlier petty-bourgeois and peasant forms of labour and only gradually gives way to the new proletarian sense of community and of the necessity of accepting discipline – this characteristic is probably most pronounced in the bourgeoisie and proletariat of the Anglo-Saxon countries. The individual's perspective is limited to his work-place, instead of embracing society as a whole; so absolute does the principle of the division of labour seem, that politics itself, the government of the whole of society, is seen not as everybody's business, but as the monopoly of a ruling stratum, the specialised province of particular experts, the politicians. With its centuries of material and intellectual commerce, its literature and art, bourgeois culture has embedded itself in the proletarian masses, and generates a feeling of national solidarity, anchored deeper in the unconscious than external indifference or superficial internationalism suggest; this can potentially express itself in national class solidarity, and greatly hinders international action.

Bourgeois culture exists in the proletariat primarily as a traditional cast of thought. The masses caught up in it think in ideological instead of real terms: bourgeois thought has always been ideological. But this ideology and tradition are not integrated; the mental reflexes left over from the innumerable class struggles of former centuries have survived as political and religious systems of thought which separate the old bourgeois world, and hence the proletarians born of it, into groups, churches, sects, parties, divided according to their ideological perspectives. The bourgeois past thus also survives in the proletariat as an organisational tradition that stands in the way of the class unity necessary for the creation of the new world; in these archaic organisations the workers make up the followers and adherents of a bourgeois vanguard. It is the intelligentsia which supplies the leaders in these ideological struggles. The intelligentsia – priests, teachers, literati, journalists, artists, politicians – form a numerous class, the function of which is to foster, develop and propagate bourgeois culture; it passes this on to the masses, and acts as mediator between the hegemony of capital and the interests of the masses. The hegemony of capital is rooted in this group's intellectual leadership of the masses. For even though the oppressed masses have often rebelled against capital and its agencies, they have only done so under the leadership of the intelligentsia; and the firm solidarity and discipline won in this common struggle subsequently proves to be the strongest support of the system once these leaders openly go over to the side of capitalism. Thus, the Christian ideology of the declining petty bourgeois strata, which had become a living force as an expression of their struggle against the modern capitalist state, often proved its worth subsequently as a reactionary system that bolstered up the state, as with Catholicism in Germany after the Kulturkampf[5]. Despite the value of its theoretical contribution, much the same is true of the role played by social democracy in destroying and extinguishing old ideologies in the rising work-force, as history demanded it should do: it made the proletarian masses mentally dependent upon political and other leaders, who, as specialists, the masses left to manage all the important matters of a general nature affecting the class, instead of themselves taking them in hand. The firm solidarity and discipline which developed in the often acute class struggles of half a century did not bury capitalism, for it represented the power of

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

leadership and organisation over the masses; and in August 1914 and November 1918 these made the masses helpless tools of the bourgeoisie, of imperialism and of reaction. The ideological power of the bourgeois past over the proletariat means that in many of the countries of Western Europe, in Germany and Holland, for example, it is divided into ideologically opposed groups which stand in the way of class unity. Social democracy originally sought to realise this class unity, but partly due to its opportunist tactics, which substituted purely political policies for class politics, it was unsuccessful in this: it merely increased the number of groups by one.

In times of crisis when the masses are driven to desperation and to action, the hegemony of bourgeois ideology over the masses cannot prevent the power of this tradition temporarily flagging, as in Germany in November 1918. But then the ideology comes to the fore again, and turns temporary victory into defeat. The concrete forces which in our view make up the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions can be seen at work in the case of Germany: in reverence for abstract slogans like 'democracy'; in the power of old habits of thought and programme-points, such as the realisation of socialism through parliamentary leaders and a socialist government; in the lack of proletarian self-confidence evidenced by the effect upon the masses of the barrage of filthy lies published about Russia; in the masses' lack of faith in their own power; but above all, in their trust in the party, in the organisation and in the leaders who for decades had incarnated their struggle, their revolutionary goals, their idealism. The tremendous mental, moral and material power of the organisations, these enormous machines painstakingly created by the masses themselves with years of effort, which incarnated the tradition of the forms of struggle belonging to a period in which the labour movement was a limb of ascendant capital, now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies once more flaring up in the masses.

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

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

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

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

IV

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

The congresses of the first International Working-Men's Association laid the basis of this tactic by taking issue with primitive conceptions belonging to the pre-capitalist, petty-bourgeois period and, in accordance with Marx's social theory, defining the character of the proletarian class struggle as a continuous struggle by the proletariat against capitalism for the means of subsistence, a struggle which would lead to the conquest of political power. When the period of bourgeois revolutions and armed uprisings had come to a close, this political struggle could only be carried on within the framework of the old or newly created national states, and trade-union struggle was often subject to even tighter restrictions. The First International was therefore bound to break up; and the struggle for the new tactics, which it was itself unable to practise, burst it apart; meanwhile, the tradition of the old conceptions and methods of struggle remained alive amongst the anarchists. The new tactics were bequeathed

by the International to those who would have to put them into practice, the trade unions and Social-Democratic Parties which were springing up on every hand. When the Second International arose as a loose federation of the latter, it did in fact still have to combat tradition in the form of anarchism; but the legacy of the First International already formed its undisputed tactical base. Today, every communist knows why these methods of struggle were necessary and productive at that time: when the working class is developing within ascendant capitalism, it is not yet capable of creating organs which would enable it to control and order society, nor can it even conceive the necessity of doing so. It must first orientate itself mentally and learn to understand capitalism and its class rule. The vanguard of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party, must reveal the nature of the system through its propaganda and show the masses their goals by raising class demands. It was therefore necessary for its spokesmen to enter the parliaments, the centres of bourgeois rule, in order to raise their voices on the tribunes and take part in conflicts between the political parties.

Matters change when the struggle of the proletariat enters a revolutionary phase. We are not here concerned with the question of why the parliamentary system is inadequate as a system of government for the masses and why it must give way to the soviet system, but with the utilisation of parliament as a means of struggle by the proletariat[7]. As such, parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. People used to believe that leaders could obtain important reforms for the workers in parliament; and the illusion even arose that parliamentarians could carry out the transformation to socialism by acts of parliament. Now that parliamentarianism has grown more modest in its claims, one hears the argument that deputies in parliament could make an important contribution to communist propaganda[8]. But this always means that the main emphasis falls on the leaders, and it is taken for granted that specialists will determine policy – even if this is done under the democratic veil of debates and resolutions by congresses; the history of social democracy is a series of unsuccessful attempts to induce the members themselves to determine policy. This is all inevitable while the proletariat is carrying on a parliamentary struggle, while the masses have yet to create organs of self-action, while the revolution has still to be made, that is; and as soon as the masses start to intervene, act and take decisions on their own behalf, the disadvantages of parliamentary struggle become overwhelming.

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

[7] The remainder of this paragraph and the two following are quoted by Gorter in the *Open Letter*. [Translator's note.]

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

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

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

What is great and truly communist about the Russian revolution is above all the fact that it has awoken the masses' own activity and ignited the spiritual and physical energy in them to build and sustain a new society. Rousing the masses to this consciousness of their own power is something which cannot be achieved all at once, but only in stages; one stage on this way to independence is the rejection of parliamentarianism. When, in December 1918, the newly formed Communist Party of Germany resolved to boycott the National Assembly, this decision did not proceed from any immature illusion of quick, easy victory, but from the proletariat's need to emancipate itself from its psychological dependence upon parliamentary representatives – a necessary reaction against the tradition of social democracy – because the way to self-activity could now be seen to lie in building up the council system. However, one half of those united at that time, those who have stayed in the KPD, readopted parliamentarianism with the ebb of the revolution: with what consequences it remains to be seen, but which have in part been demonstrated already. In other countries too, opinion is divided among the communists, and many groups want to refrain from

parliamentary activity even before the outbreak of revolution. The international dispute over the use of parliament as a method of struggle will thus clearly be one of the main tactical issues within the Third International over the next few years.

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

V

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

It was by combating capital, combating its tendencies to absolute impoverisation, setting limits to the latter and thus making the existence of the working class possible, that the trade-union movement fulfilled its role in capitalism, and this made it a

limb of capitalist society itself. But once the proletariat ceases to be a member of capitalist society and, with the advent of revolution, becomes its destroyer, the trade union enters into conflict with the proletariat.

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

Marx' and Lenin's insistence that the way in which the state is organised precludes its use as an instrument of proletarian revolution, notwithstanding its democratic forms, must therefore also apply to the trade-union organisations. Their counterrevolutionary potential cannot be destroyed or diminished by a change of personnel, by the substitution of radical or 'revolutionary' leaders for reactionary ones. It is the form of the organisation that renders the masses all but impotent and prevents them making the trade union an organ of their will. The revolution can only be successful by destroying this organisation, that is to say so completely revolutionising its organisational structure that it becomes something completely different. The soviet system, constructed from within, is not only capable of uprooting and abolishing the state bureaucracy, but the trade-union bureaucracy as well; it will form not only the new political organs to replace parliament, but also the basis of the new trade unions. The idea that a particular organisational form is revolutionary has been held up to scorn in the party disputes in Germany on the grounds that what counts is the revolutionary mentality of the members. But if the most important element of the revolution consists in the masses taking their own affairs – the management of society and production – in hand themselves, then any form of organisation which does not permit control and direction by the masses themselves is counterrevolutionary and harmful; and it should therefore be replaced by another form that is revolutionary in that it enables the workers themselves to determine everything actively. This is not to say that this form is to be set up within a still passive work-force in readiness for the revolutionary feeling of the workers to function within it in time to come: this new form of organisation can itself only be set up in the process of revolution, by workers making a revolutionary intervention. But recognition of the role played by the current form of organisation determines the attitude which the communists have to take with regard to the attempts already being made to weaken or burst this form.

Efforts to keep the bureaucratic apparatus as small as possible and to look to the activity of the masses for effectiveness have been particularly marked in the syndicalist movement, and even more so in the 'industrial' union movement. This is why so many communists have spoken out for support of these organisations against the central confederations. So long as capitalism remains intact, however, these new

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

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

VI

The conception that revolution in Western Europe will take the form of an orderly siege of the fortress of capital which the proletariat, organised by the Communist Party into a disciplined army and using time-proven weapons, will repeatedly assault until the enemy surrenders is a neo-reformist perspective that certainly does not correspond to the conditions of struggle in the old capitalist countries. Here there may occur revolutions and conquests of power that quickly turn into defeat; the bourgeoisie will be able to reassert its domination, but this will result in even greater dislocation of the economy; transitional forms may arise which, because of their inadequacy, only prolong the chaos. Certain conditions must be fulfilled in any society for the social process of production and collective existence to be possible, and these relations acquire the firm hold of spontaneous habits and moral norms – sense of duty, industriousness, discipline: in the first instance, the process of revolution consists in a loosening of these old relations. Their decay is a necessary by-product of the dissolution of capitalism, while the new bonds corresponding to the communist reorganisation of work and society, the development of which we have witnessed in Russia, have yet to grow sufficiently strong. Thus, a transitional period of social and political chaos becomes inevitable. Where the proletariat is able to seize power rapidly and

keep a firm hold upon it, as in Russia, the transitional period can be short and can be brought rapidly to a close by positive construction. But in Western Europe, the process of destruction will be much more drawn out. In Germany we see the working class split into groups in which this process has reached different stages, and which therefore cannot yet achieve unity in action. The symptoms of recent revolutionary movements indicate that the entire nation, and indeed, Central Europe as a whole, is dissolving, that the popular masses are fragmenting into separate strata and regions, with each acting on its own account: here the masses manage to arm themselves and more or less gain political power; elsewhere they paralyse the power of the bourgeoisie in strike movements; in a third place they shut themselves off as a peasant republic, and somewhere else they support white guards, or perhaps toss aside the remnants of feudalism in primitive agrarian revolts – the destruction must obviously be thorough-going before we can begin to think of the real construction of communism. It cannot be the task of the Communist Party to act the schoolmaster in this upheaval and make vain attempts to truss it in a straitjacket of traditional forms; its task is to support the forces of the proletarian movement everywhere, to connect the spontaneous actions together, to give them a broad idea of how they are related to one another, and thereby prepare the unification of the disparate actions and thus put itself at the head of the movement as a whole.

The first phase of the dissolution of capitalism is to be seen in those countries of the Entente where its hegemony is as yet unshaken; in an irresistible decline in production and in the value of their currencies, an increase in the frequency of strikes and a strong aversion to work among the proletariat. The second phase, the period of counter-revolution, i.e. the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie in the epoch of revolution, means complete economic collapse; we can study this best in Germany and the remainder of Central Europe. If a communist system had arisen immediately after the political revolution, organised reconstruction could have begun in spite of the Versailles and St Germain peace treaties, in spite of the poverty and the exhaustion. But the Ebert-Noske regime no more thought of organised reconstruction than did Renner and Bauer[9]; they gave the bourgeoisie a free hand, and saw their duty as consisting solely in the suppression of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, or rather each individual bourgeois, acted in a characteristically bourgeois manner; each of them thought only of making as much profit as possible and of rescuing for his personal use whatever could be saved from the cataclysm. It is true that there was talk in newspapers and manifestoes of the need to rebuild economic life by organised effort, but this was simply for the workers' consumption, fine phrases to conceal the fact that despite their exhaustion, they were under rigorous compulsion to work in the most intensive conditions possible. In reality, of course, not a single bourgeois concerned himself one jot with the general national interest, but only with his personal gain. At first, trade became the principal means of self-enrichment, as it used to be in the old days; the depreciation of the currency provided the opportunity to export everything that was needed for economic expansion or even for the mere survival of the masses – raw materials, food, finished products, means of production, and after that, factories themselves and property. Racketeering reigned everywhere among the bourgeois strata, supported by unbridled corruption on the part of officialdom. And so all their former possessions and everything that was not to be surrendered as war reparations was packed off abroad by the 'leaders of production'. Likewise in the domain of production, the private pursuit of profit intervened to wreck economic life by its total indifference towards the common welfare. In order to force piecework and

[9] Karl Renner was the leader of the revisionist wing of the Austrian Social Democratic Party; Otto Bauer was Austrian Foreign Secretary from November 1918 to July 1919. [Translator's note.]

longer working hours upon proletarians or to get rid of rebellious elements among them, they were locked out and the factories set at a standstill, regardless of the stagnation caused throughout the rest of the industry as a consequence. On top of that came the incompetence of the bureaucratic management in the state enterprises, which degenerated into utter vacillation when the powerful hand of the government was missing. Restriction of production, the most primitive method of raising prices and one which competition would render impossible in a healthy capitalist economy, became respectable once more. In the stock-market reports capitalism seems to be flourishing again, but the high dividends are consuming the last remaining property and are themselves being frittered away on luxuries. What we have witnessed in Germany over the last year is not something out of the ordinary, but the functioning of the general class character of the bourgeoisie. Their only aim is, and always has been, personal profit, which in normal capitalism sustains production, but which brings about the total destruction of the economy as capitalism degenerates. And things will go the same way in other countries; once production has been dislocated beyond a certain point and the currency has depreciated sharply, then the complete collapse of the economy will result if the pursuit of private profit by the bourgeoisie is given free reign – and this is what the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie amounts to, whatever non-communist party it may hide behind.

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

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

At this point, a few problems may be touched on in passing. The question of technical cadres in industry will only give temporary difficulties: although their thinking is bourgeois through and through and they are deeply hostile to proletarian rule, they will nevertheless conform in the end. Getting commerce and industry moving will above all be a question of supplying raw materials; and this question coincides with that of food-stuffs. The question of food-supplies is central to the revolution in Western Europe, since the highly industrialised population cannot get by even under capitalism without imports from abroad. For the revolution, however, the question of food-supplies is intimately bound up with the whole agrarian question, and the principles of communist regulation of agriculture must influence measures taken to deal with hunger even during the revolution. Junker estates and large-scale landed property are ripe for expropriation and collective exploitation; the small farmers will be freed from all capitalist oppression and encouraged to adopt methods of

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

The reconstruction of the economy, inordinately difficult as it will be, is not the main problem for the Communist Party. When the proletarian masses develop their intellectual and moral potential to the full, they will resolve it themselves. The prime duty of the Communist Party is to arouse and foster this potential. It must eradicate all the received ideas which leave the proletariat timid and unsure of itself, set itself against everything that breeds illusions among the workers about easier courses and restrains them from the most radical measures, energetically oppose all the tendencies which stop short at half-measures or compromises. And there are still many such tendencies.

VII

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

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

establish that of the party – that is to say the party leadership – then it too may become a hindrance to development. The attitude of the Communist Party of Germany during the revolutionary March movement, when it announced that the proletariat was not yet ripe for dictatorship and that it would therefore encounter any 'genuinely socialist government' that might be formed as a 'loyal opposition', in other words restrain the proletariat from waging the fiercest revolutionary struggle against such a government, was itself criticised from many quarters[10].

A government of socialist party leaders may arise in the course of the revolution as a transitional form; this will be expressing a temporary balance between the revolutionary and bourgeois forces, and it will tend to freeze and perpetuate the temporary balance between the destruction of the old and the development of the new. It would be something like a more radical version of the Ebert-Haase-Dittmann regime[11]; and its basis shows what can be expected of it: a seeming balance of hostile classes, but under the preponderance of the bourgeoisie, a mixture of parliamentary democracy and a kind of council system for the workers, socialisation subject to the veto of the Entente powers' imperialism with the profits of capital being maintained, futile attempts to prevent classes clashing violently. It is always the workers who take a beating in such circumstances. Not only can a regime of this sort achieve nothing in terms of reconstruction, it does not even attempt to do so, since its only aim is to halt the revolution in mid-course. Since it attempts both to prevent the further disintegration of capitalism and also the development of the full political power of the proletariat, its effects are directly counter-revolutionary. Communists have no choice but to fight such regimes in the most uncompromising manner.

Just as in Germany the Social-Democratic Party was formerly the leading organisation of the proletariat, so in England the trade-union movement, in the course of almost a century of history, has put down the deepest roots in the working class. Here it has long been the ideal of the younger radical trade-union leaders – Robert Smillie is a typical example – for the working class to govern society by means of the trade-union organisation. Even the revolutionary syndicalists and the spokesmen of the IWW in America, although affiliated to the Third International, imagine the future rule of the proletariat primarily along these lines. Radical trade-unionists see the soviet system not as the purest form of proletarian dictatorship, but rather as a regime of politicians and intellectuals built up on a base of working-class organisations. They see the trade union movement, on the other hand, as the natural organisation of the proletariat, created by the proletariat, which governs itself within it and which will go on to govern the whole of the work-process. Once the old ideal of 'industrial democracy' has been realised and the trade union is master in the factory, its collective organ, the trade-union congress, will take over the function of guiding and managing the economy as a whole. It will then be the real 'parliament of labour' and replace the old bourgeois parliament of parties. These circles often shrink from a one-sided and 'unfair' class dictatorship as an infringement of democracy, however; labour is to rule, but others are not to be without rights. Therefore, in addition to the labour parliament, which governs work, the basis of life, a second house could be

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

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

elected by universal suffrage to represent the whole nation and exercise its influence on public and cultural matters and questions of general political concern.

This conception of government by the trade unions should not be confused with 'labourism', the politics of the 'Labour Party', which is currently led by trade-unionists. This latter stands for the penetration of the bourgeois parliament of today by the trade unions, who will build a 'workers' party' on the same footing as other parties with the objective of becoming the party of government in their place. This party is completely bourgeois, and there is little to choose between Henderson and Ebert. It will give the English bourgeoisie the opportunity to continue its old policies on a broader basis as soon as the threat of pressure from below makes this necessary, and hence weaken and confuse the workers by taking their leaders into the government. A government of the workers' party, something which seemed imminent a year ago when the masses were in so revolutionary a mood, but which the leaders themselves have put back into the distant future by holding the radical current down, would, like the Ebert regime in Germany, have been nothing but government on behalf of the bourgeoisie. But it remains to be seen whether the far-sighted, subtle English bourgeoisie does not trust itself to stultify and suppress the masses more effectively than these working-class bureaucrats.

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

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

leaders, the radical trade-unionists and the communists will go hand in hand.

These tendencies are not confined to England. The trade unions are the most powerful workers' organisations in every country; as soon as a political clash topples the old state power, it will inevitably fall into the hands of the best organised and most influential force on hand. In Germany in November 1918, the trade-union executives formed the counter-revolutionary guard behind Ebert; and in the recent March crisis, they entered the political arena in an attempt to gain direct influence upon the composition of the government. The only purpose of this support for the Ebert regime was to deceive the proletariat the more subtly with the fraud of a 'government under the control of the workers' organisations'. But it shows that the same tendency exists here as in England. And even if the Legiens and Bauers[12] are too tainted by counter-revolution, new radical trade-unionists from the USP tendency will take their place just as last year the Independents under Dissmann won the leadership of the great metalworkers' federation. If a revolutionary movement overthrows the Ebert regime, this tightly organised force of seven million will doubtless be ready to seize power, in conjunction with the CP or in opposition to it.

A 'government of the working class' along these lines by the trade unions cannot be stable; although it may be able to hold its own for a long time during a slow process of economic decline, in an acute revolutionary crisis it will only be able to survive as a tottering transitional phenomenon. Its programme, as we have outlined above, cannot be radical. But a current which will sanction such measures not, like communism, as a temporary transitional form at most to be deliberately utilised for the purpose of building up a communist organisation, but as a definitive programme, must necessarily come into conflict with and antagonism towards the masses. Firstly, because it does not render bourgeois elements completely powerless, but grants them a certain position of power in the bureaucracy and perhaps in parliament, from which they can continue to wage the class struggle. The bourgeoisie will endeavour to consolidate these positions of strength, while the proletariat, because it cannot annihilate the hostile class under these conditions, must attempt to establish a straightforward soviet system as the organ of its dictatorship; in this battle between two mighty opponents, economic reconstruction will be impossible[13]. And secondly, because a government of trade-union leaders of this kind cannot resolve the problems which society is posing; for the latter can only be resolved through the proletarian masses' own initiative and activity, fuelled by the self-sacrificing and unbounded enthusiasm which only communism, with all its perspectives of total freedom and supreme intellectual and moral elevation, can command. A current which seeks to abolish material poverty and exploitation, but deliberately confines itself to this goal, which leaves the bourgeois superstructure intact and at the same time holds back from revolutionising the mental outlook and ideology of the proletariat, cannot release these great energies in the masses; and so it will be incapable of resolving the material problems of initiating economic expansion and ending the chaos.

The trade-union regime will attempt to consolidate and stabilise the prevailing level of the revolutionary process, just like the 'genuinely socialist' regime – except that it will do so at a much more developed stage, when the primacy of the bourgeoisie has been destroyed and a certain balance of class power has arisen with the

[12] Ebert, Haase and Dittmann were members of the Council of People's Commissioners given supreme authority by the November revolution. [Translator's note.]

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

proletariat predominant; when the entire profit of capital can no longer be saved, but only its less repellent petty-capitalist form; when it is no longer bourgeois but socialist expansion that is being attempted, albeit with insufficient resources. It thus signifies the last stand of the bourgeois class: when the bourgeoisie can no longer withstand the assault of the masses on the Scheidemann-Henderson-Renaudel line, it falls back to its last line of defence, the Smillie-Dissmann-Merrheim line[14]. When it is no longer able to deceive the proletariat by having 'workers' in a bourgeois or socialist regime, it can only attempt to keep the proletariat from its ultimate radical goals by a 'government of workers' organisations' and thus in part retain its privileged position. Such a government is counterrevolutionary in nature, in so far as it seeks to arrest the necessary development of the revolution towards the total destruction of the bourgeois world and prevent total communism from attaining its greatest and clearest objectives. The struggle of the communists may at present often run parallel with that of the radical trade-unionists; but it would be dangerous tactics not to clearly identify the differences of principle and objective when this happens. And these considerations also bear upon the attitude of the communists towards the trade-union confederations of today; everything which consolidates their unity and strength consolidates the force which will one day put itself in the way of the onward march of the revolution.

When communism conducts a strong and principled struggle against this transitional political form, it represents the living revolutionary tendencies in the proletariat. The same revolutionary action on the part of the proletariat which prepares the way for the rule of a worker-bureaucracy by smashing the apparatus of bourgeois power simultaneously drives the masses on to form their own organs, the councils, which immediately undermine the basis of the bureaucratic trade unions' machinery. The development of the soviet system is at the same time the struggle of the proletariat to replace the incomplete form of its dictatorship by complete dictatorship. But with the intensive labour which all the never-ending attempts to 'reorganise' the economy will demand, a leadership bureaucracy will be able to retain great power for a long time, and the masses' capacity to get rid of it will only develop slowly. These various forms and phases of the process of development do not, moreover, follow on in the abstract, logical succession in which we have set them down as degrees of maturation: they all occur at the same time, become entangled and coexist in a chaos of tendencies that complement each other, combat each other and dissolve each other, and it is through this struggle that the general development of the revolution proceeds. As Marx himself put it:

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

The resistances which issue from the proletariat itself as expressions of weakness must be overcome in order for it to develop its full strength; and this process of development is generated by conflict, it proceeds from crisis to crisis, driven on by struggle. In the beginning was the deed, but it was only the beginning. It demands an instant of united purpose to overthrow a ruling class, but only the lasting unity conferred by clear insight can keep a firm grasp upon victory. Otherwise there comes the reverse

[14] Respectively socialist and trade union leaders. [Translator's note.]

which is not a return to the old rulers, but a new hegemony in a new form, with new personnel and new illusions. Each new phase of the revolution brings a new layer of as yet unused leaders to the surface as the representatives of particular forms of organisation, and the overthrow of each of these in turn represents a higher stage in the proletariat's self-emancipation. The strength of the proletariat is not merely the raw power of the single violent act which throws the enemy down, but also the strength of mind which breaks the old mental dependence and thus succeeds in keeping a tight hold on what has been seized by storm. The growth of this strength in the ebb and flow of revolution is the growth of proletarian freedom.

VIII

In Western Europe, capitalism is in a state of progressive collapse; yet in Russia, despite the terrible difficulties, production is being built up under a new order. The hegemony of communism does not mean that production is completely based on a communist order – this latter is only possible after a relatively lengthy process of development – but that the working class is consciously developing the system of production towards communism[15] This development cannot at any point go beyond what the prevailing technical and social foundations permit, and therefore it inevitably manifests transitional forms in which vestiges of the old bourgeois world appear. According to what we have heard of the situation in Russia here in Western Europe, such vestiges do indeed exist there.

Russia is an enormous peasant land; industry there has not developed to the unnatural extent of a 'workshop' of the world as it has in Western Europe, making export and expansion a question of life and death, but just sufficiently for the formation of a working class able to take over the government of society as a developed class. Agriculture is the occupation of the popular masses, and modern, large-scale farms are in a minority, although they play a valuable role in the development of communism. It is the small units that make up the majority: not the wretched, exploited little properties of Western Europe, but farms which secure the welfare of the peasants and which the soviet regime is seeking to integrate more and more closely into the system as a whole by means of material assistance in the form of extra equipment and tools and by intensive cultural and specialist education. It is nevertheless natural that this form of enterprise generates a certain spirit of individualism alien to communism, which, among the 'rich peasants', has become a hostile, resolutely anti-communist frame of mind. The Entente has doubtless speculated on this in its proposals to trade with co-operatives, intending to initiate a bourgeois counter-movement by drawing these strata into bourgeois pursuit of profit. But because fear of feudal reaction binds them to the present regime as their major interest, such efforts must come to nothing, and when Western European imperialism collapses this danger will disappear completely.

Industry is predominantly a centrally organised, exploitation-free system of production; it is the heart of the new order, and the leadership of the state is based on the industrial proletariat. But even this system of production is in a transitional phase; the technical and administrative cadres in the factories and in the state apparatus exercise greater authority than is commensurate with developed communism. The need to increase production quickly and the even more urgent need to create an efficient army to fend off the attacks of reaction made it imperative to make good the

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

lack of reliable leaders in the shortest possible time; the threat of famine and the assaults of the enemy did not permit all resources to be directed towards a more gradual raising of the general level of competence and to the development of all as the basis of a collective communist system. Thus a new bureaucracy inevitably arose from the new leaders and functionaries, absorbing the old bureaucracy into itself. This is at times regarded with some anxiety as a peril to the new order, and it can only be removed by a broad development of the masses. Although the latter is being undertaken with the utmost energy, only the communist surplus by which man ceases to be the slave of his labour will form a lasting foundation for it. Only surplus creates the material conditions for freedom and equality; so long as the struggle against nature and against the forces of capital remains intense, an inordinate degree of specialisation will remain necessary.

It is worth noting that although our analysis predicts that development in Western Europe will take a different direction from that of Russia insofar as we can foresee the course which it will follow as the revolution progresses, both manifest the same politico-economic structure: industry run according to communist principles with workers' councils forming the element of self-management under the technical direction and political hegemony of a worker-bureaucracy, while agriculture retains an individualistic, petty-bourgeois character in the dominant small and medium-scale sectors. But this coincidence is not so extraordinary for all that, in that this kind of social structure is determined not by previous political history, but by basic technico-economic conditions – the level of development attained by industrial and agricultural technology and the formation of the proletarian masses – which are in both cases the same[16]. But despite this coincidence, there is a great difference in significance and goal. In Western Europe this politico-economic structure forms a transitional stage at which the bourgeoisie is ultimately able to arrest its decline, whereas in Russia the attempt is consciously being made to pursue development further in a communist direction. In Western Europe, it forms a phase in the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in Russia a phase in the new economic expansion. With the same external forms, Western Europe is on the downward path of a declining culture, Russia on the rising movement of a new culture.

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

This conception takes no account of the difficulties facing the revolution in Western Europe. Where the proletariat only slowly gains firm control and the bourgeoisie is upon occasion able to win back power in part or in whole, nothing can come of

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

economic reconstruction. Capitalist expansion is impossible; every time the bourgeoisie obtains a free hand, it creates new chaos and destroys the bases which could have served for the construction of communist production. Again and again it prevents the consolidation of the new proletarian order by bloody reaction and destruction. This occurred even in Russia: the destruction of industrial installations and mines in the Urals and the Donetz basin by Kolchak and Denikin, as well as the need to deploy the best workers and the greater part of the productive forces against them, was a serious blow to the economy and damaged and delayed communist expansion – and even though the initiation of trade relations with America and the West may considerably favour a new upturn, the greatest, most self-sacrificing effort will be needed on the part of the masses in Russia to achieve complete recovery from this damage. But – and herein lies the difference – the soviet republic has remained intact in Russia as an organised centre of communist power which has already developed tremendous internal stability. In Western Europe there will be just as much destruction and murder, here too the best forces of the proletariat will be wiped out in the course of the struggle, but here we lack an already consolidated, organised soviet state that could serve as a source of strength. The classes are wearing each other out in a devastating civil war, and so long as construction comes to nothing, chaos and misery will continue to rule. This will be the lot of countries where the proletariat does not immediately recognise its task with clear insight and united purpose, that is to say where bourgeois traditions weaken and split the workers, dim their eyes and subdue their hearts. It will take decades to overcome the infectious, paralysing influence of bourgeois culture upon the proletariat in the old capitalist countries. And meanwhile, production lies in ruins and the country degenerates into an economic desert.

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

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

This will not be the first time in world history that the centre of the civilised world has shifted in the transition to a new mode of production or one of its phases. In antiquity, it moved from the Middle East to Southern Europe, in the Middle Ages, from Southern to Western Europe; with the rise of colonial and merchant capital, first Spain, then Holland and England became the leading nation, and with the rise of industry England. The cause of these shifts can in fact be embraced in a general historical principle: where the earlier economic form reached its highest development, the material and mental forces, the politico-juridical institutions which secured its existence and which were necessary for its full development, were so strongly constructed that they offered almost insuperable resistance to the development of new forms. Thus, the institution of slavery inhibited the development of feudalism at the twilight of antiquity; thus, the guild laws applying in the great wealthy cities of medieval times meant that later capitalist manufacturing could only develop in other centres hitherto insignificant; thus in the late eighteenth century, the political order of French absolutism which had fostered industry under Colbert obstructed the introduction of the large-scale industry that made England a manufacturing nation. There even exists a corresponding law in organic nature, a corollary to Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' known as the law of the 'survival of the unfitted': when a species of animal has become specialised and differentiated into a wealth of forms all perfectly adapted to particular conditions of life in that period – like the Saurians in the Secondary Era – it becomes incapable of evolving into a new species; all the various options for adaptation and development have been lost and cannot be retrieved. The development of a new species proceeds from primitive forms which, because they have remained undifferentiated, have retained all their potential for development, and the old species which is incapable of further adaptation dies out. The phenomenon whereby leadership in economic, political and cultural development continually shifts from one people or nation to another in the course of human history – explained away by bourgeois science with the fantasy of a nation or race having 'exhausted its life force' – is a particular incidence of this organic rule.

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

considering the communist world revolution.

This world revolution is not seen in its full universal significance if considered only from the Western European perspective. Russia not only forms the eastern part of Europe, it is much more the western part of Asia, and not only in a geographical, but also in a politico-economic sense. The old Russia had little in common with Europe: it was the westernmost of those politico-economic structures which Marx termed 'oriental despotic powers', and which included all the great empires of ancient and modern Asia. Based on the village communism of a largely homogeneous peasantry, there evolved within these an absolute rule by princes and the nobility, which also drew support from relatively small-scale but nevertheless important trade in craft goods. Into this mode of production, which, despite superficial changes of ruler, had gone on reproducing itself in the same way for thousands of years, Western European capital penetrated from all sides, dissolving, fermenting, undermining, exploiting, impoverishing; by trade, by direct subjection and plunder, by exploitation of natural riches, by the construction of railways and factories, by state loans to the princes, by the export of food and raw materials – all of which is encompassed in the term 'colonial policy'. Whereas India, with its enormous riches, was conquered early, plundered and then proletarianised and industrialised, it was only later, through modern colonial policy, that other countries fell prey to developed capital. Although on the surface Russia had played the role of a great European power since 1700, it too became a colony of European capital; due to direct military contact with Europe it went earlier and more precipitately the way that Persia and China were subsequently to go. Before the last world war 70 per cent of the iron industry, the greater part of the railways, 90 per cent of platinum production and 75 per cent of the naphtha industry were in the hands of European capitalists, and through the enormous national debts of tsarism, the latter also exploited the Russian peasantry past the point of starvation. While the working class in Russia worked under the same conditions as those of Western Europe, with the result that a body of revolutionary marxist views developed, Russia's entire economic situation nevertheless made it the westernmost of the Asiatic empires.

The Russian revolution is the beginning of the great revolt by Asia against the Western European capital concentrated in England. As a rule, we in Western Europe only consider the effects which it has here, where the advanced theoretical development of the Russian revolutionaries has made them the teachers of the proletariat as it reaches towards communism. But its workings in the East are more important still; and Asian questions therefore influence the policies of the soviet republic almost more than European questions. The call for freedom and for the self-determination of all peoples and for struggle against European capital throughout Asia is going out from Moscow, where delegations from Asiatic tribes are arriving one after another[17]. The threads lead from the soviet republic of Turan to India and the Moslem countries; in Southern China the revolutionaries have sought to follow the example of government by soviets; the pan-Islamic movement developing in the Middle East under the leadership of Turkey is trying to connect with Russia. This is where the significance of the world struggle between Russia and England as the exponents of two

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

social systems lies; and this struggle cannot therefore end in real peace, despite temporary pauses, for the process of ferment in Asia is continuing. English politicians who look a little further ahead than the petty-bourgeois demagogue Lloyd George clearly see the danger here threatening English domination of the world, and with it the whole of capitalism; they rightly say that Russia is more dangerous than Germany ever was. But they cannot act forcefully, for the beginnings of revolutionary development in the English proletariat do not permit any regime other than one of bourgeois demagogy.

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

The fact that these peoples are predominantly agrarian need be no more of an obstacle than it was in Russia: communist communities will not consist of tightly-packed huddles of factory towns, for the capitalist division between industrial and agricultural nations will cease to exist; agriculture will have to take up a great deal of space within them. The predominant agricultural character will nevertheless render the revolution more difficult, since the mental disposition is less favourable under such conditions. Doubtless a prolonged period of intellectual and political upheaval will also be necessary in these countries. The difficulties here are different from those in Europe, less of an active than of a passive nature: they lie less in the strength of the resistance than in the slow pace at which activity is awakening, not in overcoming internal chaos, but in developing the unity to drive out the foreign exploiter. We will not go into the particulars of these difficulties here – the religious and national fragmentation of India, the petty-bourgeois character of China. However the political and economic forms continue to develop, the central problem which must first be overcome is to destroy the hegemony of European and American capital.

The hard struggle for the annihilation of capitalism is the common task which the workers of Western Europe and the USA have to accomplish hand-in-hand with the vast populations of Asia. We are at present only at the beginning of this process.

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

Afterword

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

The policy in question first made its appearance in Germany, when Radek, using all the ideological and material influence that he and the KPD leadership could muster, attempted to impose his tactics of parliamentarianism and support for the central confederations upon the German communists, thereby splitting and weakening the communist movement. Since Radek was made secretary of the executive committee this policy has become that of the entire executive committee. The previously unsuccessful efforts to secure the affiliation of the German Independents to Moscow have been redoubled, while the anti-parliamentarian communists of the KAPD, who, it can hardly be denied, by rights belong to the CI, have received frosty treatment: they had opposed the Third International on every issue of importance, it was maintained, and could only be admitted upon special conditions. The Amsterdam Auxiliary Bureau, which had accepted them and treated them as equals, was closed down. Lenin told the English communists that they should not only participate in parliamentary elections, but even join the Labour Party, a political organisation consisting largely of reactionary trade-union leaders and a member of the Second International. All these stands manifest the desire of the leading Russian comrades to establish contact with the big workers' organisations of Western Europe that have yet to turn communist. While radical communists seek to further the revolutionary development of the working masses by means of rigorous, principled struggle against all bourgeois, social-patriotic and vacillating tendencies and their representatives, the leadership of the International is attempting to gain the adherence of the latter to Moscow in droves without their having first to cast off their old perspectives.

The antagonistic stance which the Bolsheviks, whose deeds made them exponents of radical tactics in the past, have taken up towards the radical communists of

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

The basis of these policies can readily be identified in the needs of the Soviet republic. The reactionary insurgents Kolchak and Denikin have destroyed the foundations of the Russian iron industry, and the war effort has forestalled a powerful upsurge in production. Russia urgently needs machines, locomotives and tools for economic reconstruction, and only the undamaged industry of the capitalist countries can provide these. It therefore needs peaceful trade with the rest of the world, and in particular with the nations of the Entente; they in their turn need raw materials and foodstuffs from Russia to stave off the collapse of capitalism. The sluggish pace of revolutionary development in Western Europe thus compels the Soviet republic to seek a modus vivendi with the capitalist world, to surrender a portion of its natural wealth as the price of doing so, and to renounce direct support for revolution in other countries. In itself there can be no objection to an arrangement of this kind, which both parties recognise to be necessary; but it would hardly be surprising if the sense of constraint and the initiation of a policy of compromise with the bourgeois world were to foster a mental disposition towards more moderate perspectives. The Third International, as the association of communist parties preparing proletarian revolution in every country, is not formally bound by the policies of the Russian government, and it is supposed to pursue its own tasks completely independent of the latter. In practice, however, this separation does not exist; just as the CP is the backbone of the Soviet republic, the executive committee is intimately connected with the Praesidium of the Soviet republic through the persons of its members, thus forming an instrument whereby this Praesidium intervenes in the politics of Western Europe. We can now see why the tactics of the Third International, laid down by Congress to apply homogeneously to all capitalist countries and to be directed from the centre, are determined not only by the needs of communist agitation in those countries, but also by the political needs of Soviet Russia.

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

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

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

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

From the point of view of safeguarding Soviet Russia there can be no objection to this conception of the goal of world revolution. If a political system similar to that of

Russia existed in the other countries of Europe – control by a workers' bureaucracy based on a council system – the power of world imperialism would be broken and contained, at least in Europe. Economic build-up towards communism could then go ahead without fear of reactionary wars of intervention in a Russia surrounded by friendly workers' republics. It is therefore comprehensible that what we regard as a temporary, inadequate, transitional form to be combated with all our might is for Moscow the achievement of proletarian revolution, the goal of communist policy.

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

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

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