

Anton Pannekoek wrote 'Workers Councils' during and just after the second world war. He translated it into English. This translation was published by a small Australian group : the Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils — Melbourne at first in several booklets in 1947 to 1949, then in a complete book in 1950.

It remained, until now, the only English edition. An American group — Root and Branch — used the edition for a reprint of the first two parts in 1970.

The present edition is also a reprint of the whole book as it was published in Australia, but the contents will cover the four booklets to be published successively. The last one will contain some comments on the book and a biography of Pannekoek.

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**anton pannekoek**

# **workers' councils**

## **2. the fight**



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## II. THE FIGHT

### 1. TRADE UNIONISM

The task of the working class to take production in its own hand and to organise it first has to be dealt with. In order to carry on the fight it is necessary to see the goal in clear and distinct lines before us. But the fight, the conquest of power over production is the chief and most difficult part of the work. It is in this fight that the workers' councils will be created.

We cannot exactly foresee the future forms of the workers' fight for freedom. They depend on social conditions and must change along with the increasing power of the working class. It will be necessary, therefore, to survey how so far it [has] fought its way upward, adapting its modes of action to the varying circumstances. Only by learning from the experience of our predecessors and by considering it critically will we be able in our turn to meet the demands of the hour.

In every society depending on the exploitation of a working [class] by a ruling class there is a continuous struggle over the division of the total produce of labor, or in other words: over the degree of exploitation. Thus medieval times, as well as later centuries, are full of incessant struggles and furious fights between the landowners and the farmers. At the same time we see the fight of the rising burgher class against nobility and monarchy, for power over society. This is a different kind of class struggle, associated with the rise of a new system of production, proceeding from the development of technics, industry and commerce. It was waged between the masters of the land and the masters of capital, between the declining feudal and the rising capitalist system. In a series of social convulsions, of political revolutions and wars, in England, in France and in other countries consecutively, the capitalist class has gained complete mastery over society.

The working class under capitalism has to carry on both kinds of fight against capital. It has to keep up a continual struggle to mitigate the heavy pressure of exploitation, to increase wages, to



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enlarge or keep up its share in the total produce. Besides, with the growth of its strength, it has to gain mastery over society in order to overthrow capitalism and bring about a new system of production.

When for the first time, in the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England, spinning and then weaving machines were introduced, we hear of revolting workers destroying the machines. They were not workers in the modern sense, not wage earners. They were small artisans, independent before, now starved by the competition of cheaply producing machines, and trying in vain to remove the cause of their misery. Afterwards, when they or their children became wage workers, themselves handling the machines, their position was different. It was the same for the hosts from the countryside, who, during the entire 19th century of growing industry, flocked into the towns, lured by what to them appeared good wages. In modern times it is ever more the offspring of the workers themselves that fill the factories.

For all of them the struggle for better working conditions is of immediate necessity. The employers, under the pressure of competition, to enlarge their profits, try to lower the wages and to increase the hours as much as possible. At first the workers, powerless by the constraint of hunger, have to submit in silence. Then resistance bursts forth, in the only possible form, in the refusal to work, in the strike. In the strike for the first time the workers discover their strength, in the strike arises their fighting power. From the strike springs up the association of all the workers of the factory, of the branch, of the country. Out of the strike sprouts the solidarity, the feeling of fraternity with the comrades in work, of unity with the entire class: the first dawn of what some day will be the life-spending sun of the new society. The mutual help, at first appearing in spontaneous and casual money collections, soon takes the lasting form of the trade union.

For a sound development of trade-unionism certain conditions are necessary. The rough ground of lawlessness, of police arbitrariness and prohibitions, mostly inherited from pre-capitalistic times, must be smoothed before solid buildings may be erected. Usually the workers themselves had to secure these conditions. In England it was the revolutionary campaign of Chartism; in Germany, half a century later, it was the fight of Social Democracy that, by enforcing social acknowledgment for the workers, laid the foundations for the growth of the unions.

Now strong organisations are built up, comprising the workers of the same trade all over the country, forming connections with other trades, and internationally with unions all over the world. The

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regular paying of high dues provides the considerable funds from which strikers are supported, when unwilling capitalists must be forced to grant decent working conditions. The ablest among the colleagues, sometimes victims of the foe's wrath from former fights, are appointed as salaried officials, who, as independent and expert spokesmen of the workers, can negotiate with the capitalist employers. By strike at the right moment, supported by the entire power of the union, and by ensuing negotiations, agreements can be reached about better and more uniform wages and about fair working hours, in so far as the latter are not yet fixed by law.

So the workers are no longer powerless individuals, forced by hunger to sell their labor-power at any price. They are now protected by their union, protected by the power of their own solidarity and co-operation: for every member not only gives part of his earnings for the colleague, but is ready also to risk his job in defending the organisation, their community. Thus a certain equilibrium is reached between the power of the employers and the power of the workers. The working conditions are no longer dictated by all-powerful capitalist interests. The unions are recognised gradually as representatives of the workers' interests; though ever again fighting is necessary, they become a power that takes part in the decisions. Not in all trades surely, and not at once everywhere. Usually skilled craftsmen are the first in building their unions. The unskilled masses in the great factories, standing against more powerful employers, mostly come later; their unions often started from sudden outbursts of great fights. And against the monopolistic owners of giant enterprises the unions have little chance; these all-powerful capitalists wish to be absolute master, and in their haughtiness they hardly allow even servile yellow shop unions.

Apart from this restriction, and even assuming trade unionism to be fully developed and in control of all industry, this does not mean that exploitation is abolished, that capitalism is repressed. What is repressed is the arbitrariness of the single capitalist; abolished are the worst abuses of exploitation. And this is in the interest of the fellow-capitalists, too—to guard them against unfair competition—and in the interest of capitalism at large. By the power of the unions capitalism is normalised; a certain norm of exploitation is universally established. A norm of wages, allowing for the most modest life exigencies, so that the workers are not driven again and again into hunger revolts, is necessary for uninterrupted production. A norm of working hours, not quite exhausting the vitality of the working class—though reduction of hours is largely neutralised by acceleration of tempo and more intense exertion—is necessary for



capitalism itself, to preserve a usable working class as the basis of future exploitation. It was the working class that by its fight against the narrowness of capitalist greed had to establish the conditions of normal capitalism. And ever again it has to fight, to preserve the uncertain equilibrium. In this fight the trade unions are the instruments; thus the unions perform an indispensable function in capitalism. Narrow-minded employers do not see this, but their broader-minded political leaders know quite well that trade unions are an essential element of capitalism, that without the workers' unions as normalising power capitalism is not complete. Though products of the workers' fight, kept up by their pains and efforts, trade unions are at the same time organs of capitalist society.

With the development of capitalism, however, conditions gradually grow more unfavorable for the workers. Big capital grows, feels its power, and wishes to be master at home. Capitalists also have learnt to understand the power of association; they organise into employers' unions. So instead of the equality of forces arises a new ascendancy of capital. Strikes are [countered] by lock-outs that drain the funds of the trade unions. The money of the workers cannot compete with the money of the capitalists. In the bargaining about wages and working conditions the unions are more than ever the weaker party, because they have to fear, and hence must try to avoid great fights that exhaust the reserves and thereby endanger the secured existence of the organisation and its officials. In the negotiations the union officials often have to accept a lowering of conditions in order to avoid fighting. To them this is unavoidable and self-evident, because they realise that by the changed conditions the relative fighting power of their organisation has diminished.

For the workers, however, it is not self-evident that they are silently to accept harder working and living conditions. They want to fight. So a contradiction of viewpoints arises. The officials seem to have common sense on their side; they know that the unions are at a disadvantage and that fight must result in defeat. But the workers feel by instinct that great fighting powers still lie hidden in their masses; if only they knew how to use them. They rightly realise that by yielding, again and again, their position must grow worse, and that this can be prevented only by fighting. So conflicts must arise in the unions between the officials and the members. The members protest against the new tariffs [awards] favorable to the employers; the officials defend the agreements reached by long and difficult negotiations and try to have them ratified. So they often have to act as spokesmen of capital interests against workers' interests. And because they are the influential rulers of the unions,

throwing all the weight of power and authority on this side, the unions in their hands may be said to develop into organs of capital.

The growth of capitalism, the increase of the number of workers, the urgent necessity of association, make the trade unions giant organisations, needing an ever increasing staff of officials and leaders. These develop into a bureaucracy administering all business, a ruling power over the members, because all the power factors are in their hands. As the experts they prepare and manage all affairs; they administrate the finances and the spending of money for different purposes; they are editors of the union papers, by which they can force their own ideas and points of view upon the members. Formal democracy prevails; the members in their assemblies, the chosen delegates in the congresses have to decide, just as the people decide politics in Parliament and State. But the same influences that render Parliament and Government lords over the people are operative in these Parliaments of Labor. They turn the alert bureaucracy of expert officials into a kind of union government, over the members absorbed by their daily work and cares. Not solidarity, the proletarian virtue, but discipline, obedience to the decisions is asked from them. Thus there arises a difference in viewpoint, a contrast in opinions on the various questions. It is enhanced by the difference in life conditions: the insecurity of the workers' job, always threatened by depression forces and unemployment, as contrasted to the security that is necessary for officials to well-manage the union affairs.

It was the task and the function of trade unionism, by their joint united fight to raise the workers out of their helpless misery, and to gain for them an acknowledged place in capitalist society. It had to defend the workers against the ever increasing exploitation of capital. Now that big capital consolidates more than ever into a monopolistic power of banks and industrial concerns, this former function of trade unionism [is finished]. Its power falls short compared to the formidable power of capital. The unions are now giant organisations, with their acknowledged place in society; their position is regulated by law, and their tariff [Court Award] agreements are given legally binding force for the entire industry. Their leaders aspire at forming part of the power ruling industrial conditions. They are the apparatus by means of which monopolistic capital imposes its conditions upon the entire working class. To this now all-powerful capital it is, normally, far more preferable to disguise its rule in democratic and constitutional forms than to show it in the naked brutality of dictatorship. The working conditions which it thinks suitable to the workers will be accepted and obeyed



much more easily in the form of agreements concluded by the unions than in the form of dictates arrogantly imposed. Firstly, because to the workers the illusion is left that they are masters of their own interests. Secondly, because all the bonds of attachment, which as their own creation, the creation of their sacrifices, their fight, their elation, render the unions dear to the workers, now are subservient to the masters. Thus under modern conditions trade unions more than ever are turned into organs of the domination of monopolist capital over the working class.

## 2. DIRECT ACTION

As an instrument of fight for the working class against capital the trade unions are losing their importance. But the fight itself cannot cease. The depressing tendencies grow stronger under big capitalism and so the resistance of the workers must grow stronger, too. Economic crises grow more and more destructive and undermine apparently secured progress. **The exploitation is intensified to retard the lowering of the profit rate for the rapidly increasing capital. So again and again the workers are provoked to resistance.** But against the strongly increased power of capital the old methods of fight no longer can serve. New methods are needed, and before long their beginnings present themselves. They spring up spontaneously in the wild [outlaw] strike, in the direct action.

Direct action means action of the workers themselves without the intermediary of trade union officials. A strike is called wild [outlaw or unofficial] as contrasted to the strike proclaimed by the union according to the rules and regulations. The workers know that the latter is without effect, where the officials against their own will and insight are made to proclaim it, perhaps thinking a defeat a healthy lesson for the foolish workers, and in every case trying to finish it as soon as possible. Thus, when the pressure is too heavy, when negotiations with the directors drag along without effect, at last in smaller or larger groups the exasperation breaks loose in a wild strike.

Fight of the workers against capital is not possible without organisation. And organisation springs up spontaneously, immedi-

ately. Not of course in such form that a new union is founded, with a board chosen and regulations formulated in ordered paragraphs. Sometimes, to be sure, it was done in this way; attributing the inefficiency to personal shortcomings of the old leaders, and embittered against the old trade union, they founded a new one, with their most able and energetic men at the head. Then indeed in the beginning all was energy and strong action; but in the long run the new union, if it remains small, lacks power notwithstanding its activity, and if it grows large, of necessity develops the same characteristics as the old one. After such experiences the workers at last will follow the other way, of keeping the direction of their fight entirely in their own hands.

Direction in their own hands, also called their own leadership, means that all initiative and all decisions proceed from the workers themselves. Though there is a strike committee, because all cannot be always together, everything is done by the strikers; continually in touch with one another they distribute the work, they devise all measures and decide on all actions directly. Decision and action, both collective, are one.

The first and most important task is the propaganda to expand the strike. The pressure upon capital must be intensified. Against the enormous power of capital not only the individual workers, but also the separate groups are powerless. The sole power that is a match for capital is the firm unity of the entire working class. Capitalists know or feel this quite well, and so the only inducement to concessions is the fear the strike might spread universally. The more manifestly determinate the will of the strikers, the greater the numbers taking part in it, the more the chance of success.

Such an extension is possible because it is not the strike of a tardy group, in worse conditions than others, trying to raise itself to the general level. Under the new circumstances discontent is universal; all the workers feel depressed under capitalist superiority; fuel for explosions has accumulated everywhere. It is not for others, it is for themselves if they join the fight. As long as they feel isolated, afraid to lose their job, uncertain what the comrades will do, without firm unity, they shrink from action. Once, however, they take up the fight, they are changed into new personalities; selfish fear recedes to the background and forth spring the forces of community, solidarity and devotion, rousing courage and perseverance. These are contagious; the example of fighting activity rouses in others, who feel in themselves the same forces awakening, the spirit of mutual and of self-confidence. Thus the wild strike as a prairie fire may spring over to other enterprises and involve ever greater masses.



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Such cannot be the work of a small number of leaders, either union officials or self-imposed new spokesmen, though, of course, the push of some few intrepid comrades may give strong impulses. It must be the will and the work of all, in common initiative. The workers have not only to do, but also to contrive, to think out, to decide everything themselves. They cannot shift decision and responsibility to a body, a union, that takes care of them. They are entirely responsible for their fight, success or failure depends on themselves. From passive they have turned into active beings, determinedly taking their destiny into their own hands. From separate individuals each caring for himself, they have become a solid, firmly cemented unity.

Such spontaneous strikes present yet another important side; the division of the workers into different separate unions is effaced. In the trade union world traditions from former petty-capitalist times play an important role in separating the workers in often competing, jealous and bickering corporations; in some countries religious and political differences act as partition fences in establishing separate liberal, catholic, socialist and other unions. In the workshop the members of different unions stand beside one another. But even in strikes they often are kept asunder, so as not to have them infected with too much unity ideas, and the concordance in action and negotiation is solely kept up by the boards and officials. Now, however, in direct actions, these differences of union membership become unreal as outside labels. For such spontaneous fights unity is the first need; and unity there is, else there could be no fight. All who stand together in the shop, in the very same position, as direct associates, subject to the same exploitation, against the same master, stand together in common action. Their real community is the shop; personnel of the same enterprise, they form a natural union of common work, common lot and common interests. Like spectres from the past the old distinctions of different membership fall back, almost forgotten in the new living reality of fellowship in common fight. The vivid consciousness of new unity enhances the enthusiasm and the feeling of power.

Thus in the wild strikes some characteristics of the coming forms of fight make their appearance: first the self-action, the self-initiative, keeping all activity and decision in their own hands; and then the unity, irrespective of old memberships, according to the natural grouping of the enterprises. These forms come up, not through shrewd planning, but spontaneously, irresistible, urged by the heavy superior power of capital against which the old organisations cannot fight seriously any more. Hence it does not mean that now

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the scales have turned, that now the workers win. Also, wild strikes mostly bring defeat; their extent is too narrow. Only in some favourable cases they have success in preventing a lowering in working conditions. Their importance is that they demonstrate a fresh fighting spirit that cannot be suppressed. Out of the deepest instincts of self-preservation, of duty against family and comrades, the will to assert oneself ever again springs up. There is a gain of increasing self-reliance and class-feeling. They are the harbingers of future greater fights, when great social emergencies, with heavier pressure and deeper distress, drive the masses into stronger action.

When wild strikes break out on a larger scale, comprising great masses, entire branches of industry, towns or districts, the organisation has to assume new forms. Deliberation in one assembly is impossible; but more than ever mutual understanding is necessary for common action. Strike committees are formed out of the delegates of all the personnels, for continual discussion of circumstances. Such strike committees are entirely different from union boards of officials; they show the characteristics already of workers' councils. They come up out of the fight, to give it unity of direction. But they are no leaders in the old sense, they have no direct power. The delegates, often different persons, come to express the opinion and the will of the personnels [groups] that sent them. For these personnels stand for the action in which the will manifests itself. Yet the delegates are no simple messengers of their mandatory groups; they took a foremost part in the discussion, they embody the prevalent convictions. In the committee assemblies the opinions are discussed and put to the test of momentary circumstances; the results and the resolutions are brought back by the delegates into the personnel [group] assemblies. Through these intermediaries the shop personnels themselves take part in the deliberations and decisions. Thus unity of action for great masses is secured.

Not, to be sure, in such a way that every group bows obediently to the decisions of the committee. There are no paragraphs to confer such power on it. Unity in collective fighting is not the outcome of judicious regulation of competencies but of spontaneous necessities in a sphere of passionate action. The workers themselves decide, not because such a right is given to them in accepted rules, but because they actually decide, by their actions. It may happen that a group cannot convince other groups by arguments, but then by its action and example it carries them away. The self-determination of the workers over their fighting action is not a demand put up by theory, by arguments of practicability, but the statement of a fact evolving from practice. Often in great social



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movements it occurred—and doubtless will occur again—that the actions did not comply with the decisions. Sometimes central committees made an appeal for universal strike, and only small groups here and there followed; elsewhere the committees weighed scrupulously, without venturing a decision, and the workers broke loose in massal fight. It may be possible even that the same workers who enthusiastically resolved to strike shrink back when standing before the deed. Or, conversely, that prudent hesitation governs the decisions and yet, driven by inner forces, a non-resolved strike irresistibly breaks out. Whereas in their conscious thinking old watchwords and theories play a role and determine arguments and opinions, at the moment of decision on which weal and woe depend, strong intuition of real conditions breaks forth, determining the actions. This does not mean that such intuition always guides right; people may be mistaken in their impression of outer conditions. But it decides; it cannot be replaced by foreign leadership, by guardians however clever, directing them. By their own experiences in fight, in success and adversity, by their own efforts the workers must acquire the capacities rightly to take care of their interests.

Thus the two forms of organisation and fight stand in contrast, the old one of trade unions and regulated strike, the new one of spontaneous strike and workers' councils. This does not mean that the former at some time will be simply substituted by the latter as the only alternative. Intermediate forms may be conceived, attempts to correct the evils and weakness of trade unionism and preserve its right principles; to avoid the leadership of a bureaucracy of officials, to avoid the separation by narrow craft and trade interests, and to preserve and utilise the experiences of former fights. This might be done by keeping together, after a big strike, a core of the best fighters, in one general union. Wherever a strike breaks out spontaneously this union is present with its skilled propagandists and organisers to assist the inexperienced masses with their advice, to instruct, to organise, to defend them. In this way every fight means a progress of organisation, not in the sense of fees-paying membership, but in the sense of growing class unity.

An example for such a union might be found in the great American union "Industrial Workers of the World" (I.W.W.). At the end of last century in contrast to the conservative trade unions of well-paid skilled labor, united in the "American Federation of Labor," it grew up out of special American conditions. Partly out of the fierce struggles of the miners and lumbermen, independent pioneers in the wilds of the Far West, against big capital that had monopolised and seized the riches of wood and soil. Partly out

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of the hunger strikes of the miserable masses of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, accumulated and exploited in the factories of the Eastern towns and in the coal mines, despised and neglected by the old unions. The I.W.W. provided them with experienced strike leaders and organisers, who showed them how to stand against police terrorism, who defended them before public opinion and the courts, who taught them the practice of solidarity and unity and opened to them wider views on society, on capitalism and class fight. In such big fights ten thousands of new members joined the I.W.W., of whom only a small fraction remained. This "one big union" was adapted to the wild growth of American capitalism in the days when it built up its power by subjecting the masses of the independent pioneers.

Similar forms of fight and organisation may be propagated and may come up elsewhere, when in big strikes the workers stand up, without as yet having the complete self-confidence of taking matters entirely in their own hands. But only as temporary transition forms. There is a fundamental difference between the conditions of future fight in big industry and those of America in the past. There it was the rise, now it will be the downfall of capitalism. There the rugged independence of pioneers or the primitive existence-seeking egoism of immigrants were the expression of a middle class individualism that had to be curbed under the yoke of capitalist exploitation. Now masses trained to discipline during a life time by machine and capital, connected by strong technical and spiritual ties to the productive apparatus, organise its utilisation on the new basis of collaboration. These workers are thoroughly proletarian, all obstinacy of middle class individualism having been worn off long ago by the habit of collaborate work. The forces of solidarity and devotion hidden in them only wait for great fights to develop into a dominating life principle. Then even the most suppressed layers of the working class, who only hesitatingly join their comrades, wanting to lean upon their example, will soon feel the new forces of community growing also in themselves. Then they will perceive that the fight for freedom asks not only their adherence but the development of all their powers of self-activity and self-reliance. Thus overcoming all intermediate forms of partial self-determination the progress will definitely go the way of council organisation.



### 3. SHOP OCCUPATION

Under the new conditions of capitalism a new form of fight for better working conditions came up, the shop occupation, mostly called sit-down strike, the workers ceasing to work but not leaving the factory. It was not invented by theory, it arose spontaneously out of practical needs; theory can do no more than afterwards explain its causes and consequences. In the great world crisis of 1930 unemployment was so universal and lasting that there arose a kind of class antagonism between the privileged number of employed and the unemployed masses. Any regular strike against wage cuttings was made impossible, because the shops after being left by the strikers, immediately would be flooded by the masses outside. So the refusal to work under worse conditions must needs be combined with sticking to the place of work by occupying the shop.

Having sprung up, however, in these special circumstances, the sit-down strike displays some characteristics that make it worth while to consider it more closely as the expression of a further developed fighting form. It manifests the formation of a more solid unity. In the old form of strike the working community of the personnel dissolved when leaving the shop. Dispersed over the streets and homes between other people they were separated into loose individuals. To discuss and decide as one body they had then to assemble in meeting halls, in streets and squares. However often police and authorities tried to hinder or even to forbid this, the workers held fast to their right of using them, through the consciousness that they fought with legitimate means for lawful aims. The legality of trade union practice was generally recognised by public opinion.

When, however, this legality is not recognised, when the increasing power of big capital over State authorities disputes the use of hall and square for assemblies, the workers, if they will fight, have to assert their rights by taking them. In America every great strike was as a rule accompanied by a continuous fight with the police over the use of the streets and rooms for meeting. The sit-down strike releases the workers from this necessity by their taking the right to assemble at the adequate place, in the shop. At the

same time the strike is made truly efficient by the impossibility of strike-breakers to take their places.

Of course this entails new stiff fighting. The capitalists as owners of the shop consider occupation by the strikers as a violation of their ownership; and on this juridical argument, they call for the police to turn the workers out. Indeed, from the strict juridical viewpoint, shop occupation is in conflict with formal law. Just as strike is in conflict with formal law. And in fact the employer regularly appealed to this formal law as a weapon in the fight, by stigmatising the strikers as contract breakers, thus giving him the right to put new workers in their places. But against this juridical logic strikes have persisted and developed as a form of fight; because they were necessary.

Formal law, indeed, does not represent the inner reality of capitalism, but only its outer forms, to which middle class and juridical opinion cling. Capitalism in reality is not a world of equal and contracting individuals, but a world of fighting classes. When the power of the workers was too small the middle class opinion of formal law prevailed, the strikers as contract breakers were turned out and replaced by others. Where, however, trade union fight had won its place, a new and truer juridical conception asserted itself: a strike is not a break, not a cessation, but a temporary suspending of the labor contract, to settle the dispute over working terms. Lawyers may not accept theoretically this point of view, but society does, practically.

In the same way shop occupation asserted itself as a method in fight, where it was needed and where the workers were able to take a stand. Capitalists and lawyers might splutter over the violation of property rights. For the workers, however, it was an action that did not attack the property rights but only temporarily suspended their effects. Shop occupation is not shop-expropriation. It is only a momentary suspension of the disposal by the capitalist. After the contest has been settled, he is master and undisputed owner as before.

Yet, at the same time, it is more. In it, as in a light flash at the horizon, a glimpse of future development springs up. By shop occupation the workers, unwittingly, demonstrate that their fight has entered into a new phase. Here their firm interjunction as a shop-organisation appears, a natural unity not to be dissolved into single individuals. Here the workers become conscious of their intimate connection with the shop. To them it is not another man's building where only at his command they come to work for him till he sends them away. To them the shop with its machines is a productive



apparatus they handle, an organ that only by their work is made a living part of society. It is nothing foreign to them; they are at home here, much more than the juridical owners, the shareholders who do not even know its whereabouts. In the factory the workers grow conscious of the contents of their life, their productive work, their work-community as a collectivity that makes it a living organism, an element of the totality of society. Here, in shop occupation, a vague feeling arises that they ought to be entirely master of production, that they ought to expel the unworthy outsiders, the commanding capitalists, who abuse it in wasting the riches of mankind and in devastating the earth. And in the heavy fight that will be necessary, the shops again will play a primary role, as the units of organisation, of common action, perhaps as the supports and strongholds, pivots of force and objects of struggle. Compared with the natural connection of workers and shops the command of capital appears as an artificial outside domination, powerful as yet, but hanging in the air; whereas the growing hold of the workers is firmly rooted in the earth. Thus in shop occupation the future forecasts its light in the growing consciousness that the shops belong with the workers, that together they form a harmonious unity, and that the fight for freedom will be fought over, in, and by means of the shops.

#### 4. POLITICAL STRIKES

Not all the great strikes of the workers in the last century were fought over wages and working conditions. Besides the so-called economic strikes, political strikes occurred. Their object was the promotion or the prevention of a political measure. They were not directed against the employers but against State government, to induce it to give to the workers more political rights, or to dissuade it from obnoxious acts. Thus it could happen that the employers agreed with the aims and promoted the strike.

A certain amount of social equality and political rights for the working class is necessary in capitalism. Modern industrial production is based upon intricate technics, product of highly developed knowledge, and demands careful personal collaboration and capability of the workers. The utmost exertion of forces cannot, as in the

case of coolies or slaves, be enforced by rough physical compulsion, by whip or outrage; it would be revenged by equally rough mishandling of the tools. The constraint must come from inner motives, from moral means of pressure based upon individual responsibility. The workers must not feel powerless embittered slaves; they must have the means to go against inflicted wrongs. They have to feel themselves free sellers of their labor-power, exerting all their forces, because, formally and apparently, they are determining their own lot in the general competition. To maintain themselves as a working class they need not only the personal liberty and legal equality proclaimed by middle class laws: Special rights and liberties, too, are necessary to secure these possibilities; the right of association, the right of meeting in assembly, the right to form unions, freedom of speech, freedom of press. And all these political rights must be protected by universal suffrage, for the workers to assert their influence over Parliament and law.

Capitalism began by refusing these rights, assisted herein by the inherited despotism and backwardness of existing governments, and tried to make the workers powerless victims of its exploitation. Only gradually, in consequence of fierce struggle against inhuman oppression, some rights were won. Because in its first stage capitalism feared the hostility of the lower classes, the artisans impoverished by its competition, and the workers starved by low wages, the suffrage was kept restricted to the wealthy classes. Only in later times, when capitalism was firmly rooted, when its profits were large and its rule was secured, the restrictions on the ballot were gradually removed. But only under compulsion of strong pressure, often of hard fight from the side of the workers. Fight for democracy fills the history of home politics during the 19th century, first in England, and then in all countries where capitalism introduced itself.

In England universal suffrage was one of the main points of the charter of demands put up by the English workers in the Chartist movement, their first and most glorious period of fight. Their agitation had been a strong inducement to the ruling landowner class to yield to the pressure of the simultaneous Reform movement of the rising industrial capitalists. So through the Reform Act 1832 the industrial employers got their share in political power; but the workers had to go home empty-handed, and to continue their strenuous struggle. Then, at the climax of Chartism, a "holy month" was projected in 1839, when all the work had to rest till the demands were granted. Thus the English workers were the first to proclaim the political strike as a weapon in their fight. But it could not be put into effect; and at an outburst (1842) it had to



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be broken off without success; it could not curb the greater power of the now combined ruling classes of landowners and factory owners. Not till a generation later, when after a period of unprecedented industrial prosperity and expansion the propaganda was once more taken up, now by the trade unions combined in the "International Workers' Association" (the "First International" of Marx and Engels), public opinion in the middle class was ready to extend, in consecutive steps, the suffrage to the working class.

In France universal suffrage since 1848 formed part of republican constitution, dependent as such government always was on the support of the workers. In Germany the foundation of the Empire, in the years 1866-70, product of a feverish capitalist development activating the entire population, entailed universal suffrage as a warrant of continued contact with the masses of the people. But in many other countries the propertied class, often only a privileged part of it, kept fast to its monopoly of political influence. Here the campaign for the ballot, obviously the gate to political power and freedom, roused ever larger parts of the working class to participation, to organisation and to political activity. Conversely, the fear of the propertied classes for political domination of the proletariat stiffened their resistance. Formally the matter looked hopeless for the masses; universal suffrage had to be legally enacted by a Parliament chosen by the privileged minority, and thus invited to destroy its own foundations. This implies that only by extraordinary means, by pressure from outside, finally by political mass strikes the aim could be achieved. How it happens may be learnt from the classical example of the Belgian suffrage strike in 1893.

In Belgium, through a limited census-suffrage, government was perpetually in the hands of a small clique of conservatives of the clerical party. Labor conditions in the coal mines and factories were notoriously among the worst in Europe and led to explosions in frequent strikes. Extension of suffrage as a way to social reform, frequently proposed by some few liberal parliamentarians, always again was defeated by the conservative majority. Then the Workers' Party, agitating, organising and preparing for many years, decided upon a universal strike. Such a strike had to exert political pressure during the parliamentary discussion on a new suffrage proposal. It had to demonstrate the intense interest and the grim will of the masses, who abandoned their work to give all attention to this fundamental question. It had to arouse all the indifferent elements among the workers and the small business men to take part in what for all of them was a life interest. It had to show the narrow-minded rulers the social power of the working

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class, to impress upon them that it refused longer to be kept under tutelage. At first, of course, the parliamentary majority took a stand, refused to be coerced by pressure from outside, wishing to decide after their own will and conscience; so it took the suffrage bill from the rolls and ostensibly began to discuss other matters. **But in the meantime the strike went on, extended evermore,** and brought production to a standstill; traffic ceased, and even dutiful public services became restive. The governmental apparatus itself was hampered in its functions; and in the business world, with the growing feeling of uncertainty, opinion became loud that to grant the demands was less dangerous than to provoke a catastrophe. So the determination of the parliamentarians began to crumble; they felt that they had to choose between yielding or crushing the strike by military force. But could the soldiers be trusted in such a case? Thus their resistance had to give way; will and conscience had to be revised, and at last they accepted and enacted the proposals. The workers, by means of a political strike, had reached their aim and won their fundamental political right.

After such a success many workers and their spokesmen supposed that this new powerful weapon could be used oftener to win important reforms. But therein they were disappointed; the history of labor movement knows of more failures than successes in political strikes. Such a strike tries to impose the will of the workers upon a government of the capitalist class. It is somewhat of a revolt, a revolution, and calls up in that class the instincts of self-defence and the impulses of suppression. These instincts were repressed when part of the bourgeoisie itself grew annoyed by the backwardness of political institutions and felt the need of fresh reforms. Then the mass action of the workers was an instrument to modernise capitalism. Because the workers were united and full of enthusiasm, whereas the propertied class in any case was divided, the strike succeeded. It could succeed not because of the weakness of the capitalist class, but because of the strength of capitalism. Capitalism is strengthened when its roots, by universal suffrage, securing at least political equality, are driven deeper into the working class. Workers' suffrage belongs to developed capitalism; because the workers need the ballot, as well as trade unions, to maintain themselves in their function in capitalism.

If now, however, in minor points they should suppose themselves able to impose their will against the real interests of the capitalists, they find this class as a solid block against them. They feel it as by instinct; and not being carried away by a great inspiring aim that dispels all hesitations, they remain uncertain and divided.



Every group, seeing that the strike is not universal, hesitates in its turn. Volunteers of the other classes offer themselves for the most needed services and traffic, though they are not really able to uphold production, their activity at least discourages the strikers. Prohibition of assemblies, display of armed forces, martial law may still more demonstrate the power of government and the will to use it. So the strike begins to crumble and must be discontinued, often with considerable losses and disillusion for the defeated organisations. In experiences like these the workers discovered that by its inner strength capitalism is able to withstand even well organised and massal assaults. But at the same time they felt sure that in mass strikes, if only applied at the right time, they possess a powerful weapon.

This view was confirmed in the first Russian Revolution of 1905. It exhibited an entirely new character in mass-strikes. Russia at that time showed only the beginnings of capitalism: some few large factories in great towns, supported mostly by foreign capital with State subsidies, where starving peasants flocked to work as industrial hands. Trade unions and strikes were forbidden; government was primitive and despotic. The Socialist Party, consisting of intellectuals and workers, had to fight for what middle-class revolutions in Western Europe had already established: the destruction of absolutism and the introduction of constitutional rights and law. Hence the fight of the Russian workers was bound to be spontaneous and chaotic. First as wild strikes against miserable working conditions, severely suppressed by Cossacks and police, then acquiring a political character, in demonstrations and the unfolding of red flags in the streets, the struggle manifest itself. When the Japanese war of 1905 had weakened the Czarist government and shown up its inner rottenness, the revolution broke out as a series of wild-strike movements on a gigantic scale. Now they flamed up, springing like wildfire from one factory, one town to another, bringing the entire industry to a standstill; then they dissolved into minor local strikes, dying away after some concessions from the employers, or smouldered until new outbreaks came. Often there were street demonstrations and fights against police and soldiers. Days of victory came where the delegates of the factories assembled unmolested to discuss the situation, then, joined by deputations of other groups, of rebellious soldiers even, to express their sympathy, whilst the authorities stood passively by. Then again the Government made a move and arrested the entire body of delegates, and the strike ended in apathy. Till at last, in a series of barricade fights in the capital cities the movement was crushed by military force.

In Western Europe, political strikes had been carefully premeditated actions for specially indicated aims, directed by the union or the Socialist Party leaders. In Russia the strike movement was the revulsion of heavily abused humanity, uncontrolled, as a storm or a flood forcing its way. It was not the fight of organised workers claiming a long-denied right; it was the rise of a down-trodden mass to human consciousness in the only form possible of fight. Here there could be no question of success or defeat, the fact of an outbreak was already a victory, no more to be undone, the beginning of a new epoch. In outward appearance the movement was crushed and Czarist government again was master. But in reality, these strikes had struck a blow at Czarism from which it could not recover. Some reforms were introduced, political, industrial and agrarian. But the whole fabric of the State with its arbitrary despotism of incapable chinowniks could not be modernised, it had to disappear. This revolution prepared the next one, in which the old barbarous Russia was to be destroyed.

The first Russian revolution has strongly influenced the ideas of the workers in Central and Western Europe. Here a new development of capitalism had set in that made felt the need of new and more powerful methods of fight, for defence and for attack. Economic prosperity, which began in the nineties and lasted till the first world war, brought an unprecedented increase of production and wealth. Industry expanded, especially iron and steel industry, new markets were opened, railways and factories were built in foreign countries and other continents; now for the first time capitalism spread all over the earth. America and Germany were the scenes of the most rapid industrial development. Wages increased, unemployment nearly disappeared, the trade unions grew into mass organisations. The workers were filled with hopes of continual progress in prosperity and influence, and visions loomed up of a coming age of industrial democracy.

But then, at the other side of society, they saw another image. Big capital concentrated production and finance, wealth and power, in a few hands and built up strong industrial concerns and capitalist associations. Its need for expansion, for the disposal over foreign markets and raw materials, inaugurated the policy of imperialism, a policy of stronger ties to old, and conquest of new colonies, a policy of growing antagonism between the capitalist classes of different countries, and of increasing armaments. The old peaceful free-trade ideals of the "little Englanders" were ridiculed and gave way to new ideals of national greatness and power. Wars broke out in all continents, in the Transvaal, in China, Cuba, and the Philippines, in the Balkans; England consolidated its Empire, and



Germany, claiming its share in world power, prepared for world war. Big capital in its growing power ever more determined the character and opinions of the entire bourgeoisie, filling it with its anti-democratic spirit of violence. Though sometimes it tried to lure the workers by the prospect of a share in the spoils, there was on the whole less inclination than in previous times to make concessions to labour. Every strike for better wages, engaged in order to catch up with rising prices, met with stiffer resistance. Reactionary and aristocratic tendencies got hold of the ruling class; it spoke not of extension but of restriction of popular rights, and threats were heard, especially in continental countries, of suppressing the workers' discontent by violent means.

Thus circumstances had changed and were changing ever more. The power of the working class had increased through its organisation and its political action. But the power of the capitalist class had increased still more. This means that heavier clashes between the two classes might be expected. So the workers had to look for other and stronger methods of fight. What were they to do if regularly even the most justifiable strikes are met by big lock-outs, or if their parliamentary rights are reduced or circumvented, or if capitalist government will make war notwithstanding their urgent protests?

It is easily seen that under such conditions there was among the foremost elements of the working class much thought and discussion on mass action and the political strike, and that the general strike was propagated as a means against the outbreak of war. Studying the examples of such actions as the Belgian and the Russian strikes, they had to consider the conditions, the possibilities, and the consequences of mass-actions and political strikes in the most highly developed capitalist countries with strong governments and powerful capitalist classes. It was clear that strong odds were against them. What could not have happened in Belgium and Russia would be the immediate result here: the annihilation of their organisations. If the combined trade unions, Socialist or Labor Parties should proclaim a general strike, Government, sure of the support of the entire ruling and middle class, doubtless would be able to imprison the leaders, persecute the organisations as endangering the safety of the State, suppress their papers, by a state of siege prevent all mutual contact of the strikers, and by mobilizing military forces, assert its undisputed public power. Against this display of power the workers, isolated, exposed to the threats and calumnies, disheartened by distorted information from the press, would have no chance. Their organisations would be dissolved and break down. And the organisations lost, the fruits of years of devoted struggle, all is lost.

Thus the political and labor leaders asserted. Indeed, to them, with their outlook entirely limited within the confines of present forms of organisation it must appear so. So they are fundamentally opposed to political strikes. This means that in this form, as premeditated and well decided actions of the existing organisations, directed by their leaders, such political strikes are not possible. As little as a thunderstorm in a placid atmosphere. It may be true that, for special aims entirely within the capitalist system, a political strike remains entirely within the bounds of legal order, so that after it is over capitalism resumes its ordinary course. But this truth does not prevent the ruling class from being angrily aroused against every display of workers' power, nor political strikes from having consequences far beyond their immediate aims. When social conditions become intolerable for the workers, when social or political crises are threatening them with ruin, it is inevitable that mass-actions and gigantic strikes break forth spontaneously, as the natural form of fight, notwithstanding all objections and resistance of the existing unions, irresistibly, like thunderstorms out of a heavy electric tension in the atmosphere. And again the workers face the question whether they have any chance against the power of State and capital.

It is not true that with a forcible suppression of their organisations all is lost. These are only the outer form of what in essence lives within. To think that by such Government measures the workers suddenly should change into the selfish, narrow-minded, isolated individuals of olden times! In their hearts all the powers of solidarity, of comradeship, of devotion to the class remain living, are growing even more intense through the adverse conditions; and they will assert themselves in other forms. If these powers are strong enough no force from above can break the unity of the strikers. Where they suffer defeat it is mainly due to discouragement. No government power can compel them to work; it can only prohibit active deeds; it can do no more than threaten and try to intimidate them, try by fear to dissolve their unity. It depends on the inner strength of the workers, on the spirit of organisation within them, whether that can be successful. Certainly thus the highest demands are made on social and moral qualities; but just for this reason these qualities will be strained to the highest possible pitch and will be hardened as steel in the fire.

This is not the affair of one action, one strike. In every such contest the force of the workers is put to the test, whether their unity is strong enough to resist the attempts of the ruling powers to break it. Every contest arouses new strenuous efforts to strengthen it so as not to be broken. And when, actually, the



workers remain steadfast, when notwithstanding all acts of intimidation, of suppression, of isolation, they hold out, when there is no yielding of any group, then it is on the other side that the effects of the strike become manifest. Society is paralysed, production and traffic are stopped, or reduced to a minimum, the functioning of all public life is hampered, the middle classes are alarmed and may begin to advise concessions. The authority of Government, unable to restore the old order, is shaken. Its power always consisted in the solid organisation of all officials and services, directed by unity of purpose embodied in one self-sure will, all of them accustomed by duty and conviction to follow the intentions and instructions of the central authorities. When, however, it stands against the mass of the people, it feels itself ever more what it really is, a ruling minority, inspiring awe only as long as it seemed all-powerful, powerful only as long as it was undisputed, as long as it was the only solidly organised body in an ocean of unorganised individuals. But now the majority also is solidly organised, not in outward forms but in inner unity. Standing before the impossible task of imposing its will upon a rebellious population, Government grows uncertain, divided, nervous, trying different ways. Moreover, the strike impedes the intercommunication of the authorities all over the country, isolates the local ones, and throws them back upon their own resources. Thus the organisation of State power begins to lose its inner strength and solidity. Neither can the use of armed forces help otherwise than by more violent threatening. Finally the army consists either of workers too, in different dress and under the menace of stricter law, but not intended to be used against their comrades; or it is a minority over against the entire people. If put to the strain of being commanded to fire at unarmed citizens and comrades, the imposed discipline in the long run must give way. And then State power, besides its moral authority, would have lost its strongest material weapon to keep the masses in obedience.

Such considerations of the important consequences of mass strikes, once that great social crises stir up the masses to a desperate fight, could mean of course no more than the view of a possible future. For the moment, under the mollifying effects of industrial prosperity, there were no forces strong enough to drive the workers into such actions. Against the threatening war their unions and parties restricted themselves to professing their pacifism and international feelings, without the will and the daring to call upon the masses for a desperate resistance. So the ruling class could force the workers into its capitalist mass-action, into world war. It was the collapse of the appearances and illusions of self-satisfied power of the working class at the time, now disclosed as inner

weakness and insufficiency.

One of the elements of weakness was the lack of a distinct goal. There was not, and could not be, any clear idea of what had to come after successful mass-actions. The effects of mass strikes so far appeared destructive only, not constructive. This was not true, to be sure; decisive inner qualities, the basis of a new society, develop out of the fights. But the outer forms in which they had to take shape were unknown; nobody in the capitalist world at the time had heard of workers' councils. Political strikes can only be a temporary form of battle; after the strike constructive labor has to provide for permanency.

## 5. THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian revolution was an important episode in the development of the working class movement. Firstly, as already mentioned, by the display of new forms of political strike, instruments of revolution. Moreover, in a higher degree, by the first appearance of new forms of self-organisation of the fighting workers, known as soviets, i.e., councils. In 1905 they were hardly noticed as a special phenomenon and they disappeared with the revolutionary activity itself. In 1917 they reappeared with greater power; now their importance was grasped by the workers of Western Europe, and they played a role here in the class struggles after the first world war.

The soviets, essentially, were simply strike committees, such as always arise in wild strikes. Since the strikes in Russia broke out in large factories, and rapidly expanded over towns and districts, the workers had to keep in continual touch. In the shops the workers assembled and discussed regularly after the close of the work, or in times of tension even continually, the entire day. They sent their delegates to other factories and to the central committees, where information was interchanged, difficulties discussed, decisions taken, and new tasks considered.

But here the tasks proved more encompassing than in ordinary strikes. The workers had to throw off the heavy oppression of Czarism; they felt that by their action Russian society was changing in its foundations. They had to consider not only wages and labor



conditions in their shops, but all questions related to society at large. They had to find their own way in these realms and to take decisions on political matters. When the strike flared up, extended over the entire country, stopped all industry and traffic and paralysed the functions of government, the soviets were confronted with new problems. They had to regulate public life, they had to take care of public security and order, they had to provide for the indispensable public utilities and services. They had to perform governmental functions; what they decided was executed by the workers, whereas Government and police stood aloof, conscious of their impotence against their rebellious masses. Then the delegates of other groups, of intellectuals, of peasants, of soldiers, who came to join the central soviets, took part in the discussions and decisions. But all this power was like a flash of lightning, like a meteor passing. When at last the Czarist government mustered its military forces and beat down the movement the soviets disappeared.

Thus it was in 1905. In 1917 the war had weakened government through the defeats at the front and the hunger in the towns, and now the soldiers, mostly peasants, took part in the action. Besides the workers' councils in the town soldiers' councils were formed in the army; the officers were shot when they did not acquiesce in the soviets taking all power into their hands to prevent entire anarchy. After half a year of vain attempts on the part of politicians and military commanders to impose new governments, the soviets, supported by the socialist parties, were master of society.

Now the soviets stood before a new task. From organs of revolution they had to become organs of reconstruction. The masses were master and of course began to build up production according to their needs and life interests. What they wanted and did was not determined, as always in such cases, by inculcated doctrines, but by their own class character, by their conditions of life. What were these conditions? Russia was a primitive agrarian country with only the beginning of industrial development. The masses of the people were uncivilized and ignorant peasants, spiritually dominated by a gold glittering church, and even the industrial workers were strongly connected with their old villages. The village soviets arising everywhere were self-governing peasant committees. They seized the large estates of the former great landowners and divided them up. The development went in the direction of small freeholders with private property, and presented already the distinctions between larger and smaller properties, between influential wealthy and more humble poor farmers.

In the towns, on the other hand, there could be no development to private capitalist industry because there was no bourgeoisie of any significance. The workers wanted some form of socialist production, the only one possible under these conditions. But their minds and character, only superficially touched by the beginnings of capitalism, were hardly adequate to the task of themselves regulating production. So their foremost and leading elements, the socialists of the Bolshevik Party, organised and hardened by years of devoted fight, their leaders in the revolution became the leaders in the reconstruction. Moreover, were these working class tendencies not to be drowned by the flood of aspirations for private property coming from the land, a strong central government had to be formed, able to restrain the peasants' tendencies. In this heavy task of organising industry, of organising the defensive war against counter-revolutionary attacks, of subduing the resistance of capitalist tendencies among the peasants, and of educating them to modern scientific ideas instead of their old beliefs, all the capable elements among the workers and intellectuals, supplemented by such of the former officials and officers as were willing to co-operate, had to combine into the Bolshevik Party as the leading body. It formed the new government. The soviets gradually were eliminated as organs of self-rule, and reduced to subordinate organs of the government apparatus. The name of Soviet Republic, however, was preserved as a camouflage, and the ruling party retained the name of Communist Party.

The system of production developed in Russia is State socialism. It is organised production, with the State as universal employer, master of the entire production apparatus. The workers are master of the means of production no more than under Western capitalism. They receive their wages and are exploited by the State as the only mammoth capitalist. So the name State capitalism can be applied with precisely the same meaning. The entirety of the ruling and leading bureaucracy of officials is the actual owner of the factories, the possessing class. Not separately, everyone for a part, but together, collectively, they are possessors of the whole. Theirs the function and the task to do what the bourgeoisie did in Western Europe and America: develop industry and the productivity of labor. They had to change Russia from a primitive barbarous country of peasants into a modern, civilized country of great industry. And before long, in often cruelly waged class war between the peasants and the rulers, State-controlled big agrarian enterprises replaced the backward small farms.

The revolution, therefore, has not, as deceptive propaganda pretends, made Russia a land where the workers are master and com-



munism reigns. Yet it meant progress of enormous significance. It may be compared with the great French revolution: it destroyed the power of monarch and feudal landowners, it began by giving the land to the peasants, and it made the masters of industry rulers of the State. Just as then in France the masses from despised "canaille" became free citizens, recognised even in poverty and economic dependance as personalities with the possibility to rise, so now in Russia the masses rose from unevolving barbarism into the stream of world progress, where they may act as personalities. Political dictatorship as form of government can no more prevent this development once it has started than the military dictatorship of Napoleon hampered it in France. Just as then in France from among the citizens and peasants came up the capitalists and the military commanders, in an upward struggle of mutual competition, by good and by bad means, by energy and talent, by jobbery and deceit—so now in Russia. All the good brains among the workers and peasants' children rushed into the technical and farming schools, became engineers, officers, technical and military leaders. The future was opened to them and aroused immense tensions of energy; by study and exertion, by cunning and intrigue they worked to assert their places in the new ruling class—ruling, here again, over a miserable exploited class of proletarians. And just as at that time in France a strong nationalism sprang up proclaiming the new freedom to be brought to all Europe, a brief dream of everlasting glory—so now Russia proudly proclaimed its mission, by world revolution to free all peoples from capitalism.

For the working class the significance of the Russian revolution must be looked for in quite different directions. Russia showed to the European and American workers, confined within reformist ideas and practice, first how an industrial working class by a gigantic mass action of wild strikes is able to undermine and destroy an obsolete State power; and second, how in such actions the strike committees develop into workers' councils, organs of fight and of self-management, acquiring political tasks and functions. In order to see the influence of the Russian example upon the ideas and actions of the working class after the first world war, we have to go a step backward.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 meant an unexpected breakdown of the labor movement all over capitalist Europe. The obedient compliance of the workers under the military powers, the eager affiliation, in all countries, of the union and socialist party leaders

to their governments, as accomplices in the suppression of the workers, the absence of any significant protest, had brought a deep disappointment to all who before put their hopes of liberation on proletarian socialism. But gradually among the foremost of the workers came the insight that what had broken down was chiefly the illusion of an easy liberation by parliamentary reform. They saw the bleeding and exploited masses growing rebellious under the sufferings of oppression and butchery, and, in alliance with the Russian revolutionaries, they expected the world-revolution to destroy capitalism as an outcome of the chaos of the war. They rejected the disgraced name of socialism and called themselves communists, the old title of working class revolutionaries.

Then as a bright star in the dark sky the Russian revolution flared up and shone over the earth. And everywhere the masses were filled with anticipation and became restive, listening to its call for the finishing of the war, for brotherhood of the workers of all countries, for world revolution against capitalism. Still clinging to their old socialist doctrines and organisations the masses, uncertain under the flood of calumnies in the press, stood waiting, hesitating, whether the tale might still come true. Smaller groups, especially among the young workers, everywhere assembled in a growing communist movement. They were the advance guard in the movements that after the end of the war broke out in all countries, most strongly in defeated and exhausted Central Europe.

It was a new doctrine, a new system of ideas, a new tactic of fight, this communism that with the then new powerful means of government propaganda was propagated from Russia. It referred to Marx's theory of destroying capitalism by means of the workers' class fight. It was a call for fight against world capital, mainly concentrated in England and America, that exploited all peoples and all continents. It summoned not only the industrial workers of Europe and America, but also the subjected peoples of Asia and Africa to rise in common fight against capitalism. Like every war, this war could only be won by organisation, by concentration of powers, and good discipline. In the communist parties, comprising the most gallant and able fighters, kernel and staff were present already; they have to take the lead, and at their call the masses must rise and attack the capitalist governments. In the political and economic crisis of the world we cannot wait until by patient teaching the masses have all become communists. Nor is this necessary; if they are convinced that only communism is salvation, if they put their trust in the Communist Party, follow its directions, bring it to power, then the Party as the new government will establish the new order. So it did in Russia, and this example must be followed every-



where. But then, in response to the heavy task and the devotion of the leaders, strict obedience and discipline of the masses are imperative, of the masses towards the Party, of the party members towards the leaders. What Marx had called the dictatorship of the proletariat can be realised only as the dictatorship of the Communist Party. In the Party the working class is embodied, the Party is its representative.

In this form of communist doctrine the Russian origin was clearly visible. In Russia, with its small industry and undeveloped working class, only a rotten Asiatic despotism had to be overthrown. In Europe and America a numerous and highly developed working class, trained by a powerful industry, stands over against a powerful capitalist class disposing of all the resources of the world. Hence the doctrine of party dictatorship and blind obedience found strong opposition here. If in Germany the revolutionary movements after the close of the war had led to a victory of the working class and it had joined Russia, then the influence of this class, product of the highest capitalist and industrial development, would soon have outweighed the Russian character. It would have strongly influenced the English and the American workers, and it would have carried away Russia itself along new roads. But in Germany the revolution failed; the masses were kept aloof by their socialist and union leaders, by means of atrocity stories and promises of well-ordered socialist happiness, whilst their advance guards were exterminated and their best spokesmen murdered by the military forces under the protection of the socialist government. So the opposing groups of German communists could not carry weight; they were expelled from the party. In their place discontented socialist groups were induced to join the Moscow International, attracted by its new opportunist policy of parliamentarism, with which it hoped to win power in capitalist countries.

Thus world revolution from a war cry became a phrase. The Russian leaders imagined world revolution as a big scale extension and imitation of the Russian revolution. They knew capitalism only in its Russian form, as a foreign exploiting power impoverishing the inhabitants, carrying all the profits out of the country. They did not know capitalism as the great organising power, by its richness producing the basis of a still richer new world. As became clear from their writings, they did not know the enormous power of the bourgeoisie, against which all the capabilities of devoted leaders and a disciplined party are insufficient. They did not know the sources of strength that lie hidden in the modern working class. Hence the primitive forms of noisy propaganda and party terrorism, not only spiritual, but also physical, against dissenting views.

It was an anachronism that Russia, newly entering the industrial era out of its primitive barbarism, should take command over the working class of Europe and America, that stood before the task of transforming a highly developed industrial capitalism into a still higher form of organisation.

Old Russia essentially, in its economic structure, had been an Asiatic country. All over Asia lived millions of peasants, in primitive small scale agriculture, restricted to their village, under despotic far distant rulers, whom they had no connection with but by the paying of taxes. In modern times these taxes became ever more a heavy tribute to Western capitalism. The Russian revolution, with its repudiation of Czarist debts, was the liberation of the Russian peasants from this form of exploitation by Western capital. So it called upon all the suppressed and exploited Eastern peoples to follow its example, to join the fight and throw off the yoke of their despots, tools of the rapacious world capital. And far and wide, in China and Persia, in India and Africa the call was heard. Communist parties were formed, consisting of radical intellectuals, of peasants revolting against feudal landowners, of hard pressed urban coolies and artisans, bringing to the hundreds of millions the message of liberation. As in Russia it meant for all these peoples the opening of the road to modern industrial development, sometimes, as in China, in alliance with a modernizing national bourgeoisie. In this way the Moscow International even more than a European became an Asiatic institution. This accentuated its middle class character, and worked to revive in the European followers the old traditions of middle class revolutions, with the preponderance of great leaders, of sounding catchwords, of conspiracies, plots, and military revolts.

The consolidation of State capitalism in Russia itself was the determining basis for the character of the Communist Party. Whilst in its foreign propaganda it continued to speak of communism and world revolution, decried capitalism, called upon the workers to join in the fight for freedom, the workers in Russia were a subjected and exploited class, living mostly in miserable working conditions, under a strong and oppressive dictatorial rule, without freedom of speech, of press, of association, more strongly enslaved than their brethren under Western capitalism. Thus an inherent falsehood must pervade politics and teachings of that party. Though a tool of the Russian government in its foreign politics, it succeeded by its revolutionary talk to take hold of all the rebellious impulses generated in enthusiastic young people in the crisis-ridden Western world. But only to spill them in abortive sham-actions or in opportunist politics—now against the socialist parties styled as



traitors or social fascists, then seeking their alliance in a so-called red front or a people's front — causing its best adherents to leave in disgust. The doctrine it taught under the name of Marxism was not the theory of the overthrow of highly developed capitalism by a highly developed working class ; but its caricature, product of a world of barbarous primitivity, where fight against religious superstitions is spiritual, and modernised industrialism is economic progress — with atheism as philosophy, party-rule the aim ; obedience to dictatorship as highest commandment. The Communist Party did not intend to make the workers independent fighters capable by their force of insight themselves to build their new world, but to make them obedient followers ready to put the party into power.

So the light darkened that had illuminated the world; the masses that had hailed it were left in blacker night, either in discouragement turning away from the fight, or struggling along to find new and better ways. The Russian revolution first had given a mighty impulse to the fight of the working class, by its mass direct actions and by its new council forms of organisation—this was expressed in the widespread rise of the communist movement all over the world. But when then the revolution settled into a new order, a new class rule, a new form of government, State capitalism under dictatorship of a new exploiting class, the Communist Party needs must assume an ambiguous character. Thus in the course of ensuing events it became most ruinous to the working class fight, that can only live and grow in the purity of clear thought, plain deeds and fair dealings. By its idle talk of world revolution it hampered the badly needed new orientation of means and aims. By fostering and teaching under the name of discipline the vice of submissiveness, the chief vice the workers must shake off, by suppressing each trace of independent critical thought, it prevented the growth of any real power of the working class. By usurping the name communism for its system of workers' exploitation and its policy of often cruel persecution of adversaries, it made this name, till then expression of lofty ideals, a byword, an object of aversion and hatred even among workers. In Germany, where the political and economic crises had brought the class antagonisms to the highest pitch, it reduced the hard class fight to a puerile skirmish of armed youths against similar nationalist bands. And when then the tide of nationalism ran high and proved strongest, large parts of them, only educated to beat down their leaders' adversaries, simply changed colours. Thus the Communist Party by its theory and practice largely contributed to prepare the victory of fascism.

## 6. THE WORKERS' REVOLUTION

The revolution by which the working class will win mastery and freedom, is not a single event of limited duration. It is a process of organisation, of self-education, in which the workers gradually, now in progressing rise, then in steps and leaps, develop the force to vanquish the bourgeoisie, to destroy capitalism, and to build up their new system of collective production. This process will fill up an epoch in history of unknown length, on the verge of which we are now standing. Though the details of its course cannot be foreseen, some of its conditions and circumstances may be a subject of discussion now.

This fight cannot be compared with a regular war between similar antagonistic powers. The workers' forces are like an army that assembles during the battle! they must grow by the fight itself, they cannot be ascertained beforehand, and they can only put forward and attain partial aims. Looking back on history we discern a series of actions that as attempts to seize power seem to be so many failures: from Chartism, along 1848, along the Paris Commune, up to the revolutions in Russia and Germany in 1917-1918. But there is a line of progress; every next attempt shows a higher stage of consciousness and force. Looking back on the history of labor we see, moreover, that in the continuous struggle of the working class there are ups and downs, mostly connected with changes in industrial prosperity. In the first rise of industry every crisis brought misery and rebellious movements; the revolution of 1848 on the continent was the sequel of a heavy business depression combined with bad crops. The industrial depression about 1867 brought a revival of political action in England; the long crisis of the 1880's, with its heavy unemployment, excited mass actions, the rise of social-democracy on the continent and the "new unionism" in England. But in the years of industrial prosperity in between, as 1850-70, and 1895-1914, all this spirit of rebellion disappeared. When capitalism flourishes and in feverish activity expands its realm, when there is abundant employment, and trade union action is able to raise the wages, the workers do not think of any change in the social system. The capitalist class growing in wealth and power is full of self-confidence, prevails over the workers and succeeds in imbuing them with its spirit of nationalism. Formally the



workers may then stick to the old revolutionary catchwords; but in their subconscious they are content with capitalism, their vision is narrowed; hence, though their numbers are growing, their power declines. Till a new crisis finds them unprepared and has to rouse them anew.

Thus the question poses itself, whether, if previously won fighting power again and again crumbles in the contentment of a new prosperity, society and the working class ever will be ripe for revolution. To answer this question the development of capitalism must be more closely examined.

The alternation of depression and prosperity in industry is not a simple swinging to and fro. Every next swing was accompanied by an expansion. After each breakdown in a crisis capitalism was able to come up again by expanding its realm, its markets, its mass of production and product. As long as capitalism is able to expand farther over the world and to increase its volume, it can give employment to the mass of the population. As long as thus it can meet the first demand of a system of production, to procure a living to its members, it will be able to maintain itself, because no dire necessity compels the workers to make an end of it. If it could go on prospering at its highest stage of extension, revolution would be impossible as well as unnecessary; then there were only the hope that a gradual increase of general culture could reform its deficiencies.

Capitalism, however, is not a normal, in any case not a stable system of production. European, and afterwards American capitalism could increase production so continuously and rapidly, because it was surrounded by a wide non-capitalist outer world of small-scale production, source of raw materials and markets for the products. An artificial state of things, this separation between an active capitalist core and a dependent passive surrounding. But the core ever expanding. The essence of capitalist economy is growth, activity, expansion; every standstill means collapse and crisis. The reason is that profits accumulate continuously into new capital that seeks for investment to bring new profit, thus the mass of capital and the mass of products increase ever more rapidly and markets are sought for feverishly. So capitalism is the great revolutionizing power, subverting old conditions everywhere and changing the aspect of the earth. Ever new millions of people from their secluded, self-sufficient home production that reproduced itself during long centuries without notable change, are drawn into the whirl of world commerce. Capitalism itself, industrial exploitation, is introduced there, and soon from customers they become competitors. In the 19th century from England it progressed over France, Germany, America,

Japan, then in the 20th it pervades the large Asiatic territories. And first as competing individuals, then organised in national States the capitalists take up the fight for markets, colonies, world power. So they are driven on, revolutionizing ever wider domains.

But the earth is a globe, of limited extent. The discovery of its finite size accompanied the rise of capitalism four centuries ago, the realization of its finite size now marks the end of capitalism. The population to be subjected is limited. The hundreds of millions crowding the fertile plains of China and India once drawn within the confines of capitalism, its chief work is accomplished. Then no large human masses remain as objects for subjection. Surely there remain vast wild areas to be converted into realms of human culture; but their exploitation demands conscious collaboration of organised humanity; the rough rapine methods of capitalism—the fertility-destroying “rape of the earth”—are of no avail there. Then its further expansion is checked. Not as a sudden impediment, but gradually, as a growing difficulty of selling products and investing capital. Then the pace of development slackens, production slows up, unemployment waxes a sneaking disease. Then the mutual fight of the capitalists for world domination becomes fiercer, with new world wars impending.

So there can hardly be any doubt that an unlimited expansion of capitalism offering lasting life possibilities for the population, is excluded by its inner economic character. And that the time will come that the evil of depression, the calamities of unemployment, the terrors of war grow ever stronger. Then the working class, if not yet revolting, must rise and fight. Then the workers must choose between inertly succumbing and actively fighting to win freedom. Then they will have to take up their task of creating a better world out of the chaos of decaying capitalism.

Will they fight? Human history is an endless series of fights; and Clausewitz, the well-known German theorist on war, concluded from history that man is in his inner nature a warlike being. But others, sceptics as well as fiery revolutionists, seeing the timidity, the submissiveness, the indifference of the masses, often despair of the future. So we will have to look somewhat more thoroughly into psychological forces and effects.

The dominant and deepest impulse in man as in every living being is his instinct of self-preservation. It compels him to defend his life with all his powers. Fear and submissiveness also are the effect of this instinct, when against powerful masters they afford the best chances for preservation. Among the various dispositions in man those which are most adapted to secure life in the existing circumstances will prevail and develop. In the daily life of capital-



ism it is unpractical, even dangerous for a worker to nurture his feelings of independence and pride; the more he suppresses them and tacitly obeys, the less difficulty he will encounter in finding and keeping his job. The morals taught by the ministers of the ruling class enhance this disposition. And only few and independent spirits defy these tendencies and are ready to encounter the incumbent difficulties.

When, however, in times of social crisis and danger all this submissivity, this virtuousness, is of no avail to secure life, when only fighting can help, then it gives way to its contrary, to rebelliousness and courage. Then the bold set the example and the timid discover with surprise of what deeds of heroism they are capable. Then self-reliance and high-spiritedness awake in them and grow, because on their growth depend their chances of life and happiness. And at once, by instinct and by experience, they know that only collaboration and union can give strength to their masses. When then they perceive what forces are present in themselves and in their comrades, when they feel the happiness of this awakening of proud self-respect and devoted brotherhood, when they anticipate a future of victory, when they see rising before them the image of the new society they help to build, then enthusiasm and ardour grow to irresistible power. Then the working class begins to be ripe for revolution. Then capitalism begins to be ripe for collapse.

Thus a new mankind is arising. Historians often wonder when they see the rapid changes in the character of people in revolutionary times. It seems a miracle; but it simply shows how many traits lay hidden in them, suppressed because they were of no use. Now they break forth, perhaps only temporarily; but if their utility is lasting, they develop into dominant qualities, transforming man, fitting him for the new circumstances and demands.

The first and paramount change is the growth of community-feeling. Its first traces came up with capitalism itself, out of the common work and the common fight. It is strengthened by the consciousness and the experience that, single, the worker is powerless against capital, and that only firm solidarity can secure tolerable life conditions. When the fight grows larger and fiercer, and widens into a fight for dominance over labor and society, on which life and future depend, solidarity must grow into indissoluble all-pervading unity. The new community-feeling, extending over the entire working class, suppresses the old selfishness of the capitalist world.

It is not entirely new. In primeval times, in the tribe with its simple mostly communistic forms of labor the community-feeling was dominant. Man was completely bound up with the tribe; separate from it he was nothing; in all his actions the individual felt as nothing compared with the welfare and the honour of the community. Inextricably one as he was with the tribe primitive man had not yet developed into a personality. When afterwards men separated and became independent small-scale producers, community-feeling waned and gave way to individualism, that makes the own person the centre of all interests and all feelings. In the many centuries of middle class rising, of commodity production and capitalism, the individual personality-feeling awoke and ever more strongly grew into a new character. It is an acquisition that can no more be lost. To be sure, also in this time man was a social being; society dominated, and in critical moments, of revolution and war, the community-feeling temporarily imposed itself as an unwonted moral duty. But in ordinary life it lay suppressed under the proud fancy of personal independence.

What is now developing in the working class is not a reverse change, as little as life conditions are a return to bygone forms. It is the coalescence of individualism and community-feeling into a higher unity. It is the conscious subordination of all personal forces in the service of the community. In their management of the mighty productive forces the workers as their mightier masters will develop their personality to a yet higher stage. The consciousness of its intimate connection with society unites personality-feeling with the all-powerful social feeling into a new life-apprehension based on the realisation of society as the source of man's entire being.

Community-feeling from the first is the main force in the progress of revolution. This progress is the growth of the solidarity, of the mutual connection, of the unity of the workers. Their organisation, their new growing power, is a new character acquired through fight, is a change in their inner being, is a new morality. What military authors say about ordinary war, namely, that moral forces therein play a dominant role, is even more true in the war of the classes. Higher issues are at stake here. Wars always were contests of similar competing powers, and the deepest structure of society remained the same, whether one won or the other. Contests of classes are fights for new principles, and the victory of the rising class transfers the society to a higher stage of development. Hence, compared with real war, the moral forces are of a superior kind: voluntary devoted collaboration instead of blind obedience, faith to ideals instead of fidelity to commanders, love for the class companions, for humanity, instead of patriotism. Their essential practice is



not armed violence, not killing, but standing steadfast, enduring, persevering, persuading, organising; their aim is not to smash the skulls but to open the brains. Surely, armed action will also play a role in the fight of the classes; the armed violence of the masters cannot be overcome in Tolstocian fashion by patient suffering. It must be beaten down by force; but, by force animated by a deep moral conviction.

There have been wars that showed something of this character. Such wars as were a kind of revolution or formed part of revolutions, in the fight for freedom of the middle class. Where rising burgherdom fought for dominance against the home and the foreign feudal powers of monarchy and landownership,—as in Greece in antiquity, in Italy and Flanders in the Middle Ages, in Holland, England, France in later centuries—idealism and enthusiasm, arising out of deep feelings of the class-necessities, called forth great deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice. These episodes, such as in modern times we meet with in the French revolution, or in Italy's liberation by Garibaldi's followers, count among the most beautiful pages in human history. Historians have glorified and poets have sung them as epochs of greatness, gone for ever. Because the sequel of the liberation, the practice of the new society, the rule of capital, the contrast of impudent luxury and miserable poverty, the avarice and greed of the business men, the job-hunting of officials, all this pageant of low selfishness fell as a chilling disappointment upon the next generation. In middle-class revolutions egotism and ambition in strong personalities play an important role; as a rule the idealists are sacrificed and the base characters come to wealth and power. In the bourgeoisie everybody must try to raise himself by treading down the others. The virtues of community-feeling were a temporary necessity only, to gain dominance for their class; once this aim attained, they give way to the pitiless competitive strife of all against all.

Here we have the fundamental difference between the former middle-class revolutions and the now approaching workers' revolution. For the workers the strong community-feeling arising out of their fight for power and freedom is at the same time the basis of their new society. The virtues of solidarity and devotion, the impulse to common action in firm unity, generated in the social struggle, are the foundations of the new economic system of common labor, and will be perpetuated and intensified by its practice. The fight shapes the new mankind needed for the new labor system. The strong individualism in man now finds a better way of asserting itself than in the craving for personal power over others. In

applying its full force to the liberation of the class it will unfold itself more fully and more nobly than in pursuing personal aims.

Community-feeling and organisation do not suffice to defeat capitalism. In keeping the working class in submission, the spiritual dominance of the bourgeoisie has the same importance as has its physical power. Ignorance is an impediment to freedom. Old thoughts and traditions press heavily upon the brains, even when touched already by new ideas. Then the aims are seen at their narrowest, well-sounding catchwords are accepted without criticism, illusions about easy successes, half-hearted measures and false promises lead astray. Thus the importance of intellectual power for the workers is shown. Knowledge and insight are an essential factor in the rise of the working class.

The workers' revolution is not the outcome of rough physical power; it is a victory of the mind. It will be the product of the mass power of the workers, certainly; but this power is spiritual power in the first place. The workers will not win because they have strong fists; fists are easily directed by cunning brains, even against their own cause. Neither will they win because they are the majority; ignorant and unorganised majorities regularly were kept down, powerless, by well-instructed organised minorities. Majority now will win only because strong moral and intellectual forces cause it to rise above the power of their masters. Revolutions in history could succeed because new spiritual forces had been awakened in the masses. Brute stupid physical force can do nothing but destroy. Revolutions, however, are the constructive epochs in the evolution of mankind. And more than any former the revolution that is to render the workers master of the world demands the highest moral and intellectual qualities.

Can the workers respond to these demands? How can they acquire the knowledge needed? Not from the schools, where the children are imbibed with all the false ideas about society which the ruling class wishes them to have. Not from the papers, owned and edited by the capitalists, or by groups striving for leadership. Not from the pulpit that always preaches servility and where John Balls are extremely rare. Not from the radio, where—unlike the public discussions in former times, for the citizens a powerful means of training their minds on public affairs—one-sided allocations tend to stultify the passive listeners, and by their never-easing obtrusive noise allow of no reposed thinking. Not from the film that—unlike the theatre, in early days for the rising burgher class a means of



instruction and sometimes even of fight—appeals only to visual impression, never to thinking or intelligence. They all are powerful instruments of the ruling class to keep the working class in spiritual bondage. With instinctive cunning and conscious deliberation they are all used for the purpose. And the working masses unsuspectingly submit to their influence. They let themselves be fooled by artful words and outside appearances. Even those who know of class and fight leave the affairs to leaders and statesmen, and applaud them when they speak dear old words of tradition. The masses spend their free time in pursuing puerile pleasures, unaware of the great social problems on which their and their children's existence depends. It seems an insolvable problem, how a workers' revolution is ever to come and to succeed, when by the sagaciousness of the rulers and the indifference of the ruled its spiritual conditions remain lacking.

But the forces of capitalism are working in the depths of society, stirring old conditions and pushing people forward even when unwilling. Their inciting effects are suppressed as long as possible, to save the old possibilities of going on living; stored in the subconscious they only intensify the inner strains. Till at last, in crisis, at the highest pitch of necessity they snap and give way in action, in revolt. **The action is not the result of deliberate intention; it comes as a spontaneous deed, irresistably. In such spontaneous action man reveals to himself of what he is capable, a surprise to himself.** And because the action is always collective action, it reveals to each that the forces dimly felt in himself, are present in all. Confidence and courage are raised by the discovery of the strong class forces of common will, and they stir and carry away ever wider masses.

Actions break out spontaneously, enforced by capitalism upon the unwilling workers. They are not so much the result as the starting point of their spiritual development. Once the fight is taken up the workers must go on in attack and defence; they must exert all their forces to the utmost. Now falls away the indifference that was only a form of resistance to demands they felt themselves unequal to respond to. Now a time of intense mental exertion sets in. Standing over against the mighty forces of capitalism they see that only by the utmost efforts, by developing all their powers can they hope to win. What in every fight appears in its first traces now broadly unfolds; all the forces hidden in the masses are roused and set in motion. This is the creative work of revolution. Now the necessity of firm unity is hammered into their consciousness, now the necessity of knowledge is felt at every moment. Every kind of ignorance, every illusion about the character and force of the foe,

every weakness in resisting his tricks, every incapacity of refuting his arguments and calumnies, is revenged in failure and defeat. Active desire, by strong impulses from within, now incites the workers to use their brains. The new hopes, the new visions of the future inspire the mind, making it a living active power, that shuns no pains to seek for truth, to acquire knowledge.

Where will the workers find the knowledge they need? The sources are abundant; an extensive scientific literature of books and pamphlets, explaining the basic facts and theories of society and labor already exists and more will follow. But they exhibit the greatest diversity of opinion as to what is to be done; and the workers themselves have to choose and to distinguish what is true and right. They have to use their own brains in hard thinking and intent discussion. For they face new problems, ever again, to which the old books can give no solution. These can supply only general knowledge about society and capital, they present principles and theories, comprehending former experience. The application in ever new situations is our own task.

The insight needed can not be obtained as instruction of an ignorant mass by learned teachers, possessors of science, as the pouring of knowledge into passive pupils. It can only be acquired by self-education, by the strenuous self-activity that strains the brain in fell desire to understand the world. It would be very easy for the working class if it had only to accept established truth from those who know it. But the truth they need does not exist anywhere in the world outside them; they must build it up within themselves. Also what is given here does not pretend to be established final truth to be learned by heart. It is a system of ideas won by attentive experience of society and the workers' movement, formulated to induce others to think over and to discuss the problems of work and its organisation. There are hundreds of thinkers to open new viewpoints, there are thousands of intelligent workers who, once they give their attention to them, are able, from their intimate knowledge, to conceive better and in more detail the organisation of their fight and the organisation of their work. What is said here may be the spark that kindles the fire in their minds.

There are groups and parties pretending to be in the exclusive possession of truth, who try to win the workers by their propaganda under the exclusion of all other opinions. By moral and, where they have the power, also by physical constraint, they try to impose their views upon the masses. It must be clear that one-sided teaching of one system of doctrines can only serve, and indeed should serve, to breed obedient followers, hence to uphold old or prepare new domination. Self-liberation of the working masses implies self-



thinking, self-knowing, recognising truth and error by their own mental exertion. Exerting the brains is much more difficult and fatiguing than exerting the muscles; but it must be done, because the brains govern the muscles; if not their own, then foreign brains.

So unlimited freedom of discussion, of expressing opinions is the breathing air of the workers' fight. It is more than a century ago that against a despotic government, Shelley, England's greatest poet of the 19th century, "the friend of the friendless poor," vindicated for everybody the right of free expression of his opinion. "A man has the right to unrestricted liberty of discussion." "A man has not only the right to express his thoughts, but it is his duty to do so" . . . "nor can any acts of legislature destroy that right." Shelley proceeded from philosophy proclaiming the natural rights of man. For us it is owing to its necessity for the liberation of the working class that freedom of speech and press is proclaimed. To restrict the freedom of discussion is to prevent the workers from acquiring the knowledge they need. Every old despotism, every modern dictatorship began by persecuting or forbidding freedom of press; every restriction of this freedom is the first step to bring the workers under the domination of some kind of rulers. Must not, then, the masses be protected against the falsehoods, the misrepresentations, the beguiling propaganda of their enemies? As little as in education careful withholding of evil influences can develop the faculty to resist and vanquish them, as little can the working class be educated to freedom by spiritual guardianship. Where the enemies present themselves in the guise of friends, and in the diversity of opinions every party is inclined to consider the others as a danger for the class, who shall decide? The workers, certainly; they must fight their way in this realm also. But the workers of to-day might in honest conviction condemn as obnoxious opinions that afterwards prove to be the basis of new progress. Only by standing open to all ideas that the rise of a new world generates in the minds of man, by testing and selecting, by judging and applying them with its own mental capacities, can the working class gain the spiritual superiority needed to suppress the power of capitalism and erect the new society.

Every revolution in history was an epoch of the most fervent spiritual activity. By hundreds and thousands the political pamphlets and papers appeared as the agents of intense self-education of the masses. In the coming proletarian revolution it will not be otherwise. It is an illusion that, once awakened from submissiveness, the masses will be directed by one common clear insight and go their way without hesitation in unanimity of opinion. History shows that in such awakening an abundance of new thoughts in

greatest diversity sprouts in man, expressions all of the new world, as a roaming search of mankind in the newly opened land of possibilities, as a blooming richness of spiritual life. Only in the mutual struggle of all these ideas will crystallize the guiding principles that are essential for the new tasks. The first great successes, result of spontaneous united action, by destroying previous shackles, do no more than fling open the prison gates; the workers, by their own exertion, must then find the new orientation towards further progress.

This means that those great times will be full of the noise of party strife. Those who have the same ideas form groups to discuss them for their own and to propagate them for their comrades' enlightenment. Such groups of common opinion may be called parties, though their character will be entirely different from the political parties of the previous world. Under parliamentarism these parties were the organs of different and opposite class interests. In the working class movement they were organisations taking the lead of the class, acting as its spokesmen and representatives and aspiring at guidance and dominance. Now their function will be spiritual fight only. The working class for its practical action has no use for them; it has created its new organs for action, the councils. In the shop organisation, the council organisation, it is the entirety of the workers itself that acts, that has to decide what must be done. In the shop assemblies and in the councils the different and opposite opinions are exposed and defended, and out of the contest the decision and the unanimous action has to proceed. Unity of purpose can only be reached by spiritual contest between the dissenting views. The important function of the parties, then, is to organise opinion, by their mutual discussion to bring the new growing ideas into concise forms, to clarify them, to exhibit the arguments in a comprehensible form, and by their propaganda to bring them to the notice of all. Only in this way the workers in their assemblies and councils can judge their truth, their merits, their practicability in each situation, and take the decision in clear understanding. Thus the spiritual forces of new ideas, sprouting wildly in all the heads, are organised and shaped so as to be usable instruments of the class. This is the great task of party strife in the workers' fight for freedom, far nobler than the endeavour of the old parties to win dominance for themselves.

The transition of supremacy from one class to another, which as in all former revolutions is the essence of the workers' revolution,



does not depend on the haphazard chances of accidental events. Though its details, its ups and downs depend on the chance of various conditions and happenings that we cannot foresee, viewed at large there is a definite progressive course, which may be an object of consideration in advance. It is the increase of social power of the rising class, the loss of social power of the declining class. The rapid visible changes in power form the essential character of social revolutions. So we have to consider somewhat more closely the elements, the factors constituting the power of each of the contending classes.

The power of the capitalist class in the first place consists in the possession of capital. It is master of all the factories, the machines, the mines, master of the entire productive apparatus of society; so mankind depends on that class to work and to live. With its money-power it can buy not only servants for personal attendance; when threatened it can buy in unlimited number sturdy young men to defend its domination, it can organise them into well-armed fighting groups and give them a social standing. It can buy, by assuring them honourable places and good salaries, artists, writers and intellectuals, not only to amuse and to serve the masters, but also to praise them and glorify their rule, and by cunning and learning to defend their domination against criticism.

Yet the spiritual power of the capitalist class has deeper roots than the intellect it can buy. The middle class, out of which the capitalists rose as its upper layer, always was an enlightened class, self-reliant through its broad world conception, basing itself, its work, its production system, upon culture and knowledge. Its principles of personal ownership and responsibility, of self-help and individual energy pervade the entire society. These ideas the workers have brought with them, from their origin out of impoverished middle-class layers; and all the spiritual and physical means available are set to work to preserve and intensify the middle-class ideas in the masses. Thus the domination of the capitalist class is firmly rooted in the thinking and feeling of the dominated majority itself.

The strongest power factor of the capitalist class, however, is its political organisation, State-power. Only by firm organisation can a minority rule over a majority. The unity and continuity of plan and will in the central government, the discipline of the bureaucracy of officials pervading society as the nervous system pervades the body, and animated and directed by one common spirit, the disposal, moreover, when necessary, over an armed force, assure its unquestioned dominance over the population. Just as the strength of the fortress consolidates the physical forces of the garrison into an

indomitable power over the country, so State power consolidates the physical and spiritual forces of the ruling class into unassailable strength. The respect paid to the authorities by the citizens, by the feeling of necessity, by custom and education, regularly assure the smooth running of the apparatus. And should discontent make people rebellious, what can they do, unarmed and unorganised, against the firmly organised and disciplined armed forces of the Government? With the development of capitalism, when the power from a numerous middle class ever more concentrated in a smaller number of big capitalists, the State also concentrated its power and through its increasing functions took ever more hold of society.

What has the working class to oppose to these formidable factors of power?

Ever more the working class constitutes the majority, in the most advanced countries the large majority of the population, concentrated here in large and giant industrial enterprises. Not legally but actually it has the machines, the productive apparatus of society in its hands. The capitalists are owners and masters, surely; but they can do no more than command. If the working class disregards their commands they cannot run the machines. The workers can. The workers are the direct actual masters of the machines; however determined, by obedience or by self-will, they can run them and stop them. Theirs is the most important economic function; their labour bears society.

This economical power is a sleeping power as long as the workers are captivated in middle class thinking. It grows into actual power by class consciousness. By the practice of life and labour they discover that they are a special class, exploited by capital, that they have to fight to free themselves from exploitation. Their fight compels them to understand the structure of the economic system, to acquire knowledge of society. Notwithstanding all propaganda to the contrary this new knowledge dispels the inherited middle-class ideas in their heads, because it is based on the truth of daily experienced reality, whereas the old ideas express the past realities of a bygone world.

Economic and spiritual power are made an active power through organisation. It binds all the different wills to unity of purpose and combines the single forces into a mighty unity of action. Its outer forms may differ and change as to circumstances, its essence is its new moral character, the solidarity, the strong community-feeling, the devotion and spirit of sacrifice, the self-imposed discipline. Organisation is the life principle of the working class, the condition of liberation. A minority ruling by its strong organisation can be



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vanquished only, and certainly will be vanquished, by organisation of the majority.

Thus the elements constituting the power of the contending classes stand over against one another. Those of the bourgeoisie stand great and mighty, as existing and dominating forces, whereas those of the working class must develop, from small beginnings, as new life growing up. Number and economic importance grow automatically by capitalism; but the other factors, insight and organisation, depend on the efforts of the workers themselves. Because they are the conditions of efficient fight they are the results of fight; every setback strains nerves and brains to repair it, every success swells the hearts into new zealous confidence. The awakening of class-consciousness, the growing knowledge of society and its development, means the liberation from spiritual bondage, the awakening from dulness to spiritual force, the ascension of the masses to true humanity. Their uniting for a common fight, fundamentally, means already social liberation; the workers, bound into the servitude of capital resume their liberty of action. It is the awakening from submissiveness to independence, collectively, in organised union challenging the masters. Progress of the working class means progress in these factors of power. What can be won in improvement of working and living conditions depends on the power the workers have acquired; when, either by insufficiency of their actions, by lack of insight or effort, or by inevitable social changes their power, compared with the capitalist power, declines, it will be felt in their working conditions. Here is the criterion for every form of action, for tactics and methods of fight, for forms of organisation: do they enhance the power of the workers? For the present, but, still more essential, for the future, for the supreme goal of annihilating capitalism? In the past trade unionism has given shape to the feelings of solidarity and unity, and strengthened their fighting power by efficient organisation. When, however, in later times it had to suppress the fighting spirit, and it put up the demand of discipline towards leaders against the impulse of class solidarity the growth of power was impeded. Socialist party work in the past highly contributed to raise the insight and the political interest of the masses; when, however, it tried to restrict their activity within the confines of parliamentarism and the illusions of political democracy it became a source of weakness.

Out of these temporary weaknesses the working class has to lift its power in the actions of the coming times. Though we must expect an epoch of crisis and fight this may be alternated with more quiet times of relapse or consolidation. The traditions and illusions may act temporarily as weakening influences. But then also,

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making them times of preparation, the new ideas of self-rule and council organisation by steady propaganda may take a broader hold on the workers. Then, just as now, there is a task for every worker once he is seized by the vision of freedom for his class, to propagate these thoughts among his comrades, to rouse them from indifference, to open their eyes. Such propaganda is essential for the future. Practical realisation of an idea is not possible as long as it has not penetrated the minds of the masses at large.

Fight, however, is always the fresh source of power in a rising class. We cannot foresee now what forms this fight of the workers for their freedom will assume. At times and places it may take the harsh form of civil war, so common in former revolutions when it had to give the decisions. There heavy odds may seem to be against the workers, since Government and the capitalists, by money and authority, can raise armed forces in unlimited numbers. Indeed the strength of the working class is not situated here, in the bloody contest of massacring and killing. Their real strength rests in the domain of labor, in their productive work, and in their superiority in mind and character. Nevertheless, even in armed contest capitalist superiority is not unquestioned. The production of arms is in the hands of the workers; the armed bands depend on their labor. If restricted in number, such bands, when the entire working class, united and unafraid, stands against them, will be powerless, overwhelmed by sheer number. And if numerous, these bands consist of recruited workers too, accessible to the call of class solidarity.

The working class has to find out and to develop the forms of fight adapted to its needs. Fight means that it goes its own way according to its free choice, directed by its class interests, independent of, hence opposed to the former masters. In fight its creative faculties assert themselves in finding ways and means. Just as in the past it devised and practised spontaneously its forms of action: the strike, the ballot, the street demonstration, the mass meeting, the leaflet propaganda, the political strike, so it will do in future. Whatever the forms may be, character, purpose and effect will be the same for all: to raise the own elements of power, to weaken and dissolve the power of the foe. So far as experience goes mass political strikes have the strongest effects; and in future they may be still more powerful. In these strikes, born out of acute crises and strong strains, the impulses are too fierce, the issues go too deep to be directed by unions or parties, committees or boards of officials. They bear the character of direct actions of the masses. The workers do not go into strike individually, but shopwise, as personnel collectively deciding their action. Immediately strike committees are installed, where delegates of all the enterprises meet,



assuming already the character of workers' councils. They have to bring unity in action, unity also, as much as possible, in ideas and methods, by continual interaction between the fighting impulses of the shop-assemblies and the discussions in the council meetings. Thus the workers create their own organs opposing the organs of the ruling class.

Such a political strike is a kind-of rebellion, though in legal form, against the Government, by paralyzing production and traffic trying to exert such a pressure upon the government that it yields to the demands of the workers. Government, from its side, by means of political measures, by prohibiting meetings, by suspending the freedom of press, by calling up armed forces, hence by transforming its legal authority into arbitrary though actual power, tries to break the determination of the strikers. It is assisted by the ruling class itself, that by its press monopoly dictates public opinion and carries on a strong propaganda of calumny to isolate and discourage the strikers. It supplies volunteers not only for somehow maintaining traffic and services, but also for armed bands to terrorise the workers and to try to convert the strike into a form of civil war, more congenial to the bourgeoisie. Because a strike cannot last indefinitely, one of the parties, with the lesser inner solidity, must give way.

Mass actions and universal strikes are the struggle of two classes, of two organisations, each by its own solidity trying to curb and finally to break the other. This cannot be decided in one action; it demands a series of struggles that constitute an epoch of social revolution. For each of the contending classes disposes of deeper sources of power that allow it to restore itself after defeat. Though the workers at a time may be defeated and discouraged, their organisations destroyed, their rights abolished, yet the stirring forces of capitalism, their own inner forces, and the indestructible will to live, once more puts them on their feet. Neither can capitalism be destroyed at one stroke; when its fortress, State Power, is shattered, demolished, the class itself still disposes of a great deal of its physical and spiritual power. History has instances how governments entirely disabled and prostrate by war and revolution were regenerated by the economic power, the money, the intellectual capacity, the patient skill, the class-consciousness—in the form of ardent national feeling—of the bourgeoisie. But finally the class that forms the majority of the people, that supports society by its labor, that has the direct disposal over the productive apparatus, must win. In such a way that the firm organisation of the majority class dissolves and crumbles State power, the strongest organisation of the capitalist class.

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Where the action of the workers is so powerful that the very organs of Government are paralysed the councils have to fulfil political functions. Now the workers have to provide for public order and security, they have to take care that social life can proceed, and in this the councils are their organs. What is decided in the councils the workers perform. So the councils grow into organs of social revolution; and with the progress of revolution their tasks become ever more all-embracing. At the same time that the classes are struggling for supremacy, each by the solidity of its organisation trying to break that of the other class, society must go on to live. Though in the tension of critical moments it can live on the stores of provisions, production cannot stop for a long time. This is why the workers, if their inner forces of organisation fall short, are compelled by hunger to return under the old yoke. This is why, if strong enough, if they have defied, repelled, shattered State Power, if they have repulsed its violence, if they are master in the shops, they immediately must take care of the production. Mastery in the shops means at the same time organisation of production. The organisation for fight, the councils, is at the same time organisation for reconstruction.

Of the Jews in olden times building the walls of Jerusalem it is said that they fought sword in one, trowel in the other hand. Here, differently, sword and trowel are one. Establishing the organisation of production is the strongest, nay, the only lasting weapon to destroy capitalism. Wherever the workers have fought their way into the shops and taken possession of the machines, they immediately start organising the work. Where capitalist command has disappeared from the shop, disregarded and powerless, the workers build up production on the new basis. In their practical action they establish new right and new Law. They cannot wait till everywhere the fight is over; the new order has to grow from below, from the shops, work and fight at the same time.

Then at the same time the organs of capitalism and Government decline into the role of unessential foreign and superfluous things. They may still be powerful to harm, but they have lost the authority of useful and necessary institutions. Now the roles, more and more manifestly to everybody, are reverted. Now the working class, with its organs, the councils, is the power of order; life and prosperity of the entire people rests on its labor, its organisation. The measures and regulations decided in the councils, executed and followed by the working masses, are acknowledged and respected as legitimate authority. On the other hand the old governmental bodies dwindle to outside forces that merely try to prevent the stabilisation of the new order. The armed bands of the bourgeoisie, even when still



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powerful, get ever more the character of unlawful disturbers, of obnoxious destroyers in the rising world of labor. As agents of disorder they will be subdued and dissolved.

This is, in so far as we now can foresee, the way by which State Power will disappear, together with the disappearance of capitalism itself. In past times different ideas about future social revolution prevailed. First the working class had to conquer the political power, by the ballot winning a majority in Parliament, helped eventually by armed contests or political strikes. Then the new Government consisting of the spokesmen, leaders, and politicians, by its acts, by new Law, had to expropriate the capitalist class and to organise production. So the workers themselves had only to do half the work, the less essential part; the real work, the reconstruction of society, the organising of labor, had to be done by the socialist politicians and officials. This conception reflects the weakness of the working class at that time; poor and miserable, without economic power, it had to be led into the promised land of abundance by others, by able leaders, by a benignant Government. And then, of course, to remain subjects; for freedom cannot be given, it can only be conquered. This easy illusion has been dispelled by the growth of capitalist power. The workers now have to realise that only by raising their own power to the highest height can they hope to win liberty; that political dominance, mastery over society must be based upon economic power, mastery over labor.

The conquest of political power by the workers, the abolition of capitalism, the establishment of new Law, the appropriation of the enterprises, the reconstruction of society, the building of a new system of production are not different consecutive occurrences. They are contemporary, concurrent in a process of social events and transformations. Or, more precisely, they are identical. They are the different sides, indicated with different names, of one great social revolution: the organisation of labor by working humanity.