Council Communist Theory

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HTML: https://www.marxists.org/subject/left-wing/1976/revolutionary-theory.htm

This text is Chapter 8 of *Marxism and Council Communism, The foundation for revolutionary theory for modern society*, by Peter J. Rachleff, Revisionist press, NY. 1976.

Council communism emerged theoretically and politically in Germany and Holland in the 1920's as a distinct alternative to the Leninist theory of revolution and its political practice, both in Russia and internationally, through the Third International. Their theories were derived initially from their experiences in the movement for workers' councils in the abortive German Revolution of 1918 and in the early years of the Weimar Republic as well as their study of the council (or "soviet") movement in Russia during the revolutionary periods of 1905 and 1917[1]. Councilist theory did not emerge full blown, but developed over the next several decades, based on an increasingly refined critique of the Leninist experience in Russia and internationally, as well as a fuller understanding of the process of proletarian revolution and a clearer conception of the nature of a communist society. A clear thread throughout these notions is an adherence to the methods and spirit of Marx's analysis of capitalism and the nature of proletarian revolution, maintaining above all else that "the emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves.[2]" A fundamental notion of

[1] A discussion of the formation and functioning of workers' councils and factory committees in Russia and Germany is presented in Chapters VI and VII of this thesis. Pannekoek writes about the formation of their ideas: "This new organization of labor, we have to investigate and to clarify to ourselves and to one another, devoting to it the best powers of our minds. We cannot devise it as a fantasy; we derive it from the real conditions and needs of present work and present workers." *Workers' Councils*, p. 18. A contemporary French councilist group points out that the experience of Russia and Germany has been repeated elsewhere since then. "Since that time, each time that the proletariat has itself attacked capitalism, it has organized itself in workers' councils; they reappeared in 1920 in Italy, in 1927 in China, in 1936 in Spain, in 1953 in Fast Germany, in 1956 in Poland and Hungary ...". *Revolution Internationale*, No. 1, "Le Pouvoir des Conseils Ouvriers," December, 1978, P 15.

[2] Their adherence to Marx, certainly in a non dogmatic way, distinguishes them from most groups which have, in posing alternatives to Marxism Leninism and state capitalism, rejected a large body of Marx's thought. See, for example, Paul Cardan, *History and Revolution: A Revolutionary Critique of Historical Materialism* or Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*. Stanley Aronowitz writes of the councilists that "taking their cue from the works of Marx himself, they argued that the distinguishing feature of 'he

council communism is that the means and ends of the revolutionary process are inextricably intertwined, that the course of the revolution inevitably determines the nature of the new society itself. Thus, the organizational forms that they discuss as appropriate for the process of the revolution are also considered to provide the organizational bases of the new society.

It should be emphasized that the councilists did not seek to *impose* in theory or in practice an organizational form on the workers' movement. They initially stressed the "council" form because they saw it as the spontaneous creation of the working class in its struggle against capitalism[3]. Their primary loyalty remained with the self emancipation of the working class in whatever form it might take. Pannekoek made this quite clear in an article he wrote towards the end of his life.

"Workers' councils" does not designate a fixed form of organization, elaborated once and for all and for which all that remains is to perfect its details; it concerns a principle, that of workers' self management of the enterprise and of production. The realization of this principle can never occur through a theoretical discussion concerning the best means of execution. It is a question of the practical struggle against the apparatus of capitalist domination. From our time, one does not understand at all by "workers' councils" a fraternal association having an end in itself; "workers' councils," this means to say the class struggle, (where fraternity has a part), revolutionary action against the power of the State. Revolutions are not made on command, this is evident; they surge spontaneously, when the situation becomes intolerable, in moments of crisis. They are born only if the sentiment of intolerability affirms itself constantly in the heart of the masses, at the same time that a certain homogeneous consciousness of what it is necessary to do appears ...

Thus, the idea of "workers' councils" has nothing in common with a program of practical realizations to put to work tomorrow or next year it only concerns a connecting thread for the long and hard struggle of emancipation that the working class has still before it[4].

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proletariat is its capacity for self-organization and self management." "Left Wing Communism: The Reply to Lenin," in Howard and Klare, eds., *The Unknown Dimension*, P. 178.

[3] In this notion they are far closer to Marx than the dogmatic Marxist Leninists who strive to apply fixed social and economic categories and a predetermined model of revolutionary organization on all societies. Lenin himself set such a precedent for his followers in his attempts to impose particular political activities on the international left. See the discussion below concerning Lenin's *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* and Gorter's *Response to Lenin*.

[4] "Ueber Arbeiterate," *Funken*, III, January 6, 1952, pp. 14-15, quoted in "A Propos des Conseils Ouvriers et du Conseillisme," *Informations Correspondence Ouvriere* #95-96, July August, 1970, p. 2.

It was never the intention of the council communist movement to create a new ideology concerning the organizational forms of the class struggle. Rather, in the finest Marxist tradition, they sought to comprehend the self emancipatory movement of the working class, to elucidate it theoretically, and to further it practically. It is through their adherence to the notion of self emancipation that they sought to criticize all organizational forms which hindered this process and to demonstrate theoretically the potentiality of self emancipation and the creation of a new society based on "the free and equal association of the producers."

Initially, councilist theory grew out of the opposition to Bolshevism on the part of some German and Dutch communists in the early 1920's. The critique of the Russian Revolution was undertaken to demonstrate the inapplicability of the Bolshevik model of revolution to advanced capitalist countries. In 1920, Herman Gorter, the Dutch poet and communist, responded in the form of an open letter to Lenin's pamphlet, *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, which was, in effect, an attempt on the part of the Russian leader to impose the Bolshevik models of organization and revolutionary activity on the communist parties of western Europe, to tighten his control over both his own party in Russia (in the face of increasing internal dissension) and over the international revolutionary movement. Gorter argued that the concrete differences between Russia and western Europe the social situation and revolutionary potentials of various classes, particularly the proletariat and the peasantry due to the differences in historical development and level of development of mode of production, was such as to militate against the generalization of tactics from one society to another[5]. In particular, Gorter objected to the notions advanced by Lenin concerning: 1) the relationship of leaders to the masses; 2) trade union activity; 3) parliamentary activity. Gorter did not reject leadership per se, but rather took exception to Lenin's position on the relationship that he proposed should exist between leaders and masses[6]. Gorter argued that the development of western Europe necessitated greater emphasis on the role of the masses themselves.

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[5] "In my opinion, the material base of the differences of opinion that separate you from what is called the Left in Western Europe, concerning trade union and parliamentary tactics, is precisely the difference between Russia and Western Europe in these areas." *Reponse a Lenine*, P. 11.

[6] The K.A.P.D., for whom Gorter theorized the activity in his *Reponse a Lenine* still conceived its role as that of a vanguard organized outside of the masses (to enlighten them and not to lead them in the Leninist sense). But this conception was itself surpassed by some ultra Leftists opposed to the duality of party/factory organizations; revolutionaries should not seek to come together in special organizations distinct from the masses." *Informations Correspondence Ouvriere*, #84, special issue on their national conference, "Sur l'ideologie ultragauche," p. 29.

"To the degree that the importance of the class increases, the importance of leaders decreases in proportion. This is not to say that we should not have the best leaders possible: the best among the best are not yet good enough and we are trying to find them. This means only that in comparison with the importance of the masses, that of the leaders decreases ...

Have you not remarked, Comrade Lenin, that there aren't any "great" leaders in Germany? They are all ordinary men. This already shows that this revolution ought to be in the first place the work of the masses and not the leaders ...[7]"

Gorter saw the role of the vanguard being primarily one of "propaganda by the deed" as opposed to strict leadership and control of the masses by the party. He refers to "the formation ... of a group who shows in their struggles what the masses ought to do.[8]" He sums up his rejection of Lenin's notion "in one word because you present a leadership politics.[9]"

Gorter also objects to Lenin's demand that the western European left should engage in trade union and parliamentary activity. Lenin's belief in the value of such activity was attacked by Gorter who responded that "you want to stifle the organizations in which the workers, each worker, and by consequence the mass, can attain strength and power, and you want to preserve those in which the mass is a dead instrument in the hands of the leaders.[10]" Both trade unionism and parliamentary activity encourage passivity on the part of the working class, thus hindering the development of mass initiative and revolutionary class consciousness. Gorter cites Pannekoek on this matter:

"The tactical problem consists in finding the means of extirpating the traditional bourgeois mentality which dominates the masses and weakens their forces. Everything which further reinforces the traditional conception is negative. The most solid aspect, the most tenacious part of this mentality is, precisely, their dependence vis a vis leaders, to whom they abandon the solution of all general questions, the direction of their class interests.[11]"

Gorter summarizes his position thusly:

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[7] Gorter, *op. cit*., P. 15.we are still seeking true leaders *who do not seek to dominate the masses* and do not betray them, and, so long as we do not have them, everything must be done from the bottom up according to the dictates of the masses." P. 9.
[8] *Ibid.*, P. 37.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[10] *Ibid.*, P. 47. Rather than presenting in detail now the critique of trade unions and parliamentarism, I will wait to deal with them more fully later In this chapter.
[11] *Ibid.*, P. 54.

"1. The tactic of the Western revolution must be entirely other than that of the Russian Revolution;

2. Because the proletariat is here all alone;

3. The proletariat must thus here make the revolution alone against all the classes;

4. The importance of the proletarian masses is thus relatively greater, that of the leaders less than in Russia;

5. And the proletariat must have better arms for the revolution;

6. As the unions are defective arms, it is necessary to suppress them or radically change them, and put in their place factory organizations, united in a general organization;

7. As the proletariat must make the revolution alone, and not rely on any help, it must raise its consciousness and courage to great heights. And it is referable to ignore parliamentarism in the revolution.[12]"

Despite his rejection of Lenin's notions or, rather, orders Gorter avoids attacking Lenin directly or questioning the class nature of the Russian Revolution and the developments in Russia since 1917. He appeals to Lenin to reconsider his position. Gorter differentiates himself from those who have already become bitter opponents of Lenin and the Third International, having seen the latter organization as a tool for strengthening the Bolshevik state apparatus. Rather, Gorter believes that Lenin is merely wrong in his assessment of the situation and can be made to see the error of his ways, writing: "As for me, I think, as I have said all along, that you misunderstood the European situation.[13]" This somewhat naive position was soon abandoned by the councilist group as a whole. The slaughter at Kronstadt, the suppression of the Workers' Opposition, and other events soon made apparent the repressive nature of the Russian state[14]. The councilists turned their attention toward an understanding of the class nature of the Russian Revolution, the nature of Leninist politics, and the philosophical foundations of Leninism, in an effort to criticize and fight against everything that stood in the way of the self emancipation of the working class.

The critique of Bolshevism in Russia

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[12] *Ibid.*, P. 112.
[13] *Ibid.*, P. 103.
[14] Cf. Ida Mett, *The Kronstadt Commune* and Alexandra Kollontai, *The Workers' Opposition*.

In December 1934, *International Council Correspondence* translated and printed the councilist "Theses on Bolshevism," an in depth analysis of the Russian Revolution, written by the Dutch group. This was not primarily a vindictive essay against Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. Rather, it was argued that the party had merely carried out the tasks necessitated by the historical development of Russia[15].

The economic task of the Russian Revolution was, first, the setting aside of the concealed agrarian feudalism and its continued exploitation of the peasants as serfs, together with the industrialization of agriculture, placing it on the plane of modern commodity production; secondly, to make possible the unrestrained creation of a class of really "free laborers," liberating the industrial development from all its feudal fetters Essentially, the tasks of the bourgeois revolution[16].

These socio economic conditions necessitated certain political behavior, i.e., an attack on specific socio political institutions. Here, too, however, the bourgeois nature of the revolution asserted itself.

Politically, the tasks confronting the Russian Revolution were. the destruction of absolutism, the abolition of the feudal nobility as the first estate, and the creation of a political constitution and an administrative apparatus which would secure politically the fulfillment of the economic tasks of the Revolution. The political tasks of the Russian Revolution were, therefore, quite in accord with its economic presuppositions, the tasks of the bourgeois revolution[17].

However, the peculiar historical development of Russia "peculiar" in relation to western Europe, that is necessitated that someone other than the bourgeoisie carry through the revolution.

The first class characteristic of the Russian Revolution is, therefore, the fact that as a bourgeois revolution it had to be carried through not only without but directly

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[15] It is through notions such as this that it becomes apparent how similar the councilists were to Marx in the way they analyzed social situations. Marx, in the Preface to the first German edition of *Capital*, wrote: "My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains ... " *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 10. Councilist analyses of political behavior have always reflected this conception.

[16] Theses on Bolshevism," *International Council Correspondence*, No. 3, December 1934, thesis #7, P. 3. Probably the most succinct and valuable analysis of the socio economic condition of Russia prior to 1917 can be found in Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol. I, Chapter I, "Peculiarities of Russia's Social Development."

[17] "Theses on Bolshevism," *op. cit*., thesis #9, P. 3.

against the bourgeoisie. Thus arose a fundamental alteration of its whole political character[18].

So, despite their characterization of the Russian Revolution as a "bourgeois" revolution, in no way did the councilists mean to imply that it was of the same nature as the bourgeois revolutions which had occurred in western Europe some 100 300 years earlier, although it served the same function. For them, the crucial feature of the Russian pre revolutionary social structure was the vast size of the peasantry[19]. Because of their sheer numbers alone, the peasants exerted a tremendous influence on the course of the revolution. "In conformity with their over whelming majority, the peasants became the social group which at least passively determined the Russian Revolution.[20]" The semi feudal nature of their exploitation forced the revolution into an anti feudal, rather than anti capitalist, direction.

This is not, however, to deny or minimize the role played by the Russian proletariat.

In spite of its backwardness, the Russian proletariat possessed great fighting strength, due to the merciless schooling of the combined Czarist and capitalist oppression. It threw itself with enormous tenacity Into the actions of the Russian bourgeois revolution and became its sharpest and most reliable instrument[21].

Indeed, the activity of the Russian proletariat was the most striking feature of the February Revolution and the period between February and October[22].

The social circumstances which determined the consciousness of the proletariat and the peasantry were so different that it is hard to imagine their developing on their own a common basis for struggle and social reorganization. One would expect to see, rather, bitter conflict between these classes. However, a group emerged which was able

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[18] *Ibid.*, thesis #13, p. 4.

[19] Gorter emphasized this point in 1920. "The revolution in Russia won through the aid of the poor peasants. This should be kept in mind in Western Europe and throughout the world." *Op. cit*., P. 17. Gorter pointed out that there were but 7 8 million proletarians in a population of 160,000,000 (p. 20). In comparison to other analyses of the Russian social and economic conditions, Gorter's numerical estimate seems rather generous. Cf. Trotsky, *op. cit.*, Chapter II, "The Proletariat and the Peasantry."

[20] Theses on Bolshevism," *op. cit*., thesis #14, p. 4.

[21] *Ibid.*, thesis #15, p. 4. In fact, large segments of the proletariat rose spontaneously both in 1905 and 1917. However, the councilists never argued as, for example, Maurice Brinton does in *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* that the Russian masses could have actually built a socialist system out of the existing economic situation.

[22] In 1954, Pannekoek wrote in a letter to Cardan: "The Russian Revolution ... seemed to be a proletarian revolution, the workers being the authors by their strikes and their mass actions. Afterwards, however, the bolshevik party succeeded little by little in appropriating the power (the working class was a small minority of the population); thus the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution became dominant and took the. form of state capitalism." *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Vol. IV, No. 14, April June, 1954, p. 41.

to unite these classes under a common banner, a revolution based on "land, bread, and peace." This group which came to exert leadership and exercise power developed out of neither class, but was the product of the unique historical development of Russian society. "The best forces of the Russian intelligentsia stood in the forefront of the revolutionary movement, and by their leadership imprinted upon it a petty bourgeois, jacobinal stamp.[23]" However, although this group the Bolsheviks united the revolutionary forces and led them, they themselves were led by the necessity of the historical tasks confronting them. That is, in order to succeed, to have wide enough support to seize power and wield it, they had to articulate the needs and desires of the bulk of the population i.e., above all, the peasants[24]. Regardless of any subjective desires to the contrary, the Bolsheviks became the instrument of the bourgeois revolution in Russia.

But the seizure of state power by the Bolsheviks did not give to the Revolution the spirit of Lenin; on the contrary, Lenin had so completely adapted himself to the necessities of the revolution that, practically, he fulfilled the tasks of that class he ostensibly combatted[25].

Thus, the Russian Revolution was analyzed by the councilists as a bourgeois revolution, circumscribed by the peasantry, sparked by the proletariat, and led by the Bolsheviks. It was primarily anti feudal in character, and immediately set about the process of industrializing and developing capitalism in Russia, although of a unique variety, i.e., "state capitalism.[26]" The councilists observed this development with great interest, and sought to analyze it in depth in order to learn from it[27]. The Russian state never "withered away," growing in fact more powerful both domestically and

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[23] "Theses on Bolshevism," *op. cit*., thesis #16, p. 4.

[24] "... the Russian Revolution was not dependent on Lenin or on the Bolsheviks, but ... the decisive element in it was the revolt of the peasants. It was not Lenin who conducted the revolution, but the revolution conducted him." "The Lenin Legend," *International Council Correspondence*, Vol. II, No. 1, December 1934, p. 14.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[26] "It [the Russian Revolution] was, in a few words, the last bourgeois revolution, but which was the work of the working class. Bourgeois revolution signifies a revolution which destroys feudalism and opens the path to industrialization with all the social consequences that this implies. The Russian Revolution is thus in the line of the English Revolution of 1647 and the French Revolution of 1799, with those following in 1830, 1848, and 1871." Pannekoek, letter, *op. cit*., p. 40.

[27] "The experience of bolshevism can serve us as a lesson in order to know how socialism cannot be realized. Control of the means of production, private property transferred to the State, central and antagonistic direction of production and distribution leave intact the capital labor relationship as well as the relationship between exploiters and exploited, masters and subjects. This development leads only to a more modern form of capitalism, where capital is not indirectly but directly the collective property of a dominant class with a political base." Paul Mattick, "Anton Pannekoek," *La Revolution Proletarienne*, #472, 1962, P, 119.

internationally. From the vantage point of the proletariat, this was but another form of capitalism. Russian workers still lived by selling their labor power and still had no control over the means of production. Moreover, the Bolshevik state apparatus took on totalitarian features, suppressing all forms of op position and all potential threats to their power. Such behavior began under Lenin[28] and was carried to its logical conclusion by Stalin. The councilists analyzed these developments, criticized them, and argued in favor of the struggle against them as part of the international struggle for socialism. In September 1939, in "The Struggle Against Fascism Begins with the Struggle Against Bolshevism," it was argued that:

"Russia must be placed first among the totalitarian states. It was the first to adopt the new state principle. It went furthest in its application. It was the first to establish a constitutional dictatorship, together with the political and administrative terror system which goes with it. Adopting all the features of the total state, it thus becomes the model for those other countries which were forced to do away with the democratic state system and to change to dictatorial rule. Russia was the example for fascism.[29]"

In sum,

"nationalism, authoritarianism, centralism, leader dictatorship, power politics, terror rule, mechanistic dynamics, inability to socialize all these essential characteristics of fascism were and are existing in Bolshevism. Fascism is merely a copy of Bolshevism. For this reason the struggle against the one must begin with the struggle against the other.[30]"

Not only did the domestic policy of the Bolshevik state have nothing to do with socialism[31], but it was apparent that the Third International was but a tool in the hands of the Russian Communist Party in their efforts to consolidate and maintain their power,

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[28] See, for example, Brinton, *op. cit*., Mett, *op. cit*., Kollontai, op. cit., Serge, *Kronstadt 1921*, Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, Schapiro, *The Communist Autocracy*, and Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth*.

[29] *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 8, September 1939, p. 245. See also "State Capitalism and Dictatorship," *International Council Correspondence*, Vol. III, No. 2, February 1937.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 255. Pannekoek makes basically the same point in *Workers' Councils*, while also pointing out the fundamental difference between Bolshevism and Fascism. "The similarity of political forms and methods in Russia and Germany strikes the eye at first sight. In both the same dictatorship of a small group of leaders, assisted by a powerful, well organized and disciplined party, the same omnipotence of the ruling bureaucracy, the same absence of personal rights and of free speech, the same levelling of spiritual life into one doctrine, upheld by terrorism, the same cruelty towards opposition or even criticism. The economic basis, however, is different. In Russia it is state capitalism, in Germany state directed private capitalism." P. 201.

[31] "What is named state socialism discloses itself as state capitalism, the rule of a new exploiting class, bureaucracy, master of the production apparatus, as in other countries the bourgeoisie. It, too, lives on surplus value." *Ibid.*, p, 202.

rather than a means for facilitating world revolution through the self emancipation of the working class. "In light of the immediate needs of the bolshevik regime and the political ideas of its leaders, the Communist International was not the beginning of a new workers' movement, but simply an effort to gain control of the old movement and use it to defend the Bolshevik regime in Russia.[32]" Thus, "Bolshevism is not only unserviceable as a directive for the revolutionary policy of the international proletariat, but is one of its heaviest and most dangerous impediments.[33]"

However, the councilist analysis and critique of Bolshevism did not stop here. Pannekoek undertook a detailed study of Lenin's philosophy, in an effort to understand the bases of Bolshevist ideology, and to demonstrate further its inapplicability for the developed capitalist countries of western Europe[34]. This critique took the form of an analysis of Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, which had been written in opposition to a group of Russian "Marxists" who had become interested in the philosophical theories of Mach and Avenerius. Pannekoek stresses that the point of Lenin's book was not to present and analyze the ideas of Mach and Avenerius, but to attack them in such a way as to remove the threat to his ideological hegemony within the party.

Mach and Avenerius formed a danger for the Party; hence what mattered was not to find out what was true and valuable in their teachings in order to widen our own views. What mattered was o discredit them, to destroy their reputation[35]...

Pannekoek first analyzes the ideas of these other philosophers himself, and then shows how Lenin has misrepresented and misinterpreted them. This systematic misrepresentation is attacked by Pannekoek, who firmly believes that the proletariat must be allowed to consider all questions practical and theoretical on its own. He therefore favors the making available of all points of view, so that workers are enabled to decide for themselves what ideas and theories have value and which do not. Here we clearly see the contra position of councilist libertarianism to Leninist authoritarianism[36].

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[32] Mattick, "Anton Pannekoek," *op. cit*., p. 118. See also "The Development of Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy," *International Council Correspondence*, Vol. II, Nos. 3 4, March, 1936.
[33] "Theses on Bolshevism," *op. cit*., thesis #67, P. 17.
[34] "The doctrine of Party Communism of the Third International cannot be judged adequately unless their philosophical basis is thoroughly examined." Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher*, p. 4.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[36] Self liberation of the working masses implies self thinking, self knowing, recognizing truth and error by their own mental exertions." *Workers' Councils*, p. 99. Korsch argues that the basic fallacy of Lenin's position is his notion "that the militant character of a revolutionary materialist theory can and must be maintained against the weakening influences of other apparently hostile theoretical tendencies by any means to the exclusion of modifications made imperative by future scientific criticism and research. This

Pannekoek proceeds to consider the very nature of Lenin's philosophy itself. He discovers and demonstrates that Lenin's philosophical notions are akin to those of bourgeois materialism.

To Lenin nature and physical matter are Identical, the name matter has the same meaning as objective world. In this way he agrees with middle class materialism that in the same way considers matter as the real substance of the world.

... for Lenin, "nature" consists not only In matter but also in natural laws directing its behavior, floating somehow in the world as commanders who must be obeyed by the things. Hence to deny the objective existence of these laws means to him the denial of nature itself; to make man the creator of natural laws means to him to make human mind the creator of the world[37].

The distance between Lenin and Marx Is thus clear. Pannekoek points out that the meaning of matter for revolutionary Marxism was that:

"man's ideas quite as certainly belong to objective reality as the tangible objects; things spiritual constitute the real world just as things called material in physics. If in our science, needed to direct our activity, we wish to render the entire world of experience, the concept of physical matter does not suffice; we eed more and other concepts: energy, mind, consciousness.[38]"

Lenin failed to understand both Marx and the reality of the world, being "entirely captivated by the fetishism of forces as causes, as a kind of working imps.[39]"

Pannekoek finds not only the similarity with bourgeois materialism in Lenin's conception of matter and nature[40], but also in the objectives of Lenin's polemic. Rather than attacking idealism as Marx's revolutionary materialism did (e.g. *The German Ideology*), Lenin attacked religion and fideism. "This oppositeness of religion to reason is a reminiscence from pre Marxian times, from the emancipation of the middle class appealing to 'reason' in order to attack religious faith as the chief enemy in the social

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fallacious conception caused Lenin to evade discussion on their merits of such new scientific concepts and theories that in his judgment jeopardized the proved fighting value of that revolutionary (though not necessarily proletarian revolutionary) materialist philosophy that his Marxist party had adopted, less from Marx and Engels than from their philosophical teachers, the bourgeois materialists from Holbach to Feuerbach and their idealist antagonist, the dialectical philosopher Hegel. Rather he stuck to his guns, preferring the immediate utility of a given ideology to its theoretical truth in a changing world." "Lenin's Philosophy," *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 5, November, 1938, pp. 142-143.

[37] *Lenin as Philosopher*, PP. 54-55.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[39] *Ibid.*, P. 56.

[40] "Middle class materialism, identifying objective reality with physical matter, had to make every other reality, such as all things spiritual, an attribute or property of this matter. We cannot wonder, therefore, that we find with Lenin similar ideas." *Ibid.*, p. 62.

struggle.[41]" It thus becomes clear that Lenin's philosophy, rather than being the representation of the working class in its anti capitalist struggle, is closely connected to the historical situation in Russia, that of the battle against feudalism and for the bourgeois revolution[42].

Thus the proletarian class struggle in Russia was at the same time a struggle against Czarist absolutism, under the banner of socialism. So Marxism in Russia, developing as the theory of those engaged in the social conflict, necessarily assumed another character than in Western Europe. It was the theory of a fighting working class; but this class had to first fight, and foremost, for what in Western Europe had been the function and work of the bourgeoisie, with the intellectuals as its associates[43].

However, Pannekoek, once again in the best Marxist fashion, stresses that Lenin and Bolshevism must not be attacked on a personal level (for elitism, betrayal of the working class, etc.) but have to be understood on the basis of the social situation in which they struggled.

Lenin never knew real Marxism. Whence should he have taken it? Capitalism he knew only as colonial capitalism; social revolution he knew only as the annihilation of big land ownership and Czarist despotism. Russian Bolshevism cannot be reproached for having abandoned the way of Marxism; for it was never on that way. Every page of Lenin's philosophical work is there to prove it; and Marxism itself, by its thesis that theoretical opinions are determined by social relations and necessities, makes clear that it could not be otherwise. Marxism, however, at the same time shows the necessity of the legend; every middle class revolution, requiring working class and peasant support, needs the illusion that it is something different, larger, and more universal[44].

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[41] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[42] Lenin's Marxism did not express the practical necessities of the modern international anti capitalist class struggle, but was determined by conditions specific to Russia. Russia required not so much the emancipation as the creation of an industrial proletariat, and not so much the end of capital accumulation as its acceleration ... Lenin's Marxian 'orthodoxy' existed only in ideological form, as the false consciousness of a non socialist practice." Paul Mattick, *Marx and Keynes*, P. 307.

[43] Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher*, p. 68.

[44] *Ibid.*, P. 71. "Unlike Western Europe - where the Marxist theory arose in a period when the bourgeois revolution was already approaching its close and Marxism expressed a real and actualized tendency to pass beyond the goals of the bourgeois revolutionary movement, the tendency of the *proletarian* class - Marxism in Russia was from the start nothing more than an ideological form assumed by the material struggle for putting across the capitalist development in a pre-capitalist country ...Yet on this new soil the bourgeois principle could not make use, once again, of those historically outworn illusions and self deceptions with which it had concealed from itself the restricted bourgeois content of its developmental struggles in its first herioc phase in the West ...For penetration into the East, it needed a new ideological costume. And it was just the Marxist doctrine taken over from the West which seemed to be most able to render the growing bourgeois development in Russia that important historical service." "The Marxist Ideology in Russia," *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 2, March, 1938, p. 45.

Through this many faceted analysis, the councilists demonstrated that the Russian Revolution was a form of bourgeois revolution rather than a socialist revolution[45]. They recognized and argued that Bolshevism could not play a progressive role in proletarian struggles in the developed countries. The policies of the Third International could, therefore, only be a hindrance to the developing socialist struggle in the advanced capitalist countries.

The Third International aims at a world revolution after the model of the Russian Revolution and with the same goal. The Russian economic system is State capitalism, there called state socialism or even communism, with production directed by a state bureaucracy under the leadership of the Communist Party. The state officials, forming the new ruling class, have the disposal over the product, hence over the surplus value, whereas the workers receive wages only, thus forming an exploited class ...

According to CP ideas, a similar revolution is needed in the capitalist countries, with the working class again as the active power, leading to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the organization of production by a state bureaucracy. The Russian Revolution could be victorious only because a well disciplined united bolshevist party led the masses, and because in the party the clear insight and unyielding assurance of Lenin and his friends showed the right way. Thus, in the same way, in world revolution, the workers have to follow the CP, leave to it the lead and afterwards the government; and the party members have to obey their leaders in rigid discipline. Essential are the qualified capable party leaders, the proficient, experienced revolutionaries; what is necessary for the masses is the belief that the party and its leaders are right[46].

The councilist objection to this policy is not based on moral or ethical criteria (i.e., anti elitism), but is firmly grounded in the historical reality of western Europe and America[47]. There, the task of the working class is quite different from the task in Russia.

In reality, for the working class of developed capitalIsm, in Western Europe and America, matters are entirely different, Its task is not the overthrow of a backward absolutist monarchy. Its task is to vanquish a ruling class commanding the mightiest material and spiritual forces the world has ever known. Its object cannot be to replace

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[45] "The subsequent development of bolshevism showed that the boureois elements present in Leninism were not due to some 'false theory' (Gorter), but had their source in the character of the Russian Revolution itself." Mattick, "Anton Pannekoek," *op. cit*., p. 119.

[46] Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher*, P. 75.

[47] Here we see a fundamental difference between council communism and anarchism. A forthcoming essay by Paul Mattick on council communism, anarchism, and anarcho syndicalism will discuss in detail the differences between these theoretical systems. It will be included in a book on Karl Korsch to be published in Germany this summer.

the domination of stockjobbers and monopolists over a disorderly production by the domination of state officials over a production regulated from above, Its object is to be itself master of production and itself to regulate labor, the basis of life, Only then is capitalism really destroyed. Such an aim cannot be attained by an ignorant mass, confident followers of a party presenting itself as expert leadership. It can be attained only if the workers themselves, the entire class, understand the conditions, ways, and means of their fights when every man knows from his own judgment what to do. They must, every man of them, act themselves, decide de themselves, hence think out and know for themselves[48].

For the council communists, therefore, Leninism is antithetical to the self emancipation of the working class and thus must be opposed theoretically and practically by all genuine radicals in the developed countries. The total critique of Leninism Is well grounded in Marx, in terms of theory and practice. In 1879, Marx and Engels wrote to Bebel, Liebknecht, and others:

"When the International was formed we expressly formulated the battle cry: the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class Itself. We cannot, therefore, cooperate with people who openly state that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves.[49]"

It is this principle which was foremost in the minds of the councilists at all times and guided their theory and practice. Thus, they opposed all forms of political activity and all organizations which hindered the development of mass self reliance and self confidence. They developed extensive critiques of the modes of political activity engaged in by most "leftists"[50].

Trade unionism and parliamentary activity

Although most "radicals" recognized that trade unions in themselves were not revolutionary, they felt that they could be used to further the development of "revolutionary consciousness," particularly through the diffusion of radical propaganda by their leaders. If this was not the case and if often was not the blame was placed on

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[48] *Ibid.*, PP. 75-76.
[49] Circular letter of September 17, 1879, *Selected Correspondence*, P. 377.
[50] "If the essential content of the revolution consists in that the masses themselves take control of their own affairs, the direction of society and of production, it then follows that any form of organization which does not permit the masses to control and lead themselves Is counter revolutionary and harmful; for this reason It ought to be replaced by another organizational form which is revolutionary, that permits in fact the workers themselves to actively decide everything." Pannekoek, cited in Gorter, *op. cit*., p. 29.

the union leaders, who were "betraying" their class and need only be replaced by more radical leaders. The councilists, however, developed a far more fundamental critique of trade unions, demonstrating that the important question was not that of the behavior of the union leaders but of the very structure of the unions and the relationship between the unions and the development of capitalism.

The councilists emphasized that trade union activity in itself, although it did represent a form of class struggle, had no intentions or possibilities of becoming revolutionary, i.e., of aiding in the selfemancipation of the working class.

Trade unionism is an action of the workers which does not go beyond the limits of capitalism. Its aim is not to replace capitalism by another form of production, but to secure good living conditions within capitalism.

Certainly trade union activity is class struggle. There is a class antagonism in capitalism capitalists and workers have opposing interests. Not only in the question of the conservation of capitalism, but also within capitalism itself, with regard to the division of the total product. The capitalists attempt to increase their profits, the surplus value, as much as possible, by cutting down wages and increasing the hours or the intensity of labor. On the other hand, the workers attempt to increase their wages and to shorten their hours of work ... Thus the antagonism becomes the object of a contest, the real class struggle. It is the task, the function of the trade unions to carry on this fight[51].

However, the ability of trade unions to function for the benefit of the workers in the long run, in terms of the proletarian revolution, is negligible. In fact, they become a hindrance to the working class struggle (even on a daily basis) and lose all efficacy for the development of revolutionary consciousness. As the unions develop along with capitalism they lose any value they might have had in earlier periods and become just another obstacle in the path to self emancipation.

With the growth of capitalism and big industry, the unions too must grow. They become big corporations with thousands of members, extending over the whole country ... Officials must be appointed: presidents, secretaries, treasurers, to conduct the affairs, to manage the finances, locally and centrally. They are the leaders, who negotiate with the capitalists and who, by this practice, have acquired a special skill. The president of a union is a big shot, as big as the capitalist employer himself, and he discusses with him on equal terms, the interests of the members. The officials are specialists in trade union

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[51] Pannekoek, "Trade Unionism," *International Council Correspondence*, Vol. II, No. 2, January 1936, p. 11.

work, which the members themselves, entirely occupied by their factory work, cannot Judge or direct themselves[52].

Thus, a division of labor within the union structure itself develops, recreating and reinforcing the capitalist divisions between mental and manual labor. The workers lose control over their organization, delegating their own powers to the union officials. Many "radicals" have argued that this situation in itself need not be bad, especially if the union leaders are "radical." The councilists, however, recognized that this recapitulation of the division between mental and manual labor was already a large step in the wrong direction. Moreover, the ideology of union leaders makes no difference. Pannekoek, relying on Marx's notion that consciousness is determined by social existence, demonstrates that the behavior of union leaders must not be off handedly condemned as "betrayal" but must be understood as a concomitant of the social functions they perform.

The union officials, the labor leaders, are the bearers of the special union interests. Originally workmen from the shop, they acquire, by long practice at the head of the organization, a new social character. In each social group, once it is big enough to form a special group, the nature of its work molds its social character, its mode of thinking and acting. Their function is entirely different from that of the workers. They do not work in the shop, they are not exploited by capitalists, their existence is not threatened continually by unemployment. They sit in offices, in fairly secure positions. They have to manage corporation affairs and to speak at workers' meetings and discuss with employers[53].

The union officials identify with the interests and functions of the unions. Rather than becoming the leaders of proletarian revolutionary class struggle, therefore, they become agents of capitalist social control, which has become the primary function of trade unions in developed capitalism.

The labor leaders in advanced capitalism are numerous enough to form a special group or class with a special class character and interests. As representatives and leaders of the unions they embody the character and interests of the unions. The unions are necessary elements of capitalism, so the leaders feel as necessary items, as most useful citizens in capitalist society. This capitalist function of unions is to regulate class conflicts and to secure industrial peace. So labor leaders see it as their duty as citizens to

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[52] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

work for industrial peace and mediate conflicts. The test of the union lies entirely within capitalism; so labor leaders do not look beyond it[54].

Pannekoek emphasizes, as the councilists did in every matter that they analyzed, that "the conflicts arising here are not anyone's fault, they are inevitable consequences of capitalistic development.[55]" Thus, the point is not to polemicize against the "betrayal" of the working class by union bureaucrats, or to seek their replacement by "radicals,[56]" but to fight against the unions themselves and seek the creation of new structures and organizations which will allow for, if not encourage, mass self activity.

The councilists had no illusions here, however. They did not expect the workers to overthrow the unions because they failed to function as revolutionary organizations. Rather they recognized that as long as capitalism was expanding successfully the workers would remain within the union structures[57]. It is only when the workers find the unions incapable of protecting their immediate material interests that they will rebel against them. It is through new forms of struggle, spontaneously arising from the necessities of the struggle itself, that the workers will seek to act outside the union structure and will, of necessity, develop new forms of organization and activity. The sit down strikes of the 1930's were such a new form. "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.[58]" Wildcat strikes, as well, directed against both capital and trade unions, are spontaneous forms of activity stemming from the practical

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[54] *Ibid.*, P. 13. Paul Mattick describes how labor unions, the organization of workers within the structure of capitalism, once seen as a means for the liberation of the working class, have turned into their opposite, a means for accelerated capital accumulation and hence greater control over the workers. "The possibility. under conditions of a progressive capital formation, of improving labor conditions and of raising the price of labor, transformed the workers' struggle into a force for capitalist expansion. Like capitalist competition, the workers' struggle served as an incentive for further capital accumulation; it accentuated capitalist 'progress.' All gains of the workers were compensated for by an increasing exploitation, which in turn permitted a still more rapid capital expansion." Mattick, "Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler," *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 7. June 1937, P. 195.

[55] Pannekoek, "Trade Unionism," *op. cit*., P. 15.

[56] "Their counter revolutionary strength can neither be destroyed nor attenuated by a change in personnel, by the replacement of reactionary leaders by leftists or revolutionaries." Pannekoek, cited in Gorter, *op. cit*., p. 29.

[57] "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 meets 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 workers to make an end of It." Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, p. 92.

[58] *Ibid.*, P. 72. "The self-determination by 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." *Ibid.*, p. 69. For an excellent discussion of sit downs, see "Sur les Occupations d'Usines," *Information Correspondence Ouvriere*, No. 114, February, 1972.

necessities of the struggle. Although such strikes are usually limited in scope and are usually defeated,

"their importance is that they demonstrate a fresh fighting spirit that cannot be suppressed ... They are the harbingers of future greater fights, when great social emergencies, with heavier pressure and deeper distress, drive the masses to stronger action.[59]"

The experience of solidarity and self management gained in such struggles is a crucial step in the direction of revolutionary consciousness, the understanding that the working class can on its own direct production and manage society collectively. Further, it is the experience that no one but fellow workers can be relied upon in times of struggle, that all activity must be autonomous and controlled from below by the workers as a collective unit. Thus, trade unionism will be defeated, not in theory by intellectuals, but in practice, by the workers in the course of struggling to attain their goals in the only possible way. This is a necessity of the proletarian struggle for self emancipation.

Bound to an expanding capitalism, totally integrated into the whole of the social fabric, the old labor movement can only stagnate with stagnating capitalism and decline with declining capitalism. It cannot divorce itself from capitalist society, unless it breaks completely with its own past, which is possible only by breaking up the old organizations, as far as they still exist ... A rebirth of the labor movement is conceivable on as a rebellion of the masses against "their" organizations[60].

Another form of political activity which many "radicals" have considered fruitful is parliamentary politics. Some have argued in favor of the "parliamentary path to socialism," i.e., electing socialists to the government who will then begin to institute socialism; others have argued that parliamentary election campaigns offer a good forum

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[59] Pannekoek, *ibid.*, p. 69. "But these strikes prove that the class fight between capital and labor cannot cease, and that when the old forms are not practicable any more, the workers spontaneously try out and develop new forms of action. In these actions, revolt against capital is also revolt against the old organizational forms." Pannekoek, "General Remarks on the Question of Organization," *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 5, November 1938, p. 147. Pannekoek later wrote: "Wildcat strikes are spontaneous outbursts, the genuine practical expression of class struggle against capitalism, though without wider aims as yet; but they embody a new character already in the rebellious masses: selfdetermination instead of determination by leaders, self reliance instead of obedience, fighting spirit instead of accepting the dictates 7 from above, unbreakable solidarity and units with the comrades instead of duty imposed by membership." "The Failure of the Working Class," *Politics*, September 1946, p. 271.

[60] Mattick, "Groups of Council Communists," *The Social Frontier*, Vol. V, No. 45, 1939, p, 249. "The workers are not anti unionists, but they find that today, in their important struggles, in order to triumph, they must pass over the body of the unions. Because the first repressive apparatus is that which is closest to the workers, the union apparatus." "Les Greves Sauvages, une Realite vers la Construction d'un Monde Nouveau," *Information Correspondence Ouvriere*, #90, February 1970, p. 4.

for socialist propaganda[61]. Some, too, have suggested seeking election to parliamentary offices and then, once in, trying to expose the sham of bourgeois democracy.

The council communists, on the other hand, have always maintained an anti parliamentary position. Again, this position grows out of their understanding of the obstacles and possibilities for proletarian self-emancipation in specific historical circumstances (advanced capitalism), rather than any abstract moral imperative. A major obstacle to the development of the revolutionary consciousness necessary for the selfemancipation of the working class is the strength of bourgeois Ideology, which is reinforced by parliamentary elections.

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[62].

The notion that "socialism" can be introduced through the parliamentary process is obviously antithetical to the concept of socialism being the process and result of proletarian jelf emancipation. It is clear that "parliamentarism cannot bring freedom and mastery to the working class, but only new masters instead of the old ones.[63]" Moreover, the nature of the activity involved in parliamentary politics can in no way help develop the strength necessary to overthrow the capitalist system.

The conquest of mastery and freedom by the working class will be a hard and difficult fight. It is by means of the exigencies of this fight, through its sacrifices, its hardships, its dangers, in defeat and victory, that the working class must acquire those qualities that make it strong and capable for self rule, for ruling society. Can simply putting secretly a name into a ballot box be called a fight at all?[64]

In parliamentary activity, the only strength which the working class is called upon to use is its numerical strength, "the least essential only of the power factors of the

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[61] Such beliefs are still held by wide sections of the American "left," both "old" and "new." Cf. for example, the position of the New American Movement on participation in the McGovern campaign or the attitudes expressed in *Socialist Revolution*, #11, on the same subject.

[62] Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, P. 77.

[63] Pannekoek, "Some Remarks on Parliamentarism," *Left*, #149, May, 1949, P, 52.

[64] *Ibid.*, P. 50. Note the similarity between these views and those of Marx, as expressed in *The German Ideology*: "... the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, *a revolution*; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew." (p. 69)

working class.[65]" In no way is the sense of solidarity and ability to run society and production at all developed through such activity. Indeed, passivity as far as collective activity is concerned is encouraged by participation in such activity[66]. As for the parliamentary process or the parliament itself providing a forum for socialist propaganda by candidates or legislators, Pannekoek writes:

"The insight needed [for revolution] cannot 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 felt desire to understand the world. It would be very easy for the working class if it had only to accept the 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.[67]"

In sum, then, any notion, any rationale, for engaging in parliamentary activity can only hinder the development of the strengths necessary for the destruction of the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie. As Gorter wrote to Lenin, who had advised taking part in such activity, "the worker must struggle alone with his class against the formidable enemy, must bring about the most terrible struggle which the world has ever seen. No leadership tactic can help this[68].

The role of the Party

As for their own principles of organization and activity, the council communists presented a theoretical and practical alternative to Leninism. They totally rejected the Leninist party form of organization with its rigid centralism, hierarchy, strict obedience to leadership, and separation from the body of the working class.

The belief in parties is the main reason for the impotence of the working class; therefore, we avoid forming a new party not because we are too few, but because a party is an organization that aims to lead and control the working class in opposition to this, we maintain that the working class can rise to victory only when it independently attacks its problems and decides its own fate. The workers should not blindly accept the slogans of others, nor of our own groups, but must think, act, and decide for themselves.

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[65] Pannekoek, *ibid.*, P. 51.
[66] Consider the attitude of sections of the anti war movement concorning the danger that demonstrations might harm McGovern's campaign and that, therefore, demonstrations should be held off until after the election.
[67] Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, P. 99.
[68] Gorter, *op. cit.*, P. 53.

This conception is in sharp contradiction to the tradition of the party as he most important means of educating the proletariat[69].

The councilists further rejected the party structure because it recapitulated the capitalist division between mental and manual labor, between order givers and order takers[70]. With their emphasis on the importance of the connection between the means and ends of the class struggle, they recognized that socialism workers' self management of production and society cannot be achieved through a form of organization that hindered self emancipation. Rather than stimulating the capabilities of the workers, parties function to stifle them.

Such parties ... must be rigid structures with clear lines of demarcation through membership cards, statutes, party discipline, and admission and expulsion procedures. For they are instruments of power they fight for power, bridle their members by force and constantly seek to extend the scope of their power. It is not their task to develop the initiative of the workers; rather do they aim at training loyal and unquestioning members of their faith. While the working class in their struggle for power and victory needs unlimited intellectual freedom, the party rule must suppress all opinions except its own[71].

The council communists recognized that building their own organization had little relevance to the goal of proletarian self emancipation[72]. Rather, they functioned as a group which shared a general common perspective and sought to clarify and publicize the issues of the class struggle[73]. However, they were uncertain of the efficacy of their propaganda, due to their conception of the nature of consciousness, i.e., determined by social existence in the sense that it arose spontaneously from the necessities of practical

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[69] Pannekoek, "The Party and the Class," in "The Role of the Party: A Discussion," *Modern Socialism*, n.d., p, 7. In the same discussion. Mattick argues that "the party is a foreign element in social production just as the capitalist class was an unnecessary third factor to the two needed for the carrying on of social life: means of production and labor. The fact that parties participate in class struggles indicates that these class struggles do not tend towards a socialistic goal. Socialism finally means nothing more than the elimination of that third factor that stands between the means of production and labor." In *ibid.*, p. 16.

[70] The general coordination of workers' organizations to capitalism saw the adoption of the same specialization in union and party activities that characterized the hierarchy of industries." "The Masses and the Vanguard," *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 4, August 1938, P. 106.

[71] Pannekoek, "The Role of the Party," *op. cit*., p. 9.

[72] It is not possible to slowly assemble revolutionary forces into powerful organizations ready to act at favorable moments." Attempts to build such organizations have always failed with the organizations either becoming reformist or disappearing. "Apparently there is no way to replace these organizations with new ones of a revolutionary character a hopeless situation for those who want to *organize* the new society within the shell of the old." Mattick, "Spontaneity and Organization," *Left*, n.d., pp. 123-126.

[73] "If, in this situation, persons with the same fundamental conceptions units for the discussion of practical steps and seek clarification through discussions and propagandize their conclusions, such groups might be called parties, but they would be parties in an entirely different sense from those of today." Pannekoek, "The Role of the Party," *op. cit*., p. 8.

experience. Pannekoek himself often wavered on this very point, holding to different opinions at different times[74]. In the discussion of the role of the "party," he stated that:

"The struggle is so great, the enemy so powerful, that only the masses as a whole can achieve a victory the result of the material and moral power of action, unity, and enthusiasm, but also the result of the mental force of thought, of clarity. In this lies the great importance of such parties or groups based on opinions: that they bring clarity in their conflicts, discussions, and propaganda. They are the organs of the self enlightenment of the working class by means of which the workers find their way to freedom.[75]"

Whereas in *Workers' Councils* he holds to a rather different conception:

"The great decisive step in the progress of mankind, the transformation of society now impending, is essentially a transformation of the working masses. It can be accomplished only by the action, by the revolt, by the effort of the masses themselves; its essential nature is selfliberation of mankind. From this viewpoint it is clear that here no able leadership of an Intellectual elite can be helpful.[76]"

Nevertheless, Pannekoek never dismisses propaganda as useless, believing that at least keeping certain ideas in the air is worthwhile. Mattick maintains more closely the practical implications of the council communist and what appears to be Marx's conception of consciousness, recognizing the limitations of the effect of any propagandistic activity.

The "consciousness" to rebel against and to change society is not developed by the "propaganda" of conscious minorities, but by the real and direct propaganda of events; ... So long as minorities operate within the mass, the mass is not revolutionary, but neither is the minority. Its "revolutionary conceptions" can still serve only capitalistic functions. If the masses become revolutionary, the distinction between

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[74] See, for example, Richard Gombin's good discussion of this problem in *Les Origines de Gauchisme*, pp. 103-120.

[75] Pannekoek, "The Role of the Party," *op. cit*., p. 8. In "Five Theses on the Class Struggle" (reprinted as an appendix to a Root and Branch pamphlet, "Mass Strike in France"), he reiterates this position: "Freedom can be won by the working class only through their own organized action, by taking their lot in their own hands, in devoted exertion of all their faculties, by directing and organizing their fight and their work themselves by means of their councils. For the parties there remains the second function, to spread insight and knowledge, to study, discuss, and formulate social ideas, and by their propaganda to enlighten the minds of the masses. The workers' councils are the organs for practical action and the fight of the working class; to the parties falls the task of the building up of its spiritual power. Their work forms an indispensable part in the self liberation of the working class."

[76] *Workers' Councils*, p. 40.

conscious minority and unconscious majority disappears, and also the capitalistic function of the apparently "revolutionary" minority[77].

All groups which have shared the councilist perspective have been caught on the horns of this dilemma. Although most have probably shared Mattick's theoretical analysis, they have refused to content themselves with either inactivity or internal discussion. Indeed, he has not himself carried out the implications of his position, but has engaged in considerable political activity and has written voluminously. Different councilist groups have sought to resolve this dilemma in different ways. Few have ever been satisfied with their tentative solutions[78]. Nevertheless, all have been united in their struggle for the self emancipation of the working class and their unwillingness to act as any kind of leadership in the Leninist sense, i.e., formulating policy and organizing to seize power.

The councilist alternative

The discussion so far in this chapter should have given some indication of how the councilists do see the revolution occurring, if only through the process of eliminating unsatisfactory theories. I would now like to turn to an explicit description of the councilist conception of the socialist revolution and the future free society.

One of the key notions of council communist theory is that of the necessity of severe crisis in order for there to be the possibility of a revolutionary situation. Drawing both from Marx's Capital and from their study of historical instances of mass upheaval, they concluded that only a crisis could force the working class into revolutionary activity.

Left wing radicalism had been based on what was designated by their reformist adversaries as the "politics of catas trophe." The revolutionists expected not only deteriorating living standards for the laboring population but also economic crises so devastating as to call forth social conditions which would, in the end, lead to revolution.

They could not conceive of revolution short of its objective necessity. And in fact, no social revolution occurred except in times of social and economic catastrophe.

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[77] Mattick, "From the Bottom Up," in the discussion in *Modern Socialism*, *op. cit*., P. 17.

[78] Gombin's discussion (*op. cit*.) on how different French groups Informations Correspondence Ouvriere, Socialisme ou Barbarie, and the International Situationists have tried to deal with it, both theoretic,lly and practically. One could also look at documents from such groups expressing their efforts to come to some sort of understanding, if not an actual conclusion (e.g., "Organisations et Mouvement Ouvrier," *Informations Correspondence Ouvriere*, #80, April, 1969; "Pour un Regroupement Révolutionnaire," *Contre le Courant*, published as a collection of material from *Lutte de Classe*, 1971; "As We Don't See It," pamphlet from London *Solidarity*, 1972).

The revolutions released by World War I were the result of catastrophic conditions in the weaker imperialist powers and they raised, for the first time, the question of workers' control and the actualization of socialism as a real possibility[79].

The councilists recognized that as Marx pointed out in times of growth and stability the control, both material and ideological, of the bourgeoisie over the workers is so great as to make a mass based revolution impossible. As long as there is no dire necessity to overthrow the system, as long as consciousness and reality are in accord, no revolution will occur. This notion makes sense theoretically based on an understanding of the essentially practical nature of consciousness and historically revolutions have only grown out of periods of severe crisis. Mattick summarizes this conception of the importance of the crisis in a recently written essay:

"... the history of the workers' movement shows that revolutionary class consciousness only manifests itself in times of especially deep crisis. Class struggles, which do not tend yet to fix themselves on class objectives and do not leave the realm of wage labor, constitute themselves as spontaneous reactions to a slow or brutal deterioration of the proletarian condition ...

It is only in times of crisis that revolutionary class consciousness can develop. By itself, the consciousness of belonging to the working class has hardly any importance; in any case, it exists everywhere ... The workers know well that they belong to a class antagonistic to that of the capitalists ...

When one considers for a moment the enormous strength which confronts the proletariat and its class aspirations, one will understand why the workers prefer to adapt to the present conditions rather than attack them ...

As long as the ruling class is capable of asserting its political power over the economy thanks to a prosperity either true or false it is useless to hope that the consciousness of the workers will take a revolutionary character. But it is precisely a distinctive trait of capitalism that it finds itself incapable of controlling the course of its economic development.[80]"

The councilists rely theoretically on Marx's major work, *Capital*, in which he scientifically demonstrated the necessity of capitalist crises[81]. Neither they nor Marx

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[79] Paul Mattick, "Workers' Control," in Priscilla Long (ed.), *The New Left*, P. 385.
[80] Mattick, "Division du Travail et Conscience de Classe," in *Integration Capitaliste et Rupture Ouvriere*, p. 256.
[81] Henryk Grossmann and Paul Mattick have done the most work with Marx's "crisis theory." None of Grossmann's work is available in English. Mattick's major ideas can be found in his *Marx and Keynes; The Limits of the Mixed Economy*.

argued that capitalism would break down permanently on its own. Rather, the very nature of capitalist production itself, based on the contradiction between use value and exchangevalue, generates crises of varying severity. It is only in such a period of severe crisis that the workers will act to make it the final crisis of capitalism. Until then, capitalism will go on, from crisis to expansion to crisis again. Only when the working class asserts itself with the totality of its strengths will the true breakdown occur.

The councilists viewed revolutionary consciousness as the *result* rather than the precondition for activity in a crisis period[82]. The working class, due to its position in society, and particularly its activity in the labor process, recognizes that it is a class opposed to the capitalist class. They realize that they are exploited and they struggle daily, through union activity, i.e., wage struggles, over their share of their product that they are to receive, through sabotage, in which they strike out against their domination by capital, by absenteeism, goofing off, etc. However, these struggles, although a necessary part of the class struggle, usually do not result in an attack on the capitalist system itself. They represent responses to daily capitalist domination and exploitation, but they do not transcend capitalism as a whole. Rather, they are efforts either to gain a larger share of the product for the workers, i.e., raise the price of their labor power, create less value for the wages they are paid, or are merely a response to the unpleasant nature of work. Revolutionary consciousness subsumes all of this and goes a step farther. It is the recognition that the working class as a whole *forms the future communist society in itself* within capitalism, i.e., that they can run society on their own and restructure it to meet their desires. Such a consciousness cannot arise from the daily experience of the labor process alone, where workers are under the constant control of others and can only exchange their products and cooperate in production through the mediation of capitalists, foremen, and the market[83]. In a crisis, the foundations of this system, the regularities of everyday life, begin to crumble, its irrational basis becomes apparent for all to see[84], and the workers must begin to act on their own if they are not to

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[82] "In fact, revolutionary movements rarely begin with a revolutionary intention; this only develops in the course of the struggle itself." Brecher, *Strike!*, p. 240.

[83] "What are the foundations of the new society? They are the social forces of fellowship and solidarity, of discipline and enthusiasm the moral forces of self sacrifice and devotion to the community, the spiritual forces of knowledge, of courage and perseverance, the firm organization that binds all these forces into a unity of purpose, all of them are the outcome of the class struggle. They cannot purposely be prepared in advance. Their first traces arise spontaneously in the workers out of their common exploitation; and then they grow incessantly through the necessities of the fight, under the influence of experience and of mutual inducement and instruction." *Workers' Councils*, pp. 18-19.

[84] Pannekoek writes of the Depression: "In this crisis the true character of capitalism and the impossibility to maintain it, was shown to mankind as in a searchlight. There were millions of people lacking the means

submit to a much more severe exploitation than they have ever known. In fact, the existence of an explicit socialist consciousness need not, and most likely, cannot, precede the revolutionary class struggle itself.

Even though the workers in great masses may never attain a revolutionary consciousness. in order to live they are forced to take up the fight against capital. And when they fight for their existence under the conditions of the permanent crisis, this fight, regardless of its ideological quality, is a fight which can only turn in the direction of overcoming the capitalist systemem[85].

Revolution is more a matter of necessity than choice. In response to growing stagnation and crisis, the capitalists must seek to increase their surplus value at all costs, i.e., raise the rate of exploitation a great deal in a short time. This in itself begins to elicit responses from the workers. Moreover, as they find "their" organizations the trade unions obstacles in the way of their protecting their own immediate interests, they *must* begin to act autonomously.

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 rapidly increasing capital. So again and again the workers are provoked to resistance. But against this 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 wildcat strike, in the direct action[86].

It is only through forms of mass direct action that the spiritual qualities self reliance, solidarity, confidence, creativity can develop which are necessary for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a new society. "In the course of strike actions, the ordinary life of workers, in which they act under the constant direction of their boss, ceases, and they have to think, act, and coordinate their actions for themselves.[87]" It is through this acting for themselves and coordinating their actions

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to provide for their life necessities. There were the millions of workers with strong arms, eager to work; there were the machines in thousands of shops ready to whirl and to produce an abundance of goods. But it was not allowed." *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[85] "Revolutionary Marxism," *International Council Correspondence*, #8, May 1935, P. 5. As Pannekoek puts it, "the working class is confronted today with the necessity of itself taking production in hand." *Workers' Councils*, p. 11.

[86] Pannekoek, *Ibid.*, p. 66. See also the discussion of the sitdown strikes mentioned above (see page 202.)

[87] Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*, p. 237. This book is the best study I have yet seen of how people have changed themselves through the course of struggle.

with workers in other shops and regions (all necessities of the struggle) that the consciousness of the workers can undergo a crucial change, attaining the very heart of revolutionary consciousness, their "understanding that they have the ability to initiate and control action, to make themselves the basic decisions about their lives.[88]"

Thus, by forcing the workers to act for themselves due to the failure of "their" organizations which had acted for them in the past to fight off increasing exploitation and to respond to the threat of actual starvation, along with the existence of great amounts of unused means of production, masses of unemployed workers, a severe crisis can spell the end of capitalism[89]. The crisis itself does not imply the end of capitalism; nor does it necessarily cause the appearance of revolutionary consciousness. It forces the workers into actions through which revolutionary consciousness may develop. The councilists see this as the result of a long process of ever heightening struggle.

In the course of a long period of conflict, workers form the goal of taking over production themselves. This goal develops as a response to two conditions that an escalating workers' movement eventually produces. First, the workers reach the limit of what they can gain without taking power. This limit is generally experienced in the intransigence or counter attack of the old rulers, expressed through lockouts, coup d'etats, and the like. The obvious solution that presents Itself, therefore, is removing the old rulers from power. Second, the workers discover through their own actions their real power and ability, and therefore realize that taking over management is possible for them[90].

However, the council communists *never* argued that a crisis had to result in a revolution. For them, it was a necessary but insufficient condition. They recognized that considerable activity undermining bourgeois ideological hegemony and laying the basis

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[88] Paul Mattick, Jr., "Introduction," to the Root and Branch edition of Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, p. ii.

[89] Of course, we can only know afterwards if any given crisis was the "final" one, i.e., by seeing if it did indeed result in revolution.

[90] Brecher, *op. cit.*, P. 305. This same process is described in *Informations Correspondence Ouvriere* on the basis of the French experience. "The unification of the struggle and its extension do not come so much from the desire for unity and the willingness to extend it, but rather:
- that following the concentration of firms, many workers have common interests and they discover this when a limited sector is fighting;
- that the sectors are so interdependent that stopping a few blocks them all;
- that the resistance of the leaders to whatever touches their decisionmaking power rapidly pushes the struggle into an impasse and forces the striking workers to seek other support. The autonomy of the struggle does not come so much from the initial refusal of the union leaders or delegates to support a strike, but rather from the fact that their position in the modern enterprise renders them absolutely unable to regulate the problems of the base and that they intervene in the struggle to exercise a function, the union function, totally opposed to the workers' interests ...". "La Lutte de Classe en France," *Informations Correspondence Ouvriere*, #85, September 1969, P. 3.

for new social relationships had to reach a high level, not only during the crisis but before it, growing from the daily struggle between capitalists and workers, if a successful revolution were to make any crisis the final one of capitalism. Gorter saw this, although on a very abstract level, in 1920:

"Misery in Germany was terrible in the last years of the war. The revolution did not come. It was worse yet in 1918 and 1919. The revolution did not succeed ... Crisis and misery are not sufficient. The most severe economic crisis is here and nevertheless the revolution does not come. There must be another factor which brings about the revolution, and which, if it is defeated, allows it to fail. This factor is the spirit of the masses.[91]"

Almost all councilists have, however, remained far too abstract when confronted with this problem[92]. Some have merely stated what is necessary in a very general way, and then have sought to study society concretely to see if any of the necessary activity is going on. For instance *Lutte de Classe* states that "for a revolution to be possible new social relations ought to be pre existing, at least in an embryonic state, to overthrow existing relations.[93]" They have then devoted much of their efforts to describing and analyzing ongoing international working class activity. Pannekoek seems to vacillate between stating the problem in general terms and implying that the activity of the working class in the struggle itself can overcome all pre existing problems. Thus, in *Workers' Councils* he states in one place that:

"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 aid and of self confidence.[94]"

But elsewhere in the book he seems to recognize the difficulties involved:

"... the time will come that the evil of depression, the calamaties 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

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[91] Gorter, *op. cit*., p. 106.
[92] Of course, there is a rather clear connection between uncertainty on this problem and the uncertainty concerning the group's activity which was discussed earlier in this chapter.
[93] In *Contre le Courant*, "Pour un Regroupement Revolutionnaire," p. 25.
[94] *Workers' Councils*, p. 67.

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 declining 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.[95]"

But Pannekoek's investigation in this area is not very thorough. Basically, again growing from his understanding of the essentially practical nature of consciousness[96], he argues that

"the dominant and deepest impulse in man as in every living being is his instinct of selfpreservation ... Fear and submissiveness also are the effect of this instinct, when against powerful masters they afford the best chances for preservation.[97]"

Indeed, in capitalist daily life, this "fear and submissiveness" is far more practical than if the worker were 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.[98]" Here, then, is Pannekoek's tentative solution:

"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 selfreliance and high spiritedness awake in them and grow. because of 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 ardor grow to

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[95] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[96] "Among the various dispositions in man those which are the most adapted to secure life in the existing circumstances will prevail." *Ibid.*, p, 93.
[97] *Ibid.*, P. 93.
[98] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

irresistible power. Then the working class begins to be ripe for revolution. Then capitalism begins to be ripe for collapse.[99]"

Pannekoek seems to be arguing that everything can be solved in the revolutionary struggle itself. However, as we have seen. the councilists, despite their belief that such a struggle would have to happen regardless of the desires of any group or groups, often attacked those organizations and institutions which reinforced passivity in the masses. They recognized that the stronger such institutions are, the weaker the masses must be. What we have here is an immense problem, to my mind the most serious potential inadequacy in councilist theory, which merits far more consideration than I can devote to it here. I hope to deal with it more thoroughly elsewhere in this thesis. Here I must limit myself with having pointed out the nature of the problem, i.e., the extent to which conditioning towards passivity can be overcome in the revolutionary struggle. Let us move on, perhaps a bit uncomfortably, but with determination.

The functioning of councils in the revolutionary struggle

Much of the writing of the council communists concerned the form which they thought the struggle of the working class, in the process of its selfemancipation, would take. Here, once again, they relied on the analysis of historical instances of spontaneous upheavals (particularly Russia in 1905 and 1917 and Germany in 1918 1923), from which they generalized their theory of organizational forms in a revolutionary situation and the importance of those forms in the building and the controlling of a new society. As a contemporary French group puts it, "the councils are not a dried up scheme, the product of some 'brilliant mind' that they have tried to apply by force everywhere, but the spontaneous response to the problems which present themselves to the proletariat in its struggle against capitalism[100].

In the councilist discussion of organizational forms, we find again the strong emphasis on the relationship of means to ends in the revolutionary struggle. All aspects of the revolutionary struggle are inextricably connected to the nature of the new society which will be built out of this struggle. Organizational forms must, therefore, serve the

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[99] *Ibid.*, p. 94. A contemporary French group, sharing the same general perspective, analyzes the French situation in the same basic terms: "This feeling of powerlessness is normal. It will disappear to the degree that the incapacity of the capitalist class in the face of the economic crisis in which all the industrialized countries are entering will reveal itself." *Noir et Rouge*, "L'Autegestion, L'Etat, et la Revolution," special supplement to *Noir et Rouge*, #41, May 1968, P. 3. Perhaps the failure of this prophecy to come to fruition is an indication of the complex nature of this problem.

[100] *Revolution Internationale*, "Le Pouvoir des Conseils Ouvriers," No. 1, December 1968, P. 15.

dual purpose of being fighting organs and means of reconstruction. Pannekoek points this out in his discussion of forms of organization:

"As the proletariat rises to dominance it develops simultaneously its own organization and the forms of the new economic order. These two developments are inseparable and form the process of social revolution ... Since the revolutionary class fight against the bourgeoisie and its organs is inseparable from the seizure of the productive apparatus by the workers and its application to production, the same organization that unites the class for its fight also acts as the organization of the new productive process.[101]"

Once again, it is stressed that these organizational forms must be applicable to the task of the self emancipation of the working class. Thus, any form of organization, if it is to be useful in the struggle for socialism, must be based on

"the principle of *the masses* (not party or vanguard) retaining power ... Communism cannot be introduced or realized by a party. Only the proletariat as a whole can do that ... All the problems of the workers must therefore be viewed in relation to the developing self-action of the masses.[102]"

Thus, the two primary requirements of an organizational form are: 1) that it be equally applicable to the revolutionary struggle and the construction of a new society, and 2) that it be a means of direct expression of the developing revolutionary consciousness of the working class rather than an instrument for controlling them and therefore stifling their initiative[103]. Such an organizational form has appeared every time the working class has taken up the direct fight against capital.

It is not necessary to try to construct or to imagine these new forms; they can originate only in the practical fight of the workers themselves. They have already originated there; we have only to look into practice to find its beginnings everywhere the workers are rebelling against the old order[104].

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[101] Pannekoek, "General Remarks on the Question of Organization," *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 5, November 1938, p. 148. This is, of course, antithetical to such notions as those expressed by Sweezy and Bettleheim, i.e., that there are two separate periods calling for quite different organization and behavior. (Cf. *On the Transition to Socialism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971.)

[102] The Masses and the Vanguard," *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[103] 'The fighting workers are not an army conducted after a neatly conceived plan of action by a staff of able leaders. They are a people gradually rising out of submissiveness and ignorance, gradually coming to consciousness of their exploitation, again and again driven to the fight for better living conditions, by degrees developing their powers. New feelings spring up in their hearts, new thoughts arise in their heads. New wishes, new ideals, new aims fill their minds and direct their will and action. Their aims gradually begin to take a more concise shape. From the simple strife for better working conditions, in the beginning, they grow to the idea of a fundamental reorganization of society." *Workers' Councils*, pp. 17-18.

[104] "General Remarks on the Question of Organization," *op. cit.*, P. 148.

Factory committees and workers' councils are just such forms. These organizations arise spontaneously in the course of the struggle. They are non hierarchical, concentrating all power in the hands of the workers themselves. "Direction in their own hands, also called their own leadership, means that all initiative and all decisions proceed from the workers themselves ... Decision and action, both collective, are one.[105]" Such organs are not formed on command, but are the spontaneous modes of expression of the self reliance, self determination, and solidarity of the workers in the battle against capital. Such spiritual qualities do not arise out of moral exhortation, or from reading. Rather, they are the results of the developing struggle it self, as they are called forth within each worker and between the workers if the struggle is to succeed. Councils are an extremely flexible form of organization, capable of meeting the pressing needs of the revolutionary struggle.

The councils thus appeared as the basic organs of the revolutionary movement and they allowed the workers to seize and control the forces of production. It is on this basis that they organized their self defense. This base could go beyond the narrow confines of the firm and reach out to an industrial sector or to the totality of the workers of a city or region[106].

Already within such councils are embodied new social relations cooperation, fundamental equality, solidarity, creativity, self reliance, and self confidence. Indeed, they are in part also the means of individual self transformation, from the passive, dependent worker of capitalism to the active, independent member of a future socialist society. The location of new social relations, they are also the location of the self creation of new men and women. This is the very nature of organizations such as workers' councils[107].

The expression of workers' power, the location of all their power in the struggle, the councils represent power of an entirely different nature than now exists in capitalist or bureaucratic society. They express the exercising of power at the point of production, the factory, in the community, at the very heart of the society. This basis of economic

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[105] *Workers' Councils*, p. 67.

[106] "A Propos des Conseils Ouvriers, de la Fin du Travail et du Mouvement Revolutionnaire," *Informations Correspondence Ouvriere*, supplement to #97-98, September/ October 1970, P. 1.

[107] "One of the essential conditions of the revolution is thus the organization of the masses in the form which can immediately and directly translate their consciousness in actions ... Only the councils, because they bring together all the workers and because they exercise their power over all the life of society in each factory, quarter, region, can respond to this fundamental need. They alone can assure the effective and immediate participation of all the workers; they alone can guarantee the rapidity of the realization of the initiatives of the revolutionary class." *Revolution Internationale*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

power in the factory becomes itself the means and expression of political power in the society as a whole. Thus, seizing "state power" does not become the aim of the struggle; rather, the destruction of the state, of all forms of power which do not emanate from below, i.e., are apart from the daily lives of the masses of the population[108]. Indeed, the councils represent the means of moving from a society with a powerful state in the traditional sense to a society based on proletarian self management of production and of society, with no need for any such state apparatus[109].

The functioning of the councils in the new society

How would such a society function? All forms of social activity the production of goods, the performance of services will be controlled by those who engage in them. Thus, there is common ownership of the means of production rather than private ownership or "public ownership," as in Russia or other state capitalist countries. This difference is rightly stressed by the councilists.

Common ownership must not be confounded with public ownership. In public ownership, often advocated by notable social reformers, the State or another political body is master of the production. The workers are not masters of their work, they are commanded by the State officials, who are leading and directing production. Whatever may be the condition of labor, however human and considerate the treatment, the fundamental fact is that not the workers themselves, but the officials, dispose of the product, manage the entire process ... In short, the workers still receive wages, a share of the product determined by masters. Under public ownership of the means of production, the workers are still subjected to and exploited by a ruling class ... Common ownership by the producers can be the only goal of the working class[110].

Production in each workplace (be it production of goods or services) must be controlled by those who work there.

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[108] "The expropriation of the capitalists implies the destruction of the State apparatus which has as its principal function the protection of their individual or collective property. This apparatus, by its nature, is not capable of anything other than repressive use, and may neither be conquered nor transformed into an instrument of a mythic 'popular power,'" *Contre le Courant*, p. 25.

[109] "With a system of factory committees and workers' councils extending over wide areas the proletariat creates the organs which regulate production, distribution, and all the other functions of social life. In other words, the civil administrative apparatus is deprived of all power, and the proletarian dictatorship establishes itself, Thus, class organization in the very struggle for power is at the same time organization, control, and management of the productive forces and of the entire society. It is the basis of the association of free and equal producers and consumers." "The Masses and the Vanguard," *op. cit.*, p.109.

[110] *Workers' Councils*, pp. 15-16.

The ruling body in each shop organization is the entirety of the collaborating workers. They assemble to discuss matters and in assembly take their decisions. So everybody who takes part in the work takes part in the regulation of the common work[111].

In plants too large to assemble all the workers, it will be necessary to elect delegates, but these delegates will have no governing power. They will be elected from among the work groups, will continue to work there i.e., there will be no full time delegates and will be instantly revocable. They will not be experts, nor will they be responsible for the running of the factory. Rather, their task will be to facilitate discussion and to carry out the decisions not the abstract "will" of their fellow workers and to serve also as liaisons between work groups within factories and between factories[112]. Delegates will often change, depending on the issues involved. Thus, within the factory, the division between order givers and order takers will disappear.

Of course,

"the organization of the work inside the shop is only one half of the task of the workers. Over it, a still more important task, stands the joining of the separate enterprises, their combination into a social organization.[113]"

Central bodies will be formed on the same basis as councils within the factories instantly revocable delegates who continue to work in the shops, no decision making powers, i.e., they will be the executors of the workers' decisions rather than making decisions for the workers. Such bodies will perform the functions of coordination, collection of vital data and information, and will see to its dissemination in a simple and comprehensible form. They will not be planning bodies. This crucial function of planning will be performed by the workers as a whole, who, because of the dissemination of the necessary information in understandable form[114], will make all the

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[111] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[112] "The councils being assemblies of workers elected and instantly revocable, having simply a power of execution of the directive taken in informed assemblies, are thus the very form which permits all men to manage their activity, their production. They constitute not an organ destined to impose on a majority the directives of a minority, but the organization of the great majority to coordinate and effectively run its actions and its desires." *Revolution Internationale*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[113] Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, p. 23. Cardan writes: "Direct democracy gives an idea of the *decentralization* which socialist society will be able to achieve. But an industrially advanced free society will also have to find a means of democratically integrating these basic units into the social fabric as a whole. It will have to solve the difficult problem of the necessary *centralization*, without which the life of a modern community would collapse." *Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self Managed Society*, p. 14.

[114] "For the first time in history, the economic life, in general and in detail, lies as an open book before the eyes of mankind." Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, p. 28.

vital decisions which their delegates will then make known to the central councils, who will then have them publicized.

"The councils are no politicians, no government. They are the messengers, carrying and interchanging the opinions, the will of the groups of workers ... Thus they are the organs of social intercourse and discussion.[115]"

Such councils will serve to facilitate horizontal cooperation between factories in the same branch of industry and vertical cooperation between factories engaged in different stages of the productive process of a given good. Moreover, they will facilitate coordination between consumers' and community groups and the factory committees and councils.

Such a fundamental reorganization of production and society implies wide reaching changes in the nature of work and of social life in general. The priorities of production on such a basis are the opposite of those under capitalism, where the use value of goods is subordinated to their exchange value, and production for profit, rather than use and social benefit reigns.

From the viewpoint of the workers' councils, the statement of the problem in matters of economic organization is not as to how production must be governed, and in this sense best organized, but as to how the mutual relations of human beings to each other and among each other are to be regulated in connection with production. For, to the councils, production is no longer an objective process in which the labor of man and the product thereof becomes separated from him, a process which one directs end computes like lifeless material, but to them production is the vital function of the workers themselves[116].

The division between mental and manual labor, through "the reuniting of the functions of decision and execution"[117] the division between the workers and the means of production, between the producers and their products, will all disappear.

Through the development of the struggle and the expansion of new social relations,

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[115] "The councils are no government; not even the most central councils bear a governmental character. For they have to means to impose their will upon the masses; they have no organs of power. All social power is vested in the hands of the workers themselves." *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[116] "Workers' Councils and Communist Organization of Society, "*International Council Correspondence*, #7, April 1935. Cardan writes: "But workers' management is not just a new administrative technique. It cannot remain external to the structure of work itself. It doesn't mean keeping work as it is and just replacing the bureaucratic apparatus which currently manages production by a workers' council however democratic or revocable such a council might be. It means that for the mass of people new relations will have to develop with their work and about their work. The very *content* of work will immediately have to change." *Op. cit.*, P. 17.

[117] Cardan, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

"the working class itself in its deepest character is transformed. From obedient subjects they are changed into free and self reliant masters of their fate, capable to build and manage their new world.[118]"

For them, concomitantly due to their own self transformation and the alteration in the structure and nature of the work process, work itself comes to be seen less and less as the means to an end it was under capitalism. It becomes a form of pleasurable social activity, a means of engaging in useful social work and as a part of an interdependent whole which is conscious and appreciative of its interdependence. Indeed, "work" will become a fundamental though not the only means of self expression.

Two developments thus become possible in a self managed society. One needs to work less and work itself becomes more pleasurable. Significant changes in the structure of work, the abolition of the contradictions inherent in capitalist production, the development of technology (which has hitherto been held back by capitalist motivations and relations of production) to new levels, increase the productivity of labor and change the nature of work. Moreover, such increases in productivity can now be translated into increased leisure time, since the aim of production is measured in use values rather than the quantity of surplus value produced[119]. Once the necessary output has been met, why produce more?

By the rapid increase of the productivity of labor this part, the time needed to reproduce all the life necessities, will continually decrease, and an increasing part of life will be available for other purposes and activities[120].

Pannekoek stresses that we must keep in mind the importance of the changes in the nature of work itself which will go hand in hand with self management. "Whereas the abundance of life necessities, the universal prosperity represents the passive side of the new life, the innovation of labor itself as its active side makes life a delight of glorious creative experience.[121]" Society has been changed from bottom to top, production and social relations have been revolutionized, as well as the nature of work. The social causes of alienation have been removed.

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[118] Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, p. 34.
[119] "In communism, production is no longer a process of capital expansion, but only a labor process in which society draws from nature the means of consumption it needs. The only economic criterion is the labor time employed in the production of useful work." "Communist Production and Distribution," *Living Marxism*, Vol. IV, No. 4, August 1938, P. 110.
[120] *Workers' Councils*, p. 26.
[121] *Ibid.*, P. 56.

One further area of social activity needs to be considered that of the distribution of the goods produced. The original councilists' discussion of the problem of distribution seems curiously far from Marx's famous dictum: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Rather than basing their presentation on this formula, these councilists sought to devise a theoretical system in which both production and distribution were based on the same measure average social labor time[122]. The elaboration of this hypothetical system was contained in their publication of the *Grundprinzipien Kommunisticher Production und Verteilung* (Holland, 1930)[123]. As Paul Mattick rightly points out in a preface he wrote to the 1970 reprinting of this document in French:

"One cannot, however, foresee the real state of the economy after the revolution, and consequently it is impossible to construct in advance programs and tasks to fulfill in reality. The necessities of tomorrow will certainly be the determining factor. What we discuss in advance are the measures to take, the instruments to utilize to construct the desired social relations, that is to say in this case that interests us, the communist relations between people.[124]"

In fact, this publication is probably the most speculative of all the councilist writings, the least based on historical instances and tendencies. Nevertheless, as Mattick writes, "despite the weakness of the Fundamental Principles they remain, yesterday as today, the point of departure for all serious discussion and all research on the realization of the communist society.[125]" I am highly critical of their notion that in a communist society the distribution of goods will be based primarily on the amount of time that a person works. Although they also allowed for the creation of a special fund of goods for those who can't work, i.e., because they are too old, too young, or physically incapable, there seems to be a disregard on their part of the possibility of distribution according to

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[122] They had no feeling that they were going against the grain of Marx's thought when they dealt with distribution. Indeed, they considered their ideas to be based on *Capital* and *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Pannekoek wrote later that "the G.I.K. [the Dutch council communist group] in studying the problem, the main problem of Socialism, of how to combine freedom with organization, perceived that they had only to continue along the line of thought laid down by Marx in occasional small notes in *Capital* and in his remarks on the Gotha Programme of the German Social Democrats." "The Crisis in Socialist Theory," *Left*, #132, October 1947, p. 226.

[123] This has been recently translated into French ("Temps du Travail Social Moyen: Base d'une Production et d'une Repartition Communiste," supplement to *Informations Correspondence Ouvriere*, #101, February 1971) and English (*The Movement for Workers' Councils in Germany*, Coptic Press, London, 1970). The latter is extremely hard to obtain.

[124] Mattick, "Preface," to the French edition of this document, p. 42. Of course, his point applies to much of our discussion in this last section, concerning the nature of work, organization of production, and of distribution, etc. in a future society.

[125] Ibid., p. 47.

need. This document seems to contradict the above cited statement that in a communist society, the approach to economics and related problems would be seen primarily in terms of human needs and desires[126], because there is an over emphasis on calculation without a concern for distribution according to need.

If the capitalist methods of calculation rest on the universal domination of money, the disappearance of money and of the market in the communist society does not however suppress the necessity for calculation. To socially regulate production and distribution, it is indispensable to have a universal standard, a unity of calculation[127].

The bulk of their presentation is thus an elaborate scheme of production and distribution based on calculations according to social average labor time, working out relations between the sectors of goods production and service production, accumulation and reproduction, and so on. Their fundamental notion of self management remains and is basic to their conception of production under socialism, but most of the rest of their discussion in this publication is unacceptable to me. Other councilists have recognized the weaknesses and inadequacies of these ideas concerning distribution and have not hesitated to criticize them.

The authors of the 'Fundamental Principles" are right to insist on the fact that the producers have the right to dispose of their production, but it is something else again to affirm that this right of disposition should be exercised by the intermediary of a distribution based on the equality of labor time[128].

Despite the weaknesses in this particular document, we must grasp the value of council communist theory. Their fundamental notions have great relevance to "radicals" today, such as the relationship of means to ends in political activity, the importance of the notion of the class struggle as the self emancipation of the working class, the necessity of crisis for there to be revolutionary activity, their theory of revolutionary consciousness, and finally their notions of the new society, based not on a utopian vision but on generalizations from the historical experience of working class struggles in the 20th century. Throughout, save for their discussion of the bases for distribution, they represent a continuation of the essence of Marx's thought: analyses of tendencies existing within contemporary society, the self emancipation of the working class as a fundamental guiding principle, the new society as the "association of free and equal

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[126] See pages 228 and 229.
[127] "Temps du Travail Social Moyen," *op. cit*., P. 32.
[128] Mattick, "Preface," *op. cit*., p. 43.

producers," the theory of crisis, the theory of consciousness, etc. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that their primary concern was to analyze society in order to help change it, rather than be true to Marx. Perhaps the similarity of their theoretical conclusions to Marx's results from the remarkable insight with which he had analyzed society some fifty years before.