

4/4/87

I do not know how or when this document -- a letter from Anton Pannekoek to Chauvieu dated Nov. 8, 1953, came into our possession. I imagine it was Grace, but since it is from so important a person, who to this day is considered the founder of the concept of Workers' Councils, it is extremely important to consider it the ground of all other tendencies, be it various anti-Leninist groups like Mattick's or even within Marxist-Humanism. But those who act as if the absolute opposites are party/spontaneity rather than party/dialectics of thought; in a word, that both party and mass are forms of organization sans philosophy, and we want organization inseparable from philosophy.

In any case, Pannekoek is commenting on the 11 issues of Socialisme ^{ou} ~~de~~ Barbarie sent to him, and as you will see later also the American Worker, which P. says he read "with great interest, because it reveals a great affinity of views between us. You have probably made the same observation on reading my book, The Workers' Councils." He then notes that his book has been ignored by the whole socialist press "excepting recently in the Socialist Leader of the IIP." "While you limit the activity of these councils to the organization of the work in the factories after the seizure of power by the workers, we consider them equally as being the means by which the workers will convey this power."

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He rejects, however, that what we need is the organization of "the revolutionary party." Incidentally, that sounds very Johnsonite; he always thought that once he added the word "revolutionary" no other concept was needed. P., however, considers it "a Trotskyist conception which had some adherents (since 1930) among the numerous ex-members of the CP, disappointed by the actions of the latter."

He calls attention to the fact that he opposed it earlier even than then, and we of course know the famous letter that he and his comrades wrote to Lenin in 1919 or 1920. He considers that expression as "a turn towards ^{political} opportunism".

They never followed Trotsky at any time.

"But after we recognized a growing state-capitalism in Russia, our attention turned primarily towards the Western world of large-scale capital, where the workers would have to transform a capitalism which was most highly developed into a real communism (in the literal sense of the word)".

He explains that, so far as he is concerned, the Russian Revolution was the last bourgeois revolution, though it was carried out by the working class, and that it bears more a parallel to the English Revolution of 1647 and the French Revolution of 1789, with its aftermath in 1830, 1848, 1871. And because it included artisans, peasants and workers, on a mass scale, it was sufficient to destroy the feudal regime, but couldn't go further because the working class was not mature enough to govern by itself.

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Therefore the Bolshevik Party succeeded in taking over power. And because the working class was so small in the midst of a peasant population ^{bourgeois character of the} "the Russian Revolution became dominant and took on the form of state-capitalism." c

"For us, the glorious tradition of the Russian Revolution is the fact that in the first uprisings in 1905 and 1917 it was the first to develop and show to the workers of the world the organizational form of its independent revolutionary activity, the soviets. From this experience, confirmed later on a smaller scale in Germany, we have drawn our ideas on the forms of mass action which are organic to the working class and which it will need to apply for its own liberation."

The soviets or the Councils are necessary not only for the conquest of power but after "because the power of the workers over society cannot be obtained in any other way, as for instance, in what is called the revolutionary party."

P. considers that you do not have a "knotty contradiction" of "revolutionary ~~direction~~ direction".

"I have to tell you how pleased I have been with the articles on the "American Worker" which clarifies considerably the enigmatic problem of this working class without socialism; also the very educational article on the working class in East Germany. I hope your group will be able to publish many other issues of this magazine."

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Now, to jump from 53 to the late 70s and really the mid-80s, because that's when Peter reports he was still having discussion with people who are evidently following P., and Telos and Mattick who are following these so-called "spontaneous" movements, may be an unconnected leap, but only because they all pretend to be originals. In fact, that is what they are repeating and on a much lower level. Take the book on P. and the Workers Councils by Serge Bricianer. The only thing of interest is the background that P. came to Marxism in 1898, and in 1900 discovered Dietzgen whom he held to be "the unifying thread" of the whole German Left Marxists, especially Roland-Holst. ^{Dutch?} You can just imagine how are P's concepts of philosophy when you see his conclusion, "Dietzgen raised philosophy to the position of a natural science, the same as Marx did with history." ^{P. considered} D. ~~as the one~~ ^{as the one} "not Engels" who "developed the framework for a real Marxian dialectic" (pg 16)

The other book on P. , likewise a '78 publication, was published by Pluto Press, Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism. Gorter died in 1927, P. lived to 1960.

When it comes to Paul Mattick, whether it's the '78 Anti-Bolshevik Communism or the final publication after his death by Paul Mattick Jr. (but written by Paul Mattick, Sr.) Marxism: Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie? (Mattick died 1981), the actual drive is that the proletariat is backward, and while he supposedly is for Luxemburg . . .