

Anton Pannekoek to J.A. Dawson  
(Letter 1946)

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Amsterdam

Dear Comrade.

My friend, Paul Mattick, advised me to get into communication with you in order to investigate the possibility of publishing a book on the new aspect of working class movement.

Under the influence of the depression and confusion in the 1920'ies among the socialist and labor groups, there arose in a group of leftist militants in Holland. (connected with friends in Germany, England and France) the opinion that this crisis and apparent decline was in reality a transition and preliminary to the real coming fight for worker's freedom.

Whereas all socialist writers proclaim as their goal State-socialism, where the workers are dominated and commanded by managers in the shops, by a bureaucracy of intellectuals in social life (look, e.g. the writings of Cole in England), these comrades (calling themselves groups of international communists) demonstrated that freedom from exploitation is only possible when the workers are themselves masters of the shops, direct and manage the shops by their community, and build up a social organisation of all the shops and enterprises into a united system of production by means of *workers' councils*.

At present we see how State-socialism is making headway, as propagated by the socialist and communist parties, just means the tendencies of monopolist capital linking itself narrower to State Power (what the English Labor Government is doing is only modernising capitalism, abolishing its worst ignominies while securing State-guaranteed profits to capital).

So we see the future of the real classfight of the workers in bi strike movements, increasing in importance, against big capital growing into a united world capital and State (perhaps growing into a world-government), acquiring the character of political strikes, finding its organization the germ of future world organization in their strike-committees turned into workers' councils.

These ideas stand behind the propaganda made by a weekly *Spartacus*, our only weekly that stands by the workers in all their strikes and fights.

A book, explaining these ideas, has been published, and finds rapid approval among the workers here. So now we are desirous to make them known among the English-speaking workers also.

We have an English translation, or better, a version (it has been written separately) of it ready, and are now investigating the possibilities of having it published. So Mattick advised me to write to you. I have just received the [.. *Southern Socialist Review*..?], published [..by ..] the Workers Literature Bureau.

I realise there are many difficulties.

The book is about 110.000 words or [?.] pages such as in *Rebels and Renegades*. Hence it would demand a large financial expense to publish it. ... On the other hand it will certainly be worth [.. while to make ... efforts to bring it out ... give you a short .. of its contents..]

It consists of first Three Parts written 1941-42, and then an epilogue as Fourth Part, written in 1944, all under the German occupation of Holland; its intention is to summarise and collect the teachings of the workers' movement during half a century and draw the conclusions out of it.

*Part I: The Task*, brings - after a short exposure of labor under capitalism, and the functions of Law and property - the fundamental ideas of the workers' [councils,] their structure and function, a comparison with parliamentarism as the preceding form of social organisation of middle class domination before the period of worker's revolution, and then their functions after the revolution in the growth of freedom of society.

*Part II: The Fight*, gives the development of the forms of class-struggle: the trade-unionism, the wild strikes, the shop occupation; these bring a historical survey and discussion of political strikes and the Russian Revolution, to end with an examination of the deep-seated fundamental difference of such former fights with workers' revolution as a liberation from exploitation.

*Part III: The Foe*, gives a historical survey of the growth of the bourgeoisie in England, in France, in Germany, in their different characters, of American capitalism, of the nature of nationalism and of democracy, to treat then fascism and national-socialism, in order to expound their social roots and principles. In the later written

*Part IV: The War*, different topics are treated that were brought to the fore by the extension of the war into a world war: the Japanese imperialism, the rise of China, the problem of the colonies, the relation of Russia to Europe, the low ebb of workers' power through this war. We think that with this orientation about the past fights and problems and resulting tasks the readers among the working class will be better prepared to face and understand the new problems that every day are confronting them.

Another difficulty would be this: our intention is chiefly to bring it among the workers in England and America, the chief masses on which the future depends. ... A good publishing house or group in England or America would make things easier. But I fear that an independent middle-class social-minded publisher perhaps would shrink back when he sees that the contents, though written in a mild style, are so entirely uncompromising working-class radicalism. And I do not know of any radical-minded group in England who could do it. ... Surely all leaders and groups who aspire at power for themselves will try to keep down such a propaganda, .eg. by a conspiracy of silence about everything that appears from our side. So I think we must not be all too optimistic in the beginning, though probably gradually these ideas will find [...?...] hearing among workers with fighting spirit, and the publishing of them will be highly appreciated later on ...

I will be glad to hear your opinion about these points, also whether you think it better to look for a publisher in England.

Yours truly

Ant. Pannekoek