The Third International

Anton Pannekoek
in "Vorbote"

Note.—The following article by Comrade Anton Pannekoek is from his magazine, "Vorbote." It gives the views held by Left Wing socialists in Europe and of the Zimmerwald conference. Comrade Pannekoek has long been regarded as one of the clearest thinkers in the movement.—Editor.

WE ARE standing in the midst of a catastrophe of the working class movement, such as it has never experienced in all its history. The collapse of the Internationale due to the world war is not simply a surrender of international sentiment before the power of intensified nationalism. It is at the same time a collapse of tactics, of methods of fighting, of the entire system which has been incorporated into the social-democracy and the working class movement during the last few decades.

The knowledge and the tactics which, during the early rise of capitalism, were of great service to the proletariat, failed in the face of the new imperialistic development. Outwardly this was apparent in the increasing impotency of the parliament and the labor union movement, spiritually in the substitution of tradition and declamation for clear insight and militant tactics, in stultification of tactics and the forms of organization, in the transformation of the revolutionary theory of Marxism into a doctrine of passive expectation.

IMPERIALIST DEVELOPMENT

During the period when capitalism was developing into imperialism, was establishing new aims for itself and was energetically arming for the struggle for world supremacy, this development of the majority of the Social Democracy remained unobserved. It allowed itself to be fooled by the dream of immediate social reforms and did nothing to increase the power of the proletariat to fight against imperialism.

Hence the present catastrophe does not mean only that the proletariat was too weak to prevent the outbreak of war. It means that the methods of the era of the second Internationale were not capable of increasing the spiritual and material power of the proletariat to the necessary extent of breaking the power of the ruling classes. Therefore the world war must be a turning point in the history of the working class movement.

With the world war we have entered into a new period of capitalism, the period of its intensive extension by force over the entire earth, accompanied by embittered struggles between nationalities and huge destruction of capital and men; a period therefore, of the heaviest oppression and suffering for the working classes. But the masses are thereby driven to aspiration; they must raise themselves if they are not to be completely submerged.

PROLETARIAN VICTORY

In great mass struggles, alongside of which former struggles and methods are merely child's play, they must grapple with imperialism. This struggle for indispensable rights and liberties, for the most urgent reforms, often for mere life itself, against reaction and the oppression of the employing class, against war and poverty, can only end with the overthrow of imperialism and the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. It will at the same time be the struggle for Socialism, for the emancipation of the proletariat. Therefore with the present world war there also dawns a new period for Socialism.

For the new struggle our spiritual bearings must be taken anew. Lack of clear socialistic insight was one of the chief causes of the weakness of the proletariat when the war began—it knew neither imperialism nor its own tactics. The fight against imperialism, this most recent and most powerful form of capitalism, made demands upon the highest spiritual and material, moral and organizational, qualities of the proletariat. It could not succumb to stupid, impotent desperation; but it was not enough that it break out into spontaneous actions against the unbearable pressure. If these are to lead anywhere and to gain new stages on the climb to power it is necessary that they be inspired with spiritual clarity in regard to the aims, the possibilities and the meaning of such actions. Theory must go hand in hand with practice, theory which transforms blind acts to conscious ones and spreads light over the path.

THE NEW SOLUTION

"Material force can only be broken by material force. But even theory becomes material force when it takes hold on the masses." (Marx.) The germs of this theory, this new spiritual weapon, were already at hand in the spiritual defeat of the former practice of imperialism and mass action. Now the world war has brought much new insight and has shaken minds out of the sleep of tradition. Now is the time to gather together everything in the way of new ideas, new solutions, new propositions, to inspect them, to prove them, to clarify them by means of discussion and thus to make them of service in the new struggle.

An immense number of new questions lie before us. First of all the question of imperialism, its economic roots, its connection with the export of capital, procuring of raw material, its effect upon politics, government and bureaucracy, its spiritual power upon the bourgeoisie. Then those questions which relate to the proletariat, the causes of their weakness, their psychology and the phenomena of social-imperialism and social-patriotism. Added to these are the questions of proletarian tactics, the significance and possibilities of parliamentarianism, of mass actions, of labor union tactics, reforms and immediate demands, the significance and the future role of organization; also the questions of nationalism, of militarism and colonial policies.

Upon many of these questions the old Socialism had settled answers, which had already crystallized into formulae—but with the collapse of the second Internationale even its formulae have gone by the board. In the old rules and ideas of the pre-imperialistic era the proletariat can find no guides for its actions under new conditions. Nor can the social-democratic parties furnish it with a firm foot hold. They have in the great majority surrendered to imperialism; the conscious, active or passive, support of war policies by the party and labor union representatives has dug too deep to make possible a simple return to the old prebellum point of view.

OUR SPIRITUAL WEAPONS

This support of imperialism in its most important and vital phrases characterizes these working class organizations, no matter how strongly they subscribe to the old socialist solutions and combat the most intimate effects of imperialism. For in this way they come into conflict with the necessarily revolutionary aims of the proletariat and are themselves forced into a difficult crisis of their own. Between those who would make of the social-democracy a tool of imperialism and those who want to see it a weapon of revolution no unity is possible any longer.

The task of elucidating those problems of offering solutions, of formulating the proper direction for the new struggle, falls to those who have not allowed themselves to be misled by war conditions and who have held fast to internationalism and the class struggle. In this their weapon will be Marxism. Marxism, regarded by the theoreticians of Socialism as the method to explain the past and the present and in their hands degraded more and more into a dry doctrine of mechanical fatalism, again is to come into its birthright as a theory of revolutionary acts. "The philosophers have interpreted the world in a number of differing ways: the real necessity is to alter it." As a live revolutionary method this sort of Marxism again becomes the most solid principle, the sharpest spiritual weapon of Socialism.

There is no more pressing task than this elucidation of the new problems. For it is a life and death question for the proletariat—and hence for the entire development of humanity—that it should see its way clear and bright before leading to new heights. And there are no questions of the future whose solution can be postponed until we can once more discuss them in peace and quietness. They are not capable of postponement. Even during the war and after its conclusion they form the most important and immediate vital questions for the working class of all nations.

WORKERS' CHIEF ENEMY

Not merely the important question, which everywhere is the kernel of the object of struggle, whether and how the proletariat can emerge, hasten the end of the war and influence the terms of peace. At the conclusion of the war the immense economic shattering of the world will first be felt in its entirety, when, with the condition of general exhaustion, lack of capital and unemployment industry must be organized anew, when the fearful debts of all nations necessitate colossal taxes and state socialism, the militarization of agricultural pursuits, as the only way out of the financial difficulties. Then the probleb must be met with or without theory; but then the lack of theoretical insight will entail the most disastrous errors.

There lies the greatest task of our journal: by discussion and elucidation of these questions it will support the material struggle of the proletariat against imperialism. As an organ of discussion and elucidation it is at the same time an organ of battle—the publisher and the contributors to the journal have the common will to give battle, the same point of view in regard to these chief questions of the practice to be adopted at this time.

First of all the struggle against imperialism, the chief enemy of the proletariat. But this struggle is only made possible by a simultaneous relentless struggle against all the elements of the former social-democracy, which would bind the proletariat to the chariot of imperialism; also the open imperialism which has become the mere agent of the bourgeoisie, and that social patriotism of all shades which would gloss over undisputable antagonisms and would rob the proletariat of the sharpest weapons in its struggle against imperialism. The reconstitution of the Third Internationale will only be made possible by an absolute break with social-patriotism.

With this knowledge we stand upon the same ground as the left wing of the Zimmerwald Conference. The principles put forth by this group of international socialists as their aim our journal will support by theoretical work; by the most intense struggle against social patriotism, by merciless analysis of the errors of the old revisionism and the radical socialism to pave the way for the new Internationale. If the proletariat recognizes the weaknesses and mistakes of the old points of view, the practical collapse of which it is now suffering from, it will gain the foresight for the new struggle and the new Socialism.

Self-Deliverance of the Masses

THE last days of the year were marked by chimes of bells and great jubilation all over the world. Children and ninnies were rejoicing over the birth of a saviour.

The working class should know that it is futile and silly to expect a deliverer from far-off heavenly spheres. The working class must take its deliverance into its own hands. It must fight for its existence upon pain of being crushed by economic exploitation and political oppression.

Ever since private property appeared and human society was subdivided in classes, intolerable hardships have compelled the toilers to fight their oppressors and exploiters.

Marx did not invent the classes nor the class struggle. He only investigated these phenomena in our modern capitalistic society. He revealed the essence of capitalism and studied the nature of the combatting classes under that system.

But he did not content himself with his theoretical discoveries; he turned them into practical action. He not only stated "Capital comes out of unpaid labor," but he also called out: "Proletarians of all countries unite to overthrow the capitalistic system of production." And as he theoretically demonstrated that there is and inevitably must be a deadly contrast between the owning class and the toiling class, a contrast that does not depend upon the will of either side but depends upon the historically developed conditions of production, he showed that practically this contrast can not be removed but by an irreconcilable struggle of the proletarians against the capitalists. And this struggle must be waged by the united efforts of the workers themselves. No saviour will come from heaven nor from the upper classes; no great leader or hero from out of their own midst can accomplish their deliverance.

That is the doctrine of Karl Marx, the great founder of the science of Socialism, and that was the theory and practice of the glorious First International.

It remained also the theory of the Second International: The principal part of the programs (preambles) of all existing Socialist and social democratic parties is built upon these conceptions of Marx. But the practice of all great parties of the Second International gradually deviated from this clear conception.

Why? Not because of the will of some leaders, but again as the result of the economic and historic development.

In 1871 the great struggle of the bourgeoisie for political power was finished. After 82 years of revolutionary wars the consolidation of the great national states of Central Europe was accomplished and the bourgeoisie, i. e., the personification of capital, became master of these national states and established its parliamentary form of government as the most suitable means of taking care of the interests of all groups of the upper as well as of the middle classes.

So even the working class, or at least the upper layers of the working class of all Central Europe, got some political rights and liberties: a certain amount of freedom of speech, press and coalition. And it was a wise policy for the working class to use these rights and liberties by building up strong organizations (economic and political) with the purpose of improving the economic, social and political conditions of the workers. By so doing the labor organizations all over the capitalistic world achieved the most remarkable results.

Why then did the Second International fail and collapse?

Firstly: Because its legal method of action was conducive to overestimation of the importance of the formally established labor organizations and considered mainly or solely the interests of the skilled and enfranchised aristocracy of the working class, leaving the great mass of unskilled laborers to their fate.

Secondly: The peaceful and legal method of action rendered it necessary that most of the actual "fighting" was not done by the organized workers themselves, but was left to small groups of "labor leaders," parliamentary representatives and union officers, who day by day doing their petty work in their respective departments, inevitably turned to bureaucrats. They gradually lost sight of the real goal of the labor movement, viz., the overthrow of the capitalistic society, and looked only for immediate practical achievements within that society by accommodation of the labor movement to their respective national capitalisms.

Thirdly: Neither the bureaucrats of the labor movement, who were wholly absorbed in their narrow every day work, nor the organized masses whose action practically consists only in the electioneering of their "leaders," noticed the great change of situation accomplished by the economic and political development of the last two decades.

What are these changes?

Firstly: The development of the technic of production constantly increases the number of unskilled laborers and badly mixes up the different organized trades, so that the power and significance of the trade unions is constantly diminishing although the absolute numbers of their membership may be growing.

Secondly: The combination of all important industries in the hands of a few all-powerful trusts, practically controlling not only the entire production but also the political government of all capitalistic countries, makes it impossible to keep the traditional separation between economic and political action. No economic strife of the workers can be successful unless it involves the whole working class and so turns to political action.

Thirdly: Under the domination of financial capital practically all groups of the possessing classes are dependent upon the great banks whose interests are imperative for the trust magnates as well as for landed proprietors and middle classes. There is no possibility for the representatives of labor to achieve concessions by skillfully playing one group against another. No great political achievement can be accomplished by labor representatives unless the masses back it up by the whole weight of their vast numbers and their economic power.

Revolutionary Socialists saw it long ago. They conceived that under the rule of imperialism mass-action (unceasingly repeated demonstrations, parades, strikes) must be the principal means of strife of the working class, if it does not want to be degraded to the level of beasts of burden.

Our comrades, Anton Pannekoek, Karl Radek, Rosa Luxemburg, Henriette Roland-Holst, and others did all they could to spread this insight among the masses and establish a mental understanding which is the only possible organization of real fighting masses.

But such mass-action means the beginning of the great final battle, "La Lutte Finale," which is a long period of extremely acute class war, where the working class will be defeated many times until it grows so strong morally and physically, as to rout the ruling classes and conquer their stronghold—the state.

In face of this situation the labor bureaucracy filled with awe the working class into avoiding actual fight, for fear a defeat should imperil the legal labor organizations and their funds.

So the working class is now divided, powerless, despised. One part of it—the majority of the skilled and organized aristocrats of labor—goes along with the bureaucratic labor leaders. Another part, disgusted and discouraged, falls in dull indifference. Only the third part—mostly consisting of unskilled laborers—is moved by misery, class instinct and revolutionary sentiment and faces the situation as it really is.

The aspirations of this third part are the beginning of the self-deliverance of the working class.

But even this fighting part of the proletariat does not have a clear understanding of the nature of imperialism nor of the effective means and methods of fighting it. To bring this understanding and insight—that is the task of the Socialist Propaganda League of America. To perform this task the members of the League must do what Marx told the Communists of his time to do: They must participate in every mass movement and represent in it the future of the class movement. Fr. Rosin.

NOW FIX YOUR ATTENTION HERE!

We assume that every live Left Wing Socialist in the United States who receives this paper, is equally interested with us in making the year 1917 memorable in the history of uncompromising Socialism, and holds himself and herself ready, as a good soldier in the Revolution, to outdo all previous efforts by building the sub list.

READ WHAT THE BOOSTER SAYS—MAKE YOUR RESPONSE BIG WITH PROMISE FOR THE WHOLE YEAR.

WHY YOU NEED OUR PAPER

There is at present in America no English periodical published oftener than once a month that is outspoken in advocacy of industrial and political action. Nothing but the veriest of lip service is given to anything but vote chasing and fawning upon the dominant labor union leaders by the average periodical of the Socialist movement in this country.

A clear conception of present tendencies in capitalist society is lacking; failing to comprehend the essential facts, they are in a poor position to teach. A strong tendency has set in for governmental ownership and control of industry. The capitalists see in this a chance for a more efficient and purposeful extension of their power and prolongation of their class domination. We see the majority in control of the Socialist movement learning nothing from the events that occur with ever-accelerating speed, and which plainly indicate that reformistic tactics are of no avail against the juggernaut of Imperialism. The tecnique of industry is to be developed beyond anything now obtaining; markets are to be sought and all the means at the disposal of the capitalist class are to be invoked for the successful conquest of a constantly shrinking world market—relatively speaking as compared to the ability to supply. Compulsory military service, greater military appropriations, conscription of labor—all will be invoked unless labor is aroused against a nationalistic competition for the marketing of labor's surplus value.

This picture is not overdrawn. A ballot box counting of noses wil not settle such mighty problems. The marshaling of labor's hosts is the imperative duty of the hour. The foregoing reasons are sufficient to justify the launching of The Internationalist. We need your help in the enterprise.

WHAT THE PAPER NEEDS FROM YOU.

First—Your subscription at $1.00 a year.

Second—A regular contribution to the Sustainers' Fund, either weekly or monthly.

Third—A donation to the paper.

Fourth—A loan to be repaid in definite amounts at regular intervals.

Fifth—Your enlistment in our bundle brigade to distribute The Internationalist and insure a big circulation. Whrite "Business Manager" for plan "A" and "B" on this.

Sixth—Your active support in getting subscribers for the paper.

Seventh—We want agents to look after definite territory, who will be paid regular and uniform commissions.

We realize that no individual can respond to our call in the seven ways, but all can help in some way. Select the way to help that you are qualified for, financially or otherwise, and Boost With a Will! We are out for 10,000 subscribers by July 1st. Shall we have them?

Make checks and MoneyOrders payable to Louis Velleman, Treasurer.

The following named persons have subscribed for your paper and have paid for same.

"THE INTERNATIONALIST"
Box 23, Roxbury Station
Boston, Mass.

Subscribers rates:
12 mos., $1.00; 6 mos., 50 cts; 3 mos., 25 cts. Ten to one address for a year, $7.50.

Name.	Address.	3 mos.	6 mos.	12 mos.

Collected by ..... Remittance $.....