

The Organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle

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Published by the KAPD in Berlin in 1921. Translated by D. A. Smart for his book Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism. Smart calls this text Gorter's "last major attempt to win the working class to left communist tactics." It is in some ways a clear exposition of the themes developed in Gorter's Open Letter to Comrade Lenin.

1. The Factory Organisation: the General Union of Workers

The greatest weakness of the German revolution and the world revolution and one of the principal causes of the defeats which they have suffered is the fact that they are not being conducted according to scientific, that is to say historical-materialist, tactics. When the tactics were decided upon, the conditions of production and class relations of Germany, Western Europe and North America were not given primary consideration, and often none at all.

The Russians, Lenin, Zinoviev and Radek among others, together with the entire Third International, are to blame for this.

All that they could say was: 'Imitate Russia'.

In these highly developed capitalist states, with their bank capital and developed industry, imitate a backward agrarian state!

And it happened!!!

And others, equally foolishly, cried 'Just set up a union and do away with parties'.

As if we were living in the United States, so backward in conscious political development!

No wonder we only encounter defeat, and that the world revolution cannot get started.

For how can we achieve victory without tactics based on class relations, on historical materialism?

In the text that follows I shall demonstrate on the basis of historical materialism, that is to say by reference to the conditions of production and the class relations of Western Europe and North America, that a communist party like the KAPD and tactics like those of the KAPD are necessary in Western Europe and North America.

For only the tactics of the KAPD are determined by the conditions of production and the class relations of Western Europe and North America, and all others, those of the VKPD and the Third International, for example, are not based on these factors

and can therefore never succeed¹.

It is only when tactics are based on scientific, historical-materialist foundations that they can bring progress.

It is only then that they can gradually unite all true revolutionaries.

It is only then that the schisms can be overcome.

The first factor upon which the proletariat must build is that throughout a large part of Europe, capitalism is bankrupt. And capitalism threatens the proletariat with destruction or the most wretched slavery. But the proletariat can and must destroy capitalism. If the revolution is victorious here, then capitalism will also become untenable in England and North America, and world communism will be achieved!

The entire tactics of the proletariat must therefore be directed towards revolution. Everything that the proletariat does must further the revolution. What tactics must the proletariat follow in order to bring the revolution to a victorious conclusion?

The Russian tactics of dictatorship by party and leadership cannot possibly be correct here. For the Russian proletariat was tiny, and faced by a feeble capitalism. The world War had armed it. The possessor classes confronting it were divided. Countless millions of peasants assisted the proletariat. This meant that a small party, the Bolsheviks, was able to achieve victory there.

In Western Europe, especially England and Germany, and in the United States, a mighty proletariat confronts a mighty capitalism. It is practically unarmed. And big capital, bank capital, unites all the possessor classes, even the petty-bourgeois and the small farmers, against communism. Whereas Russian capitalism was new and only shallowly-rooted in traditional modes of production, the capitalism of Western Europe has for many centuries been firmly anchored in the material and more especially the ideological world of the entire population.

These straightforward conditions of production and class relations, apparent to everybody, mean that a small party or its leadership cannot exercise dictatorship here during and after the revolution. The adversary is much too powerful and the proletariat too numerous for that. In Germany, for example, all the capitalist classes are united against communism, which is nevertheless very powerful! And the proletariat makes up at least three-fifths of the population, between thirty and forty millions. A small party or leadership clique cannot rule over this mighty proletariat: neither during nor after the revolution.

Who must rule here, during and after the revolution? Who must exercise dictatorship?

¹ The greatness of Lenin lies not least in his having derived the Russian revolution and its tactics entirely from the conditions of production and the class relations prevailing in Russia, in particular the agrarian conditions, and that long before the revolution itself.

It is therefore to be regretted that he and all the Russians and the entire Third International with him completely disregarded the conditions of production and class relations prevailing in Western Europe and the United States in fixing tactics for the latter continents.

There is no trace of historical materialism in the 21 conditions of Moscow. The class relations of Western Europe, so different from those of Russia, are not even mentioned!

The tactics of Russia are merely being copied, and what was correct in Russia is being imposed on Western Europe and North America.

With catastrophic results, of course. The German proletariat is already bleeding to death, parties like the VKPD are already being split by the Russian tactics, which have no basis in the reality of Western Europe.

The class itself, the proletariat. At least the great majority of it.

And the same applies in England, in the United States and throughout Western Europe.

It follows from the class relations. Our theory, historical materialism, which has never yet deceived us, tells us so. And everyone, even the most unsophisticated worker can see it. It is the truth.

And I will now say openly, clearly and forcefully what has until now been expressed only in moderate language, what the consequences of the Russian tactics, after the March action in Germany and the collapse of the VKPD, no longer allow us to state with moderation: *if the Russian tactics of dictatorship by party and leadership are still pursued here after all the disastrous consequences that they have already had here, then it will no longer be stupidity, but a crime; a crime against the revolution.*

If Radek, Zinoviev, Lenin and other Russians and members of the International still persist in defending and advocating the dictatorship of party and leadership in Germany, England, Western Europe and North America, then we must say to them – hands off. The revolutionary workers of Western Europe, and in the first instance those of Germany and England, will decide for themselves and follow their own lead.

It is not the dictatorship of party and leadership that is necessary here, but the dictatorship of the class, of the great majority of the class.

We cannot repeat too often that this is determined by the might of the adversary, the great numbers of the proletariat and the terrible struggle that we must conduct on an increasing scale, a thousand times more terrible than in Russia.

So what does it mean to say that the class must exercise dictatorship itself?

In the first place, that the great majority of the proletariat must become conscious communists, militants clear as to their objectives. But that is not alone sufficient! An unorganised rabble cannot exercise dictatorship. There must be an organisation.

Thus, an organisation of the great majority of the proletariat, consisting of conscious communists and experienced militants.

That is what we need here in Germany, England, Western Europe, North America. That is what historical-materialist considerations, what the class relations demand here.

Of course, it is very difficult to create an organisation of this kind. To destroy the trade unions and set up an organisation of this kind in their place is a difficult and wearisome task. But is revolution here not difficult? Do you think that anything can be achieved here with neat, easy expedients?

The problem facing us here is not to overthrow a feeble, divided capitalism with the help of untold millions of peasants, but to uproot capitalism in its homelands, England and France, a capitalism that is centuries old and tremendously powerful, not to mention the wonderfully organised capitalism of Germany and North America.'

If you think that this is a slight task, just follow the Russian example, the Russian tactics: if not, look for another way and take it!

This is what differentiates us from Russia, where the class relations, the participation of twenty or thirty million poor peasants, meant that the dictatorship of party and leadership was necessary, with all its consequences of unquestioning obedience and extreme centralisation.

An organisation of millions, of many, many millions of conscious communists is what we require; without them we cannot achieve victory.

This is the task facing us.

This, comrades, means that the real work, the real struggle, is only just beginning. All that went before, from 1848 to 1917, from Marx to the Russian revolution, was merely preparation. The real thing is only just beginning.

The proletariat, the entire proletariat of Western Europe and North America, or at least the great majority of it, must now rise up, rise up to a tremendous peak of mental and moral strength.

For it is here, in Western Europe and the United States, that the real proletarian revolution will take place. Not like the Russian revolution, only partly proletarian, predominantly peasant-democratic, but a truly proletarian revolution.

The entire proletariat must rise up to a tremendous peak: not just a leadership clique, not even just a party, but the great majority of the proletariat.

The time has at last come, for the masses themselves, the proletarians.

The period from 1848 to 1917, the period of evolution, from Marx to Lenin, was the period of leaders, of the few. In parliament and in wage-struggles the leaders played the principal role, they were the principal force. Intellectuals and theoreticians too. For there had to be negotiations, and that is the business of leaders. The way forward had to be found, and that is the business of theoreticians. But now the masses themselves, the proletariat itself, are taking the stage. Here in this part of the world. It must act itself, man for man, woman for woman. Action will be decisive: action on their part. Thus the significance of leaders is diminishing. The proletariat, working men and women, are becoming just as important as the old leaders. They are becoming just as important as the leaders, the theoreticians, the intellectuals. They are surpassing them in importance.

The proletarian, proletarians, will raise themselves to heights of power beside which the grandeur of all previous bourgeois revolutions will pale.

This must happen, for victory is imperative, and without it victory is not possible. That is why they will raise themselves to such heights.

They are already doing so.

The proletariat, the great majority of it, must become good communists, militants clear as to their objectives. And this great majority must have an organisation that enables it to achieve victory. How are we to attain this goal? By what means? What organisation will serve this purpose?

Once again, it is the conditions of production and class relations of our Western European and North American (not Russian) developed capitalist society, with its trusts, its bank capital and its imperialism, that will provide us with the answer!

Never, let it be added in parenthesis, was historical materialism, that mighty weapon left us by Marx and Engels, of greater importance to us than it is now. The theory of surplus-value and class struggle no longer needs proving in times when the world is bankrupt because the workers are no longer producing value, in times when the classes are locked in armed combat. Yet historical materialism can still show us the way, every day and every hour, in Western Europe and North America. It will lead us to victory.

The economic system, the conditions of production in our society, provide us with the answer when we ask what organisation we need.

They say that the trade unions cannot accomplish the task. For in the first place they are old-fashioned weapons dating from the period of evolution.

And secondly, they do not make the proletariat, proletarians, the millions and millions of workers, into the uninhibited militants, the conscious communists that the proletariat needs. For the entire structure of these organisations, which were the right ones for the period of peaceful development, makes the workers into the slaves of a clique of leaders and of trade-union relations. Uninhibited, courageous militants are still stifled in the trade unions, they cannot exist in them.

For these reasons it was the representatives of the workers who *necessarily* obtained complete power in those times of world economic expansion. For only they were able and obliged to *negotiate* in parliament and with the employers. This gave them complete power. It meant that all organisations, parties and trade unions, were structured to suit them, to secure their authority. This had to happen in the period of evolution. And it was good that this was the case. But matters are different in the period of revolution! What was formerly good now becomes bad. And even *before* the revolution, the trade unions could no longer even conduct the struggle against the trusts and the state! Even then they were obsolete weapons, fit to be thrown in the lumber-room, as far as Western Europe and North America were concerned. Now they are powerless against the trusts and the state, the white guards, the Stinnes and Orgesch².

So historical materialism shows that the trade unions are not the organisations which the proletariat needs to achieve victory. What are, then?

The conditions of production, which always bear within themselves the solution, the deliverance, not only give a negative answer, but also a positive one. And this is as follows: *it is no longer trades but factories which exercise power and enjoy strength in the new society of today. And which therefore confer strength on the proletariat when it organises itself within them.*

In the modern world of Western Europe and North America, with its trusts, its bank capital and its imperialism, capital is no longer organised by trades, but by the factory unit. Although it used to be organised by trades not so long ago – all the electrical works together, all the glass factories together, all the chemical firms together – this is no longer the case.

The organisation of Stinnes and the like is, as Rathenau says, no longer merely horizontal, but also vertical. What does this mean?

Various different sectors of production are all organised together. Mines, metallurgical factories, machine-tool works, power stations, railways, shipyards and clocks are all integrated. And this is no longer done in terms of trades. Large sectors of the same profession are left out, outside the combine, ignored. Only the *factories* that are required are taken. The strength of capitalism now lies in the factories³. The conditions of production demonstrate this. This is particularly the case in the bankrupt German state and in bankrupt countries in general. There, capital is forming a new state behind the bankrupt one. In the factories, in the enormous new complexes of factories. This is what capital is basing itself upon now. It hopes to survive in this way, although its state is bankrupt. This indicates to the proletariat the means which it must use.

² Hugo Stinnes was the industrialist who signed the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft' agreement with Legien in November 1918. 'Orgesch' was an armed, strike-breaking fascist organisation. – Translator's note.

³ This tendency was already in evidence before the war, but has now developed enormously.

But the revolution itself teaches us this. Was it trade-unionists who did the fighting? Did the proletariat go into battle organised according to their trade unions? In 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921? No, a thousand times no. They fought in the factories and organised by factories.

This has a historical foundation, a historical-materialist foundation.

The proletariat stands, works, lives together in the factories. And *here and now* the factories are so gigantic that each represents a regiment *just by itself*.

All these considerations prove to anyone capable of thought that the factory organisation is *the* organisation for the revolution in Western Europe and North America.

But the real reason, the one that arises from the conditions of production, is this: *in the factories the proletarian himself counts for something*. He is a militant there because he is a worker there. He can express himself as a free person there, as a free militant. He can be active in discussion and in struggle there every day and every minute of the day. Because the revolution begins in the factories he can engage in active struggle there, in armed struggle. In the factories, therefore, every proletarian and hence the entire proletariat can become lucid communists, complete revolutionaries. And this they cannot do in the trade union. Yet it is what is needed.

While the trade union stifles the militant, stifles the free person in every proletarian, as it must with its organisational structure and invulnerable cliques of leaders, factory organisation arouses the militant, the free man in every proletarian. And enables him to liberate himself from the despotic leaders. Because it is first and foremost he himself who fights in his own factory! And can, if necessary, settle accounts with his leaders there. So, because factory organisation is the organisation of the most modern form of capitalism, because capitalism in its bankruptcy particularly organises itself by factories and seeks to found a renewed existence upon them, because the revolution itself teaches us that it must be made on the basis of the factories, and last and most important, because it is only in the factory organisations that the entire proletariat can only become conscious communists, real militants fighting for the revolution, factory organisation is the sole form of organisation appropriate for the revolution.

This is the answer which theory gives us, the theory that is the only way to attain the truth of practice.

It goes without saying that the factory organisations of a locality, a municipality, a district, a region must unite. It will also be useful to make further sub-divisions according to industries. We need not go into these details here. Nor do we need to go into the consideration that soviets will readily arise out of these factory organisations⁴.

So, destruction of the trade unions, these seed-beds of slavery, and in their stead the establishment of factory organisations, industrial federations based upon these, and taking in the whole, a union like the General Workers' Union of Germany, the AAUD, and finally the unification of the unions of every country in an international league – this is the way to revolution, to victory.

⁴ On this question, and on the question of the union in general, one should read the pamphlet *Die Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union*, published by the Greater Berlin economic area organisation of the AAUD, Berlin, 1921.

2. The Communist Political Party

Now that we have identified the organisation which is to replace the trade unions and take in the whole proletariat, or at least the greater part of it, making them conscious militants and lucid communists and hence so strengthening the proletariat that it can conquer power, the question poses itself as to whether this organisation is sufficient, whether a political Communist Party is also necessary.

This question too must be investigated with the greatest rigour. For the whole revolution depends just as much upon the answer we give to it as upon what organisation can make the great majority of the proletariat into conscious militants.

And again we must derive our answer from the conditions of production and the class relations if we are to arrive at the truth. It is only upon this basis, and not through indulging in subjective sentiments, likes and dislikes as the anarchists, syndicalists and their kind do, or through imitating the Russian revolution as the Russians and the Third International urge us, that we can arrive at it.

But now it is not primarily the strength and solidity of bank capital, of imperialism, of the bourgeois classes that we must consider, as we did with the first question, but the condition of the proletariat itself. For the issue as to whether the proletarian masses organised in the factory organisation are capable of revolution relates to the quality of the proletariat itself.

Is the condition, the class condition of the proletariat, of the great majority of it, such that an organisation based upon factories, industrial federations and a union is sufficient for the development of communist consciousness and liberation, for revolution and victory?

Let the revolutionary worker ask himself this question!

Let him consider the class condition of the proletariat, which he knows at first hand. Let him think of the education, the housing, the nutrition, the life of the worker. Every worker, if he were to answer objectively and without prejudice, would certainly reply – No, the factory organisation is not sufficient for the great majority of the proletariat to become conscious, for it to achieve freedom and victory.

For the great majority of the proletariat is badly fed, badly housed, over-worked and has no free time for self-education. It is badly brought up, very poorly informed, and is in such a state of mental dependence from birth onwards, and has been so as a class for centuries, that not only does it not see the road to liberation, it does not dare to think of it.

Nobody can be in any doubt about this.

This also means that even if the majority of the proletariat were to organise itself in factory organisations, these weaknesses would still affect a large part of this majority. For a long time.

What would – and will – be the consequences of this for the factory organisation and the section of the proletariat organised in it?

This proletarian class condition will have many very harmful effects upon the factory organisation. Many dangers.

Firstly: the class situation of the great majority of the proletariat means that they urgently need small improvements and reforms and defence against the conditions of life deteriorating. Their life is so impoverished that they will always desire these and fight for them, even during the revolution. They will now and then temporarily abandon the revolution for their sake. They will even use their factory

organisation, their union, to gain them. Opportunism and reformism threaten the factory organisation and union and the section of the proletariat organised in them.

The factory organisation and the union is therefore always subject to the danger of the revolution being sabotaged for the sake of securing small improvements, for the sake of conquering illusory power, for the sake of increasing the membership by taking in confused elements, etc. etc.

It is therefore beyond question that even many members of the union, like many of the anarchists and syndicalists, do not want the communist party, because it puts the revolution before reforms.

Secondly, there is a great danger of individualism in the factory organisations. Out of ignorance, out of egoism, and so on, the individual, for example the leader within the factory, will put himself, his own interests as leader, before the revolution. A particular factory may do the same thing, or a particular locality or district. The unity that is essential to revolution will vanish. This is already to be seen in sections of the union.

A third danger also threatens, that of utopianism. The section of the proletariat that is organised in the union overestimates its power through being insufficiently acquainted with reality. Important sections of the work-force, the miners, imagine that they, by themselves, can achieve the revolution which in Western Europe and North America can only be achieved by the entire proletariat.

And finally – and this is the most powerful reason why factory organisations and union are not sufficient – large sections of the proletariat are not sufficiently well-informed. They are not sufficiently acquainted with economics and politics, with national and international political and economic events, their connection with and significance for the revolution. They cannot be acquainted with these because of their class situation. Therefore, they do not know the right time to act. They act when they ought not to and do not act when they ought to. They will often make mistakes.

All these weaknesses in the proletariat are consequences of its class situation. Our tactics *must* reckon with them. If they do not do so, they will lead to the most terrible defeats.

As far as a large section of the proletariat is concerned, they cannot be remedied while capitalism survives.

How can we overcome these drawbacks of the factory organisation, which is to take in the great majority of the proletariat, how can we guard against the lack of knowledge in one section of the proletariat?

There is one answer.

For not *all* proletarians are insufficiently well-informed. And not all are opportunists, individualists and utopians, especially those who are well-informed. In the German proletariat particularly, there are many who are genuine revolutionaries not only in sentiment, but who also have a broad and deep understanding of politics and economics. Marx and Engels, Mehring, Bebel, Luxemburg and many others did not live among them for nothing. For this reason Marx's dictum that the German proletariat is near to a proletarian revolution, a genuinely proletarian revolution, still holds good.

The class relations, the mighty upsurge of capitalism have, over the last 70 years, put this section of the proletariat in a position to make such progress. They have held back another large section. The division into union and party is thus a

natural consequence of the conditions of production, of the effect of capitalism upon the proletariat, which has been differentiated by it.

To unite this section of the proletariat that has large and profound understanding within one organisation, to make this organisation profoundly conscious and active in a revolutionary sense, to put it in the service of the revolution, only of the revolution, of the whole proletariat, only of the whole proletariat, of the factory organisation and the union – this is the way to overcome or relieve all the weaknesses outlined above to which the factory organisation is subject.

And this organisation is the communist political party, if it is the genuinely revolutionary communist party, the true party, if it has truly scientific tactics based on the class relations of Western Europe and North America.

For *it* is familiar with economic and political factors, both on a national and an international level. *It* is not opportunistic, nor individualistic, nor utopian. *It* is revolutionary, not only in heart, but also in mind. It can therefore take the lead in word and deed. It takes the lead in both if it is the true party.

This is not of course to say that the same broad understanding and good qualities are not present in one section of the factory organisation, of the union, as in the party. All party members are after all members of the union as well. It only means that these elements can always be outvoted in the union by other sections which are not so advanced. The best elements can easily become isolated and atomised in the union and thus exercise little power. They only gain power and expand it by being organised together⁵.

Those who reject all that we have said about the proletariat and the factory organisation either do not know the proletariat, or do not take matters seriously.

Only the party can be 'pure'. Because of the class condition, the class situation of the proletariat.

It alone can consist of genuinely revolutionary, completely lucid elements.

It is the only proletarian organisation of which this is true. Because of the class condition to which capitalism reduces the workers. And if it has the correct tactics, based upon the class relations, it will remain 'pure'.

The factory organisation endows its members with the most general understanding of the revolution, e.g. the nature and significance of the workers' councils (soviets) and of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The party comprises the proletarians whose understanding is much broader and deeper.

If it is the factory organisation, the union, which is able to raise the mass of the proletariat to heroic fighters clearly aware of the revolution and its means and objectives (precisely because it is a *factory* organisation and not a trade union), it is the party which regroups those of them whose minds are clearest, and who are therefore the most courageous and best of all, the elite of the proletariat.

This section of the proletariat, this party, foresees the whole struggle, locates and establishes tactics, exercises persuasion over the remainder of the proletariat, and in the first instance the union; it seeks revolution alone, regards everything from this perspective, always puts the general cause of revolution above all other interests both in the national and the international struggle.

⁵ It has been suggested that instead of parties, fractions should be formed within the union. This would lead to chaos and condemn the union to impotence.

We will state once more, because it is a matter of such importance, that in Western Europe and North America it is not the ruler, the tyrant, the dictator of the proletariat as in Russia. We will point out once again that historical-materialist factors rule this out.

The most one could say is that it is the brain of the proletariat, its eye, its steersman. But even this image is not quite correct. For it makes the party a *part* of the whole. And here it is not, nor does it seek to be. Here it seeks to be the whole itself, here in Western Europe and North America it seeks to inspire the entire proletariat, to make the whole like itself.

Here it seeks to create a united entity consisting of itself, the factory organisation and the proletariat. I shall shortly return to this.

What should a party of this kind be like, a party which serves the proletariat by word and deed in the revolution?

In the first place, it should not be a parliamentary party. For parliamentarianism was a good weapon in the period of evolution (1860-1910 or even a few years earlier), when the proletariat's cause was being managed by leaders. Now that the proletariat must act for itself, its disadvantages far outweigh its advantages⁶.

For here the weakness of the proletariat lies in the fact that it believes others can act on its behalf and that it does not then need to act itself. Parliamentarianism increases this weakness.

Secondly, the party should not seek dictatorship for itself, but for the class, for the proletariat as a whole, for the great majority of it – I demonstrated this at the beginning of this pamphlet, but I will return to it in greater detail at this juncture. For it is a matter of prime importance in Western Europe and North America, just as important as factory organisation. And it cannot therefore be repeated too often.

The party should not seek dictatorship by the party – or by the leadership, which is what it comes down to – but the dictatorship of the class. This follows from the class relations.

The proletariat's adversary, capitalism, is mighty in these countries. An advanced, highly industrialised structure of bank capital and imperialism. A capital that has put down material and ideological roots and grown up over the course of centuries. Subjugating the entire population materially and ideologically. And uniting all the bourgeois classes, including the petty-bourgeoisie and small farmers.

And beside them, a proletariat almost infinite in numbers. Three to five-sevenths of the population. More than forty million. In England, and soon in the United States, even more in relative terms. And in the whole of Western Europe an enormous number.

Now let the layman, the simple worker, consider: in all these countries there has up to now been only a small number of proletarians who have profound insight, rigorously consistent thinking, the greatest, most self-sacrificing courage and revolutionary consistency in their actions.

This too no one will deny.

And so in all these countries, the communist party must be small. Smaller in one place, larger in another, but everywhere small in proportion to the proletariat.

Nor is this the dream, the chimera, the fantasy of a 'left-wing' worker!

⁶ I refer the reader to my *Letter to Comrade Lenin*, in which I prove this.

It follows directly from the class condition, which, as you all know, prevents a very large number of proletarians from gaining broad and deep understanding.

Therefore, a small party everywhere⁷.

Can this one small party simultaneously rule this mighty adversary, massively armed capitalism, and the mighty proletariat? Can it be the dictator, the despotic ruler, or both, of adversary and proletariat? The very numbers involved rule it out.

Imagine a German party with 500,000 really *completely* lucid, heroic communists, the elite of the proletariat.

These would face twenty million in the bourgeois classes. Is it to be thought they can achieve victory unless there stands beside them a factory organisation, a union, with at least ten million members, who would make up at least twenty-five million with their dependents? Is it to be thought that it could achieve Victory if it was the dictator, the tyrant of this factory organisation, of these twenty-five million? Those who think so do not know Western Europe. It is not Russia we are considering.

It is true that a tiny party achieved victory there. But there were twenty-five million turn-coats in the adversary's camp there, the poor peasants. Where are they here?

And anybody who knows the proletariat of Western Europe and North America knows that dictatorship by a party is impossible for other reasons!

The adversary is too mighty! The proletariat is too big for a small party to be able to rule both.

Therefore, it is not the party, but the class itself, the great majority of the class which must exercise dictatorship.

Historical materialism teaches us this.

And now that you have clearly seen that anti-parliamentarianism, factory organisation and class dictatorship are the tactics which necessarily follow from the conditions of production and class relations of Western Europe and North America, workers, that these are the scientific tactics, the sure and correct ones, compare the tactics of the Third International, the tactics of Lenin, Radek, Zinoviev and all the Russians and of all the other 'right-wing' leaders.

They want cells and trade unions, although these are completely out-dated and stifle the free spirit of the workers, they want parliament which stupefies the workers and keeps them aloof from the struggle, and which is thus counter-revolutionary. They want the dictatorship of party and leaders, which would not only be bad and damaging here, but which is also downright impossible.

Their tactics are unscientific, they are at odds with the real conditions, and *must* therefore lead to failure.

Compare these two courses, workers, and you will choose the right one⁸.

⁷ The opportunism of the Third International is also evident in its desire to form mass communist parties. It is obliged to pursue this by the very fact that it rejects factory organisation and that its cell tactics are failing to conquer the trade unions, so that it can only gain organised masses within the party. The March action showed what the consequences of this are. I have pointed out sufficiently often that a small party was only able to control its adversaries and the proletariat in Russia because it had the assistance of the poor peasants. But there too we can now see how terrible the consequences are if the whole proletarian class does not exercise dictatorship. Just consider Kronstadt! For ultimately it is only the proletarians, and not the peasants who are a sure source of support.

⁸ The fact that the Russians, Lenin for example, are so wrong in their judgement comes from their not knowing Western Europe sufficiently well. Their thinking may well be historical-materialist, but they are

And compare the idiocies of the anarchists, syndicalists and those members of the union who don't want a party⁹.

Can they deny that the class condition of the proletariat enables only a small section of the proletariat to develop broad and deep understanding? Can they deny that large sections within the factory organisation will therefore always be opportunistic, individualistic, utopian and insufficiently developed? No. And that therefore the factory organisation can never make and lead the revolution alone? No.

And they still reject the party, the organisation of those proletarians who have broad and deep understanding?

They still reject the only correct tactics based on the class relations and historical materialism.

Why?

Because their own understanding is not sufficiently profound. Because they themselves are not historical materialists. Because they themselves belong, like the anarchists and syndicalists, to that section of the proletariat which does not have sufficient insight.

Just as the Russians, Radek, Lenin, Zinoviev and the Second Congress of the Third International with their tactics of parliament and cells, their dictatorship of leaders and party, prove that they do not represent the conditions of Western Europe and Northern America, so, by rejecting the party, the syndicalists, anarchists, and people like Rühle prove that they cannot make their judgement in accordance with conditions they know, but only on the basis of personal sentiments.

We must therefore engage in the fiercest struggle against both the Third International and the Russians, such as Lenin, Zinoviev, and Radek, and the syndicalists, anarchists and the like. Neither possess a tactic based on the class relations of Western Europe and North America.

This, then, is the schema we arrive at: on the one hand, factory organisation and union, taking in the great majority of the proletariat; on the other, the communist political party, a party which is not parliamentary and not dictatorial.

Let us examine the way in which these interact to form a single entity, how they can assure the proletariat itself of dictatorship.

3. The Unity of General Union of Workers and Communist Party

This is our strategy for Western Europe and North America, then: a union built up on factory organisations and taking in all workers, and a party made up of the most lucid and energetic section of the proletariat.

But a major difficulty now presents itself.

We have said that the factory organisation is not sufficiently strong to lead the revolution alone and achieve victory. It is subject to many weaknesses.

And on the other hand we have said that the party cannot exercise dictatorship. It is too small in relation to the adversary and to the proletariat. This appears to be a terrible and insurmountable difficulty. For we then have no single organisation capable of making and leading the revolution and achieving victory!

unable to apply historical materialism in this case because they are not familiar with the conditions.

⁹ Like the East Saxony districts of the union, like Otto Rühle and Pfemfert.

Our opponents are exploiting this apparent difficulty in order to prove to us that we do not know how to attain victory, how to attain communism.

This is the criticism made, for example, by Zinoviev in his comments on the 21 conditions (see *International* 11 and 12), where, in his polemic against syndicalism, the IWW in the United States, etc. he includes us (or rather pretends not to know that the 'left-wingers' are something quite different to the syndicalists, the IWW, etc¹⁰.)

But this difficulty is an illusion.

For what neither union nor party can achieve singly can be achieved by both together if they unite.

It is true: the factory organisation, the union, cannot achieve victory alone. And no more can the party. But both together can do so.

For the factory organisation gradually turns proletarians into conscious communists, militants clear as to their objectives, precisely because it is the organisation in the factories.

Certainly, one section will remain confused and necessarily so, because of the impoverished class condition of the proletariat. Even a majority within the union will not attain the *fullest* clarity, genuinely deep and broad understanding of economic and political factors.

But this is where the party comes in. This section of the proletariat, although not *very* large, does have deep and broad understanding and advises and helps the other section. And the party.

The union needs the party. The party needs the union. The members of the one are members of the other. Both are therefore connected in the most intimate manner. And both with a single objective – the revolution and communism. And both recognising the same means – the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the whole class.

But how is the latter to be achieved? When we have said ourselves that the majority of the proletariat does not have any understanding, does not possess sufficient strength!

This will become possible through the process of development, through struggle.

This will become possible through the revolution itself.

The union will take in an increasingly large section of the proletariat, and all the clearest and best elements will gradually join the party.

When union and party then train their members in the struggle, each in its own fashion, each according to its capacities, these members will attain ever greater heights. Of strength of mind and deed.

And when the factory organisation, the union, eventually takes in the great majority of the proletariat, as the trade unions do now, and a very large number of its members have become lucid, conscious communists, and unity with the party has become complete, the union will be synonymous with the proletariat, it will be the proletariat. And since union and party form one entity, the proletariat and the party will form one entity.

¹⁰ The syndicalists and members of the union who reject the party do not in fact know how communism is to be attained. For the syndicalists, the IWW, the factory organisation alone, can never achieve it, for the very reason that they reject the party.

And then the union, that is to say the proletariat, will have attained such heights and the unity of proletariat and party will be so complete that the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the class itself, will be possible.

Then the dictatorship of the class will be achieved through the unity of party and union. Then too, leaders and soviets will arise from union and party, that is to say from the proletariat itself. Then the objective of the entire struggle here in Western Europe and North America will be attained, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat, without which historical-materialist considerations of the class conditions obtaining here rule out any victory, any communism. Then no dictatorship by party or leaders will be necessary or possible any longer. This, then, workers of Germany and England, of Western Europe and North America, is our plan, the plan of the 'left-wingers', of the opposition within the Third International.

This, workers of Germany and England, of Western Europe and North America and of the world, is what the 'left' is fighting for.

These are its means: firstly, regroupment of all workers, of the great majority of the proletariat in the union; secondly, regroupment of the most conscious workers in the party; thirdly, unity of union and party.

And this is its objective: the dictatorship of the class, of the proletariat itself.

Does this appeal to you, workers of Western Europe and North America? Does it perhaps appeal to you more than the dictatorship of the party advocated by the Russians and the Third International (and which was necessary in Russia)?

It makes little difference whether or not it appeals to you, comrades. For what we are saying must necessarily apply. The class relations of Western Europe and North America make it necessary.

One more comment: should the party have *supreme* power? Or should the union perhaps be so strong and solid that it is predominant? We cannot tell. It very much depends on the course the revolution takes. The question is idle and tedious. All that we can do is to further both and the unity of both. These then, are the perfectly clear, integrated, comprehensive tactics of the 'left-wingers', the clear plan of the way to revolution which every proletarian can understand.

Factory organisation or union together with party! The unity of both! And through both and the unity of both, the dictatorship of the class!

There can be no clearer tactics, no clearer plan.

And so when Zinoviev and the Third International ask us 'left-wingers' (in his exposition of the 21 conditions) who we think will be responsible for economic administration, feeding and educating the populace, etc. during the period of transition – tasks which in their opinion only the party can accomplish – we reply that the factory organisation and the party together will carry this out in Western Europe and North America. That means, for those who have followed our argument, the proletariat. And when they ask us who other than the party will establish the red army, we reply: the union and the party together, that is to say the proletariat. And when they ask us who other than the party will overcome the counter-revolution, we reply that in Western Europe and North America it will be the union and the party, that is to say the proletariat. And when they ask us how iron discipline and absolute centralism will be possible here if the party is not dictator, we reply that the union and the party together will certainly ensure centralisation and discipline, but not in the form you have them. The class relations dictate that this should be so. By the numbers involved alone, for 70 per cent of the population are proletarian here, and only 7 per

cent in Russia! Anybody who cannot comprehend that discipline and centralisation will therefore be different here is a dunce.

And when they ask us what is the overall plan for the organisation of the revolution and the way to communism, and mock and insult us because they believe we have no such plan, we reply that it is their fault if they do not understand us. They see everything in *such* obscurity that they believe only the Russian way is possible. But we have a clear plan and a clear way forward: unity of party and union – that is to say the proletariat – and dictatorship by the proletariat. We will add just one thing more for the benefit of our Russian friends.

Now that the proletariat in Kronstadt¹¹ has risen up against you, the communist party, now that you have had to declare a state of emergency in Petrograd against the proletariat (things which, like all your tactics, were necessary in the conditions you face), has the thought still not occurred to you, even now, that dictatorship by the proletariat really is preferable to dictatorship by the party? Or that it would perhaps really be preferable if class- and not party-dictatorship were to develop in Western Europe and North America? Or that perhaps the 'left-wingers' here are in the right?

Perhaps this idea has occurred to you; but even if it has, you have still not completely understood the issue. For the dictatorship of the class is not only preferable here, it is absolutely necessary.

This can best be understood in terms of the factors already mentioned: in Russia you were still able to suppress the counter-revolution when a section of the proletariat rose up against you in Kronstadt and Petrograd, because it is weak in Russia; but if a section of the proletariat were to rise up against us under the conditions prevailing here, the counter-revolution would be victorious, for it is powerful here.

For this reason too class dictatorship is necessary here, absolutely necessary. And party-dictatorship impossible.

The 'left' therefore not only has a good and clear plan, it has the only one possible and necessary. A plan that is the opposite of yours, which means nothing but harm for the revolution in Western Europe and North America.

And on this point we will conclude with a word on the Russian tactics for Germany, for Western Europe, to the German, English, the Western European, the North American, the world proletariat.

Workers of Germany and England, of Western Europe and North America, you were recently able to witness the consequences of the tactics espoused by the Russians and the Third International and those of the 'left-wingers' in Germany in March 1921. Of the Third International, which uses parliamentarianism and cell tactics, and the 'left', which is anti-parliamentarian and advocates factory organisation. The Third International, which seeks dictatorship by the party, the 'left', which seeks the dictatorship of the class. The consequences of the tactics espoused by Moscow, by Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek and the Third International, those tactics of party-dictatorship, etc. were a putsch ordered from above, a terrible defeat, the fiasco of cell tactics and parliamentarianism, betrayal by one section of the leadership (Levi), the downfall of a communist party (the VKPD), a weakening of communism.

The consequences of the tactics of the 'left' – although everything did not go entirely as planned – were the unity and solidarity of the communist party, the reinforcement of this party and of the union: an advance for communism.

¹¹ The KAPD felt obliged to explain publicly that although Gorter understood the motives of the Kronstadt insurgents, he did not side with them. – Translator's note.

We say to you: the tactics of the 'left' have not only been demonstrated as the best in terms of theory, in terms of historical materialism, but in practice too. And they have proved the best in practice for the very reason that their theoretical basis is sounder.

Factory organisations with the union built up upon them, a party like the KAPD that is anti-parliamentarian and not dictatorial, the unity of both; and both pursuing and developing the class-dictatorship of the proletariat, by word and deed, by theory and struggle – theory and practice show clearly that this is the way to victory.

The course espoused by Moscow, by the VKPD and the Third International, is clearly the way to defeat, to downfall.

Workers of Germany, England, Western Europe and North America! Victory is only assured you if you unite on scientific tactics, that is to say tactics in conformity with historical materialism, with the class conditions! Only these scientific tactics can bring you unity.

Workers of Germany, England, Western Europe and North America, unite in the KAPD or in parties like the KAPD, and in unions like the General Union of German Workers, the AAUD!