

Chaulieu's Response to Pannekoek's Second and Third Letters*

Paris, August 22, 1954

Dear Comrade Pannekoek,

Please excuse my somewhat tardy response to your letter of June 15; I was absent from Paris and wanted to answer you only after discussing it with the comrades from our group. In the meantime, I also received your letter of August 10,¹ with the article on Marxist “ethics,”² which we also discussed.

Concerning your letter of June 15, we have unanimously decided to publish it in the upcoming issue (15)³ of “Socialisme ou Barbarie.” It certainly will help readers to understand your point of view better, both on the party question and on that of the character of the Russian Revolution. For my part, I do not think that I personally have anything of importance to add to what I wrote in [issue 14](#). To you alone I would like to point out that I have never thought that “we can defeat the CP . . . by copying its methods” and that I have always said that the working class—or its vanguard—needed a new mode of organization, one that meets the needs of the struggle against the bureaucracy, not only the outside and already attained bureaucracy (that of the CP) but also the potential bureaucracy from within. I am saying: The working class needs an organization before

*Editor: This letter is available in box 11 of the Antonie Pannekoek Archives; see: <http://www.aap.be/Pdf/IISG-Archief-Pannekoek/Map-011.pdf> for the scan. We have on occasion consulted an earlier, partial translation, available in [Marcel van der Linden's “Did Castoriadis Suppress a Letter from Pannekoek? A Note on the Debate regarding the ‘Organizational Question’ in the 1950s,”](#) *A Usable Collection: Essays in Honour of Jaap Kloosterman on Collecting Social History*, ed. Aad Blok, Jan Lucassen and Huub Sanders (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014): 252-62; see: “Letter from Castoriadis to Pannekoek, 22 August, 1954,” *ibid.*, 260-61. The present version is the *first full and fully accurate translation of Castoriadis's response in French to Pannekoek's June 15, 1954 letter*, as it also takes into account the English-language wording of the first-ever transcription of the [“Second Letter from Anton Pannekoek.”](#)

¹Editor: See the newly uncovered and recently scanned transcription, [“Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu.”](#)

²Editor: [A full German transcription of what appears to be the definitive draft is now available online.](#)

³Editor: Actually, this was ultimately a double issue, listed as [“Nos 15-16”](#) and published for “October-December 1954.” Linden's transcription of a *fourth* Pannekoek letter—“Draft reply from Pannekoek to Castoriadis, 3 September 1954”—appears in *ibid.*, 261-62. Linden notes (*ibid.*, p. 258) that, in this “draft version of a fourth letter from Pannekoek to Castoriadis, dated 3 September 1954, . . . Pannekoek writes that his [second letter](#) was ‘not written with great care’ and was not intended for publication.” Thus, it was *after reading Chaulieu's August 22 private criticism of a gaping hole in Pannekoek's argument*—see below in the body of the present letter about the confusion or conflation between all organization and a “Stalinist-type organization”—that Pannekoek wrote back to say that he did not want his second letter published in full in *S. ou B.* (*This is perhaps the first time, in all the polemics surrounding the Pannekoek-Chaulieu correspondence, that this crucial point has been brought forward*—crucial, for the bulk of the controversies leading to the 1958 split within *S. ou B.* and to the departure of Henri Simon, Claude Lefort, and others from the group had, as their background, this confusion or conflation of organization/bureaucracy, which was colored by the experience of Stalinist and Trotskyist groups.)

Councils are set up, —and you reply to me: It does not need a Stalinist-type organization. We are in agreement, but your thesis requires that you show that a Stalinist-type organization is the sole organization attainable. I think, moreover, that on this terrain the discussion cannot advance much; I intend to take up the question again on the basis of the “intellectuals and workers” text that was published in [issue 14 of “Socialisme ou Barbarie,”](#)⁴ and I hope to be able to publish an article about that in issue 16.⁵ I dare to think that at that moment we will be able to resume the discussion in a more fruitful way.

As for your article against [\[Maximilien\] Rubel,](#)⁶ we thought that it would be quite difficult to publish a critique of a book that has not yet been published.⁷ Indeed, Rubel’s thesis exists only in typescript form; the public (and we ourselves) know about it only on the basis of an account thereof in *Le Monde* written by Jean Lacroix, if I’m not mistaken,⁸ who must have simply attended the oral presentation of this dissertation on the day of its defense, and in all likelihood did not read it. In any case, it seems to me difficult to critique a book on the basis of a newspaper account.⁹ True, Rubel

⁴Editor: See “Intellectuels et ouvriers: Un article de ‘Correspondance,’” which appeared on pp. 74-77 of [that issue](#). This is *S. ou B.*’s translation of all but the first two sentences of [“The Real Trouble: We Solve This or Fail,”](#) in the “Special Supplement” to *Correspondence*, 14 (April 3, 1954): S1 and S4. The identity of the author, “R. M.,” is probably untraceable.

⁵Editor: As mentioned in note 2, above, *S. ou B.* issues 15 and 16 were folded into a [single, delayed issue](#). No such article by Castoriadis appeared there or afterward, though he often addressed the need to integrate manual and intellectual labor and laborers within a revolutionary organization as well as into a future socialist society. In [issue 17](#), published in July of the following year, Castoriadis emphasized that “Workers’ management is possible . . . only if from the outset it starts moving in the direction of overcoming this division [of manual and intellectual labor], in particular with respect to intellectual labor as it relates to the production process” (“On the Content of Socialism, I,” in [PSWI](#), 308).

⁶Editor: Scans of two draft versions, written mainly in German, of Pannekoek’s critique of Rubel, with both bearing the French title “Marx éthicien? [Marx an ethicist?]” and both referencing Rubel’s dissertation defense and *Le Monde*’s account thereof (see note 8, below), are available online. [The first](#) appears to be a more extensive draft; [the second](#) also contains, interspersed, the (recently discovered and [now-transcribed](#)) handwritten draft in English of “Pannekoek’s Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu,” dated August 10, 1954, which proposes that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* translate and publish this ([now-transcribed](#)) Pannekoek review of the unread and not yet published Rubel dissertation.

⁷The book version of Rubel’s dissertation was published by Rivière in 1956 as *Bibliographie des œuvres de Karl Marx*.

⁸Editor: Accompanying the scan of Castoriadis’s typewritten letter sent in an envelope postmarked “rue du Chaillot, 3PM August 24, 1954” and listing on the back as return address “‘Socialisme ou Barbarie’/9, rue de Savoie/Paris 6^e” (S. ou B. member Georges Petit’s home address)—is [a clipping of an article from page 9 of Le Monde’s May 26, 1954 issue: “À la recherche d’un Marx au delà du marxisme.”](#) The author of this review of Rubel’s dissertation defense at the Sorbonne is listed not as Jean Lacroix but as “J. Piatier”—the journalist [Jacqueline Piatier](#), who created *Le Monde*’s weekly book review supplement, *Le Monde des Livres*, in 1967. ([Jean Lacroix](#), who cofounded the [“non-conformist”](#) Christian [“personalist”](#) review *Esprit* with [Emmanuel Mounier](#) in 1932, also chronicled philosophical topics in *Le Monde*.) When the scan was accessed May 1, 2019, the first page of Castoriadis’s letter and the clipping, while in the file, had not yet been scanned. It is unclear whether the now-scanned clipping is the one Pannekoek mentioned receiving from a third party (see next note) or a second copy Castoriadis himself might have sent in this envelope.

⁹Editor: In a [letter written to Rubel on June 23rd](#), Pannekoek states that he had received from “[[Henk\] Canne Meijer”](#) a clipping of this *Le Monde* article, apropos of which he writes (as translated from the original German):

had already expounded his view, which as you quite rightly say is not new, in his Introduction to Marx's Pages Choisies.¹⁰ But, since he is making the effort to write a book on the topic, people will rightly think that we could wait to see the development of his position and the accompanying argument. For, we are for the moment pretty much in the process of struggling with a term We therefore kindly ask that you await the publication of Rubel's book; we will send you a copy as soon as it comes out, and perhaps you will note that there is no call to change anything whatsoever in your article—but we will have been in compliance with the rules of good literary manners [*la correction littéraire*].

Faternally,

[signed Pierre Chaulieu]

P.S.: Due to a misunderstanding, you believe that an error slipped into the translation of your [first] letter.¹¹ The phrase (p. 40, line 13, of [issue 14](#)) "*nous n'avons que faire d'un parti révolutionnaire*" is a Gallicism that means "we do not need, we cannot make any use of a revolutionary party [*nous n'avons pas besoin, nous ne pouvons pas nous servir d'un parti révolutionnaire*]"—this translation is rather close to your English: "We have no use for"

From the article in Le Monde I believe I can see that you have also defended your thesis . . . of ethics as the basis [*Grundlage*] of Marxian theory. You know that I do not agree, and we have argued about it enough in our correspondence. I suppose that you are now arguing the matter exactly as you did in the "Pages Choisi[e]s" [on this earlier Rubel volume, see note 1 of "[Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu](#)"].

At the end of this same letter, Pannekoek adds:

[T]his question of ethics drove me to read through all of the earlier (i.e., pre-1848) articles and writings of Marx. His development was now much clearer to me; but not only did I not find a single sentence that could confirm your view, but the whole of the exposition appeared to me to stand in complete opposition to it more than before.

In, for example, [a letter also written in German to Rubel a year earlier \(July 19, 1953\)](#), Pannekoek the Dutch astronomer had argued, in a heavily scientific and reductionist way, that

Marxism is first of all a science; a science of society which draws conclusions from the study of phenomena (i.e., history here), i.e., establishes rules (e.g., previous history is a history of class struggles, etc.) and applies these rules to the present and the future. He therefore says: the exploited class will fight against the exploiter class (it already is). So he is not saying: The working class should do this or that; And still less does he say: You should act like this. . . . It is therefore not the case that Marx presents socialism only as a material possibility; he says: The workers will realize socialism; and not because it is an ethical necessity, but because it is a material, social necessity to secure their lives. . . . if everything in the world is strictly causal, a certain event will either happen or not happen. In the first case it is certain [*sicher*], in the second it is impossible, and there is no third. So if you say that it is not certain, you say that it is impossible.

¹⁰Editor: See again note 1 of "[Pannekoek's Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu](#)."

¹¹Editor: Previously (in a [May 29, 1954 letter](#)), Pannekoek had checked with Rubel about this controversial (for him) *S. ou B.* translation.