

Second Letter from Anton Pannekoek*

June 15, 1954

Dear Comrade Chaulieu,

It was a great satisfaction for me to see that you printed a translation of my letter of November 8 [1953] in N° 14 of your review “Socialisme ou Barbarie,”[^] and added your critical remarks,[^] in this way involving your readers in a discussion of principles.[^] There is one place in the translation where, probably by lack of clearness in my English, just the reverse has come out of what I meant to say: page 40 line 13 I intended to say: pour conquérir le pouvoir nous ne pouvons *pas* faire usage d’un “parti révolutionnaire.”^{^1} Because you express

*Editor’s Note: Presented here, we believe for the first time, is a *transcription* of a scan of the original, numbered, four-pages-on-lined-sheets manuscript “draft” (marked in Dutch: *klad*) of Anton Pannekoek’s second letter written, directly in English, to Pierre Chaulieu (pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis, cofounder of the postwar French revolutionary group [Socialisme ou Barbarie](#)); the scan appears online here: <http://archivesautonomies.org/IMG/pdf/echanges/documents/Pannekoek-Chaulieu-juin54.pdf>. When used twice, the caret symbol “^” indicates the beginning and end of interline or marginal additions. Crossed-out words appear in **strikeout**; a crossed-out paragraph appears in **gray highlight**. Crossed-out words that are illegible appear as: **xxx**. The Editor may be reached via curtis@msh-paris.fr; all suggestions for improvements in this transcription are welcome.

For additional information about this epistolary exchange and the controversy surrounding it, the reader is referred to “Réponse au Camarade Pannekoek” (*Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 14 [April 1954]: 44-50), its [Postface \(1974\)](#), and the newly published accompanying “Documents sur la ‘Réponse,’” in Castoriadis’s *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*, tome 1, *La Question du mouvement ouvrier*, tome 1, édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay (Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2012): 101-26. Additional material in English may be found in Marcel van der Linden’s text “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, which presents information, analyses, and references, as well as translations and transcriptions. Neither Linden nor Castoriadis’s posthumous French Editors, however, included any mention of Jean-Luc Leylavergne’s “Remarques sur la brochure: *Correspondance Pierre Chaulieu–Anton Pannekoek 1953-1954*; présentée et commentée par Henri Simon (Echanges et Mouvement 2001),” a text that was composed by Leylavergne in early February 2003 and that was sent to Simon but that never received a response from Simon, author of the above-mentioned 2001 *Correspondance* brochure—a rather hypocritical bit of negligence on Simon’s part, given that at one time both he and [Cajo Brendel](#) claimed that Castoriadis had “suppressed” publication of Pannekoek’s second letter to Chaulieu (Castoriadis) “in the same way that Stalin suppressed [Lenin’s testament](#)” (even though Pannekoek himself, in this second letter, described “these expositions,” now transcribed here, as “contain[ing] no new arguments”). Nevertheless, since June 20, 2009 Leylavergne’s scathing “Remarques sur la brochure” have been made available to all on the following website: <http://collectiflieuxcommuns.fr/160-remarques-sur-la-brochure>. See also pp. 34-35n21 in the [Translator/Editor’s Introduction to A Socialisme ou Barbarie Anthology: Autonomy, Critique, and Revolution in the Age of Bureaucratic Capitalism](#) (London: Eris, 2018) concerning other tendentious claims contained in Simon’s brochure, along with a misidentification that was brought to Simon’s attention but that Simon, despite Simon’s promise to do so, has never corrected in the [brochure’s online version](#). Readers may also wish to visit, respectively, the Antonie Pannekoek Archives: <http://aaap.be> and the Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website: <http://www.agorainternational.org> for additional information and bibliographical references about these two revolutionary authors.

It is unknown by the Editor at this time whether this scanned document, at some point marked “draft,” is the actual sent letter or a preliminary version then turned into a clean copy and mailed to France by Pannekoek, though the scan is currently available on a [French website](#). In any case, a Dutch translation of an original English-language version in Pannekoek’s possession appeared in the “Spartacus” Communistenbond’s *Daad en Gedachte (Deed and Thought)*, 2:5 (October 1954): 64-66, and it was on the *indirect* basis of that Dutch translation that a French translation, “Deuxième lettre d’Anton Pannekoek à Pierre Chaulieu,” first appeared, with commentary by Brendel, in the *Cahiers du communisme de conseils*, 8 (1971): 32-35, was reprinted in [Simon’s brochure](#), and reproduced by Castoriadis in his 1974 Postface. Here, editorial notes either translate French phrases in Pannekoek’s original English or signal where, for whatever reason, the subsequent Dutch or French translations depart substantially from this original English-language “draft.”

¹Editor: The Dutch and French translations drop this marginal note on translation, called out in the draft by an “x”. In his [August 22, 1954 reply to Pannekoek](#), Chaulieu/Castoriadis corrects Pannekoek’s misimpression of a translation error; see his “P.S.” on page two. See now [“Pannekoek’s Third Letter to Comrade Chaulieu”](#) and [“Chaulieu’s Response to Pannekoek’s Second and Third Letters.”](#)

the wish to continue the discussion I will present here some remarks on your response. Of course there remain differences of opinion, which by discussion may come to the ~~front~~ fore with greater clarity. Such differences ~~have~~ usually ^{^have^} their origin in a difference of the points of chief interest, proceeding either from different practical experiences or from living in a different milieu. For me it was the study of the political strikes and massal [*sic*] actions of the workers, in Belgium 1893, in Russia 1905 and 1917, in Germany 1918-19, from which I tried to get a clear understanding of the fundamental character of such actions. Your group is living and working ~~in~~ ^{^among^} the tumultuous working class movements of a big industrial town; so your attention is ~~struck~~ ^{^directed to^} ~~by~~ ^{^practical^} the problem how efficient modes of fight may develop out of the present often inefficient strife and partial strikes.

Surely I do not suppose that the revolutionary actions of the working class will take place all in a sphere² of peaceful discussion. But what I contend is that the final result of the often violent strifes is determined ^{^not be accidental facts but^} by what stands behind them in the minds of the workers, as a basis of firm convictions acquired by ^{^experience,^} study, and discussion of arguments. When ~~a~~ the personnel in a shop has to decide on strike or not it is not by fists and violence but usually by arguments that the decision is taken.

You put the dilemma in an entirely practical way: what shall the party do when it has 45% of the (council) members ^{^as its adherents^} and expects that another party (neo-stalinien [*sic*], aspiring at totalitarian state power)³ will try to seize power by violent action? Your answer is: forestall them by doing ourselves what we fear they will do. What will be the final result of such an action? ~~There~~ ^{^Look at what happened in Russia. There^} was a party ^{^with^} ~~good~~ ^{^excellent^4} revolutionary ^{^principles^} ~~as any~~, imbued with Marxism; it could moreover lean upon soviets already formed by the workers; yet it had to seize power ^{^for itself^} and the result was the totalitarian system of Stalinism. (This “had to” means that the conditions were not yet ripe for a real proletarian revolution; in the highly capitalistic Western world they certainly are more ripe; how much more can only be shown by the course of the class struggle[.]) So it ^{^the question^} must be ~~asked~~ ^{^posed^}: ~~will~~ the action⁵ of the party you suppose will it save the workers’ revolution? It seems to me that it would rather be a step towards new despotism.⁶

Certainly there are difficulties in either way. When the situation in France or in the world should call for massal actions of the working class, then immediately the CP will try to bend the action into a pro-Russian party-demonstration. And you will have to wage a strenuous fight with them. But it is not by copying its methods that ~~you~~ we can defeat the CP. ~~You We can win real and lasting success by~~ ^{^This can be achieved^} only by applying our own method—the genuine mode of action of the fighting class—: by the strength of ~~quiet~~ argument based on the great principle of self-determination.⁷

The argument with the 45% example fits entirely in the parliamentary world of fighting parties each with a certain percentage of followers. In the workers’ revolution which we foresee it is the class that rises into action; there all the conditions, ^{^e.g., of party-adherence^} have changed. We do not say: it shall be *our* party with its most excellent program that has to seize power and we ^{^it is our task to^} call upon the workers to sustain *us*

²Editor: While the Dutch has: *sfeer*; the French interpolates: *atmosphère*.

³Editor: While the Dutch has: *die naar totalitaire macht streven*, the French, eliminating all mention of totalitarianism, modifies this to: *qui s’efforcerait de conquérir le régime* (which would endeavor to capture/conquer the regime).

⁴Editor: While the Dutch has: *uitstekende* (excellent), the French (“*bon*”) seems to mirror the crossed-out “good.”

⁵Editor: Stronger than the English’s “action,” the Dutch has: *strijd* (fight) and the French: *lutte* (struggle).

⁶Editor: Differing from the original English’s “despotism,” the Dutch has: *onderdrukking* (crackdown/oppression/repression/suppression) and the French has: *oppression*.

⁷Editor: While the Dutch has: *zelf-belissing* (self-determination), the French has the more roundabout: *autonomie des décisions* (autonomy of decisions). Probably misreading an editorial mark, both are followed by an otherwise anomalous exclamation point.

against the others. It ^{^We say it^} is our task to arouse and induce the workers to establish their own class-power in the shops and enterprises. The difference may be expressed in another more fundamental way. Our ^{^Your^} point of view is this ^{^seems to me to be^}; the worst that could happen to the liberation of the working class is the domination of party-communism; for then the workers will have lost the possibility to propagate and develop their ideas of freedom by means of council organisation. Or, expressed in another way: our first duty is to prevent the CP from ^{^and thereby:^^} establishing a totalitarian state power and to defend against them the western parliamentary democracy. It looks quite sensible and logical: it has the same sense and logics as had reformism xxx when it said: revolution is far away; let us for the present by reforms make capitalism tolerable for the workers. Marxist argument then replied: reforms the workers will get not by conciliatory tactics but by increasing their fighting power. So now we may reply: the workers can prevent mastery of the CP only by developing and strengthening their own class power, i.e. their united will to seize and control themselves the production apparatus.

The main condition for the working class to win freedom is that the ideas of self-rule and self-management of the production apparatus have taken deep roots in the mind of the masses. There is a certain analogy to ^{^with^} what Jaurès wrote in his *Histoire Socialiste*, on the Constituante: “Cette assemblée, toute neuve aux choses de la politique, sut, à peine réunie, déjouer toutes les manœuvres de la Cour. Pourquoi? Parce qu’elle portait en elle quelques idées abstraites et grandes, fortement et long[u]ement méditées, qui lui étaient une lumière.”⁸ The cases are different, surely: instead of the grand political ideas of the ~~xxx~~ revolutionary bourgeoisie⁹ we will have the grander social ideas of the workers, ^{^the ideas^} of control of production in organised collaboration: instead of the ~~five~~ six hundred¹⁰ delegates elevated by the abstract ideas they had studied we will have the millions guided by their life experience of ^{^exploitation in^} productive work. Hence I see it to be the noblest and most useful task of a revolutionary party, by its propaganda in thousands of leaflets, pamphlets and papers, to awaken these feelings to ever greater consciousness and clarity.

As to the character of the Russian revolution:¹¹ the translation of middle-class revolution into *révolution bourgeoise*¹² (en Allemand on dit: *bürgerliche Revolution*)¹³ ne rend pas exactement¹⁴ its essence. When in England the ^{^so called^} middle class (~~the capitalist class~~ ^{^was called this, because it stood} ~~between~~ ^{^the^} aristocracy ~~and the working people~~) rose to power it consisted of a numerous class of mostly small ^{^capitalists or^} business men, owners of the (industrial) productive apparatus of society. Though the pulling down of aristocratic power needed ~~xxx~~ actions of the masses, these were not yet able to lay hands upon the ^{^xxx means of^} production apparatus; this spiritual, moral, and organisational capability can be acquired by the workers only by means of their class-struggle in a highly developed capitalism. In Russia there was no bourgeoisie of any

⁸Editor: This excerpt from Jean Jaurès’s *Histoire Socialiste* can be found here: http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Histoire_socialiste/La_Constituante/La_Fuite_à_Varennes. In English: “This [Constituent] Assembly, quite new to political affairs, was able, shortly after it began meeting, to foil all the Court’s maneuvers. Why? Because it bore within itself a few grand and abstract ideas it had vigorously meditated upon at length, which were to it a shining light.” The French version merely retranslates the Dutch of Jaurès directly back into French, and both create a new paragraph break after the quotation.

⁹Editor: While the Dutch has: *revolutionaire bourgeoisie*, the French has: *Révolution française*.

¹⁰Editor: Both the Dutch and the French seem to adopt the crossed-out “500,” now written as a numeral.

¹¹Editor: Unlike the English (and the Dutch translation), the French translation divides this paragraph in three.

¹²Editor: In English: “bourgeois revolution.”

¹³Editor: The Dutch retains, but the French suppresses, this parenthetical phrase.

¹⁴Editor: In English: “does not exactly render.”

importance; so a “new “middle class,” as directors of the productive work had to arise out of the avant-garde ^{^of the revolution^} and ^{^to^} take possession of the production apparatus, not ^{^as^} individually ^{^owners^} each of a small part but as collectively ^{^owners^} of the totality. ^{^Generally we can say:^} When the working masses (because they come out of pre-capitalist conditions) are not yet capable to take the production in their own hands, the results, inevitably, is a new ruling class, master of the ~~xxx~~ production. This similarity is why I called the Russian revolution (in its lasting character) a middle-class revolution. Surely the massal force of the proletarian class was needed to destroy the old system (and this was a school for ~~the~~ workers all over the world). But a revolution of society can achieve no more than corresponds to the nature of the ~~xxx~~ relevant social classes,¹⁵ and when the greatest radicalism was needed to overcome the resistances it has afterwards to retrace its steps. This seems to be a ~~general~~ ^{^common^} rule in the revolutions till now; thus ~~in xxx~~ ^{^up to^} 1793 the ^{^French^} revolution became ever more radical, ~~till~~ until the peasants ^{^at last^} were ~~assured~~ ^{^unquestioned^} ^{^definitely^} free masters of the soil and the foreign armies were repelled; then the Jacobins were massacred and ~~the ugliest~~ capitalism presented itself as the new masters. Seen in this way the Russian revolution falls in line with its predecessors, ^{^all against vanquishing} ^{feudal}¹⁶ powers, [^] in England, France, Germany. It is ^{^was^} not an abortive proletarian revolution; the proletarian revolution is a thing of the future, before us.

I hope that these expositions, though they contain no new arguments, may serve to clarify some of ^{^the differences in^} our points of view.

¹⁵Editor: The English “relevant social classes” becomes *opstandige klassen* (rebellious classes) in Dutch and *classes révolutionnaires* (revolutionary classes) in French.

¹⁶Editor: While the Dutch has: *feodale*, the French drops any mention of “feudal.”