

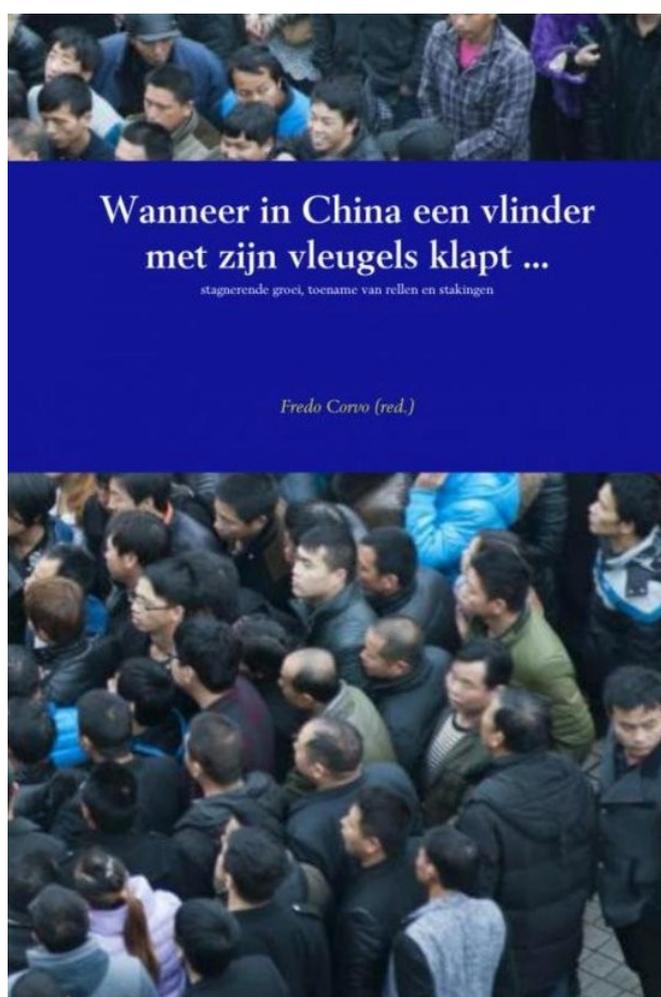
When in China a Butterfly Claps its Wings ...

Stagnating Growth, Increase of Riots and Strikes

Original Title:

Wanneer in China een vlinder met zijn vleugels klapt...

Stagnerende groei, toename van rellen en stakingen



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From the back-cover:

China has long been a model for economic success. The neo-liberal myth wants the world economy to be stimulated by cheap labour. After having transferred labour to Asia only few workers have remained in the labour process in the Western countries. Competition in the labour market by migration and precarious labour contracts have reduced the number of strikes and their extent there. In China both developments do not stand in the way of fierce workers' struggles, but even foster them. What are the consequences for China and the world when the economic negotiating space shrinks under pressure of the crisis ?

The Dutch language web edition [Arbeidersstemmen](#) (“Workers’ Voices”) has recently published a book with the title **When in China a Butterfly Claps its Wings... Stagnating Growth, Increase of Riots and Strikes**, presenting translations of articles by the Chinese group [Chuǎng](#), of poems by the late Foxconn worker [Xu Lizhi](#), and of three shorter articles from other groups. An extensive and annotated postscript by the editor concludes this collection, advancing a critical appraisal of certain theses defended by Chuǎng.

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1. “[Scenarios of the Coming Crisis: A Response to Aufheben](#)” by Chuǎng
2. “[No Way Forward, No Way Back: China in the Era of Riots](#)” by Chuǎng
3. “[Wildcat Strikes at Walmart China](#)” by Working Class Self Organisation
4. Nine poems by a Foxconn Worker Xu Lizhi (1990-2014), from [the English translation](#) by Friends of the Nao Project
5. “Guiyang’s Casualized Train Attendants Fight Back” from Railroad Workers Bulletin, based on [Chuǎng’s English translation](#)
6. “Instead of a Foreword”, by Fredo Corvo.

Excerpts (in Dutch language) from the book can be found [here](#).

This document contains an **English translation of the postscript** by its author:

Extract: Chapter 6 of the book

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Instead of a Foreword (Fredo Corvo, Editor) ¹

What are the consequences for the rest of the world now that economic growth in China stagnates and when strikes and riots will challenge the ruling power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)?

Edward Lorenz is told to have used first the metaphor of the butterfly, in 1961 - albeit with a flapping seagull in Brazil, followed by a tornado over Texas - to explain phenomena in diverse fields such as meteorology and securities with chaos theory. We live in a remarkable time that seems to be governed by natural laws which, however, only are allowed to play their dominant role by human activity in the markets for goods, services, money and labour. Brought to dominance by the ideology and practice of neo-liberalism, the laws of the market plunge the world into unbelievable chaos. For most people this is incomprehensible, even for the same businessmen, politicians and scientists who have made themselves the blind executors of these same laws.

In this paper we go some 100 years back in time for an explanation of this paradoxical situation. To a theory which already at that time discussed the vital importance of Asia - and China in particular - for the development of capitalism. A century ago, Anton Pannekoek, a Dutch astronomer and social democrat, later a communist, eventually council communist, developed a Marxist theory of crises based on the need to integrate into capitalism more and more people as wage labourers. In 1944 he wrote in "THE WORKERS' COUNCILS" a whole chapter on the rise of China, where among other things, he outlined the disastrous influence of the Comintern that pressed the CCP to form a united front with the bourgeois Kuomintang, and the subsequent destruction of China's young labour movement. ² However, Pannekoek also described in "THE WORKERS' COUNCILS" the importance of further capitalist development in China (and India) for the world economy, a situation that has now become reality.

"So capitalism is the great revolutionizing power, subverting old conditions everywhere and changing the aspect of the earth. Ever new millions of people from their secluded, self-sufficient home production that reproduced itself during long centuries without notable change, are drawn into the whirl of world commerce. (...) So they are driven on, revolutionizing ever wider domains. But the earth is a globe, of limited extent. The discovery of its finite size accompanied the rise of capitalism four centuries ago, the realization of its finite size now marks the end of capitalism. The population to be subjected is limited. The hundreds of millions crowding the fertile plains of China and India once drawn within the confines of capitalism, its chief work is accomplished. (...) Then its further expansion is checked. Not as a sudden impediment, but gradually, as a growing difficulty of selling products and investing capital. Then the pace of development slackens, production slows up, unemployment waxes a sneaking disease. Then the mutual fight of the capitalists for world domination becomes fiercer, with new world wars impending." ³

When Pannekoek discusses the opening of China to the world, in a certain sense he just repeats what Marx and Engels already wrote in the Communist Manifesto in 1848. ⁴ And at first glance his

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- (1) Special thanks to Vico for his invaluable website www.aaap.be and who drew my attention to Anton Pannekoek's non-Eurocentric view on the Russian Revolution.
 - (2) About the defeat of the Shanghai Commune, the following articles are recommended : CDW, "China 1927: Last gasp of the world revolution." <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/2007/china-march-1927>; Damiano Signorini, "China 1925-1927." <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2009-04-21/china-1925-1927>.
 - (3) P. Aartsz (Anton Pannekoek), "WORKERS' COUNCILS" Melbourne 1950. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1947/workers-councils.htm#h30-05.pdf>.
 - (4) "The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate, (...) And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented." <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>

theory of crisis looks exactly like Rosa Luxemburg's imperialism theory of crisis. However, there are two differences with Marx and Luxemburg, which are of great importance for understanding the current situation. First, Pannekoek pointed at the role of migrant labour, i.e. the integration of rural labour in capitalist production, already mentioned above. Secondly he underlined even more than Marx and Luxemburg that the proletarian revolution is not a mechanical result of the crisis of capitalism, and he developed a theory of the development of the working class consciousness. Both points will be elaborated in the following, points that have been developed before in Chuǎng's article "NO WAY FORWARD AND NO WAY BACK: CHINA IN THE ERA OF RIOTS." ⁵

6.1. Labour Migration and Crisis

Already in 1899, in "REFORM OR REVOLUTION?" ⁶ Rosa Luxemburg defends the cyclical nature of capitalist crises against Bernstein, who wants to prove that capitalist development does not lead towards a general 'Krach'. According to Luxemburg, Bernstein thereby not only rejects a certain form of the collapse of capitalism, but the decline itself. With 'Krach' Bernstein refers to the image, generally accepted in Social Democracy, of a collapse of capitalism, automatically followed by the transition to socialism. Luxemburg rejects this mechanistic conception explicitly with reference to the preconditions of socialism, "*the increase in the level of organization and of class consciousness of the proletariat, which constitutes the active factor in the coming revolution.*"

In "THE ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL" Luxemburg in 1913, starting with a supposed error in Marx' schemes for enlarged reproduction of capital, develops her theory of the necessity of conquest of extra capitalist markets. At the time that accumulation would stagnate in the absence of new markets, the last, imperialist stage would dawn as "*the final period of the historical career of capital.*" ⁷ However, Luxemburg was careful to add "*This does not imply that this end has to be reached pedantically. Just the trend towards the end of capitalist development manifests itself in forms which make the final phase of capitalism a period of catastrophes.*" ⁸ And this: "... will make necessary the rebellion of the international working class against the rule of capital even before it is pushed economically to its natural self-created border." ⁹

Pannekoek defends the same points. Firstly, the view that capitalism is characterized by worsening cyclical crises and the necessity of expanding the markets. Secondly, the view that only a conscious and organized working class can accomplish the proletarian revolution. However, precisely because of the latter necessity, Pannekoek emphatically rejects the "*radical doctrine of collapse, stating that the chronic crisis will render impossible capitalist production.*" ¹⁰ He criticizes Luxemburg's theory that imperialism is an economic need, understood as "*an absolute, as it were mechanical necessity, an iron law of capitalist reproduction, which forces the bourgeoisie to enter the road of imperialism.*" ¹¹

(5) **Chuǎng Journal** No. 1. <http://www.chuangcn.org/journal> .

(6) Rosa Luxemburg, "REFORM OR REVOLUTION?" <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/>.

(7) All quotes translated from German: Rosa Luxemburg, "DIE AKKUMULATION DES KAPITALS", Gesammelte Werke Bd. 5, Berlin, 1974, p. 364. Web resources, in German: http://www.mlwerke.de/lu/lu05/lu05_342.htm; in English: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/ch07.htm>.

(8) Idem, p. 391/392.

(9) Idem, p. 410/411.

(10) Anton Pannekoek, "DE ECONOMISCHE NOODZAKELIJKHEID VAN HET IMPERIALISME" deel V, p. 280. <http://aaap.be/Pdf/Nieuwe-Tijd/Pannekoek-nl-NT-1916-De-Economische-Noodzakelijkheid-Van-Het-Imperialisme.pdf> . In this article, never translated from Dutch language, Pannekoek extensively develops his position.

(11) Idem p. 273.

Pannekoek declares Luxemburg's idea of the fundamental cause of the crises to be incorrect, namely the breakdown in the relationship between sector I of the means of production and sector II of the means of consumption. Theoretically - he demonstrates - the sector (or department) of production of the means of production and that of the means of consumption are always in balance with each other. According to Pannekoek, in reality there are always *imbalances*, but that's not Luxemburg's argument.

Luxemburg's second argument for the economic necessity of imperialism is a practical one: to generate more production resources, just to keep more workers on the job, seems nonsensical to her ¹². Pannekoek rejects this practical argument as well, by saying that Luxemburg overlooks the drive for profit and the accumulation of capital as an incentive for entrepreneurs. Pannekoek has shown now that a capitalist society can exist without need for buyers or markets outside capitalism. According to Pannekoek, the actual limit to capitalist production is of a different nature:

“Of course it is thereby assumed that the material conditions for expansion of production do exist. Raw materials must be available in nature in so unlimited quantity, that no shortages may arise, which would cause further expansion to become impossible; and there must be a reservoir of people, sufficient enough not to run into a deficit in the increasingly expanding number of workers needed for production. It also goes without saying that a capitalist society, which already includes all people, cannot expand. Theoretically, this requires that capitalism grows within a much larger world of men, from which the necessary workers can be taken, who worked before in production-for-personal-use and had nothing to do with capitalism. These men become incorporated in the circuit, as producers and consumers at the same time.”

¹³

According to Pannekoek, capitalism in reality is mixed with, and surrounded by a wide border with simple commodity production dominated by trade and agriculture, and with which capitalism maintains a commercial relationship (generally raw materials are exchanged for industrial consumables). These elements can be incorporated into theoretically balanced reproduction schemes, as Pannekoek had already demonstrated in 1913 in *Die Neue Zeit*. ¹⁴ In that context Pannekoek emphasizes the importance of external markets and labour migration – now particularly relevant in both China and in Europe and the US:

“Because the expansion of production is initiated by capital, because the accumulation of capital is the driving force and determines the rate of growth, these conditions amount to the following:

1. Sufficient growth of the proletariat must be ensured, so when the influx from the other layers is insufficient, it is promoted by immigration;
2. More and more resources are tapped for the supply of raw materials, and more and more markets are opened to capitalist products. However, since the first condition, the trade in raw materials, demands low-effort, while the second condition, the sale of its products is more difficult for each individual capitalist, this need for continued expansion of the area adjacent to capitalism, comes to consciousness of the capitalists as the problem of creating more and new markets.

This ever expanding of commodity production at the expense of the economy based on exchange in kind, the inclusion of more and more people and nations in the whole of the interconnected world production, this economic expansion is necessary for capitalism and therefore dominates capitalist politics.” ¹⁵

(12) Luxemburg, according to Pannekoek, idem, p. 272. See as well: Rosa Luxemburg, “DIE AKKUMULATION DES KAPITALS”, Gesammelte Werke Bd. 5, Berlin, 1974, p. 102. In German: http://www.mlwerke.de/lu/lu05/lu05_091.htm. In English: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/ch07.htm>.

(13) Anton Pannekoek, Idem p. 274.

(14) Anton Pannekoek, “THEORETISCHES ZUR URSACHE DER KRISEN”, 1913. <http://www.aap.be/Pdf/Neue-Zeit/Pannekoek-de-NZ-1913-Theoretisches-Zur-Ursachen-Der-Krisen.pdf> .

(15) Idem, §3.

According to Pannekoek, this desire for expansion - imperialism - exists in the most powerful part of the bourgeoisie, which is involved in the production of means of production. The theory Pannekoek developed in this way, describes imperialism as an ideological, social, political and economic process, with particular emphasis on its global and unifying character. This brought his attention to the possibility that a series of anti-colonial revolutions in Africa and Asia “*could give the signal to the European proletariat for their freedom struggle.*” And: “*The political revolution in Asia, the uprising in India, the rebellion within the Arab world, are imposing a decisive obstacle to the expansion of capitalism in Europe. [...] Bloody clashes are becoming more and more inevitable. There is a link between the Asian wars of independence and colonialism and the World War between European nations.*” Gerber, who gives these quotes, rightly notes that Pannekoek was one of the first to point out the importance of national liberation movements, but that his position on the national question prevented him to develop this perspective.¹⁶ Indeed Pannekoek rejected national liberation - like Rosa Luxemburg.¹⁷ Maybe not for Gerber, but according to Pannekoek nationalism is the most dangerous of bourgeois ideologies because it not only derives its force from the past - such as religion - but from the economic foundations of society itself. Nationalism leads the proletariat away from its own class goals, divides it into different nationalities and weakens class consciousness by xenophobia.¹⁸

In 1914, shortly after the outbreak of World War Pannekoek applies his theory to imperialism in “THE DOWNFALL OF THE INTERNATIONAL.” In this article he emphasized the global nature of capitalism and the labour movement:

“Favoured by the period of unparalleled prosperity that began in 1894 in Germany and spread out over the other nations, interrupted only by short crises, capitalism had taken possession of the earth. It revolutionized every continent, it broke down the rigid immobility of immense empires that had resisted change for thousands of years, it seized the treasures of the world, it exploited men of every race and colour. And everywhere the Socialist spirit, hatred against capital, took root in the minds of the exploited workers, often combined with the aspiration for national freedom. Socialist organizations arose in China and in New Zealand, in Johannesburg and Honolulu, in Alaska and Arabia. Capitalism and Socialism were flooding the whole earth.

More important still were the internal upheavals. Capital had won complete mastery over the industrial and political life of the nations. All classes, even those which were apparently independent — farmers and the small business men — became its servants; but in the same measure ever greater masses of men became its foes. Gigantic factories filled with the latest machinery put millions of workers into the power of a few magnates. Organization growing steadily more perfect took the place of anarchistic competition. The first Trusts twenty-five years ago were but the weak beginnings of that concentration of capitalistic power which now placed the whole industrial life and the treasures of the earth into the hands of a few hundred kings of production.”¹⁹

In 1920 Pannekoek would apply this analysis to the Russian revolution, which still remained isolated, in following characterization:

“The Russian revolution is the beginning of the great revolt by Asia against the Western European capital concentrated in England. As a rule, we in Western Europe only consider the effects which it has here, where the advanced theoretical development of the Russian revolutionaries has made them the teachers

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- (16) John Gerber, “ANTON PANNEKOEK AND THE SOCIALISM OF WORKERS’ SELF-EMANCIPATION, 1873-1960”, ISBN 0-7923-0274-5, p. 102.
- (17) In Russian Social Democracy Luxemburg opposed Lenin’s position on the ‘Right of the nations to self-determination’. In the interior policy of the Soviet Union this ‘right’ only existed as long as it suited the Bolsheviks. In the foreign policy and that of the subordinate Comintern this ‘right’ was used to subordinate the emerging workers’ movement, specially in Asia, to the formation of fronts with bourgeois parties, like the Kuomintang in China, because in the latter country ‘bourgeois revolutions’ would be on the agenda of history. See also note 2.
- (18) Anton Pannekoek, “CLASS STRUGGLE AND NATION”, 1912.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1912/nation.htm>
- (19) Anton Pannekoek, “THE DOWNFALL OF THE INTERNATIONAL” in *The New Review*, November 1914.
<http://aaap.be/Pdf/Anton-Pannekoek/Pannekoek-en-1914-NR-Downfall-Of-The-International.pdf> .

of the proletariat as it reaches towards communism. But its workings in the East are more important still; and Asian questions therefore influence the policies of the soviet republic almost more than European questions. The call for freedom and for the self-determination of all peoples and for struggle against European capital throughout Asia is going out from Moscow, where delegations from Asiatic tribes are arriving one after another. ²⁰ (...)

The interests of Asia are in essence the interests of the human race. Eight hundred million people live in Russia, China and India, in the Siberia-Russian plain and the fertile valleys of the Ganges and the Yangtze Kiang, more than half the population of the earth and almost three times as many as in the part of Europe under capitalist domination. And the seeds of revolution have appeared everywhere, besides Russia; on the one hand, powerful strike-movements flaring up where industrial proletarians are huddled together, as in Bombay and Hangchow; on the other, nationalist movements under the leadership of the rising national intelligentsia. As far as can be judged from the reticent English press, the world war was a powerful stimulus to national movements, but then suppressed them forcefully, while industry is in such an upsurge that gold is flowing in torrents from America to East Asia. When the wave of economic crisis hits these countries – it seems to have overtaken Japan already – new struggles can be expected. The question may be raised as to whether purely nationalist movements seeking a national capitalist order in Asia should be supported, since they will be hostile to their own proletarian liberation movements; but development will clearly not take this course. In the past the rising intelligentsia has orientated itself in terms of European nationalism and, as the ideologues of the developing indigenous bourgeoisie, has advocated a national bourgeois government on a Western model. But this idea is paling with the decline of Europe, and they will doubtlessly come strongly under the intellectual sway of Russian Bolshevism and find in it the means to fuse with the proletarian strike-movements and uprisings. Thus, the national liberation movements of Asia will perhaps adopt a communist world view and a communist programme on the firm material ground of the workers' and peasants' class struggle against the barbaric oppression of world capital sooner than external appearances might lead us to believe.

The fact that these peoples are predominantly agrarian need be no more of an obstacle than it was in Russia : communist communities ²¹ will not consist of tightly-packed huddles of factory towns, for the capitalist division between industrial and agricultural nations will cease to exist; agriculture will have to take up a great deal of space within them. The predominant agricultural character will nevertheless render the revolution more difficult, since the mental disposition is less favourable under such conditions. Doubtless a prolonged period of intellectual and political upheaval will also be necessary in these countries. The difficulties here are different from those in Europe, less of an active than of a passive nature: they lie less in the strength of the resistance than in the slow pace at which activity is awakening, not in overcoming internal chaos, but in developing the unity to drive out the foreign exploiter. We will not go into the particulars of these difficulties here – the religious and national fragmentation of India, the petty-bourgeois character of China. However, the political and economic forms in continuous development, the central problem which must first be overcome is to destroy the hegemony of European and American capital.

(...) This world revolution is not seen in its full universal significance if considered only from the Western European perspective. Russia not only forms the eastern part of Europe, it is much more the western part of Asia, and not only in a geographical, but also in a politico-economic sense.” ²²

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- (20) *This is the basis of the stand taken by Lenin in 1916 at the time of Zimmerwald against Radek, who was representing the view of Western European communists. The latter insisted that the slogan of the right of all peoples to self-determination, which the social patriots had taken up along with Wilson, was merely a deception, since this right can only ever be an appearance and illusion under imperialism, and that we should therefore oppose this slogan. Lenin saw in this standpoint the tendency of Western European socialists to reject the Asiatic peoples' wars of national liberation, thus avoiding radical struggle against the colonial policies of their governments. [Pannekoek's note].*
- (21) Pannekoek seems to refer to 'village communism', that he mentions twice in this text and that is part of 'oriental despotism', as Marx referred to the dominant mode of production in Russia and Asia. See also Rudi Dutschke: *VERSUCH, LENIN AUF DIE FÜSSE ZU STELLEN. ÜBER DEN HALBASIASISCHEN UND DEN WESTEUROPÄISCHEN WEG ZUM SOZIALISMUS. LENIN, LUKÁCS UND DIE DRITTE INTERNATIONALE* (1974). Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin 1984, ISBN 3-8031-3518-4.
- (22) Anton Pannekoek, "WORLD REVOLUTION AND COMMUNIST TACTICS", 1920. <http://aaap.be/Pages/Pannekoek-en-1920-World-Revolution-Tactics.html> .

The history of the Commune of Shanghai in 1927 has shown that Pannekoek seriously underestimated the risks of supporting nationalist movements. After the crushing of the workers' movement by the Kuomintang, the "revolution" in China took a predominantly agricultural character and, although in 1949 it ultimately gained victory, this was not the victory of communism. We should note that Pannekoek thought that communism in Asia is not possible without "*destroying the rule of the Euro-American capital.*"

But while the authors of "NO WAY FORWARD AND NO WAY BACK" seem to say that the result of the victory of Mao's peasant army did not bring communism, what about their suggestion that during the Mao era existed a "*chaotic inconsistent socialism*" in the Peoples' Republic of China, which was lost in 1989 with the Tiananmen riots? The authors are clearly not Maoists; see their doubts on or even rejection of "*awareness*" and "*cultural agitation*" as futile attempts to push the development towards communism, or even to prevent the slide into capitalism. But what about the future, when this supposed "*socialism*" of the past, in fact was no socialism?

To answer this question, we must look more closely at the renewal of the terms socialism and communism which Lenin introduced in "THE STATE AND REVOLUTION" and that Stalin completed with "*socialism in one country.*"

6.2. Communism, Crisis and Consciousness

The terms communism and socialism refer to a form of society as well as to a labour movement that pursues this society and to the ideas of that movement. The left-wing groups that around the First World War broke with Social Democracy for its support to the war, henceforth called themselves communists in order to be better distinguished from the formerly socialist Social Democracy. The Russian Bolsheviks were the first to consciously assume the same name as the "**Communist League**" of Marx and Engels, who played a role in the European revolutions of 1848 and had laid down its program in the "COMMUNIST MANIFESTO."

The words 'communism' and 'socialism' were synonyms referring to the same concept of a classless society without money and state until Lenin in "THE STATE AND REVOLUTION" brought a change in definition. In this work, written during August - September 1917, Lenin tried to arrive at a better understanding of the upcoming struggle for power in Russia and the period that would follow on what became known as the October Revolution. The period after the revolution is interpreted by Lenin as a transitional period from capitalism to completed communism. In this transition period, Lenin distinguishes two phases, socialism as its lower phase in which a state and scarcity would still exist, and communism as the higher phase.

The ideas Lenin develops in "THE STATE AND REVOLUTION" are related to his altered conception of the nature of the revolution in Russia. From 1917 on he is on the same position as Trotsky, that of a socialist dictatorship in Russia awaiting the help of proletarian revolutions in Europe. Despite all the seemingly subtle differences in views between different fractions of the Russian Social Democracy, they all compare Russia's position with regards to Central and Western Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, to that of the Germany of 1848 with regards to Western Europe. But the conclusions from this historical comparison lead to important differences in political positions. According to Lenin and Trotsky the Russian bourgeoisie of 1905 and 1917, just like the German bourgeoisie of 1848/1850, was too weak - and too afraid of its own proletariat - to consistently execute the impending bourgeois revolution. Therefore, this task went to the workers' party (which erroneously was seen as identical to the class as a whole) which later, with help of the workers in the rest of Europe,

was to carry out the world revolution, which alone is capable of entering the road to Communism (or Socialism).

Despite the theoretical efforts within the left wing of international Social-Democracy to understand the new stage in the development of capitalism as a global turning point in the relations of production – particularly Lenin's "IMPERIALISM, THE HIGHEST STAGE OF CAPITALISM", Luxemburg's "THE ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL" and Pannekoek's "THE ECONOMIC NECESSITY OF IMPERIALISM" – no one arrived at the idea that the period of the bourgeois revolution – a phenomenon in the superstructure of society – wasn't on the historical agenda any more in any place in the world. Until this day, in the name of Marxism, Stalinist, Maoist, Trotskyist and Bordigist organizations justify strategies of the formation of fronts with the bourgeoisie by an imaginary necessity of bourgeois revolutions and national liberation that in reality are totally outdated. These practices go hand in hand with the denial of the possibility of a communist awareness in the working class and admiration of state capitalism. In the minds of these ideologues, the latter is opposed to 'private capitalism', despite the fact that in it wage labour persists and the workers remain separated from the means of production, which confront them now as one capital united through the state.

Communism was understood by Marx and Engels, and by Lenin and Trotsky as well, as a society that can only exist on a world level.²³ Stalin breaks with this central concept of historical materialism when he speaks of the Soviet Union as "socialism in one country" and in 1926 both the party and the Comintern officially replaced their view of the extension of the world revolution – which for a long time already only existed on paper – by what they already for some time had put into practice: the defence of the Soviet Union. Trotsky, who clung to the world revolution, thought that with state capitalism in Russia, the foundations of socialism existed and, after the murder of Trotsky by order of Stalin, the Trotskyists concluded from this idea to the defence of the 'bureaucratized workers' state' in World War II by participating in the Allied camp. In the Netherlands only few, including **Sneevliet** ("Maring") and the **GIC** (Groups of International Communists), and outside the Netherlands specifically the **Italian Communist Left**, held on to the position of proletarian internationalism against each and every imperialism.

The irony of history is that, as the Bolsheviks attempted to make the working class execute a bourgeois revolution along the lines of 1848, they in reality became the executors of the global trend towards state capitalism. Thus they changed from the internationalist vanguard that they had been in the struggle of the working class against World War I into the gravediggers of the world proletarian movement that began in Russia in 1917 and ended with the defeat of the Chinese workers in 1927. Yes, the workers in Central and Western Europe could have saved the Russian Revolution, but not with the Bolshevik tactics the Comintern imposed on them – tactics based on a supposed bourgeois revolution, accomplished by a barely conscious working class under the leadership of a party that substituted itself for this class. This also raises the question whether the character of the Russian Revolution could have been saved by the workers of Europe, given the fact that the power of the workers' councils soon after October eclipsed behind the increasing power of the state.

Returning to "THE STATE AND REVOLUTION", it is unfortunate that Anton Pannekoek has not fulfilled his promise to write a review of this book.²⁴ In 1932, however, an article appeared in a revue close to

(23) See for Lenin's internationalism in the period he considered the situation in Russia not yet ripe for a socialist revolution for instance the last paragraph of "WHAT THE 'FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE' ARE AND HOW THEY FIGHT THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATS". <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1894/friends/08.htm#v01zz99h-271-GUESS> .

(24) On an inset at the first issue of 1919 of "**De Nieuwe Tijd**" (dated December 1918), in which the editorial board and the publisher announce the articles planned for the year 1919 to its readers. See: <http://aaap.be/Pdf/Nieuwe-Tijd/Pannekoek-nl-NT-1919-Inlegvel.pdf>.

his position, the “**Persdienst van de Groep(en) van Internationale Communisten**”, in which “THE STATE AND REVOLUTION” is subjected to criticism from the perspective of council communism.

The article “MARXISM AND STATE COMMUNISM” raises the question “*whether transfer of the means of production to the state by the victorious working class, as reflected in Bolshevik theory and practice, is the way to communism.*”²⁵

The answer to this question provided by the GIC is ‘no’. Following Marx and Engels, it adopted the view that after the revolution the “association of free and equal producers” takes control of the means of production. In “FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNIST PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION”²⁶, the GIC elaborated this position into a critique of the views of state capitalist planning as developed by reformism and taken over by the Bolsheviks in power. Instead, the GIC gave the broad outlines of a system in which the workers’ councils manage production and distribution. In doing so, a victorious working class can also apply the dictatorship of the proletariat through the councils in the economic domain. And, most importantly, by understanding the operation of production and distribution, it can see the limitations of “*freedom*” and “*equality*” that in essence are still bourgeois, and thereby can ensure a further development towards communism in which giving and taking according to the needs and the individually unique self-development, are paramount.

In “FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES ...” the social average working hour plays the role of accounting unit and – for the time being – serves as criterion for the distribution of the wealth produced. The latter has led to criticisms, to which we unfortunately cannot reply within the scope of this text.²⁷

Our question here is whether there was socialism in China in the period before the Tiananmen riots of 1989. If we follow the GIC in its criticism of Lenin, we can at most speak of state socialism. We prefer the much clearer term state capitalism. Engels has warned clearly against the tendency towards state capitalism that appeared at the end of the 19th Century. The GIC shows in “MARXISM AND STATE COMMUNISM” that Engels in his “ANTI-DÜHRING” declares that the means of production will be state property and that for this reason Lenin bases his theory on this statement. This fragment can also be found in Engels’ “THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALISM: UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC” (separate reissue of a part of the “ANTI-DÜHRING”). Engels notes in the Preface to its German edition of 1891 that he has added significant text by the end of Part III about the “*now become important new form of production of the Trusts.*”²⁸ “*In this*”, so Engels warns “*the workers remain wage-workers – proletarians.*”²⁹

(25) GIC, “MARXISM AND STATE COMMUNISM. THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE”. <http://www.aaap.be/Pages/Transition-en-Marxism-And-State-Communism-1932.html>. Pannekoek was not a member of the GIC, but maintained intensive contact by intermediate of Henk Canne Meijer and he contributed regularly with articles to the **Persdienst** (‘Press service’).

(26) See for this and related texts: <http://aaap.be/Pages/Theme-Period-of-transition.html>.

(27) The critics from the Bordigist camp are understandable. With the association of free and equal producers their aimed dictatorship of the party is prevented. As an alternative to management by this association, they advocate planning of goods and services in quantities, following Bordiga who took Bolshevik ‘War communism’ – much admired by Bordiga – as an example and starting point. The political adventurer Dauvé (“Barrot”), followed by the ‘*Communisation*’ tendency, elaborates this to deny any need for a period of transition. In doing so they get around the problems of this period which gives themselves an aura of ‘radicalism’. Read David Adam’s important refutation of the reproach of the GIC’s supposed Proudhonism: <http://aaap.be/Pages/Theme-Period-of-transition.html> For a biography of Dauvé see Bourrinet “UN SIÈCLE DE GAUCHE COMMUNISTE «ITALIENNE» (1915-2015) (SUIVI D’UN) DICTIONNAIRE BIOGRAPHIQUE D’UN COURANT INTERNATIONALISTE” p. 264. <http://www.left-dis.nl/f/DictionnaireGCI.pdf>.

(28) MEW Bd. 19, p. 523

(29) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/ch03.htm>.

The GIC shows that Lenin embraces state capitalism as being “*socialist*” by doing some research on the following quote from “THE STATE AND REVOLUTION”: “A witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the postal service an example of the socialist economic system. This is very true.”³⁰ The GIC indicates that in the view of the young social democracy the management and administration of production and distribution would accrue directly to the producers and consumers themselves and not take the detour of the state. The equation of state and society is only an invention of later years. However, in the struggle for “*social reform*”, this position was given up at about 1900 and “*nationalization*”, bringing several industries to the state or municipality, was increasingly suggested as a move toward socialism. The Russian Revolution went perfectly according to the programme of “*nationalization*” of industry. In Russia as well, those branches that were considered “*ripe*” for this purpose, were added to the central state apparatus. In 1917, producers began to expropriate the owners in different companies, to great discomfort of those who wanted to lead and manage the enterprises “*from above*”. The workers wanted to organize production on new bases according to communist rules. Instead the Communist Party issued guidelines, according to which the companies should unite into trusts, as to get them under single management. What could not be included in the central disposal plan was returned to the owners, as these companies were not yet “*ripe*”.

According to the GIC, Lenin was aware that the concentration of the entire production in the state meant a strengthening of state power and therefore was contrary to the idea of the withering away of the state. But according to the GIC it was not good intentions, but the situation in Russia itself, that developed the Leninist theory of state communism. The way to make the state increasingly stronger, firmer, was gradually dictated to those who disposed of Russian state power.³¹

Thus, when the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Vietnam, the Eastern European countries at the time of the Soviet bloc, are considered as “*socialist*” countries, this is only possible on the basis of an identification of state capitalism with socialism, that Lenin borrowed from reformism. Stalin disconnected this equivalence from the need for a world revolution. The idea of the proletariat as the executioner of the transition towards this “*socialism*” has been replaced by military conquest in the Second World War and by the subsequent establishment of state capitalism along the lines of the Soviet Union. The idea of the supposed superiority of this form of state capitalism has now clearly been proven wrong by the failure of almost all of these countries. China could only avoid this bankruptcy - for the sake of preserving the power of the CCP - by an overt integration into the neo-liberal world order and the international division of labour, taking the position of the ‘workshop of the world’. With the stagnation of economic growth and the increase in strikes and riots in China, world capitalism, after a century, starts to falter for the second time under war and threatening workers' struggles - as foreseen by Anton Pannekoek.

6.3. Reinventing Communism

The group **Chuǎng** has the merit to highlight the international significance of the developments in China. A revolt in the “*workshop of the world*”, because of the Pearl River Delta’s position in the international division of labour, will immediately manifest itself in jamming the global logistics of capitalism. Like the Russian Revolution in the past, a Chinese Revolution in our time will find a huge resonance among workers not only in China, but throughout the world. The huge concentrations of labour and production facilities, coupled with the high technological skills in the working class, make that any seizure of power by militant workers in China also can maintain itself longer

(30) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm>.

(31) <http://www.aap.be/Pages/Transition-en-Marxism-And-State-Communism-1932.html>.

than anywhere else in the world. Finally, for the few revolutionary elements in the West who persist in their trust in the revolutionary potential of the international working class, the texts of Chuǎng constitute an important source of inspiration as they show that in China migration and insecure employment contracts do not prevent, but even promote fierce class struggles.

Thereby Chuǎng is not afraid to self-consciously shatter several myths and fallacies of various present groups in the West naming themselves communist, from Keynesianism in Marxist clothing to advertising the combination of trade unions and social media.

However, seen from the standpoints of “*Western Marxism*” by Anton Pannekoek and the GIC some 70 to 100 years ago, Chuǎng also shows some neo- or post-modernist weaknesses that correspond to the theorization by groups in Europe and America of the weakening of workers' struggles in the former central capitalist countries under the pressure of neo-liberalism since the 1980s. We just mention the decline of the importance of the traditional working class by automation, robotics and outsourcing production to India and China, the shift to the service sector, privatization, attacks on the “*social wage*”, flexibility, increasing job insecurity, labour migration and, related to the latter – last but not least: xenophobia.

An important difference between our times and those in which Pannekoek was active, is the loss of Social Democratic and Communist parties as organizational and theoretical expressions of the struggle of the working class. Pannekoek experienced and analysed this process as participant of the labour movement ‘from within’. But today even the living memory of these organizations has disappeared. The implosion of the Soviet Union, in the eyes of wider masses, has blurred the image of the proletarian struggle, by which the so-called “*Workers' State*” would have come about, (despite how distorted this idea has been by Stalinism and the Cold War). This “*last hope*” - even though most workers did not want to live and work in it - has disappeared in the mists of a distant past. With this, another important reference point for the current revolutionary-minded elements is weakened. Only small groups and single individuals still refer to proletarian internationalist positions, to the history of the labour movement and apply historical materialism - as good and as bad as they can - as a method of analysis and struggle.

But that does not mean that history should be rejected in a post-modern way, because it would lead to “nothing.” Starting with a clean slate does not guarantee against repeating past mistakes. In this sense, a proletariat with no past, has no future. It is clear that a new generation will have to remake its own communism. Not as a dogma but as a method, and overall positions resulting from the application of historical materialism. This appropriation can only happen through a renewal in the light of current events. But that is something completely different from the rejection of the method and of any coherent set of views as ‘programmatic’, as suggested by academicism.

In the West – understandable given the deterioration of the workers' struggle since the 1980s – doubts are shed on the importance of the working class, its struggles, its ability to become conscious and on the validity of its theoretical expression, historical materialism or Marxism. In the academic world, leaving the positions of the working class is obviously facilitated. The most effective are those theorizations that follow the example of Stalinism in the 1930s, focussing on people who imagine that they are intellectuals and who hope that “imagination comes to power”. From the side of the disappointed “ultra-Leftists” we can see a movement towards academicism. Both movements express themselves and come together in awkward ‘dialectical’ formulations, the fabrication of new terms for old concepts and the construction of new concepts that tend to slide easily into meaningless abstractions. The Chuǎng texts are marked by this unnecessarily difficult language.

As regards the “(non-) subject” a new concept for the identification of the revolutionary class, this appears redundant if you give a glance at the excerpt from the “GERMAN IDEOLOGY” in which Marx and Engels show the result of their historical analysis of the working class, namely:

1) The emergence of a period of social revolution and of the working class “*which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness, which may, of course, arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this class.*”

2) The necessity of class struggles and their political character.

3) The communist revolution abolishes labour and transcends the rule of all classes with the classes themselves, “*because it is carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, is not recognised as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. within present society.*”

4) “*Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is, necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.*”³²

In the “COMMUNIST MANIFESTO” Marx and Engels present the same understanding of the working class, but this time not in terms of their theory of alienation and criticism of the Young Hegelians. Instead, they formulate in programmatic terms, focusing on the role of the proletariat and the communists in the revolutions of 1848. Later, the concept of the working class will take the form of formal and real subsumption under capital when Marx and Engels analyse economy; in their political analysis of the Paris Commune, it brings about the concept of the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and so on. But on how many terrains or historical periods the concept of the proletariat may be applied, according to the self-understanding of historical materialism, these formulations approach only aspects of the whole. This approach by theory is - to formulate it dialectically - just an abstract of “*concrete totality*”, of the comprehensive whole of experiences of acting and thinking of all the workers who were and will be, until this understanding enables the living to carry out the proletarian revolution, standing on the shoulders of past generations of proletarians, in being aware at a maximum, covering the smallest crevices and corners of the world of human existence.

By contrast, any restriction of the theory of the revolutionary working class to just one of the aspects of its ‘identity’, like that of ‘real subordination’, or ‘precariousness’ (job insecurity), or to just a part of the class, as for example the ‘new’ or ‘migrant’ part, the unemployed or just the working part, or to the consciousness derived from ‘heterodox peoples’ histories’ is nothing but a limitation of the self-consciousness of the proletariat. On the contrary, it is decisive to place all these partial experiences in the bigger picture that empowers the class to execute its self-emancipation successfully.

In his life, Anton Pannekoek has seen how the relative prosperity that followed in 1894 upon a prolonged slump, soothed class consciousness into sleep. Within Social Democracy the idea developed

(32) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm#d1>.

that through gradual reforms, increasing state capitalism, eventually, under the influence of the crisis, the proletariat – massively united in trade unions and the party – would obtain state power through elections. Against this mechanical and state capitalist conception of the transition to socialism, Pannekoek increasingly opposed the independent organization (factory organizations, general assemblies and councils, organizations of the unemployed) and the consciousness within the class – inspired as he was by the experiences of the international working class in its mass movements in and around the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and those in Germany between 1918 and 1923. In particular, the notion that capitalism with the First World War has entered the “*period of social revolution*” (Marx), contributed to the understanding that there is no place for ‘reformism’ and that the state could not tolerate any more permanent mass organizations of workers – like the trade unions and the workers’ parties once were. Put before the choice by the state to see their organizations destroyed, the party and unions bureaucrats chose the alternative, their preservation as part of the bourgeois state.

But with the integration of the former reformist organizations in the capitalist state, the struggle against the effects of the crisis is not over. In a certain sense, the crisis is the best ally of the working class, because it can give rise to awareness of the historical obsolescence of capitalism. But it would be a gross underestimation of the power of the capitalist class and its state, to believe that the crisis exhausts all possible means to divide the working class with temporary and vain concessions. Certainly if one believes at the same time that conflicts in other areas than that of wages, labour and benefits (like that of the environment or expropriations) by the same lack of room for bargaining under pressure of the crisis, could lead to a revolutionary situation as well. For over a century the reality of class struggle demonstrates that struggles take no revolutionary character when they lack at least consciousness on a mass scale of the need to face the attacks of the state and of eventually of defeating it. For example, the protracted crisis that began with the stock market crash of 1929, led to a profound defeat of the international working class, which – confused between the false choices between (Social) Democracy, Fascism and Stalinism – could not find back the road to fight for their own class goals.

The lack of struggles and therefore of proletarian consciousness on a mass scale is identical to the lack of a significant influence of minority groups who defend revolutionary positions on the base of a deeper understanding of the historical possibility of communism. However, only these same minorities are able to maintain themselves as small groups outside periods of open conflict - often in the deepest underground. These groups or cores cannot act as substitutes for the class or as its ‘thinking brain’, for instance to appease the class with convenient slogans. What these groups can do is to disseminate their insights into the development of the struggle, in a way that they play a role in the process of self-consciousness of the workers, from which they have emerged. When these groups – under the influence of prolonged open conflict with temporary mass meetings and councils, and by a process of merger of groups based on common positions, have grown to such an extent that they better be called ‘parties’, then these most conscious parts of the class will indeed serve as points of reference and as a guide to the struggle for the destruction of the state and the revolution of society into communism. An insurrectionist movement of workers in China, even if it would only temporarily succeed in recoiling the state, will mean a huge boost for the awakening of the working class worldwide.

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About Chuǎng

闯 **Chuǎng**: The image of a horse breaking through a gate. Meaning: To break free; To attack, charge; To break through, force one's way in or out; To act impetuously. 闯关 (chuǎngguān): to run a blockade. 闯座 (chuǎngzuò): to attend a feast without being invited.

Over the past three decades, China has transformed from an isolated state-planned economy into an integrated hub of capitalist production. Waves of new investment are reshaping and deepening China's contradictions, creating billionaires like Ma Yun while the millions below — those who farm, cook, clean, and assemble his electronic infrastructure — struggle to escape fates of endless gruelling work. But as China's wealthy feast ever more lavishly, the poor have begun to batter down the gates to the banquet hall. 闯 is the sudden movement when the gate is broken and the possibilities for a new world emerge beyond it.

闯 Chuǎng publishes a [journal](#) analysing the ongoing development of capitalism in China, its historical roots, and the revolts of those crushed beneath it. Chuǎng is also a [blog](#) chronicling these developments in shorter and more immediate form, and will publish translations, reports, and comments on Chinese news of interest to those who want to break beyond the bounds of the slaughterhouse called capitalism.

To contact Chuǎng, send your e-mail to: chuangcn@riseup.net.

More materials on China, as well as similar projects to Chuǎng's, can be found on its [resources](#) page.

About *Arbeidersstemmen*

'**Arbeidersstemmen**' consists of a [website](#) and a [blog](#) with the aim of advancing the autonomous workers' struggle, led by the following three basic positions:

- for a humans world, void of war, terror, capital or state;
- the workers don't have a fatherland
- all power to the workers' councils

More elaborate positions can be found in the [ten theses on the coming revolution](#).

In its **web blog** 'Arbeidersstemmen' informs about:

- current workers' struggles;
- the social, economic and political context of the class struggle.

The adoption of texts on the blog does not imply they fully agree with the points of departure of 'Arbeidersstemmen'. If necessary this will be indicated in an introduction or a postscript.

On the **website** theoretical and historical texts are published in order to advance the comprehension of current events.

In its struggle to defend its living conditions, the working class changes itself from an exploited class in a revolutionary class that is capable of revolutionizing society. The corresponding development of proletarian consciousness manifests itself by a process of individual reflection and collective discussion, in which diverging and changing positions emerge. 'Arbeidersstemmen' has a role to play in departing from the historical positions of the proletarian internationalist current in the workers' movement known in the Netherlands and Belgium as council communism.

'Arbeidersstemmen' is open for discussion with interested individuals with different points of view and who are looking for clarification with an open attitude. A partial cooperation with organisations sharing the three basic positions is possible as well.

To contact 'Arbeidersstemmen', send your e-mail to: FredoCorvo@gmail.com.