

the international activities of political parties. That it is unavoidably history from above diminishes neither its value nor Milner's achievement.

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GERBER, JOHN. *Anton Pannekoek and the Socialism of Workers' Self-Emancipation 1873–1960*. [Studies in Social History, 10.] Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London; International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam 1989. xxv, 250 pp. Ill. D.fl. 130.00; \$ 76.00; £ 46.00.

Dormant memories of days gone by were reawakened when I was sent this book to read. For a short time in 1975, I corresponded with Gerber on scientific matters concerning Anton Pannekoek's intellectual development and socialist militancy. We had a friendly exchange of material, information and opinions. Our rapport came to an end when I stopped my research work for about six years. Then, in the early 1980s when I resumed my research, I had completely forgotten the interesting written exchange with my American friend. I am now moved to discover that Gerber has also published a fine political biography of Pannekoek, and I am delighted to write this review. My own work, entitled *Scienza e socialismo. Anton Pannekoek 1873–1969*, was published in Italian in 1987 (see *International Review of Social History*, XXXIII (1988), p. 98).

I believe that Gerber and I both began by basing our work on the influence that Pannekoek's ideas had on some extreme left-wing movements towards the end of the 1960s, during the student demonstrations. Then, independently of each other, the nucleus was further developed and we were led to an appreciation of the doctrines of a thinker who has been almost totally forgotten today. Although Gerber's book only came to light in 1989, it was probably completed much earlier, since it does not consider important literature published after 1982 nor, to my dismay, my own earlier contributions. *Habent sua fata libelli*: unfortunately, this is often the fate of papers which find their publisher too late, when the author has come to terms with himself and gone on to deal with new subjects.

Gerber correctly views Anton Pannekoek's ideology and political career in the light of his concept of socialism, above all understood to be the "self-emancipation of the working class", and he reflects on its evolution from the historical-political conditions at that time and the critical arguments of Marxist theory. He gives detailed explanations of the way in which Pannekoek's socialist conscience developed within the Marxist milieu of the SDAP and the magazine *De Nieuwe Tijd*; his experiences in Germany with Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg; his emergence as theorist of the radical left, firstly Social Democratic and later Communist, at the time of the First World War and the revolutions; his contention with Lenin; his other exclusively intellectual position as "mentor" of the Dutch council-communist groups between the two world wars and after the Second World War. Serious, well-documented research has been carried out on original sources and important literature, despite the chronological limitations mentioned earlier. Having said this, I would also add that the book does perhaps give a politically one-dimensional and tendentially narrow impression of Pannekoek, while in fact he endeavoured to be

not only a political thinker but a natural scientist and epistemologist. Even in later life, he continued to study the problems of natural and human evolution and the interpretation of scientific-natural law in relation to the neo-positivist developments supported by the Vienna Circle. Since the Pannekoekian approach to politics and science was philosophically uniform, further elaboration on his scientific ideas in general would not have gone amiss. For example, and from a social scientist's point of view, during the 1930s he was involved in some interesting discussions with Hans Reichenbach on the existence of natural law.

Pannekoek's philosophy and political life drew their *raison d'être* from a fundamental choice: his rejection of the unjust and immoral consequences of social division into two classes. A tiny, privileged minority made up the ruling, dominating, exploiting class, while the vast, productive majority of the population represented the servile, dominated, exploited class. Gerber noted (p. 6) that this observation was not handed down to Pannekoek through his family and social circumstances, but was the result of an awareness and inner conflict of a moral, philosophical and eventually political nature. This crisis led Pannekoek to support an alternative ideal to that of the liberal-progressives and to follow a revolutionary idea that was capable of resolving the existing social contradictions and contained two basic requirements: to be both scientific and radical. For many years prior to 1911, he believed the just solution to be the Kautskyan orthodox *version* of Marxist socialism, philosophically strengthened by the work of J. Dietzgen. He was late in realizing his mistake. With regard to Kautskyism in Pannekoek's philosophy during his "German" period, there is a slight difference of opinion on this point between Gerber and myself. In my opinion, even though he was one of the first to begin voicing criticism of the bourgeois State and to theorize the necessity for mass revolutionary action, Pannekoek only came to realize this fully at the time of the First World War, by which time legalism, nationalism and statism has a considerable influence within the SPD, the "Marxist" party *par excellence* of the Second International. The collapse of international socialism after the First World War made no change to Pannekoek's general approach to the fundamental principles of the political problem as regards the newly acquired ideas following the disagreement with Kautsky. He thought that if Social-Democratic parties had failed, the time had come to establish a purer Marxist model, livelier party organizations that were more in keeping with their principal function of enlightenment and, above all, with the direct intervention of the proletariat instead of the parliamentary and unionist delegation which, in short, were considered to be rife with opportunism and corruption. New means of ensuring the power of the proletariat had to be created, after having destroyed those of the bourgeois government. The struggle for emancipation would have a trial-like quality, where victory and defeat would contribute to the building of a workable, revolutionary idea, positive awareness of the working class as producers, self-controlled and self-governing in the historic-cultural conditions of the developed, capitalist West. At that point, however, and before he reached the more visible awareness of his later remarks, as Gerber points out (pp. 198, 202), Pannekoek moved away from the Marxist approach and employed, if confusedly, an ideology half-way between Marxism and anarchic socialist concepts. In the years between the two world wars, and even more so after the Second World War, Pannekoek's social and political ideas attempted to harmonize old Marxist

development with the deeply felt need for self-determination in the working class, which was losing its political face and gaining an ethical-social aspect. This created his rarely stated necessity to turn to anarchic philosophy, from Owen to Bakunin, even if he never ceased to define himself as a Marxist. As Gerber quite rightly points out (p. 197), he began to “rethink” Marxism itself. Although evasive and not without contradictions, this attitude deserves closer inspection because of its philosophical and political implications.

Pannekoek understood Marxism to be a historical-materialist concept with two unwavering poles: firstly, as “the” dialectic-scientific relativistic method *par excellence*, and secondly as “the” true theory of contemporary industrial society. In this sense, this was not in his opinion indivisibly linked to Social-Democratic and communist ideologies. These were merely expressions of the radical-democratic factions of the progressive bourgeoisie, of different countries at various stages of socio-economic development, who had exploited the political power of the working class in order to achieve their own aims. Consequently, the working class should reject these ideologies and independently try to create its own organizational structure and political beliefs on which to build their proposed social model where culture, society, politics and production would be unified and be in open opposition to the bourgeois model.

This rigid attitude, not without its orthodox prejudice and scientism, isolated Pannekoek from all the contemporary political and intellectual trends with which he could perhaps have nurtured fruitful links. For example, on the political front he showed little perceptive awareness of a phenomenon of epoch-making impact: the rise of Nazism. On the intellectual front, he stifled the development of any changes in his philosophy. This dogmatic attitude, which, for a philosophic relativist like him was a contradiction in terms, often clouded Pannekoek’s vision of events and of the real trends in culture, politics and society. It paralysed his ability to establish a critical but at the same time flexible and understanding rapport with these events and trends. He had no understanding of the total transformation that began to take place during the 1930s in the economy and the structure of social classes. Nor did he perceive the importance of Keynesian ideas for market reform. Although his last, and unpublished, thoughts on the “future of civilization” were abundant in valuable ideas, they are permeated with his oppressive pessimism, the product of his extreme isolation.

Because of restricted space, my comments may seem somewhat sketchy. However, Pannekoek’s achievement as an innovator within Marxist socialism should not be underestimated, as Gerber has clearly shown in his book. He was a theoretician of the classless society, founded on liberty and equality for the producers. In short, he believed in council self-management. For this reason, and because of the faith shown in man’s ability to use science as the means to build relative certainties in order to overcome the most difficult tests, and because of his faith in the establishment of a more human and just social system, Pannekoek’s work has contributed to a turn to self-criticism in socialist philosophy.

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