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Book review

Questions without Answers: The Dutch and German Communist Left

- Reviews section -

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A Review of The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900-1968): 'Neither Lenin nor Trotsky nor Stalin! All Workers Must Think for Themselves!' (Historical Materialism Book Series, Leiden: Brill, 2017) by Philippe Bourrinet

As a movement the Dutch and German Communist Left took shape in the first years after the October Revolution, and largely disappeared after the defeat of the socialist revolution in Germany. Today it is mainly remembered as a target of Lenin's polemic in *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder* (1920), and its specific political ideas often disappear when lumped together with other movements as 'ultra-left'.

In *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900–1968): 'Neither Lenin nor Trotsky nor Stalin! All Workers Must Think for Themselves!'*, Philippe Bourrinet discusses the history of this movement, from its roots in the Dutch and German revolutionary Left before and during the First World War to its evolution into council communism after the Russian and German revolutions. Especially in German-language works, various aspects of the movement have already been discussed and some of the writings of its theorists, such as part of the writings of Dutch Marxist Anton Pannekoek (the 'Karl Horner' attacked in *Left-Wing Communism*) have appeared in English. [\[1\]](#) But *The Dutch and German Communist Left* is the most extensive study of this movement to date.

The Birth of the Communist Left

The Communist Left can only be understood as a product of a specific historical moment: after the first setbacks of the Russian and German revolutions, but before the final defeat of the socialist revolution in Western Europe. Its political positions were a reaction to strategies developed in the Communist International after the setbacks for the revolutionary movement in Western Europe. In particular, the Communist Left opposed the orientation towards building united fronts adopted at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921.

An important theme in these discussions was the question of what kind of party was needed. In the words of one of the most important theorists of the Communist Left, Dutch poet Herman Gorter, the Communist Left proposed to form 'very firm, very clear, and very strong (though at the outset perhaps quite small) parties, kernels'. Such 'kernels' had to be 'hard as steel, clear as glass'. [\[2\]](#) Those were Gorter's words in his Open Letter to Comrade Lenin. This response to Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism* was a founding document of the movement and a clear rejection of politics aimed at winning over parts of left-wing Social Democracy, such as the left wing of the German USPD.

Instead of mass movements, revolutionary politics had, according to Gorter, for the time being to consist of small elites. Instead of taking joint action with reformists, they should set an example to the rest of the working class through their actions: 'they see our strikes, our street fights, our councils. They hear our watchwords. They see our lead. This is the best propaganda, the most convincing.' The essential element in the agitation of these groups would be the immediate call to hand over all the power, political and economic, to the workers' councils. In order to maintain the 'purity' that would be needed to be an effective example, any involvement with trade unions, or alliances with parties that still saw a role for parliaments or elections, needed to be rejected.

As a matter of principle, then, the Left Communists rejected compromise. An organisation such as the *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands* (KAPD), founded in 1920, had an apocalyptic world view. It stated that 'the final phase of the struggle between capital and labour has begun' and that 'the decisive battle is already

underway'. There could 'be no compromise with the enemy, only a struggle to the death'. Tactics such as participation in elections or trade unions were nothing but ways to 'avoid serious and decisive struggles with the bourgeois class'. [3] This, of course, led to an extremely sectarian approach. Gorter's friend Karl Schröder, at the time one of the KAPD's most influential theorists, wrote in the same year that Gorter wrote the Open Letter that there was no 'substantial difference' between the various parties, 'from the [German National People's Party] to the Spartacus League', as they were all characterised by 'capitalist methods' of organisation. [4]

In his *Open Letter*, Gorter stated that the proletariat in Western Europe had no allies, and he employed a very narrow definition of 'working class'. Shopkeepers, poor farmers, artisans, but also lower-ranking servants and employees, such as shop clerks and civil servants – Gorter considered them all to be enemies of the working class. Gorter's argument for this view was that such layers are employed by big capital or otherwise 'depended' on capital, and they would therefore take its side – a strange view for a Marxist to take.

The early Communist Left was a body with two souls. On the one hand, there was the deliberate formation of small elite groups, who refused compromise or alliances with others. In his historico-sociological study of workers' radicalism during the German Revolution, Erhard Lucas described the activists of the Communist Left as a 'major problem' for the movement after the defeat of the 1920 uprising; 'because they saw armed struggle as the only option, and they saw all political discussions within the movement as weakening it, and negotiations with the government as treason. When the [armed] struggle was apparently lost, they acted according to the motto "victory or death"'. [5] A 1927 article of the KAPD stated that it would have been better if the Bolsheviks, faced with the choice of defeat or the compromises of the NEP, had perished while retaining their 'political honour'. [6]

The elitism of small groups, 'hard as steel, clear as glass', characterised one of the souls. The insistence on small nuclei that would take exemplary, revolutionary actions meant that actions were taken that were not supported by the majority of workers.

The other soul of the Communist Left, however, expressed a boundless faith in the spontaneous development of revolutionary beliefs, and a rejection of the 'leadership politics [Führerpolitik]' of the KPD and the Social Democrats. In the previously quoted text, Schröder gave a broad definition of the working class and an optimistic assessment of the possible spread of revolutionary ideas among the working class. He wrote that support for the rebuilding of society on the basis of workers' councils would 'reach ever wider circles, as the consciousness of all those who are addressed as proletarians will develop at an ever-increasing rate, whether they are saleswomen or professors, artists or civil servants'.

Spontaneous actions and daily experiences would, according to the Left Communists, make workers understand the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of workers' councils. In the same year that the KAPD was founded, the General Workers' Union of Germany (Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands, AAUD) was founded. The AAUD was intended to replace the trade unions and to be a unitary organisation of the working class. It defined itself as a class-struggle organisation (Klassenkampforganisation) that fights for 'unification of the proletariat as a class' – but it accepted as members only those who, in addition, accepted that the 'next phase will be the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the exclusive control by the proletariat over all the political and economic institutions of society through the councils'. [7]

Breaking with the Bolsheviks

Initially, Gorter and many other Left Communists had been prepared to admit that the strategy of the Bolsheviks had been suitable for 'the East', where there was a peasant class and a 'desperate middle class'. The early KAPD

considered itself the most militant ally of the Russian Revolution in Germany. But as their differences became clearer, the Communist Left became increasingly critical of the Russian Revolution and of the Bolsheviks. A year after the Open Letter, Gorter concluded that the Russian revolution was essentially a 'democratic peasant revolution'. [8] Given the fact that there were only '6 or 7 million industrial proletarians', compared to '25 to 40 million peasants', Gorter concluded that in Russia 'communism was only a thin shell and the peasant democracy based on private property was the core'. Communism 'was like a thin crust on a large deep sea'. Left-wing communists like Gorter held a self-contradictory criticism of the Bolsheviks. On the one hand, they criticised their authoritarian character, on the other, they criticised the Bolsheviks for letting their policies be influenced by the demands of the large majority of the population: the peasants.

In a 1921 article, Gorter angrily attacked the Communist International for its 'opportunism' – the origin of which Left Communists sought in the influence of Russian peasants and their desire to become small property owners. Gorter claimed that if the Communist International had not gone astray, large revolutionary parties would have been possible in Western Europe, with in Germany a rapidly growing party of 'at least one hundred thousand members'. [9]

This was a complete reversal with respect to his *Open Letter*, in which he had criticised the Bolsheviks for their 'impatience' and stressed that there was not yet even a revolutionary 'kernel' in Western Europe. For the Gorter of the Open Letter, the era of solely propaganda for communism had only just begun in Western Europe.

In 1921, Gorter apparently forgot the implications of an idea he had adopted from Anton Pannekoek. Pannekoek had concluded that the deep roots of the Western European bourgeoisie, as compared to those in Russia, meant that the revolution in Western Europe would become a 'slower and more difficult process'. [10] Pierre Broué summarises Pannekoek's analysis as follows: 'The cause of the victory of the German bourgeoisie over the Revolution in 1918–19 lay in the "hidden power" of "the bourgeoisie's ideological hold over the proletariat". Pannekoek rejected the role of the "active minority", and the "the thesis of the 'active minority'" and the illusion that power was within the grasp of the revolutionaries. [...] The only point which it shared with the ultra-left ideology as it had shown itself in the opposition so far, seemed to be its hostility to forming parties which recognised the role of "leaders", and which admitted the possibility of revolutionary work in bourgeois parliaments and reformist trade unions.' [11]

In the following years, the character of the Russian Revolution remained subject to debate among the Communist Left. One point of view was that the Russian Revolution had a 'dual' character: a proletarian revolution, based on Russia's small industrial working class, and a bourgeois and capitalist revolution, based on the peasant majority. The other point of view, and the position later adopted by the council communists, including Pannekoek, was that the Russian revolution had always been merely 'bourgeois'. In the 1930s, Pannekoek argued in a strongly deterministic fashion that, since pre-revolutionary Russia was feudal, the Bolsheviks were from the beginning historically destined to carry out a bourgeois revolution – regardless of their subjective views. From within that perspective, it makes little sense to criticise specific Bolshevik policies, since those were historically inevitable. [12]

Collapse and Transformation

For a short period, less than two years, the Communist Left was a mass movement, but its history is also one of divisions and rapid decline. When it was founded in 1920, the KAPD, with about 38,000 members, organised at least half of the people in Germany who considered themselves communists. In the following months this grew to more than 40,000 members. However, as the revolutionary tide turned, the KAPD was paralysed by its refusal to organise a strategic retreat, compromises or alliances: in short, by its refusal to engage in politics. This led to it being paralysed. The decline of the party accelerated after the defeat of the March Action in 1921. At the beginning of 1922 the KAPD branches in Altona and Hamburg, once strongholds with thousands of members, had a total of 13(!) members. [13] At the end of 1924, various break-aways from the KAPD had a combined number of fewer than 3,000

members. A similar process of splits and rapid decline took place in the AAUD after the early 1920s. [\[14\]](#)

Only in Germany did the Communist Left briefly have mass influence. In the Netherlands it was marginal from the very beginning. According to Bourrinet, the Dutch sister organisation of the German KAPD, the KAPN, had 200 members. Even this modest number is doubtful; in Amsterdam, the stronghold of the KAPN, the group never had more than a dozen members. The number of 200 comes from a statement by the KAPD, but, as Bourrinet shows, this organisation tended to exaggerate the size of its international sister organisations; several groups that were supposedly ready to join their new international had 'no real existence' (p. 259), the Russian Communist Workers' Party, for example, 'consisted of two Russians who lived in Berlin' (p. 269).

Out of KAPN circles, a new, pronounced ideology grew: council communism. Like its predecessor, council communism was marginal in terms of size and political influence. Bourrinet estimates that the most important council-communist organisation, the Group of International Communists (GIC), had about 50 members (p. 278). Its importance lies in the texts it produced, which were distributed via various radical journals. Pannekoek withdrew from political activism in the early 1920s, but as a writer he was in constant discussion with the GIC, without ever formally joining.

The GIC deepened the KAPD's emphasis on spontaneous actions. The world view of the KAPD can be summarised by their emphasis on 'the workers themselves' taking action, organising councils and overthrowing capitalism. Council communists further deepened the rejection of trade unions and political parties already present in the early Communist Left. They saw these forms of organisation as inherently 'capitalist' and as remnants of an earlier period in history.

Bourrinet describes the attitude of the GIC as a refusal to act 'within' the proletariat, 'for fear of imposing a political line on it' (p. 378). It is a strange combination: on the one hand, the working class was supposed to have the potential to 'spontaneously' recreate society – on the other, the GIC apparently thought that workers could very easily be led astray. What is astonishing about the GIC is that, despite its rhetoric about the self-activity of the working class, it had little interest in much of what this class was actually doing. Different political parties and trade unions, for example, grew considerably during this period, but the GIC continued to see these forms of organisation only as remnants of the past, and as inherently 'bourgeois'. For both the GIC and Pannekoek, the involvement of workers in such organisations apparently meant that they were no longer part of 'the workers themselves'. The GIC was not only small, but also very isolated.

The GIC wanted to 'enlighten' the proletariat by means of discussion and publications and represented the class struggle 'in an ideological form, as a struggle of ideas' (p. 378), as Bourrinet puts it. Looking back, Cajo Brendel, a member of the GIC and a lifelong council communist, wrote that the GIC as a matter of principle committed itself to political activism. [\[15\]](#) Their activities consisted of publications, educational courses and discussions.

How cut off from political reality the Communist Left had become was shown by its inability to react to fascism. Three years after the Nazis came to power in Germany, Pannekoek suggested that fascism had actually benefitted the workers' struggle (unwittingly, of course). Instead of crushing the workers' movements, fascism had only abolished 'ineffective' remnants of the past, such as political parties and trade unions. By doing so, fascism had removed the illusions of the workers in such organisations and 'restored their natural class unity'. [\[16\]](#) In his book *The Workers' Councils* however, written during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, Pannekoek concluded that fascism meant making workers 'powerless' and the disappearance of 'an independent workers' movement'. [\[17\]](#) But he still could not explain what made fascism different for the working class. Pannekoek, after all, described the politics of fascism as a dictatorship that abolished parliaments, parties, trade unions and democratic rights, but at the same time considered such things to be useless to the proletariat anyway.

As Bourrinet puts it, for the GIC there was 'no significant difference between Nazism and the national socialism of social democracy and Stalinism' (p. 388). Already in the 1930s, such a view was incredibly short-sighted; after the history of the unfolding of Nazi barbarism, especially the Shoah, it must be rejected outright.

War and Occupation

The last chapter in the history of the Dutch Communist Left showed a remarkable development. In the 1930s, the Netherlands was home to the Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party (RSAP). This party, led by Henk Sneevliet, was one of the largest anti-Stalinist, revolutionary socialist parties. Sneevliet was a member of the Communist Party of the Netherlands, but broke from it at the end of the 1920s. The RSAP, which was originally close to Trotskyism, was a revolutionary socialist party that at the end of the 1930s supported the Spanish POUM. When Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands, a selected core of RSAP members went underground to form the Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front (MLL Front). [\[18\]](#)

After the Nazis arrested and murdered its original leadership, including Sneevliet, this organisation split. One part took up Trotskyist positions, while the other part evolved towards council communism. Together with former members of the GIC, this group formed the Communist Union Spartacus and continued the council-communist tradition. Unfortunately, Bourrinet repeats a member's claim that Spartacus had about 100 members shortly after the Second World War and even published a daily newspaper. But the organisation only had several dozen activists and was unable to produce a daily newspaper (p. 466).

In the mid-sixties, Spartacus broke apart. One wing continued the tradition of the GIC. Former GIC member Cajo Brendel was one of the central figures of this group. Until 1997 Brendel and a small, shrinking group of comrades continued to produce a journal, *Daad en Gedachte* (Act and Thought), which commented on workers' struggles. Another current rejected the attitude of the GIC and wanted to form an activist organisation that would participate in social struggles. In the wake of the protest movements of the 1960s, this group increasingly resembled an anarchist action group and finally merged into the radical activist milieu.

Towards the end of Spartacus' existence there was a modest revival of interest in the Communist Left. After the radical ferment of 1968, texts of the Communist Left were reprinted and a number of studies were written about it. This representation of the Communist Left was often quite selective: its spontaneity and rejection of vanguard parties were popular among part of the new radical milieu, but its workerism and its historical determinism were incompatible with the voluntarism of the New Left activist circles.

An Unfinished History

Bourrinet is in agreement with many of the views of the Communist Left, especially its more political parts, although he is more critical of the 'council-communist' ideas of the GIC and of the older Pannekoek. He criticises the anti-organisational views of the council communists and their view that 'communist ideas' would automatically eliminate the difference between workers' organisations and revolutionary organisations. The book also largely adopts the characterisation by the Communist Left of other socialist movements. All involvement in electoral politics after World War I is, for example, considered 'electoralist'.

One conclusion we can draw is that the Communist Left, in its criticism of 'leadership politics', of bureaucrats and their stranglehold on the self-organisation of workers, raised essential questions that still haunt the revolutionary and

radical Left.

However, despite Bourrinet's sympathetic presentation of the movement, reading the book also leads to the conclusion that the Communist Left was unable to answer such questions. Faced with the limits of the revolutionary process in Western Europe and the Soviet Union, it retreated into the supposedly predetermined, inevitable self-activity of workers. In his memoirs written in the 1940s, Pannekoek described how he used to be plagued by doubts about what to do – until he 'suddenly saw the simple answer' and realised that this question simply did not need to bother him; 'the workers themselves must decide and take full responsibility'. [19] The activity of the 'workers themselves' was the universal key. If the workers did not succeed in establishing communism, it simply meant that they were not yet ready to 'take full responsibility'.

The Dutch and German Communist Left tells the history of this movement mainly on the basis of documents and explanations. The core of the book consists of detailed descriptions of the debates in the movement and analyses of the most important documents. This focus on ideas and texts may seem paradoxical for a movement that, according to its rhetoric, focused on 'worker self-activity'. But about half the book is devoted to the small Dutch Communist Left, especially the GIC, and the actual activity of this group indeed consisted largely of discussing and describing ideas.

Of course, this focus on publications also has drawbacks. We learn little about what the organisations actually did except publish, about who their members were, or what their lives were like. In an article from 2004 Marcel van der Linden remarked that 'almost nothing is known about the practical and organisational functioning of the KAPD, its sister organisations and successors. We also know little about the social implantation of the KAPD and the sociology of its supporters.' [20]

This book has its roots in a dissertation, and an earlier version was published under the title *The Dutch and German Communist Left: A Contribution to the History of the Revolutionary Movement, 1900–1950*. This edition has been considerably expanded and brings the history up to 1968. With several pages of photographs, and at more than 500 pages long with a bibliography of no less than 80 pages, this is clearly the product of years and years of work. Unfortunately, it does include some factual inaccuracies and questionable accounts of important events. [21]

The descriptions of Dutch history and other movements contain several factual inaccuracies. Most of these errors do not affect the main subject matter of the book, but make it a little unreliable as a source. For example: the early Dutch socialist SDB did not nominate candidates for the parliamentary elections in 1897 after an internal debate had 'led to a new political orientation'; it did not take part in elections at that time (pp. 22–3). The revolutionary Marxist SDP, in which Gorter and Pannekoek were active, did not have 5,000 members 'on the eve of the First World War' (p. 81). Rather, in 1914 there were about 1,200 members. [22] And the German bombing of Rotterdam killed almost 1,000 people – not 30,000. [23]

More important are statements about the influence of the Communist Left. Some claims that play up the role of the Communist Left are questionable speculations, such as that it was the influence of council communists that led to the formation of an opposition in the Dutch Communist Party in the 1930s (p. 282). [24] Another speculation is the claim that the future historian B.A. Sijes, then a council communist, played 'a major role' in the February 1941 strike (p. 447). [25] Also problematic are some of the claims that are contradicted by the cited literature. [26] An example of this is the description in the book of the left-wing opposition in the Dutch Communist Party (CPH), from which the KAPN originated. This opposition is described as 'solidly organised' around 'its organ De Roode Vaan' and supported by 'just over a third of the party' with 'a great echo among the workers of the CPH': 'the departments in the industrial cities of Enschede and Zwolle were in its hands' (p. 242). These claims contradict what is written concerning this opposition in the literature on the Dutch CP and in the biography of the leader of the group, Barend Luteraan, referenced elsewhere in the book. This biography describes De Roode Vaan as a 'small magazine', 'published, edited and written' by Luteraan himself. The group around him is described as 'a small group of loyalists' with two

Amsterdam families as its 'core'. Only individual supporters in Zwolle and Enschede are mentioned. [27]

Other times the book gives dubious accounts of important events in the development of the Left in the Netherlands. For example, the description of the attitude of the Dutch Social-Democratic SDAP before the First World War towards government participation is contradicted by the quoted literature. According to the book, in 1913 the SDAP was 'ready to accept' three ministerial posts in the new government (p. 63) after its success in the elections of that year. But the original position of the SDAP leadership was to remain outside the government. The offer of three ministerial posts was made in response to the party's initial refusal and became the subject of intense debate before eventually being rejected. Bourrinet describes the attitude of SDAP party leader Pieter Jelles Troelstra at the congress convened to discuss the issue of government participation as 'radical', apparently in favour of joining the government. However, the quoted literature shows that Troelstra initially opposed government participation and then preferred the party to accept the three posts only under certain conditions, and only if the alternative was the formation of a right-wing coalition. In the end, Troelstra gave a speech at the congress in which he stated that he could not call on his party to accept the posts. [28]

The book also claims that this congress was 'never even aware' (p. 63) of an open letter from Gorter in which he urged the SDAP not to participate in the government. However, the literature cited for this claim describes how the president of the congress informed the attendees of this letter and offered to read this document to the congress. However, this proposal was received with ridicule. [29] The dismissive response to the letter undermines the book's claim that Gorter had a major influence on the congress's decision to reject participation in government.

Finally, two important events in the history of the Dutch labour movement need to be discussed. The description of protests in 1917 – a high point of social unrest in the Netherlands – states that after a ban on protests 'the workers reacted immediately' and a 24-hour strike was held by '20,000 Amsterdam workers'. This was supposedly followed by a 'mass strike that spread like wildfire to most major cities in the Netherlands' (p. 159). This massive wave of strikes never happened. The cited literature describes a 'relatively successful' 24-hour strike of 'between ten and twenty thousand workers' in Amsterdam as well as marches and gatherings in other cities. [30]

Finally, there is the description of the famous February Strike of 1941. Bourrinet bases himself on the standard work on the strike by Bernard Sijes, *De februari-staking. 25–26 februari 1941*. [31] Bourrinet writes that the February Strike 'had taken a mass-character, comparable in breadth with the great mass strike of 1903' (p. 450) and spread to 'The Hague, Rotterdam, Groningen, Utrecht and Hilversum, Haarlem and many other towns' (p. 44) – it is said even to have spread to Belgium. The reference for this is the book by Sijes. However, Sijes writes that the rumour that the strike had spread so widely was false. Sijes shows in detail how the strike was essentially limited to Amsterdam and some neighbouring areas. [32]

The cumulative effect of such questionable interpretations is that the revolutionary movement in the Netherlands, and the Communist Left within it, is presented as more significant than it was. Because the book also pays little attention to the role of other socialist movements in the social struggle it discusses, the reader is left with a skewed picture of the relative importance of the Communist Left.

In conclusion: for readers who want to know the theoretical debates in the Communist Left, the book is crucial if read with a grain or two of salt.

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[1] The most important English-language works are Pannekoek and Gorter's *Marxism* (Smart (ed.) 1978), a selection of important texts by two important Left Communist writers with an extensive introduction, and *Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils* (Bricianer (ed.) 1978), a compilation of excerpts with commentary by the editor, and the study by John Gerber, *Anton Pannekoek and the Socialism of Workers' Self-Emancipation, 1873–1960* (Gerber 1989). In German, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918–1923* (Bock 1969) is still one of the most extensive works. An extensive selection of original texts can be found in *Die Linke gegen die Parteiherrschaft* (Kool (ed.) 1970).

[2] Gorter 1920.

[3] Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands 1920.

- [4] Karl Schröder, Vom werden der neuen Gesellschaft (Alte und neue Organisationsformen) (1920), in Kool (ed.) 1970, pp. 338–55 (p. 343).
- [5] Lucas 1976, p. 259.
- [6] Lucas 1976, p. 259.
- [7] Lucas 1976, p. 259.
- [8] Gorter 1921.
- [9] Ibid
- [10] Anton Pannekoek, Weltrevolution und kommunistische Taktik, in Bock (ed.) 1969, pp. 123–62 (p. 127).
- [11] Broué 2005, pp. 329, 330.
- [12] Pannekoek developed such views in his 1938 book *Lenin as Philosopher* (Pannekoek 1948).
- [13] Ihlau 1969, p. 26.
- [14] Ihlau 1969, pp. 29–35, and Bock 1969, pp. 319–34, describe the organisational decline of the movement.
- [15] Cajo Brendel, Gruppe Internationale Kommunisten. Persönliche Erinnerungen, in Brendel 2008, pp. 34–47 (p. 36).
- [16] Anton Pannekoek, De rol van fascisme, in Pannekoek 1970, pp. 157–64 (p. 161).
- [17] Pannekoek 1946, p. 210
- [18] The figure given in *The Dutch and German Communist Left* estimating the number of original members is incorrect; probably a misprint, it should be four to six hundred, not 4,600.
- [19] Pannekoek 1982, p. 215.
- [20] van der Linden 2004.
- [21] A new French edition, dealing with some of the remarks made here, has been published under the title *La Gauche Communiste Germano-Hollandaise des origines* 1968 (Bourrinet 2018).
- [22] Voerman 2001, p. 609. This book is cited several times as a source.
- [23] There are other examples. The portrayal of the Indonesian independence movement contains numerous errors (for example, the Japanese occupiers did not transfer sovereignty over Indonesia to Sukarno in April 1945). Other inaccuracies concern the revolutionary socialist Henk Sneevliet and his party. Sneevliet did not 'return' to the Dutch East Indies in 1913 (he had never been there) and his son Pam was not killed in the POUM militia in Spain, nor did he possibly commit suicide there. His body was found in the water near Amsterdam, after an apparent suicide. In the 1935 elections, the RSAP did not win four seats in parliament. Only Sneevliet was elected to parliament for the RSAP, two years earlier. It would appear that seats in the national parliament and in the provincial councils have been mixed up here. A questionable statement about Dutch history is that the Dutch Nazi movement, the NSB, developed 'quickly after 1932'. After 1936 until the German invasion it lost 20,000 members from its peak of 52,000, and in the only general election in which it participated it won just over four per cent. Jan Baars was not a leader of the NSB, but of another fascist group, and in the book's index he is confused with Asser Baars, Sneevliet's comrade. Eddy Wijnkoop was not a member of the MLL Front who led the underground Vonk ('Spark') group during the Nazi occupation 'with the consent of Sneevliet and the central

leadership', but the other way around: he was a leader of Vonk who became a member of the central leadership of the MLL Front. He was arrested by the Nazis and died in 1942, not 1944. In addition, the German bombing of Rotterdam took place in May, during the German invasion, not the following month.

[24] The literature cited gives no indication that this was the case.

[25] Sijes took part in this strike, but he claimed not to have played a major role in it, and Sijes's biography does not suggest otherwise; see Roegholt 1988. Roegholt writes that neither Sijes's recollections of this period, nor his scholarly work, 'show any sign of a leading role' that he would have played (p. 76).

[26] An example is Spartacus, the newspaper of the MLL Front and later of the Spartacus group. This newspaper is said to have had the 'largest' circulation of illegal newspapers during the Nazi occupation. The given source, however, only makes the claim that the circulation was 'very large' in the beginning. Other newspapers, such as those of the CPN, indeed had a larger circulation. See Perthus 1976, p. 432.

[27] See for this episode Bos 1996, pp. 50–5.

[28] de Wolff 1978, p. 121.

[29] de Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 114.

[30] Burger 1983, pp. 88–9.

[31] Sijes 1954. When discussing the run-up to the strike, there are some incorrect claims concerning the extent of forced labour, apparently the result of a misreading.

[32] Sijes 1954, pp. 138, 139: 'Such rumours that strengthened the morale of the people on strike were, as will be shown, not in accordance with the truth'.