June 15, 1937:

Dear Comrade Chaulieu,

It was a great satisfaction for me to see that you printed a translation (and added your critical remarks) of my letter of Nov. 8 in No. 14 of your review "Socialisme ou Barbarie" in this way involving your readers in a discussion of principles. Because you express the wish to continue the discussion I will present here some remarks on your response. Of course there remain differences of opinion, which by discussion may come to the front with greater clarity. Such differences have usually their origin in a difference of the points of chief interest, proceeding either from different practical experiences or from living in different milieu. For me it was the study of the political strikes and moral actions of the workers, in Belgium 1893, in Russia 1905 and 1917, in Germany 1918-19, from which I tried to get a clear understanding of the fundamental character of such actions. Your group is living and working the tumultuous working class movements of a big industrial town so your attention is directed by the problem how efficient modes of fight may develop out of the present often inefficient party strife and partial strikes.

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

You put the dilemma in an entirely practical way: what shall the party (as its adherents) do when it has 45% of the council members and expects that another party (neo-stalinism, aspiring at totalitarian state power) will try to seize power by violent action? Your answer is: forestall them by doing ourselves what we fear they will do. What will be the final result of such an action? There was a party (good revolutionary as any, imbued)

Look at what happened in Russia. There
with Marxism, it could moreover lean upon soviet already formed by the
workers; yet it had to seize power and the result was the totalitarian
system of Stalinism. (This "had to" means that the conditions were not yet
ripe for a real proletarian revolution; in the highly capitalist Western
world they certainly are more ripe; how much more can only be shown
by the course of the class struggle.) So must be asked: what the action
of the party you suppose will it save the workers' revolution? It
seems to me that it would rather be a step towards new despotism.

Certainly there are difficulties in either way. When the situation in
France or in the world should call for mass action of the working class,
then immediately the CP will try to bend the action into a pro-Russian
party-demonstration. And you will have to wage a strenuous fight with
them. But it is not by copying its methods that one can defeat the CP.

We can win real and lasting success only by applying our own
method — the genuine mode of action of the fighting class — by the strength
of our argument based on the great principle of self-determination.

The argument with the 45% example fits entirely in the parliamentary
world of fighting parties each with a certain percentage of followers. In the workers'
revolution which we foresee it is the class that rises into action; there all the
conditions have changed. We do not say: it shall be our party with its most
excellent program that has to seize power; and we call upon the workers to sustain
us against the others. It is our task to arouse and induce the workers to establish
their own class-power in the shops and enterprises. The difference may be expressed
in another more fundamental way. The point of view seemed to be: the worst that could
happen to the liberation of the working class is the domination of party-communism;
for then the workers will have lost the possibility to propagate and develop their
ideas of freedom by means of council organisation. Or expressed in another way:
our first duty is to prevent the CP from establishing a totalitarian state power
and to defend against them the western parliamentary democracy. It looks
quite sensible and logical; it has the same sense and logic as had reformism.
when it said: "revolution is far away; let us for the present by reforms make capitalism tolerable for the workers."

Marxist argument then replied: reforms the workers will get not by conciliatory tactics but by increasing their fighting power. So now we may reply: the workers can prevent mastery of the CP only by developing and strengthening their own class power, i.e. their united will to seize and control themselves, the production apparatus.

The main condition for the working class to win freedom is that the ideas of self-rule and self-management of the production apparatus have taken deep roots in the mind of the masses. There is a certain analogy to what Jaurès wrote in his Histoire Socialiste, on the Constituante: "Cette Assemblée fonde neuve aux choses de la politique, suit, à peine réunie, devoir toutes les manoeuvres de la Cour. Pourquoi? Parce qu'elle portait en elle quelques idées abstraites et grandes, fortement et longement méditées, qui lui étaient une lumière." The cases are different, surely; instead of the grand political ideas of the revolutionary bourgeoisie we will have the greater social ideas of the workers, of control of production in organized collaboration: instead of the few hundred delegates elected by the abstract ideas they had studied we will have the millions guided by their life experience of productive work. Hence I see it to be the noblest and most useful task of a revolutionary party, by its propaganda in thousands of leaflets, pamphlets and papers, to awaken these feelings to ever greater consciousness and clarity.

As to the character of the Russian revolution: the translation of middle-class revolution into revolution bourgeoise (en allemand on dit: Bürgerliche Revolution) he rend pas exactement "its essence. When in England the (middle class (the capital class between aristocracy and the working people) rose to power it consisted of a numerous class of mostly small business men, owners of the (industrial) productive apparatus of society. Though the putting down of aristocratic power needed the actions of the masses, these were not yet able to lay hands upon the production apparatus; this spiritual, moral, and
Organisational capability can be acquired by the workers only by means of their class-struggle in a highly developed capitalism. In Russia there was no Bourgeoisie of any importance; so a new "middle class" as directors of the productive work had to arise out of the avant-garde and take possession of the production apparatus, not individually (each of a small part) but as collective as of the totality. When the working masses (because they come out of pre-capitalist conditions) are not yet capable to take the production in their own hands, the result inevitably is a new ruling class, master of the production. This similarity is why I called the Russian revolution (in its ruling character) an "ultra-class revolution." Surely the massed force of the proletarian class was needed to destroy the old system (and this was a school for the workers all over the world). But a revolution of society can achieve no more than corresponds to the nature of the relevant social classes, and when the greatest radicalism was needed to overcome the resistances it has afterward to retrace its steps. This seems to be a general rule in the revolutions till now: thus in 1793 the revolution became even more radical, till until the peasants (were really free masters of the soil and the foreign armies were expelled); then the Jacobins were massacred and the radical capitalism presented itself as the new master. Seen in this way, the Russian revolution falls in line with its predecessors in England, France, Germany. It is not an abortive proletarian revolution: the proletarian revolution is a thing of the future, before us.

I hope that these expositions, though they contain no new arguments, may serve to clarify some of our points of view.