

Recommencing the Revolution (1964)*

I. The End of Classical Marxism

1 Three massive facts today confront revolutionaries who still wish to claim they are acting in such a way that they understand what they are doing, that is, in full knowledge of the relevant facts:

- The way capitalism functions has been fundamentally altered in relation to the reality of the pre-1939 era. It has altered even more in relation to the analysis of it Marxism had provided.
- As an organized class movement explicitly and permanently contesting capitalist domination, the workers' movement has disappeared.
- Colonial or semicolonial domination by advanced countries over backward countries has been abolished without this abolition being accompanied anywhere by a revolutionary mutation [*transcroissance*] within the movement of the masses, nor have the foundations of capitalism in the ruling countries been shaken by this process.

2 For those who refuse to mystify themselves, it is clear that, in practice, the establishment of these facts means the ruination of classical Marxism as a *system* of thought and action as it was formulated, developed, and maintained between 1847 and 1939. For, these findings signify that Marx's analysis of capitalism in his masterwork (the analysis of the economy), Lenin's analysis of imperialism, and Marx-Trotsky's conception of the permanent revolution as applied to backward countries have been refuted or outstripped, and that virtually all traditional forms of organization and action in the workers' movement (save for those of revolutionary

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periods) are irreversibly bankrupt. They signify the ruination of classical Marxism as a *concrete system of thought* having some grasp on reality. Apart from a few abstract ideas, nothing that is essential in *Capital* is to be found in the reality of today. Conversely, what is essential in reality today (the changes in and the crisis of the nature of work, the scission and opposition between the formal organization and the real organization of production and between the formal and the real functioning of institutions, the phenomenon of bureaucratization, the consumer society, working-class apathy, the nature of Eastern-bloc countries, the changes in backward countries and their relations with the advanced countries, the crisis of all aspects of life and the increasing importance of phenomena previously considered peripheral, people's attempts to find a way out of this crisis) can be understood only in the light of different analyses. The best in Marx's work can serve as a source of inspiration for these analyses, but set in front of these analyses is instead a vulgar and bastardized Marxism, the only kind practised today by his self-proclaimed 'defenders' of every ilk, which acts as a screen blocking one's view. The findings also signify the ruination of classical Marxism (and of Leninism-Trotskyism-Bordigism, etc.) as a *programme of action* in which what was to be done by revolutionaries at any given moment was coherently linked (at least on the level of intentions) with the real actions of the working class and with an overall theoretical viewpoint. When, for instance, a Marxist organization supported or led a working-class strike for higher wages, it did so (a) with a strong likelihood of receiving a real hearing from the workers, (b) as the only instituted organization fighting on their side, and (c) in the belief that each working-class victory on the wages front was a blow delivered to the objective structure of the capitalist edifice. None of the measures advocated in the classical Marxist programmes can today fulfil these three requirements.

3 Certainly, society today still remains profoundly divided. It functions against the immense majority of working people. In their everyday lives these people express their opposition to this society with half of each one of their gestures. The present crisis of humanity will be able to be resolved only through a socialist revolution. But these ideas run the risk of remaining empty abstractions, pretexts for sermons or for a blind and spasmodic activism, if we do not strive to understand how society's divisions are concretely being realized at the present hour, how this society functions, what forms of reaction and struggle labouring people adopt against the ruling strata and their system, what new kinds of revolutionary activity related to people's concrete existence and struggle in society and to a coherent and lucid view of the world are possible under these conditions. For all of this, what is needed is nothing less than a radical theoretical and practical renewal. It is this effort at renewal and the specific *new* ideas through which this effort has taken on concrete form at each stage that have

characterized the Socialisme ou Barbarie group from the outset, not simple-minded rigid adherence to the idea of class struggle, of the proletariat as revolutionary force, or of revolution. Such blind adherence would have sterilized us, as it did the Trotskyists, Bordigists, and nearly all communists and 'left' socialists. From the first issue of our review we have affirmed, in conclusion of our critique of conservatism in the realm of theory, that 'without *development* of revolutionary theory, no development of revolutionary action'.¹ Ten years later, after having shown that the basic postulates as well as the logical structure of Marx's economic theory reflect 'essentially bourgeois ideas' and having affirmed that a total reconstruction of revolutionary theory was needed, we concluded, 'Whatever the contents of the organization's revolutionary theory or programme, and however deep their connections with the experience and needs of the proletariat, there always will be the possibility, the *certainty* even, that at some point this theory and programme will be outstripped by history, and there will always be the risk that those who have defended them up to that point will tend to make them into absolutes and to try to subordinate and adapt the creations of living history to fit them.'²

4 This theoretical reconstruction, which remains a permanent task, has nothing to do with a vague and irresponsible revisionism. We have never abandoned traditional positions because they were traditional, simply saying: They are out of date, times have changed. On the contrary, we have shown, on each occasion, why they were wrong or why they have been outstripped, and we have defined that with which they should be replaced (save in the cases where it was then and remains today impossible for a group of revolutionaries to define, in the absence of mass activity, new forms to replace those that history itself has refuted). But this has not prevented, even within the Socialisme ou Barbarie group, our reconstruction effort from encountering, at each of its crucial stages, bitter opposition from conservative elements representing the type of militant who retains nostalgia for the golden age of the workers' movement (a golden age that, like all golden ages, is, moreover, perfectly imaginary) and who moves forward in history only by proceeding backwards, constantly wishing to return to the era in which, as he believes, theory and programme were indisputable, established once and for all, and constantly corroborated by the activity of the masses.³

5 It is not possible to discuss this conservatism in depth, for its main characteristic is its failure to confront the problems that count today, usually denying that they exist. It is a negative and sterile current. This sterility obviously is not a personality or character trait. It is an objective phenomenon, the sure consequence of the terrain on which conservatives place themselves and the inevitable result of the very conception they have of revolutionary theory.

A contemporary physicist who would set himself the task of defending

Newtonian physics against all comers would condemn himself to total sterility and would throw a neurotic fit every time he heard someone speak about such monstrosities as antimatter, particles that also are waves, the expansion of the universe, or the collapse of causality, locality, and identity as absolute categories. The plight of the person who would today simply defend Marxism or a handful of ideas he has borrowed from it is just as desperate. For, taken in this form, the question of Marxism has been settled in the real world and is beyond discussion: leaving aside for the moment the theoretical reconstruction we have been carrying out, Marxism quite simply no longer exists historically as a living theory. Marxism was not, could not, and did not seek to be a theory like the others, whose truth was consigned to books; it was not another Platonism, another Spinozism, another Hegelianism. According to its own programme and its most deep-seated content, Marxism could live only as a constantly renewed theoretical search that sheds light on a world in constant change and as a practice that constantly transforms the world while also being transformed by it (the indissoluble unity of the two corresponding to the Marxian concept of praxis).

Where is that kind of Marxism today? Where, since 1923 (the year Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* appeared), has a single study that has advanced Marxism been published? Where, since 1940 (the year of Trotsky's death), has a single text been written that defends the traditional ideas on a level high enough to allow one to discuss them without being ashamed of doing so? Where, since the Spanish Civil War, has there been a Marxist group that has actually acted on its principles and connected these with mass activity? Quite simply: nowhere!

It is not one of the least of the tragicomic paradoxes to which the self-proclaimed defenders of Marxism today have been condemned that they are carrying out this rape and killing of Marxism even as they undertake to defend it, and because of this very attempt. For they can defend Marxism only by remaining silent about what has happened to it over the past forty years. As if actual history did not count! As if the presence or absence in real history of a theory and a political programme had no effect on the truth or the signification of such a theory or programme, which somehow would reside 'elsewhere'. As if it were not one of the indestructible principles taught to us by Marx that an ideology is not to be judged by the words it employs but by what it becomes in social reality. They can defend Marxism only by transforming it into its contrary, into an eternal doctrine that could never be upset by any fact (forgetting in the process that if that were so, Marxism would no longer be able in its turn to 'upset the facts', i.e. it would then possess no historical effectiveness). Like a despairing lover whose mistress has died prematurely, they can now express their love only by raping the corpse.

6 Less and less does this conservative attitude take the overt form of a defence of Marxist orthodoxy as such. Obviously, it is difficult to uphold without fear of ridicule the idea that one should remain true to the truths revealed once and for all by Marx and Lenin. Rather, it now takes the following form: faced with the crisis and the disappearance of the workers' movement, one reasons as if this state of affairs affected only certain specifically designated organizations (the Communist Party, the SFIO [Socialist Party], the [Communist-affiliated] CGT labour federation, etc.); confronted by the transformations capitalism is undergoing, one reasons as if these transformations represented merely an accumulation of similar characteristics that was in no way altering its essence.

One thus forgets, and makes others forget, that the crisis of the workers' movement is not simply the degeneration of social-democratic or Bolshevik organizations but a crisis embracing practically all the traditional expressions of working-class activity; that it is not some scaly excrescence covering over the intact revolutionary body of the proletariat or a penalty of condemnation imposed from without, but an expression of problems lying at the very heart of the workers' situation, upon which, moreover, this crisis acts in its turn.⁴ One forgets, and makes others forget, that the quantitative accumulation of such 'similar traits' of capitalist society is accompanied by qualitative changes, that 'proletarianization' in contemporary society in no way has the simple meaning attributed to it in classical Marxism and that bureaucratization is not a simple and superficial corollary to the process of capital concentration, but entails profound modifications in the structure and functioning of society.⁵ Thus, what one does is simply to offer a few 'additional' interpretations – as if a conception of history and the world that would unite theory and practice, which is what classical Marxism wanted to be, could be subjected to some 'additions', like a pile of potato sacks whose nature would not be altered by the addition of a few more sacks to the pile.

In doing so, one reduces the unknown to the known, which is tantamount to eliminating what is new, and ends up reducing history to one huge tautology. In the best of cases one 'makes repairs at least cost', a practice that in the long run is an infallible way of going broke ideologically, just as it is a sure way of going broke financially in the business world. This attitude, while psychologically understandable, is henceforth impossible. Beyond a certain point it becomes clearly apparent that it can no longer be taken seriously, for a thousand reasons, the first of which is that it is intrinsically contradictory (ideas cannot remain intact while reality is changing, nor can a new reality be understood without a revolution in ideas) and the last of which is that it is theological (and, like every theology, it basically expresses fear and a fundamental feeling of insecurity toward the unknown, neither of which do we have any reason to share).

7 Indeed, the time has arrived to attain a clear awareness that con-

temporary reality can no longer be grasped simply at the cost of a low-budget revision of classical Marxism, or even through any kind of revision at all. In order to be understood, contemporary reality requires a new whole in which breaks with the classical ideas are just as important as (and much more significant than) the ties of kinship. This fact was able to be hidden even from our own eyes by the gradual character of our theoretical elaboration and, undoubtedly, also by a desire to maintain the greatest possible degree of historical continuity. Nevertheless, it becomes strikingly apparent when we look back over the path travelled and as we gauge the distance separating the ideas that appear essential to us today from those of classical Marxism. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate this point.⁶

(a) For classical Marxism, the division of society was between capitalists who owned the means of production and propertyless proletarians. Today it should be seen as a division between directors and executants.

(b) Society was seen as dominated by the abstract power of impersonal capital. Today, we see it as dominated by a hierarchical bureaucratic structure.

(c) For Marx, the central category for understanding capitalist social relations was that of *reification*. Reification was the result of the transformation of all human relations into *market* relations.⁷ For us, the central structuring moment of contemporary society is not the market but its bureaucratic-hierarchical 'organization'. The basic category to be used in grasping social relations is that of the *scission* between the processes of direction and execution of collective activities.

(d) In Marx, the category of reification found its natural continuation in the analysis of labour power as a commodity, in the literal and full sense of this term. As a commodity, labour power had an exchange value defined by 'objective' factors (costs of production and reproduction of labour power) and a use value the purchaser was able to extract at will. The worker was seen as a passive object of the capitalist economy and of capitalist production. For us, this abstraction is halfway a mystification. Labour power can never become purely and simply a commodity (despite capitalism's best efforts). Labour power has no exchange value determined by 'objective' factors, for wage levels are determined essentially by formal and informal working-class struggles. Labour power has no predefined use value, for productivity levels are the stake in an incessant struggle at the point of production and the worker is an active as much as a passive subject in this struggle.

(e) For Marx, the inherent 'contradiction' of capitalism was that the development of the forces of production was becoming, beyond a certain point, incompatible with capitalist forms of property ownership and of private appropriation of the social product, and would have to 'break them asunder'. For us, the inherent contradiction of capitalism is to be found in the type of scission between direction and execution that capitalism brings about, and in its consequent need simultaneously to seek the exclusion and to solicit the participation of individuals in their activities.

(f) For the classical revolutionary way of thinking, the proletariat suffers its history until the day it explodes its situation. For us, the proletariat makes its

history, under given conditions, and its struggles are constantly transforming capitalist society at the same time that these struggles transform the proletariat itself.

(g) For the classical revolutionary way of thinking, capitalist culture produces mystifications pure and simple, which are then denounced as such, or it produces scientific truths and valid works, in which case one denounces the fact that they have been appropriated exclusively by the privileged strata of society. For us, this culture, in all its manifestations, both participates in the general crisis of society and helps to prepare the way for a new form of human life.

(h) For Marx, production will always remain the 'realm of necessity'. Whence comes the Marxist movement's implicit idea that socialism is essentially a matter of rearranging the economic and social consequences of a technical infrastructure that is at the same time both neutral and inevitable. For us, production must become the realm of creativity for the associated producers. And the conscious transformation of technology, aimed at putting it at the service of *homo faber*, must be a central task of postrevolutionary society.

(i) Already for Marx, and much more so for the Marxist movement, the development of the forces of production was at the centre of everything, and its incompatibility with capitalist forms brought history's condemnation down upon these forms. Whence the quite natural identification of socialism with nationalization and economic planning. For us, the essence of socialism is people's domination over all aspects of their lives and in the first place over their work. Whence the idea that socialism is inconceivable outside of the management of production by the associated producers and without the power of workers' councils.

(j) For Marx, 'bourgeois right' and therefore wage inequality would still have to prevail during a period of transition. For us, a revolutionary society could not survive and develop if it did not immediately instaurate absolute wage equality.

(k) Finally, and to stick to fundamentals, the traditional movement has always been dominated by the twin concepts of economic determinism and the leading role of the Party. For us, at the centre of everything is the autonomy of labouring people, the masses' capacity for self-direction, without which every idea of socialism immediately turns into a mystification. This entails a new conception of the revolutionary process, as well as of revolutionary organization and politics.

It is not difficult to see that these ideas – whether they are true or false matters little for the moment – represent neither 'additions' nor partial revisions but, rather, constitute the elements for an all-around theoretical reconstruction.

8 One must also grasp that this reconstruction affects not only the content of the ideas, but also the very type of theoretical conception we are attempting to make. Just as it is vain to search today for a type of organization that would be able to be, in the new period to come, a 'substitute' for trade unions, resuming somehow its previously positive role but without the negative traits now associated with unions – in short, to seek to invent a type of organization that would be a union without being one, while all the time

remaining one – so it is illusory to believe that it will be possible for 'another Marxism' to exist henceforth that would not be Marxism. The ruination of Marxism is not only the ruination of a certain number of specific ideas (though we should point out, if need be, that through this process of ruination a number of fundamental discoveries and a way of envisaging history and society remain that no one can any longer ignore). It is also the ruination of a certain type of connection among ideas, as well as between ideas and reality or action. In brief, it is the ruination of the conception of a closed theory (and, even more, of a closed theoretico-practical system) that thought it could enclose the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of the historical period presently occurring within a certain number of allegedly scientific schemata.

With this ruination, a phase in the history of the workers' movement – and, we should add, in the history of humanity – is drawing to a close. We can call it the theological phase, with the understanding that there can be and there is a theology of 'science' that is not better – but, rather, worse – than the other type of theology (in as much as it gives those who share in this belief the false conviction that their faith is 'rational'). It is the phase of faith, be it faith in a Supreme Being, be it in an 'exceptional' man or a group of 'exceptional' men, be it in an impersonal truth established once and for all and written up as a doctrine. It is the phase during which man became alienated in his own creations, whether imaginary or real, theoretical or practical. Never again will there be a complete theory that would need merely to be 'updated'. Incidentally, in real life there never was any theory of this sort, for all great theoretical discoveries have veered off into the imaginary as soon as one tried to convert them into systems, Marxism no less than the others.

What there has been, and what there will continue to be, is a living theoretical process, from whose womb emerge moments of truth destined to be outstripped (were it only through their integration into another whole within which they no longer have the same meaning). This does not entail some sort of scepticism: at each instant and for each stage in our experience *there are* truths and errors, and there is always the need to carry out a provisional totalization, ever changing and ever open, of what is true. The idea of a complete and definitive theory, however, is today only a bureaucrat's phantasm helping him to manipulate the oppressed; for the oppressed, it can only be the equivalent, in modern-day terms, of an essentially irrational faith.

At each stage in our development, we ought therefore to assert positively those elements about which we are certain, but we also must recognize – and not just by paying lip service – that at the frontiers of our reflection and our practice we encounter problems whose solution we do not know in advance, and perhaps we will not know for a good while; we may not even know whether the solution will oblige us to abandon positions we would have died

defending the day before. Whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, each of us is obliged in our personal lives to display this lucidity and this courage in the face of the unknownness of the perpetually renewed creation into which we are advancing. Revolutionary politics cannot be the last refuge for neurotic rigidity and the neurotic need for security.

9 More than ever before, the problem of the fate of human society is now posed in global terms. The fate of the two-thirds of humanity that live in nonindustrialized countries; the relations these countries maintain with the industrialized countries; more profound still, the structure and the dynamic of a world society that is gradually emerging – these questions are not only starting to take on central importance, they are being raised, in one form or another, day after day. For us, however, we who live in a modern capitalist society, the primary task is to analyse this society, the fate of the workers' movement born therein, the orientation revolutionaries should adopt for themselves. This task is *objectively* the primary one, since it is in fact the forms of life of modern capitalism that dominate the world and shape the evolution of other countries. This task is also the primary one *for us*, for we are nothing if we cannot define ourselves, both theoretically and practically, in relation to our own society. It is to this definition that the present text is devoted.⁸

II. Modern Bureaucratic Capitalism

10 In no way can it be said that capitalism, whether in its 'private' or in its totally bureaucratic form, is unable to continue to develop the forces of production. Nor is there any insurmountable economic contradiction to be found in its mode of operation. More generally speaking, there is no contradiction between the development of the forces of production and capitalist economic forms or capitalist production relations. To state that a socialist regime would be able to develop the forces of production infinitely faster is not to point out a contradiction. And to state that there is a contradiction between capitalist forms and the development of human beings is a sophism, for to speak of the development of human beings has meaning only to the exact extent that they are considered as something other than 'productive forces'. Capitalism is engaged in a movement of expanding the forces of production, and itself constantly creates the conditions for this expansion.

Classical economic crises of overproduction correspond to a historically obsolete phase characterized by the capitalist class's lack of organization. Such crises are completely unknown in totally bureaucratic capitalism (as exists in Eastern-bloc countries). And they only have a minor equivalent in the economic fluctuations of modern industrial countries, where state

control over the economy can and actually does maintain such fluctuations within narrow limits.

11 There is neither a growing 'reserve army of the unemployed' nor a relative or absolute 'pauperization' of the working class that would prevent the system from selling off its products or would render its long-term operation impossible. 'Full employment' (in the capitalist sense and within capitalist limits) and the rise in mass consumption (a type of consumption that is capitalist in its form and in its content) are both the prerequisite for and the result of the expansion of production, which capitalism in actual fact achieves. Within its current limits, the continuous rise in workers' real wages not only does not undermine the foundations of capitalism as a system but is the condition for its survival. The same will go, to an increasing degree, for the shortening of the working week.

12 None of this prevents the capitalist economy from being full of irrationalities and antinomies in all its manifestations. Still less does it prevent capitalism from being immensely wasteful as compared with the possibilities of a socialist form of production. These irrationalities, however, do not come to our attention because of some analysis of the kind found in *Capital*. They are the irrationalities found in the bureaucratic management of the economy, which exists in its pure and unadulterated form in the Eastern-bloc countries. In the Western countries they are mixed with residues from the private-anarchic phase of capitalism.

These irrationalities express the incapacity of a separate ruling stratum to manage rationally any field of activity in an alienated society, not the autonomous functioning of 'economic laws' independent of the action of individuals, groups, and classes. This is the reason they are irrationalities, and never absolute impossibilities, except at the moment when the dominated classes refuse to make the system work any longer.

13 Under capitalism, changes in labour and in the way it is organized are dominated by two profoundly related tendencies: bureaucratization on the one hand, mechanization-automation on the other. Taken together, these tendencies constitute the directors' basic response to the executives' struggle against their exploitation and their alienation. But this fact does not lead to a simple, straightforward, and uniform evolution of labour, of its structure, of the skills it requires, of its relationship to the object of labour and to work machinery; nor does it entail a simple evolution of relations among labouring people themselves. If the reduction of all tasks to compartmentalized tasks has long been and remains the central phenomenon of capitalist production, this process of reducing labour to compartmentalized tasks is beginning to attain its limits in the sectors most characteristic of modern production, where it is becoming impossible to divide up tasks any further without making work itself impossible. Similarly, the reduction of tasks to simple jobs requiring no special qualifications (the destruction

of skilled jobs) encounters its limits in modern production too, and even tends to be reversed by the growing need for greater skills that most modern industries require. Mechanization and automation are leading to a compartmentalization of tasks, but tasks that have been sufficiently compartmentalized and simplified are taken over at the next stage by 'totally' automated units, which entail a restructuring of manpower that involves a division between a group of 'passive', isolated, and unskilled attendants, on the one hand, and highly skilled and specialized technicians working in teams, on the other.

Side by side with all this, and still the largest segment of the workforce in numerical terms, traditionally structured production sectors continue to exist. In these sectors are found all the historically sedimented strata of previous eras in the evolution of work, along with completely new sectors (notably office work) where traditional concepts and distinctions lose in this regard almost all their meaning. We therefore must consider as hasty and unverified extrapolations both the traditional idea (from Marx's *Capital*) that capitalism entails the pure and simple destruction of skills and the creation of an undifferentiated mass of automaton-workers, slaves to their machines, as well as the more recent idea (of Romano and Ria Stone [Grace (Lee) Boggs] in *The American Worker*)⁹ of the growing importance of a category of universal workers working on universal machines. Both these tendencies exist as partial tendencies, together with a third tendency toward the proliferation of new categories both skilled and specialized at the same time, but it is neither possible nor necessary to decide in some arbitrary fashion that a single one of these categories represents the future.

14 It follows that neither the problem of uniting labouring people in the struggle against the present system nor that of workers' management of the business enterprise after the revolution has a guaranteed solution that relies on some automatic process incorporated into the evolution of technique itself. These problems remain, rather, political problems in the highest meaning of the term: their solution depends on a thoroughgoing raising of people's consciousness concerning the totality of society's problems.

Under capitalism there will always be a problem of uniting the struggles of different categories of labourers who are not and never will be in immediately identical situations. And during the revolution, and even afterward, workers' management will not consist in the labouring people taking charge of a production process that has become materialized in the form of mechanization and whose objective logic is watertight and beyond argument. Nor will it consist in the deployment of the aptitudes, somehow fully formed, of a collectivity of virtually universal producers, ready-made by capitalism. Workers' management will have to face up to an extraordinarily complex internal differentiation among the various strata of the labouring population; it will have to resolve the problem of how to integrate individuals, various

categories of labourers, and different types of activity, for this will be its fundamental problem. Not in any foreseeable future will capitalism produce, through its own workings, a class of labourers that would already be, in itself, a concrete universal. Unless we stick to a sociological concept, actual labouring class unity can be realized only through the struggle by labouring people and against capitalism. (Let it be said, parenthetically, that to speak today of the proletariat as a class is merely to indulge in descriptive sociology, pure and simple; what unites labouring people as identical members of a group is simply the set of passively shared traits capitalism imposes upon them, and not their attempt to assert themselves as a class that unites itself and opposes itself to the rest of society through their activity, even if fragmentary in character, or through their organization, even if that of a minority.)

The two problems mentioned above [uniting workers in struggle and workers' management] can be resolved only by the association of all the nonexploiting categories of workers at the workplace, manual workers as well as intellectual workers or office workers and technicians. Any attempt at achieving workers' management that would eliminate a category of workers essential to the modern production process would lead to the collapse of this production process – which could be built back up again only through renewed bureaucratization and the use of coercion.

15 The changes in the structuring of society that have taken place over the past century were not those foreseen by classical Marxism. This has had important consequences. Certainly there has been a 'proletarianization' of society in the sense that the old 'petit bourgeois' classes have practically disappeared, and in the sense that the overwhelming majority of the population has been transformed into a population of wage and salary earners and has been integrated into the capitalist division of labour found in the business enterprise. But this 'proletarianization' differs essentially from the classical image, where society was supposed to have evolved in two opposite directions, toward an enormous pole of industrial workers and toward an infinitesimal one of capitalists. On the contrary, as it has become bureaucratized, and in accordance with the underlying logic of bureaucratization, society has been transformed into a pyramid, or, rather, a complex set of pyramids.

The transformation of virtually the whole population into a population of wage and salary earners does not signify that there no longer exists anyone but pure and simple executants on the bottom rungs of the ladder. The population absorbed by the bureaucratic-capitalist structure has come to inhabit all tiers of the bureaucratic pyramid. It will continue to do so. And in this pyramid one can detect no tendency toward a reduction of the intermediate layers. Quite the contrary. Although it is difficult to delimit clearly this concept and although it is impossible to make it coincide with the extant

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statistical categories of analysis, we can with certainty state that in no modern industrial country does the number of 'simple executants' (manual workers in industry and their counterparts in other branches: typists, sales personnel, etc.) exceed 50 per cent of the labouring population. Moreover, the previously nonproletarianized population has not been absorbed into the industrial sectors of the economy. Except for countries that have not 'completed' their industrialization process (Italy, for example), the percentage of the population in industry stopped growing after reaching a ceiling of between 30 and (rarely) 50 per cent of the active population. The rest are employed in the 'service' sectors of the economy (the proportion of the population employed in agriculture is declining rapidly all over and is already negligible in England and the United States).

Even if the increase in the percentages employed in the service sectors were to stop (due to the mechanization and automation now encroaching upon these sectors in their turn), it would be very difficult to *reverse* this tendency, given the increasingly rapid productivity increases occurring in the industrial sector and the consequent rapid decrease in demand for industrial manpower. The combined result of these two factors is that the industrial proletariat in the classical and strict sense (i.e. defined in terms of manual workers or as hourly paid workers, categories that are roughly overlapping) is in the process of declining in relative and sometimes even absolute size. Thus, in the United States, the percentage of the industrial proletariat ('production and allied workers' and 'unskilled workers other than those in agriculture and mining', statistics that *include the unemployed*, as listed according to their last job) has fallen from 28 per cent in 1947 to 24 per cent in 1961, this decline moreover having accelerated appreciably since 1955.¹⁰

16 In no way do these observations signify that the industrial proletariat has lost its importance, or that it does not have a central role to play in the unfolding of a revolutionary process, as has been confirmed both by the Hungarian Revolution (though in that case not under conditions of modern capitalism) and by the Belgian General Strike. However, our observations clearly show that the revolutionary movement could no longer claim to represent the interests of the immense majority of the population against a small minority if it did not address itself to all categories of the wage-earning and labouring population, excluding the small minority of capitalists and ruling bureaucrats, and if it did not seek to associate the strata of simple executants with intermediate strata of the pyramid, which numerically speaking are nearly as important.

17 Apart from the transformations in the nature of the capitalist State and of capitalist policy that we have analysed elsewhere,¹¹ we must understand what the new form of capitalist totalitarianism exactly signifies and what its methods of domination are in present-day society. In present-day

totalitarianism the State, as the central expression of domination of society by a minority, or its appendages and ultimately the ruling strata seize hold of all spheres of social activity and try to model them explicitly after their interests and their outlook. This in no way implies, however, a continuous use of violence or direct coercion, or the suppression of freedoms and formal rights. Violence of course remains the ultimate guarantor of the system, but the system need not have recourse to it every day. It need not resort to violence precisely to the extent that the extension of its grip into almost all fields of activity assures it a more 'economical' exercise of its authority, to the extent that its control over the economy and the continuous expansion of the latter allow it most of the time to appease economic demands without major conflict, and to the extent, finally, that rises in the material standard of living and the degeneration of the traditional organizations and ideas of the workers' movement serve as the constant condition for individual privatization, which, though contradictory and transitory, nonetheless signifies that the domination of the system is not explicitly contested by anyone in society.

We must reject the traditional idea that bourgeois democracy is a worm-eaten edifice doomed to give way to fascism in the absence of revolution. First, this 'democracy', even as bourgeois democracy, has already effectively disappeared, *not* through the reign of the Gestapo, but through the bureaucratization of all political and state institutions and the concomitant rise of apathy among the population. Second, this new pseudodemocracy (pseudo to the second degree) is precisely the adequate form of domination for modern capitalism, which could not do without parties (including socialist and communist ones) and unions, nowadays essential cogs of the system, whatever point of view you might adopt. This has been confirmed by what has happened over the last five years in France, where, despite the decomposition of the state apparatus and the Algerian crisis, there was never a serious chance of a fascist takeover and establishment of a dictatorship. It also has been confirmed by Khrushchevism in Russia, which expresses precisely the bureaucracy's attempt to move on to new methods of domination, the old ones (totalitarian in the traditional sense) having become incompatible with modern society (it is another thing that there are chances that everything might break apart *during* the passage to these new methods of domination). With the monopoly over violence as its last resort, capitalist domination presently rests on the bureaucratic manipulation of people in their work life, in their consumer life, and everywhere else in their lives.

18 Thus, modern capitalism is essentially a bureaucratized society with a pyramidal, hierarchical structure. In it are not opposed, as in two clearly separate tiers, a small class of exploiters and a large class of producers. The division of society is much more complex and stratified, and no simple criterion is available to sum it up.

The traditional concept of class corresponded to the relation of individuals and social groups to the ownership of the means of production. We have gone beyond this concept under that form, and rightly so, when we insisted upon looking at how individuals and groups are situated in the real relations of production, and when we introduced the concepts of directors and executants. These concepts remain valid for shedding light on the situation of contemporary capitalism, but they cannot be applied in a mechanical fashion. In their pure state, they can be concretely applied only at the very top and the very bottom of the pyramid, thus leaving aside all the intermediate strata, namely, almost half the population, the half whose tasks involve both execution (with regard to their superiors) and direction (toward those 'below'). Certainly, within these intermediate strata one can encounter again some practically 'pure' cases. Thus a part of the hierarchical network basically fulfils the functions of coercion and authority, while another part basically fulfils technical functions and includes those who could be called 'executants with status' (for example, well-paid technicians or scientists who carry out only the studies or research they are asked to perform). But the collectivization of production has made it such that these pure cases, increasingly rare nowadays, leave out the great majority of the intermediate strata. While a business enterprise's service personnel may have considerably expanded, it is clear that not only the typists but a good number of employees placed higher up in these departments play no role of their own in the system of coercion and constraints that their departments help to impose within the company. Conversely, when a research department or a department that performs 'studies' for the company is developed, a chain of command is set up there, too, for a good number of people in such departments will have as their function the management of the other people's work.

More generally, it is impossible for the bureaucracy – and here is one more expression of the contradiction it experiences – to separate entirely the two work requirements, of 'knowledge' or 'technical expertise', on the one hand, and of 'managerial ability' on the other. True, the logic of the system would want only those capable of 'handling the men' to participate in the managerial chain of command, but the logic of reality requires that those who do a job know something about it – and the system can never become entirely unstuck from reality. This is why the intermediate strata are populated with people who combine a professional qualification with the exercise of managerial functions. For some of these people, the problem of how to manage in a way other than through manipulation and coercion crops up daily. Ambiguity vanishes when one reaches the layer of those who really are directors. These are the people for whose interests everything ultimately functions. They make the important decisions. They reactivate and stimulate the workings of the system, which would otherwise tend to become

bogged down in its own inertia. They take the initiative for plugging the leaks [*brèches*] during moments of crisis.

This definition is not of the same nature as the simple criteria previously adopted to characterize classes. The question today, however, is not to get wrapped up in how to define the concept of class: it is to understand and to show that bureaucratization does not diminish society's divisions but on the contrary aggravates them (by complicating them), that the system functions in the interests of a small minority at the top, that hierarchization does not suppress and never will suppress people's struggle against the ruling minority and its rules, that labouring people (whether they be workers, clerical staff, or engineers) will not be able to free themselves from oppression, from alienation, and from exploitation unless they overthrow this system by eliminating hierarchy and by instaurating their collective and egalitarian management of production. The revolution will come into being the day the immense majority of the labouring people who populate the bureaucratic pyramid attack this pyramid and the small minority who rule it. And it will not occur a day sooner. In the meantime, the only differentiation of genuinely practical importance is the one that exists at almost all levels of the pyramid (save at the very top, obviously) between those who *accept* the system and those who, in the everyday reality of production, *combat* it.

19 We already have defined elsewhere the profound contradiction of this society.¹² Briefly speaking, it resides in the fact that capitalism (and this reaches its point of paroxysm under bureaucratic capitalism) is obliged to try to realize simultaneously the exclusion and the participation of people in their activities, that people are forced to make the system run half the time *against* its rules and therefore in struggle against it. This fundamental contradiction is constantly appearing at the junction of the process of direction with the process of execution, this being, as a matter of fact, the *social* moment of production *par excellence*. And it is to be found again, in an indefinite number of refracted forms, within the process of direction itself, where it renders the bureaucracy's functioning irrational from the root up. If this contradiction can be analysed in a particularly clear-cut fashion in the *labour* process, that central manifestation of human activity found in modern Western societies, it is to be found again under other forms, transposed to a greater or lesser degree, in all spheres of social activity, whether one is dealing with political life, sexual and family life (where people are more or less obliged to conform to norms they no longer internalize), or cultural life.

20 The crisis of capitalist production, which is only the flipside of this contradiction, has already been analysed in *S. ou B.*,¹³ along with the crises of political and other kinds of organizations and institutions. These analyses must be complemented by an analysis of the crisis in values and in social life as such, and ultimately by an analysis of the crisis in the very personality of modern man, a result of the contradictory situations with which he must

constantly grapple in his work and in his private life. This personality crisis also results from the collapse of values in the most profound sense of the term, namely, the fact that without values no culture is able to structure personalities adequate to it (i.e. to make the culture function, if only as the exploited).

Yet, our analysis of the crisis of production did not show that in this system of production there was only alienation. On the contrary, it has made clear that production occurred only to the extent that the producers have constantly struggled against this alienation. Likewise, our analysis of the crisis of capitalist culture in the broadest sense, and of the corresponding human personality, will take as its starting point the quite obvious fact that society is not and cannot be simply a 'society without culture'. Alongside the debris of the old culture are to be found positive (but ever ambiguous) elements created through the evolution of history. Above all, we find the permanent effort of people to live their lives, to give their lives a meaning in an era where nothing is certain any longer and where, in any case, nothing from without is accepted at face value. In the course of this effort there tends to be realized for the first time in the history of humanity people's aspiration for autonomy. For that very reason, this effort is just as important for the preparation of the socialist revolution as are the analogous manifestations in the domain of production.

21 The fundamental contradiction of capitalism and the multiple processes of conflict and irrationality in which its ramifications are brought out express themselves, and will express themselves so long as this society exists, through 'crises' of one kind or another, breakdowns in the regular functioning of the system. These crises can open the way to revolutionary periods if the labouring masses are combative enough to put the capitalist system into question and conscious enough to be able to knock it down and to organize on its ruins a new society. The very functioning of capitalism therefore guarantees that there always will be 'revolutionary opportunities'. It does not, however, guarantee their outcome, which can depend upon nothing other than the masses' level of consciousness and their degree of autonomy. There is no 'objective' dynamic guaranteeing socialism, and to say that one can exist is a contradiction in terms. All objective dynamics that can be detected in contemporary society are thoroughly ambiguous, as we have shown elsewhere.¹⁴

The only dynamic to which one can, and should, give the meaning of a dialectical progression toward revolution is the *historical* dialectic of the struggle of social groups, first of the proletariat in the strict sense of the term, and today more generally labouring people earning wages or salaries. The signification of this dialectic is that, through their struggle, those who are exploited transform reality as well as themselves, so that when the struggle resumes it can occur only at a higher level. This alone is the revolutionary

perspective, and the search for another type of revolutionary perspective, even by those who condemn a mechanistic approach, proves that the true signification of their condemnation of such an approach has not really been understood. The ripening [*maturation*] of the conditions for socialism can never be an objective ripening (because no fact has signification outside human activity of one sort or another, and the will to read the certainty of the revolution in simple facts is no less absurd than the will to read it in the stars). Nor can it be a subjective ripening in a psychological sense (labouring people today do not have history and its lessons explicitly present in their minds, far from it; the main lesson of history is, as Hegel said, that there are no lessons of history, since history is always new). It is a historical process of maturation, that is, the accumulation of objective conditions for an adequate consciousness. This accumulation is itself the product of class action and the action of social groups. It cannot acquire its meaning, however, except through its resumption in a new consciousness and in new activity, which is not governed by 'laws' and which, while being probable, is never *fated*.

22 The present era remains within this perspective. The victory of reformism as well as of bureaucratism signifies that if labouring people are to undertake large-scale struggles, they will be able to do so only by combating reformism and bureaucracy. The bureaucratization of society poses in an explicit way the social problem as one of the *management* of society: management by whom, to what ends, by what means? The rise in standards of consumption will tend to lessen the effectiveness of consumption as a substitute in people's lives, as motive and as justification for what is already called in the United States the 'rat race'.¹⁵ In as much as 'economic' problems in the narrow sense are diminishing in importance, the interests and preoccupations of labouring people will be able to turn toward the real problems of life in modern society: toward working conditions and the organization of the workplace, toward the very *meaning* of work under present conditions, toward the other aspects of social organization and of people's lives.

To these points¹⁶ we must add another that is just as important. The crisis of culture and of traditional values increasingly raises for individuals the problem of how to orient their concrete life both in the workplace and in all its other manifestations (relationships between man and woman, between adults and children, with other social groups, with their neighbourhood and immediate surroundings, even with 'disinterested' activities), of its modes of being [*modalités*], but also, in the end, of its very *meaning*. Less and less can individuals resolve these problems simply by conforming to traditional and inherited ideas and roles – and even when they do conform they no longer internalize them, that is, they no longer accept them as valid and unchallengeable – because these ideas and these roles, which are

incompatible with present-day social reality as well as with the needs of individuals, are collapsing from within. The ruling bureaucracy tries to replace them by means of manipulation, mystification, and propaganda – but these synthetic products cannot, any more than any other ones, resist next year's fashions, they can serve only as the basis for fleeting, external types of conformism. To an increasing degree, individuals are obliged to invent new responses to their problems. In doing so, not only do they manifest their tendency toward autonomy, but at the same time they tend to embody this autonomy, in their behaviour and in their relationships with others. More and more, one's actions are set on the idea that a relationship between human beings can be founded only on the recognition by each of the freedom and responsibility of the other in the conduct of his life. If one takes seriously the character of the revolution as total, if one understands that workers' management does not signify only a certain type of machinery but also a certain type of people, then it must also be recognized that this tendency is just as important, as an index of the revolution, as the workers' tendency to combat the bureaucratic management of the business enterprise – even if we do not yet see the collective manifestations of this former tendency, or how it could lead to organized activities.

III. The End of the Traditional Workers' Movement: A Balance Sheet

23 Today one cannot act or think as a revolutionary without becoming deeply and totally conscious of this fact: the result of the transformations of capitalism and of the degeneration of the organized workers' movement has been that its traditional organizational forms, its traditional forms of action, its traditional preoccupations, ideas, and very vocabulary no longer have any value, or even have only a negative value. As [Daniel] Mothé has written, when discussing the effective reality of this movement for workers, 'even the Roman Empire, when it disappeared, left behind it ruins; the workers' movement is leaving behind only refuse'.¹⁷

To become aware of this fact means to be done once and for all with the idea that, consciously or unconsciously, still dominates many people's attitudes, namely, that today's parties and trade unions – and all that goes with them (ideas, demands, etc.) – represent merely a screen interposed between a proletariat, ever and inalterably revolutionary in itself, and its class objectives, or a casting mould that distorts the form of workers' activities but does not modify their substance. The degeneration of the workers' movement has not only entailed the appearance of a bureaucratic stratum at the summit of these organizations, it has affected *all* its manifestations. This process of degeneration is due neither to chance nor simply to the 'outside' influence

of capitalism, but expresses just as much the proletariat's reality during an entire historic phase, for the proletariat is not and cannot be unfamiliar with what happens to it, let alone what it does.¹⁸

To speak of the demise of the traditional workers' movement means to understand that a historical period is coming to a close, dragging with it into the nothingness of the past the near-totality of forms and contents it had produced to embody labouring people's struggle for liberation. Just as there will be a renewal of struggles against capitalist society only to the extent that labouring people will make a *tabula rasa* of the residues of their own past activity and hinder the rebirth of these struggles, so there can be a renewal of the activity of revolutionaries only to the extent that the corpses have been properly and definitively buried.

24 The workers' traditional forms of organization were the trade union and the party. What is a union today? It is a cog in capitalist society, indispensable for its 'smooth' functioning both at the level of production and at the level of distribution of the social product. (That it plays an ambiguous role in this regard does not suffice to distinguish it in any essential way from other institutions in established society; that the character of trade unions does not forbid revolutionary militants from belonging to them is also another matter.) This is what they are *necessarily*, and to seek to restore trade unions to their original purity is to live in a dream world under the pretext of being realistic.

What is a political party today (a 'working-class' one, I mean)? A managerial organ of capitalist society, a means for enrolling the masses into this society; when it is 'in power', it differs in no way from bourgeois parties except that it helps accelerate the evolution of capitalism toward its bureaucratic form and that it sometimes gives capitalism a more overtly totalitarian twist; in any case such 'working-class' parties organize repression of the exploited and of the colonial masses as well as, if not better than, their rivals. This is what they are necessarily, and there is no way these parties can be reformed. An abyss separates what we mean by revolutionary organization from the traditional party.

In the case of both the labour union and the 'working-class' political party, our critique¹⁹ merely renders explicit the critique to which history itself has subjected these two institutions. And like history itself, it has offered not just a critique of events but also a critique of contents and forms of people's action over an entire period. It is not just *these* parties and *these* unions that are dead as institutions for working-class struggle, but The Party and The Union. Not only is it utopian to wish to reform them, to straighten them out, or to constitute new ones that would miraculously escape the fate of the old ones; it is false to want to find for them in the new period exact equivalents, replacements under 'new' forms that would still have the same old functions.

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25 Traditional 'minimum' demands were first of all economic demands. Such economic demands not only coincided with workers' interests but were supposed to undermine the capitalist system. We have already shown²⁰ that steady wage increases are the condition for the expansion of the capitalist system and ultimately for its 'health', even if capitalists do not always understand this. (It is another thing if the capitalists' resistance to such increases can, under certain completely exceptional circumstances, become the point of departure for conflicts that go beyond the level of economic issues.)

Then there were political demands. In the great tradition of the real workers' movement (and in Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky; if not for the ultra-left sects), these consisted in demanding and defending 'democratic rights' and the extension of such rights, in making use of parliamentary institutions, and in demanding the right to manage municipal affairs. The justifications for these demands were (a) that these rights were necessary to the development of the workers' movement; (b) that the bourgeoisie could not grant them or tolerate in the long run their exercise, since it was 'choking on its own legality'. Now, we have seen the system accommodate itself very well to its pseudodemocracy. 'Rights' do not mean very much for the workers' movement since they have been cancelled out by the bureaucratization of 'working-class' organizations themselves. We must add that these 'rights' have been achieved in almost all cases in modern Western societies, and that challenges to these rights by the ruling strata, when they do take place, stir up large-scale reactions on the part of the populace only quite seldom. As for the so-called transitional demands put forth by Trotsky, we have shown well enough their false and illusory character, so we need not return to that issue here.

Finally, it must be stated and repeated that the central points of traditional 'maximum' demands (which remain alive in the minds of the overwhelming majority of people) were nationalization and economic planning. We have shown that these were organically the programme of the bureaucracy (the expression 'workers' management' is mentioned only once in passing in the *Theses, Resolutions, and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, without being elaborated at all or even defined, never to appear again).

26 The traditional forms of action (we are not talking here about armed insurrection, which does not take place every day or even every year) basically were the strike and the mass demonstration.

What is the strike today – not the idea of the strike, but striking in its effective social reality? Basically there are mass strikes, controlled and marshalled by trade unions into confrontations whose unfolding is set like a theatre piece (whatever the sacrifices such strikes may demand of the mass of workers). Or else there are 'symbolic' strikes lasting fifteen minutes, an hour, etc.; these too are controlled and marshalled from above. The only

cases in which strikes go beyond the institutionalized procedure that is now part of union-management negotiations are the wildcat strikes in England and the United States, precisely because they put this procedure into question, either in its form or in its content. There are also, we should add, a few cases of strikes limited to one company or to one department of a company; for this very reason, the grass-roots are able to play a more active role in them.

As for mass demonstrations, it is better not even to mention them.

What must be understood in these two cases is that, in their reality, these forms of action are necessarily and indissociably linked both to the organizations that control them and to the objectives these organizations pursue. It is true, for example, that the idea of the big strike still remains valid 'in itself', and that one can imagine a process in which 'real' strike committees would be elected (and not appointed from above), would put forward the 'real' demands of the workers, would remain under their control, etc. In relation to the real world today, however, such speculations are empty and gratuitous. To achieve this on a larger scale than that of a single enterprise or shop within one enterprise would require both a deep break between workers and the union bureaucracy and the masses' capacity to set up autonomous organs and to formulate demands that would cut through the present context of reformism. In short, it would signify that society was entering into a revolutionary period. The enormous difficulties that the Belgian strikes of 1960–1 encountered, as well as their ultimate failure, dramatically highlight the problem.

27 This same irreversible historical wear and tear has had its effect on the traditional vocabulary of the workers' movement as well as on what can be called its *idées-forces*. If we take into account the real way words are used in society, their signification for people and not their dictionary definitions, a communist is today a member of the Communist Party, that is all; socialism is the type of regime that exists in the USSR and other similar countries; the proletariat is a term used by no one outside a few extreme left-wing sects, and so on. Words have their historical destiny, and whatever difficulties this creates for us (difficulties that are resolved only in appearance when we write 'communist' in quotation marks), we should understand that we cannot play in relation to this language the role of a revolutionary counterpart of the Académie Française, more conservative than the real one, as we would be rejecting the living meaning of words in their everyday social usage while maintaining, for example, that 'sensible' means 'pertaining to the mode of knowing' rather than 'reasonable'²¹ or that a communist is someone in favour of a society in which everyone gives according to his ability and receives according to his needs, and not a supporter of Maurice Thorez.²²

As for the *idées-forces* of the workers' movement, no one outside a few sects

knows any longer, even vaguely, what 'social revolution', for example, means. At most one thinks of a civil war. The 'abolition of the wages system', once the top priority in labour-union programmes, no longer signifies anything to anyone. The last manifestations of actual internationalism date from the Spanish Civil War (not that opportunities have been lacking since then). The very idea of working-class unity or, more generally, unity of the entire population of labouring people (in as much as they basically share the same interests, which indeed are radically opposed to those of the ruling strata) hardly manifests itself at all in reality (apart from solidarity strikes and the 'blacking' of strike-bound companies that take place in England). As background to all this there is the collapse of traditional theoretical conceptions and ideology, to which we will not here return.

28 At the same time that we are witnessing the irreversible bankruptcy of the forms that are characteristic of the traditional movement, we have witnessed, we are witnessing, and we will continue to witness the birth, rebirth, or resumption of new forms that, to the best of our ability to judge at the present time, are pointing to the direction the revolutionary process will take in the future. These new forms should guide us in our present thinking and action. The Hungarian Workers' Councils, their demands concerning the management of production, the abolition of [externally prescribed work] norms, and so on; the shop stewards' movement in England and wildcat strikes in the United States; demands concerning working conditions in the most general sense and those directed against hierarchy, which various categories of workers in several countries are putting forward, almost always *against* the unions: these are the new forms that ought to be the certain and positive points of departure in our effort to reconstruct a revolutionary movement. We have made an extensive analysis of these movements in *S. ou B.*, and this analysis remains valid (even if it must be re-examined and developed further). These insights, however, will not allow our reflections and our action to become truly fruitful unless we come to understand fully how they represent a *rupture*, certainly not with the high points of past revolutions, but with the everyday historical reality of the traditional movement today, and unless we take them not as amendments or additions to past forms, but as new bases upon which we must continue to reflect and to act, together with what our analysis and our renewed critique of established society teach us.

29 Present conditions allow us, therefore, to deepen and to enlarge both the idea of socialism and its bases in social reality. This claim seems to be in direct conflict with the total disappearance of the revolutionary socialist movement and of political activity on the part of labouring people. And this opposition is not merely apparent. It is real, and it constitutes the central problem of our age. The workers' movement has been integrated into official society; its institutions (parties, unions) have become those of

official society. Moreover, labouring people have in fact abandoned all political and sometimes even trade-union activity. This privatization of the working class and even of all other social strata is the combined result of two factors: on the one hand, the bureaucratization of parties and unions distances these organizations from the mass of labouring people; on the other, rising living standards and the massive proliferation of new types of consumer objects and new consumer life-styles provide them with the substitute for and the simulacrum of reasons for living. This phase is neither superficial nor accidental. It expresses one possible destiny of present-day society. If the term *barbarism* has a meaning today, it is neither fascism nor poverty nor a return to the Stone Age. It is precisely this 'air-conditioned nightmare', consumption for the sake of consumption in private life, organization for the sake of organization in collective life, as well as their corollaries: privatization, withdrawal, and apathy as regards matters shared in common, and dehumanization of social relationships. This process is well under way in industrialized countries, but it also engenders its own opposites. People have abandoned bureaucratized institutions, and ultimately they enter into opposition against them. The race after 'ever higher' levels of consumption and 'ever newer' consumer objects sooner or later condemns itself by its very absurdity. Those elements that may allow a raising of consciousness, socialist activity, and, in the last analysis, revolution have not disappeared, but on the contrary are proliferating in contemporary society. Each labouring person can observe the anarchy and incoherencies that characterize the ruling classes and their system in their management of the grand affairs of society. And in his daily existence – and in the first place, in his work – he lives the absurdity of a system that tries to reduce him to the status of an automaton but is obliged to call upon his inventiveness and his initiative to correct its own mistakes.

Here lies the fundamental contradiction we have analysed, the decrepitude and the crisis of all traditional forms of organization and life. Here too we find people's aspirations for autonomy, such as these are manifested in their concrete existence. Here, finally, we discover labouring people constantly struggling in an informal way against the bureaucratic management of production, the movements and just demands we mentioned in point 28. Thus the elements of a socialist solution continue being produced, even if they are hidden underground, deformed, or mutilated by the functioning of bureaucratic society.

Moreover, this society does not succeed in rationalizing its operation (not even from its own point of view). It is doomed to go on producing 'crises', which, as accidental as they may appear to be each time they occur, are nonetheless inevitable, and never fail to raise before humanity the totality of its problems. These two elements provide the necessary and sufficient basis upon which a revolutionary perspective and project can be founded. It is a

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vain mystification to seek another perspective, to try to deduce the revolution, to provide a 'proof' for it, or to describe the way in which the conjunction of these two elements (the conscious revolt of the masses and the temporary inability of the established system to go on functioning) will take place and lead to revolution. Besides, no description of this kind ever existed in classical Marxism, except for the passage at the end of the chapter entitled 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation' in *Capital*. Moreover, this passage is theoretically false, for no revolution that has ever actually taken place in history took place in this way. Every revolution that has occurred began as an unforeseeable 'accident' of the system, setting off an explosion of mass activity. (Later on, the historians – whether Marxist or not – who have never been able to foresee anything, but are always very wise after the fact, furnish us with a *posteriori* explanations for such explosions, explanations that explain nothing at all.)

A long time ago we wrote that it is not a matter of deducing the revolution, but of making it. And the only factor making a connection between these two elements about which *we*, as revolutionaries, can speak is our own activity, the activity of a revolutionary organization. Of course, such activity does not constitute a 'guarantee' of any sort, but it is the only factor dependent on us that can increase the likelihood that the innumerable individual and collective revolts taking place throughout society will be able to respond to one another and unite among themselves, take on the same meaning, explicitly aim at the radical reconstruction of society, and finally transform what is, at the beginning, never anything other than 'just another crisis of the system' into a revolutionary crisis. In this sense the unification of the two elements of the revolutionary perspective can take place only through our activity and by means of the concrete content of our orientation.

IV. Elements for a New Orientation²³

30 As an organized movement, the revolutionary movement must be rebuilt totally. This reconstruction will find a solid base in the development of working-class experience, but it presupposes a radical rupture with present-day organizations, their ideology, their mentality, their methods, and their actions. Everything that has existed and exists today in instituted form in the labour movement – parties, unions, etc. – is irremediably and irrevocably finished, rotten, integrated into exploiting society. There can be no miraculous solutions. Everything must be remade at the cost of long and patient labour. Everything must be started over again [*recommencer*], but starting from the immense experience of a century of working-class struggles and with labouring people, who find themselves closer than ever to genuine solutions.

31 Equivocations about the socialist programme created by degenerated 'working-class' organizations (whether Stalinist or reformist) must be destroyed down to their very roots. The idea that socialism coincides in any way with the nationalization of the means of production or with planning, that it basically aims at – or that people ought to aim at – increasing production and consumption are ideas that must be mercilessly denounced. Their basic identity with the underlying orientation of capitalism must be repeatedly shown.

Workers' management of production and society and the power of workers' councils as the necessary form of socialism should be demonstrated and illustrated, starting from recent historical experience. The basic content of socialism is the restitution of people's domination over their own lives; the transformation of work from an absurd form of breadwinning into the free deployment of the creative forces of individuals and groups; the constitution of integrated human communities; the unification of people's culture and lives. This content should not be embarrassingly hidden as some kind of speculation about an indeterminate future but, rather, put forward as the sole response to the problems that today torment and stifle people and society. The socialist programme ought to be presented for what it is: a programme for the humanization of work and of society. It ought to be shouted from the rooftops that socialism is not a backyard of leisure attached to the industrial prison, or transistors for the prisoners, but the destruction of the industrial prison itself.

32 Revolutionary criticism of society must switch its axis. In the first place, it should denounce in all its forms the inhuman and absurd character of work today. It should unveil the arbitrariness and monstrosity of hierarchy in production and in society, its lack of justification, the tremendous wastefulness and strife it generates, the incompetency of those who rule, the contradictions and irrationality of bureaucratic management of each enterprise, of the economy, of the State, and of society. It ought to show that, whatever the rise in the 'standard of living', the problem of people's needs is not resolved even in the richest of societies, that consumption in the capitalist mode is full of contradictions and ultimately absurd. Finally, it ought to broaden itself to encompass all aspects of life, to denounce the disintegration of communities, the dehumanization of relations between individuals, the content and methods of capitalist education, the monstrosity of modern cities, and the double oppression imposed upon women and youth.

33 The analysis of social reality today cannot and must not simply explain and denounce alienation. It must constantly show the *double reality* of every social activity under present-day conditions (which is but the expression of what we have defined above as the fundamental contradiction of the system), namely, that people's creativity and their struggle against

alienation, at times individual, at times collective, necessarily manifest themselves in every domain, especially during the contemporary era (were this not so, there would never be a question of socialism).

We have attacked the absurd idea that the factory is *nothing but* a hard-labour camp. And we have shown that alienation can never be total (for then production would simply grind to a halt). Rather, production is dominated just as much by the tendency of the producers, both individually and collectively, partially to take on the management of production. Similarly, we must denounce the absurd idea that people's lives under capitalism consist of *nothing but* passivity toward capitalist manipulation and mystification (if this were so, we would be living in a world of zombies for whom the question of socialism would never arise). On the contrary, we must highlight and recognize the positive value of people's efforts (which are at once the cause and the effect of the collapse of traditional values and forms of living) to orient for themselves their own lives and their own attitudes in a period where nothing is certain any longer.

These efforts open up – no more, no less – an absolutely new phase in the history of humanity, and, in so far as they embody the aspiration for autonomy, they are a condition for socialism as essential as, if not more essential than, the development of technology. And we must also show the positive content the exercise of this autonomy often takes on, for instance in the growing transformation of the relations between the sexes or between parents and children in the family. This transformation contains within itself the recognition that the other person is or ought in the last analysis to be the master of his life and responsible for it. It is equally important to show the similar contents that appear in the most radical currents in contemporary culture (tendencies in psychoanalysis, sociology, and ethnology, for example), to the extent that these currents both complete the demolition of what remains of oppressive ideologies and are bound to spread within society.

34 Traditional organizations were based upon the idea that economic demands constituted the central problem confronting workers and that capitalism was incapable of satisfying these demands. This idea should be categorically repudiated since it corresponds to nothing in present-day reality. The revolutionary organization and the trade-union activity of revolutionary militants cannot be founded upon a game of outbidding others over economic demands, which the unions have more or less successfully defended and which are achievable within the capitalist system without major difficulties. The basis for permanent trade-union reformism is to be found in the possibility of wage increases. This is also one of the conditions for their irreversible degeneration into bureaucratic organizations. Capitalism can survive only by granting wage increases. For this reason, bureaucratized, reformist trade unions are indispensable to it.

This does not mean that revolutionary militants ought necessarily to leave the unions or no longer interest themselves in economic demands. But neither of these two points retains the central importance they once were given.

35 The wage earner's humanity is less and less subject to attack by economic poverty that puts his physical existence into danger. It is more and more threatened by the nature and conditions of his work, by the oppression and alienation he suffers in the production process. Now, in this field there is not, and cannot be, lasting reform, but only a struggle with unstable results that are never fully established, for one cannot reduce alienation by 3 per cent per annum. Nor is the organization of the production process ever free from the upheavals of technical change. In this field, too, the trade unions cooperate with management down the line. A key task for the revolutionary movement is to help workers organize their struggle against living and working conditions in the capitalist enterprise.

36 Exploitation in contemporary society occurs more and more under the form of inequality within the hierarchy. Respect for the value of hierarchy, which is sustained by 'working-class' organizations, becomes the last ideological support for the whole system. The revolutionary movement ought to organize a systematic struggle against the ideology of hierarchy in all its forms, including the wage and salary hierarchy and the hierarchy among different jobs in each company.

This struggle can no longer continue, however, simply on the basis of an analysis of the respective situations of semiskilled machine operators and foremen within traditional industries. Such an analysis would have no grasp over the growing number of categories of labourers, to whom it would be false to present hierarchy as merely a veil of mystification covering over a reality in which all roles would be identical, save for those that involve the exercise of coercion. What we must show is that in the overwhelming majority of cases, differences in skills among labouring people result from the very functioning of a society that is unequal and hierarchized from the outset.

With each new generation, such a society constantly reproduces itself as a stratified society. We must show that it is not simply these differences in skill levels that determine where individuals are situated on the hierarchical pyramid; their situations are defined as much (and more and more so, as one moves up from one echelon to the next) by each individual's ability to remain afloat amid the struggle between bureaucratic cliques and clans – an ability of no social value. In any case, we must show that it is only the collectivity of labouring people that can and should manage work in a rational manner, as to its general objectives and to its conditions. To the extent that certain technical aspects of work require a differentiation in people's responsibilities, we must show that those given positions of responsibility should

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remain under the control of the collectivity. We must show that in no case can there be a justification for any kind of wage differentials whatsoever, wage equality being a central plank of any socialist programme. In this same context, it must be understood that labouring people's desire to improve their skills or to take on posts of responsibility does not always or necessarily express an aspiration to pass over to the other side of the class barrier. Indeed, to an increasing degree it expresses people's need to find some interest in their work. (It is another thing that this need cannot be satisfied within the present system just by getting a promotion, either. Nor is there any point in saying that such a solution remains purely personal and individualistic; it is no more so than that of individuals who raise their children the best they can, instead of just saying, 'The problem is insoluble anyhow under the present system.')

37 In all struggles, the way in which a result is obtained is as important as, even more important than, what is obtained. Even with regard to immediate effectiveness, actions organized and directed by labouring people themselves are superior to actions decided and directed bureaucratically. But above all, these alone create the conditions for pushing the movement forward, for they alone teach labouring people how to manage their own affairs. The supreme criterion guiding the activity of the revolutionary movement ought to be the idea that when it intervenes it aims not at replacing but at developing labouring people's initiative and autonomy.

38 Even when struggles in production reach a great intensity and attain a high level, the passage to the overall problem of society remains the hardest one for labouring people to make. In this field, therefore, the revolutionary movement has a key task to perform. This task must not be confused with sterile agitation about incidents in the 'political life' of capitalism. It lies instead in showing that the system always operates against labouring people, that they cannot resolve their problems without abolishing capitalism and the bureaucracy and totally reconstructing society; that there is a profound and intimate similarity between their fate as producers in the workplace and their fate as people in society, in the sense that neither one nor the other can be modified without the division between a class of directors and a class of executants being suppressed. Only through long and patient work in this direction can the problem of how to mobilize labouring people around general questions be posed again in correct terms.

39 Experience has proved that internationalism is not an automatic product of working-class life. Formerly it had been developed into a real political factor by the actions of working-class organizations, but it disappeared when the latter degenerated and lapsed into chauvinism.

The revolutionary movement will have to struggle to help the proletariat reclaim the long path down which it has been descending for the past quarter-century. It will have to breathe life back into the international

solidarity of labour struggles and especially the solidarity of labouring people in imperialist countries with the struggles of colonized peoples.

40 The revolutionary movement must cease to appear as a political movement in the traditional sense of the term. Traditional politics is dead, and for good reasons. The population has abandoned it because it sees it for what it is in social reality: the activity of a stratum of professional mystifiers hovering around the state machinery and its appendages in order to penetrate into them or to take them over. The revolutionary movement ought to appear as a total movement concerned with everything that people do and are subject to in society, and above all with their real daily life.

41 The revolutionary movement ought therefore to cease being an organization of specialists. It ought to become the place – the only place in present-day society outside the workplace – where a growing number of individuals relearn how to live a truly collective life, manage their own affairs, and realize and develop themselves while working in mutual recognition for a common objective [*projet*].

42 The propaganda and recruitment efforts of the revolutionary movement must take into account the transformations in the structure of capitalist society described above, as well as the generalization of its state of crisis. The revolutionary movement cannot address itself to manual labourers to the exclusion of almost everyone else, or pretend that everyone has been or ultimately is going to be transformed into a simple executant at the base of the bureaucratic pyramid. What really is the case, and what can serve as an adequate basis for propaganda and recruitment efforts, is that the great majority of individuals, whatever their qualifications or level of pay, have been integrated into a bureaucratically organized production process. They feel the alienation in their work as well as the absurdity of the system, and they tend to revolt against it. Similarly, the crisis of culture and the decomposition of values in capitalist society are driving large sections of intellectuals and students (whose numerical weight, indeed, is growing) toward a radical critique of the system.

In order to achieve unity in the struggles against the system and to make the collective management of production by labouring people a realizable goal, the role of these 'new strata' will be fundamental. Indeed, it will be much more fundamental than was, for example, 'unity with the poor peasantry' in Lenin's time, for, as such, the peasantry represented only a negative force, capable merely of destroying the old system, whereas the 'new strata' have an essential, positive role to play in the socialist reconstruction of society.

The revolutionary movement alone can give a positive meaning and provide the positive outcome to the revolt of these strata against the system. And in return, the movement will be greatly enriched by them. Under the conditions of an exploitative society, the revolutionary move-

ment alone can serve as the link between manual workers, 'tertiary' employees, and intellectuals. Without this link-up there can be no victory for the revolution.

43 The rupture between generations and the youth revolt in modern society are not comparable to the 'generational conflicts' of former times. Youth no longer oppose adults as part of a strategy to take their place in an accepted and established system. They reject this system. They no longer recognize its values. Contemporary society is losing its hold over the generations it produces. This rupture is especially brutal when it comes to politics.

On the one hand, the overwhelming majority of adult cadres and labour militants cannot regear themselves to the changing situation, no matter how hard they try or how sincere they may be. They mechanically repeat the lessons and phrases learned long ago, even though these ideas have become devoid of meaning. They remain attached to forms of action and organization that are in the process of collapsing. Conversely, traditional organizations are succeeding less and less in recruiting youth. In the eyes of young people, nothing separates these organizations from all the stupid, worm-eaten pomposity they meet when they come into the social world.

The revolutionary movement will be able to give a positive direction to the immense revolt of youth today. It will make of it the leaven for social transformation, if it can find the new and genuine language for which youth is searching and if it can show young people an effective form of action and struggle against a world they reject.

44 The crisis and wearing down of the capitalist system today extend to all sectors of life. Its leaders tire themselves out trying to plug the leaks [*brèches*] in the system, without ever succeeding in doing so. In this society, the richest and most powerful the earth has ever known, people's dissatisfaction and their impotence in the face of their own creations are greater than ever.

Today capitalism may succeed in privatizing the labouring population, in driving them away from dealing with their social problems and from acting collectively. But this phase cannot last forever, if only because established society will put a stop to it first. Sooner or later, due to one of those inevitable 'accidents' that take place under the present system, the masses will enter into action again to change the conditions of their existence. The fate of this action will depend on the degree of consciousness, of initiative, of will and of capacity for autonomy that labouring people will then exhibit.

But the development of this awareness and the consolidation of this autonomy depend to a decisive degree on the continuing work of a revolutionary organization. This organization must have a clear understanding of a century of working-class struggles. Above all, it must understand that both the end and the means of all revolutionary activity are the development of the conscious and autonomous action of labouring people. It must be

capable of tracing out the perspective of a new human society for which it is worth living and dying. Finally, it must itself embody the example of a collective activity that people can both understand and dominate.

Notes

- 1 *S. ou B.*, 1 (March 1949), p. 4 (emphasis in the original) [T/E: see, now, the 'Presentation' above in *CR*].
- 2 *PO I*, in *PSW* 2, pp. 202-3, 213-14, and 220.
- 3 This opposition reached the point of paroxysm in *MCR* (1960-1), and in the ideas that, developed on the basis of that text, were formulated in the present article. The ultimate result was a scission within the group. The comrades who have separated themselves from us, among whom are P[ierre] Brune, J[ean]-F[ranois] Lyotard, and R. Maille, propose to continue publication of the monthly journal *Pouvoir Ouvrier* [T/E: *S. ou B.*'s popularized, mimeographed newsletter, *Workers' power*]. The customary and logical thing would have been to discuss publicly the reasons for this scission, and the opposing theses. Unfortunately, that is not possible for us to do. This opposition has remained without any definable content, positive or even negative; to this day we know nothing about what those who reject our ideas want to put in their place, and just as little about what precisely they are opposed to. We therefore can only explain ourselves concerning our own positions and, for the rest, we can merely note once again the ideological and political sterility of conservatism. [See *MCR*; T/E: see now the Postface to *RR*, chapter 7 in *PSW* 3.]
- 4 See *PO I*, in *PSW* 2, pp. 207-9.
- 5 See *MCR*, in *PSW* 2, pp. 272ff.
- 6 The ideas that follow have been developed in a number of texts published in *S. ou B.* See in particular the editorial, *SB* (1949); *RPR* (1949); 'Sur le programme socialiste', *S. ou B.*, 10 (July 1952) [T/E: reprinted in *CS*, pp. 47-65]; 'L'Expérience prolétarienne', *S. ou B.*, 11 (November 1952) [T/E: by Claude Lefort, reprinted in *Éléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie* (Geneva: Droz, 1971; 2nd edn, Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 39-58 and 71-97, respectively]; 'La Bureaucratie syndicale et les ouvriers', *S. ou B.*, 13 (January 1954) [T/E: by Daniel Mothé]; *CS I-III* (1955-8) [T/E: excerpts from *CS I* and *CS II* appear above in *CR*]; 'La Révolution en Pologne et en Hongrie', *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956) [T/E: Castoriadis is referring to a special section of this issue of *S. ou B.*, which included 'Questions aux militants du P.C.F.' (reprinted in *SB* 2, pp. 231-65, and *SB**, pp. 353-70, as 'L'Insurrection hongroise: questions aux militants du P.C.F.']; Claude Lefort, 'L'Insurrection hongroise' (reprinted in the 1971 edition of *Éléments*, pp. 191-220); Philippe Guillaume, 'Comment ils se sont battus'; D. Mothé, 'Chez Renault on parle de la Hongrie'; and Pierre Chauhieu (Cornelius Castoriadis), *PRAB* (1956)]; 'L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière', *S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957) [T/E: by Daniel Mothé]; *PO I* and *PO II* (1959); 'Les Ouvriers et la culture', *S. ou B.*, 30 (April 1960) [T/E: by Daniel Mothé]; and *MCR*.
- 7 It is in a spirit of profound fidelity to this, the most important aspect of Marx's doctrine, that Lukács devoted the main part of *History and Class Consciousness* to an analysis of reification.
- 8 Several of the ideas summarized below have been developed or demonstrated in *MCR*.
- 9 *S. ou B.*, 1-8. [T/E: *The American Worker*, which includes 'The American Worker' by Paul Romano and 'The Reconstruction of Society' by Ria Stone (Grace [Lee] Boggs), was originally published in English by Correspondence in 1947; a 1974 reprint is still available from Bewick in Detroit.]
- 10 Solidarity text footnote: By 1971 the proportion had declined to 21 per cent. (Figures calculated from *Manpower Report of the President* [Washington, DC: GPO, 1973],

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- pp. 188–9; and *Statistical Abstracts of the United States* [1963; T/E: this last date presumably should read 1973]).
- 11 See *CS II* in *PSW 2*, pp. 137–9 [T/E: see *CR*, pp. 91–93] and *MCR*, in *PSW 2*, pp. 267–71.
 - 12 See *CS III*, in *PSW 2*, pp. 158ff, and *MCR*, in *PSW 2*, pp. 258ff.
 - 13 See Paul Romano and Ria Stone, 'L'Ouvrier américain', *S. ou B.*, 1–8 [T/E: see note 9 above for the original English-language version]; D[aniel] Mothé, 'L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière', *S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957); R[oger] Berthier, 'Une expérience d'organisation ouvrière', *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956), and *CS III*.
 - 14 See *MCR*, in *PSW 2*, p. 299.
 - 15 T/E: Castoriadis uses the French phrase 'la course de rats' in quotation marks followed by the English phrase 'rat race', in parentheses and italics.
 - 16 Developed in *MCR*, in *PSW 2*, pp. 301–3.
 - 17 'Les Ouvriers et la culture', *S. ou B.*, 30 (April 1960), p. 37.
 - 18 See *PO I*, in *PSW 2*, pp. 207–9.
 - 19 See *PO I*, in *PSW 2*, pp. 201–9.
 - 20 See *MCR*, in *PSW 2*, pp. 249–50.
 - 21 T/E: We have followed the Solidarity text here, beginning with the word 'sensible'. The accompanying footnote reads: 'This is an English adaptation of Cardan's [i.e. Castoriadis's] text. The original stated, ". . . qui refuserait le sens vivant des mots dans l'usage social et insisterait qu'étonner signifie 'faire trembler par une violente commotion' et non 'surprendre' . . ." (Solidarity footnote).' The reprinted French text, we might also note, replaced 'insisterait' with 'maintiendrait'.
 - 22 T/E: Maurice Thorez (1900–64) was general secretary of the French Communist Party at the time.
 - 23 T/E: This fourth and final section of *RR*, 'Elements for a New Orientation', is an almost verbatim restatement of the eighth and final section of *MCR*, 'For a Modern Revolutionary Movement', with a few slight, but quite significant, alterations. See note 23 to *RR* in *PSW 3*, p. 55, for the details of these changes. (In this *Reader* text and in others in this volume, some additional slight changes have been made in order to conform to specifically British parlance or to Blackwell Publishers' house style or in order simply to improve upon the previous translations.)

Marxism and Revolutionary Theory (1964–1965)*: Excerpts

Marxism: A Provisional Assessment

The Historical Situation of Marxism and the Notion of Orthodoxy

For anyone who is preoccupied with the question of society, the encounter with Marxism is immediate and inevitable. Even to speak of an encounter in this case is inappropriate, in as much as this word denotes a contingent and external event. Ceasing to be a particular theory or a political programme professed by a few, Marxism has so impregnated language, ideas, and reality that it has become part of the atmosphere we breathe when we come into the social world, part of the historical landscape that frames our comings and goings.

For this very reason, however, to speak of Marxism has become one of the most difficult tasks. To begin with, we ourselves are implicated in a thousand different ways in this matter. And Marxism, in 'realizing' itself, has become ungraspable. Of which Marxism, in fact, should we be speaking? That of Khrushchev, of Mao Tse-tung, of Togliatti or Thorez? Or that of Castro, of the Yugoslavs, of the Polish revisionists? Or, rather, of the Trotskyists (and here again this depends on geography: French and English Trotskyists, those from the United States and those from Latin America fight among themselves and denounce one another), Bordigists, or any given far-left group that accuses all the others of betraying the spirit of 'true' Marxism, which it alone would possess? There is not simply the abyss that separates official Marxisms and oppositional Marxisms. There is an

* 'Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire' originally appeared in the final five issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 36–40 (April 1964–June 1965) and was reprinted as the first part of *IIS*. The present abridged translation, which includes the first section of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2 of *MRT*, first appeared in its entirety in the translation of *IIS* by Kathleen Blamey. [T/E: I have made some editorial changes in order to standardize terminology and style and to correct some translated passages.]

enormous range of variants, each presenting itself as excluding all the others.

No simple criterion allows us to reduce this complexity all at once. There is obviously no factual test that speaks for itself, since both the public official and the political prisoner find themselves in particular social situations which, as such, confer no privilege on their views and, on the contrary, render indispensable a double interpretation of what they say. The consecration of power must not carry greater weight for us than the halo of irreducible opposition, and it is Marxism itself that forbids us to forget the suspicion that is cast on established powers as well as on the oppositions that remain indefinitely in the margins of historical reality.

Nor could the solution be 'a return to Marx', pure and simple, whereby the historical evolution of ideas and practices over the past eighty years¹ would be considered no more than a layer of impurities concealing the resplendent body of a doctrine intact. Not only is it that the doctrine of Marx itself, as is well known and as I shall attempt once more to show, far from possesses the systematic simplicity and the consistency that some would like to attribute to it. Nor is it that such a 'return' necessarily involves an academic character – since, at best, it could do no more than restore the correct theoretical content belonging to a past doctrine, as could be done for Descartes or Thomas Aquinas, while at the same time leaving entirely in the shadows the problem that counts above all others, namely, the importance and the signification of Marxism for us and for contemporary history. The return to Marx is impossible because, under the pretext of being faithful to Marx and in order to realize this fidelity, it begins by violating some essential principles posited by Marx himself.

Marx was, in fact, the first to show that the signification of a theory cannot be understood in isolation from the historical and social practice to which it corresponds, which is an extension of it or which it serves to cover. Who today would dare to claim that the one and only meaning of Christianity is that which restores a purified reading of the Gospels, and that the social reality and the historical practice of the Churches and of Christianity over two millennia have nothing essential to teach us on this account? The 'faithfulness to Marx' that brackets the historical fate of Marxism is no less laughable. It is even more so, because for a Christian the revelation of Scripture has a transcendent ground and a timeless truth that no theory could possess in the eyes of a Marxist. To want to find the meaning of Marxism exclusively in what Marx wrote, ignoring what this doctrine has become in history, is to claim, in direct contradiction to the central ideas of this doctrine, that real history does not count, that the truth of a theory is always and exclusively 'beyond', and, finally, it is to replace revolution by revelation and the reflection on facts by the exegesis of texts:

This in itself would be serious enough. But there is more to it, for the necessity of confrontation with historical reality² is explicitly inscribed in

Marx's work and bound up with its most profound meaning. The Marxism of Marx did not aspire to be, and could not have been, a theory like any other, paying no attention to its rootedness and its historical resonance. The point was no longer 'to interpret but to change the world',³ and the full meaning of the theory is, according to the theory itself, the one that appears in the practice it inspires. Those who say, believing they thus 'exonerate' Marxist theory: None of the historical practices that claim to belong to Marxism are 'truly' inspired by it – these very people, in saying this, 'condemn' Marxism to being a 'mere theory' and level an irrevocable judgement upon it. This could even be called, quite literally, a Last Judgement, for Marx assumed entirely as his own Hegel's great idea: *Weltgeschichte ist Weltgericht*.⁴

In fact, if the practice inspired by Marxism effectively was revolutionary during certain phases of modern history, it was also the opposite during other periods. And if these two phenomena require interpretation (I shall return to this), it is nevertheless the case that they indicate beyond any doubt the essential ambiguity of Marxism. It is also the case, and this is even more important, that in history and in politics the present carries infinitely greater weight than the past. Now, this 'present' is the fact that for over forty years Marxism has become an *ideology* in the very sense Marx gave to this term: a set of ideas that relate to a reality not in order to shed light on it and to change it, but in order to veil it and to justify it in the imaginary, which permits people to say one thing and do another, to appear as other than they are.

Marxism first became an ideology as the official dogma of the established powers in countries described by antiphrasis as 'socialist'. Invoked by governments that visibly do not embody the power of the proletariat and are no more 'controlled' by the latter than any bourgeois government; represented by brilliant leaders treated by their equally brilliant successors as no more than criminal madmen, without further ado; serving as a foundation for the policies of Tito as well as those of the Albanians, the policies of Khrushchev as well as those of Mao, Marxism has become the 'solemn complement of justification' discussed by Marx, which allows one to teach students the mandatory work, *The State and Revolution*, and at the same time to maintain the most oppressive and most rigid state apparatus ever known,⁵ thereby helping the bureaucracy to conceal itself behind the 'collective ownership' of the means of production.

Marxism has also become an ideology as the doctrine of the multitude of sects that proliferated as a result of the degeneration of the official Marxist movement. The word 'sect' is not used here simply as an epithet; it has a precise sociological and historical meaning. A group with few members is not necessarily a sect; Marx and Engels did not form a sect even at the times they were most isolated. A sect is a group that sets up as an absolute a single side, aspect, or phase of the movement from which it stems, makes this