

# WORKERS' COUNCILS

AND THE ECONOMICS OF SELF-MANAGED SOCIETY



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by Solidarity Group (London)

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# 0. Our Preface

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To the best of our knowledge there have been no serious attempts by modern libertarian revolutionaries to grapple with the economic and political problems of a totally self-managed society.

What might the structure, social relations and decision-making institutions of such a society look like, in an advanced industrial country, in the second half of the twentieth century? Is the technological basis of modern life so complex that all talk of workers' management of production can be dismissed as pure 'utopia' (as both the beneficiaries -- and most of the victims -- of the present social order would have us believe)?

Or, on the contrary, isn't this allegation itself the real mystification? Doesn't historical experience, and in particular the working class experience of recent decades, prove the very opposite? Don't the very advances of science enhance the feasibility of a rational form of social organization, where real power would lie in the hands of the producers themselves?

This pamphlet seeks to deal with some of these questions. The events of the last few years show quite clearly that this is no longer a 'theoretical' preoccupation, relating to some remote and problematic future. On the contrary, it is a real, immediate and down-to-earth concern. At any time between now and the end of the century, hundreds of thousands -- nay, millions -- of men and women may well be confronted with problems of the kind here discussed. And on the solutions ordinary people may collectively provide to these problems will depend whether humanity really moves to something new, or whether we just exchange one servitude for another.

Let us immediately circumscribe the relevant area. We are not concerned with the recipes and double-talk of various 'reformed' or 'partially reformed' bureaucracies. We are not concerned with 'workers control' seen as an adjunct or decoration to nationalization and the political power of some vanguard Party. We are not discussing how to run, from above, a system of workers-management-from-below (as in Yugoslavia). We want to go a little deeper than those Polish bureaucrats, the only recent addition to whose wisdom seems to be that one shouldn't increase prices, without warning, the week before Christmas. We won't be examining what happened in Spain in 1936, firstly because this has been done before, and better than we could, and

secondly, because it only has limited relevance to the problems of an advanced industrial country, in the last third of the twentieth century.

Nor, for much the same reasons, will we examine the withered remains of what may briefly have flowered in the Algerian countryside, before being swept away in 1965 by Boumedienne's theocratic putsch (to the plaudits, be it remembered, of the rulers of 'Communist' China). Nor will we echo Castro's paeans to the 'socialist' work ethic, his exhortations to his followers to 'cut yet more sugar cane', or his fulminations against sundry slackers, uttered without ever seeking to discover the real source of their 'slackness': their lack of involvement in the fundamental decisions and their refusal to participate in their own exploitation.

At the other end of the political spectrum, we will only deal in passing with those who believe that all work and all sorrow, all limitations on human freedom, and all compulsion could immediately be swept away, and that socialism implies the immediate transcending of the human condition. With the decay of every social order, various millenaral doctrines tend to flourish. We endorse the vision but are concerned with the steps for making it reality.

Those whom we might call 'cornucopian socialists' [\[a1\]](#) will probably denounce us for discussing the organization and transformation of work (instead of its abolition). But, such is the capacity of our minds for mutually incompatible ideas that the very comrades who talk of abolishing all work will take it for granted that, under socialism, lights will go on when they press switches, and water flow when they turn on taps. We would gently ask them how the light or water will get there, who will lay the cables or pipes -- and who, before that, will make them. We are not of those who believe that reservoirs and power stations are divine dispensations to socialist humanity -- or that there is no human or social cost involved in their creation. We are intensely concerned, on the other hand, about how collectively to determine whether the cost is acceptable, and how it should be shared.

In considering various aspects of a self-managed society we will not be discussing the insights, however shrewd, or various writers or science fiction. Their undoubted merit it is that they, at least, have perceived the fantastic scope of what could be possible, even today. Unlike Jules Verne, we aren't planning to proceed '20,000 Leagues Under the Sea' or even to undertake a 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'. We just want to walk widely and freely on its surface, in the here-and-now. In this, we will immediately differentiate ourselves from most modern revolutionaries, who under pretext of 'keeping their feet on earth' remain waist-deep in concrete.

This pamphlet is based on a text by P. Chaulieu ('*Sur le Contenu du Socialisme*') which first appeared in the summer of 1957 (in issue Number 22 of the French journal, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*). [\[a2\]](#) It is important to keep the date in mind. The text was written just after the Hungarian Workers Councils had been ruthlessly suppressed, following a prolonged and heroic struggle in which hundreds of thousands of workers had put forward demands for the abolition of norms, for the equalization of wages, for workers' management of production, for a Federation of Workers' Councils, and for control from below of all institutions exercising any kind of decisional authority. [\[a3\]](#)

The text was written before the momentous developments of the sixties, before the massive growth of 'do-it-yourself' politics, and before the Berkeley events of 1964 (which showed the explosive new tensions modern capitalist society was busily producing). It was written before the vast spread -- at least in Europe -- of the 'youth revolt' (with its deep questioning of the 'work ethic' as such -- and of so many other aspects of bourgeois culture and before the development of the women's liberation movement (with its widespread critique not only of the economic exploitation of women, but of the more subtle forms of exploitation inherent in the attribution of fixed polarities and roles to the two sexes). Finally, it was written more than a decade before the great events of May 1968 (despite the fact that the movement's demands for 'autogestion', or 'self-management', at times, sound like the reverberating echoes of what the text is talking about).

Way ahead of its time in 1957, the text seems dated, in some respects, in 1972 -- not so much in what it says, which retains great freshness and originality, but in what it does not and could not say. Why, in view of all this, is *Solidarity* publishing this document at this particular time? The answer is twofold. Firstly, because

the text remains, in our opinion, the most cogent, lucid and comprehensive vision of the economic structure of a modern self-managed society ever to have been published. Secondly, because we feel that a discussion on this theme is now fairly urgent.

The text does not evade difficulties, but faces them honestly and openly. Its scope is wide. How could institutions be made comprehensible? How could they be effectively controlled from below? How could relevant information be made available to all, so that meaningful decisions might be taken collectively? How could genuinely democratic planning function, in an advanced industrial society? But the text deals with much more: with the essential changes a socialist society would have to introduce into the very structure of work, with how a genuine consumer 'market' might function, with problems of agriculture, with the political representation of those who do not work in large enterprises and with the meaning of politics in a society based on Workers Councils.

Revolutionaries usually react to all this in one of three ways:

1. For the Leninists of all ilk there is no problem. They may pay lip service to 'proletarian democracy', 'Workers Councils', and 'workers' control', but know in their bones that, wherever necessary, their Party (which has as great a role to play after the revolution as before) will take the appropriate decisions. They dismiss workers' self-management with derogatory comments about 'socialism in one factory' or with profundities like 'you can't have groups of workers doing whatever they like, without taking into account the requirements of the economy as a whole'. In this, they are tilting at men of straw, for libertarian revolutionaries have never claimed any such thing. Moreover, the Leninists utterly fail to understand what is here being proposed: we are not discussing 'workers control' (seen as some adjunct or decoration to a hierarchy of political organs, which would genuinely embody decisional authority, and which would not be directly based on the producers themselves). What we are proposing and discussing is something much more fundamental, a total reorganization of society, a reorganization involving every one of its social relations and basic institutions.

Non-Leninist revolutionaries will react to what we say in two different ways. Either,

2. 'Why worry about such things? Blueprints are a waste of time. The workers themselves will decide when the time comes'.

Or, more simplistically,

3. 'Under socialism there just won't be any problems of this kind. All present problems stem from the material scarcity of capitalism which a "free society" will immediately abolish'. The text argues most cogently why these are short-sighted answers and describes what will probably happen if libertarian revolutionaries refrain from discussing these matters as from now.

One may accept or reject what the author proposes (we are not ourselves all agreed on his various views), But it cannot be claimed that s/he fails to tackle a whole range of new problems. We are here firmly in the era of the computer, of the knowledge explosion, of wireless and television, of input-output matrices, and of the problems of today's society. We have left the quieter waters of Owen's New View of Society (1813), of Morris' News from Nowhere (1891), of Blatchford's Clarion, or of sundry other socialist or anarchist utopias of earlier years.

Let us not be misunderstood. We are not passing value judgments. We are not decrying the sensitivity and deep humanity that permeated the vision of many earlier revolutionaries. We are merely claiming that the technological infrastructures of their societies and of ours are so immeasurably different as to make comparisons rather meaningless. Although we hate much that we see around us -- and, in particular, many of the products of misapplied science -- we don't want to move the clock back (incidentally, a remarkably fruitless occupation). We see no advantage in candles or coke over electricity, or in carrying water from the well when it can be got from a tap. We want to control and humanize this society (by means commensurate with its vastness), not to seek refuge in some mythical golden past. Nor do we use the word 'utopia' in any derogatory sense, as contemporary Marxists so often do. We are using it in a purely etymological sense. Strictly speaking, 'utopian' means 'which exists nowhere'. When we say that the author's proposals are not utopian we are saying no more than that his mental constructs are but extrapolations from what already exists here and now, from experiences the working class has already been through and from institutions it has already created.

We would like to contribute this pamphlet to the serious and sustained discussion now taking place among libertarian revolutionaries about all aspects of a self-managed society. This discussion is already ranging widely and fruitfully over such fields as education, conditioning by the family, internalized repression, urbanism, town planning, ecology, new forms of art and communication, new relations between people, and between people and the essential content of their lives. In this surge of questioning one dimension is, however, missing. The dimension is that of economic organization. The silence here is quite deafening. Sure, there are occasional distant echoes of what de Leon said before the First World War about 'socialist industrial unions' -- or about what various syndicalists have proclaimed, with diminishing credibility, about the need for 'one big union'. For modern revolutionaries, however, this is totally inadequate. Perhaps what we propose isn't good enough either, but at least it tries to grapple with the problems of our epoch.

Although economic organization isn't the be-all and end-all of life, it is the pre-condition of a great deal else. And it is high time revolutionary libertarians started discussing this subject rationally. They must realize that if they have no views on these matters, others (the trad[itional] rev[olutionarie]s) do. Politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum. If we don't want the economic tyranny of bourgeois society to be replaced by the tyranny of Party-dominated structures -- masquerading as 'socialism' or 'workers control' -- it is high time we explained, and in some detail, what we mean by workers' management of production and a society genuinely based on Workers Councils.

Conservatives will say that what is here outlined threatens the rights of management. They are dead right. The non-political will proclaim what many left *politicos* believe (but are reluctant to articulate), namely that all this is 'pie in the sky' because in industry as elsewhere there must always be leaders, and that hierarchical organization is both inevitable and intrinsically rational. The liberals and Labor lefts -- aware of the increasing cynicism with which people now regard them -- will proclaim that what we say is 'what they meant all along', when they were talking about 'workers' participation'. Having failed to grasp the essence of what we are talking about, they will then doubtless start arguing how it could all be introduced by parliamentary legislation!

There will be more subtle criticisms too. Those alarmed at the monstrosities of modern science -- or those naturally suspicious of what they do not fully understand -- will shy away from the text's bold advocacy of subjugating the most modern techniques to the needs of democracy. They will remember the 'plan factory', the matrices and the coefficients, forget who will be determining them, and denounce the text as a 'technocratic' view of socialism. The text will be criticized by many anarchists as containing Marxist residues (for instance it still attributes an enormous specific weight, in the process of social change, to the industrial proletariat, a weight which the author himself would probably gauge differently today). Moreover the document still envisages a 'transitional' society between capitalism and communism, as Marx did in his Critique of the Gotha Programme. We will be told that the technical capacity of industry has increased so vastly in the last decades as to invalidate the need for such a phase of history. We hope to initiate a wide discussion on this issue.

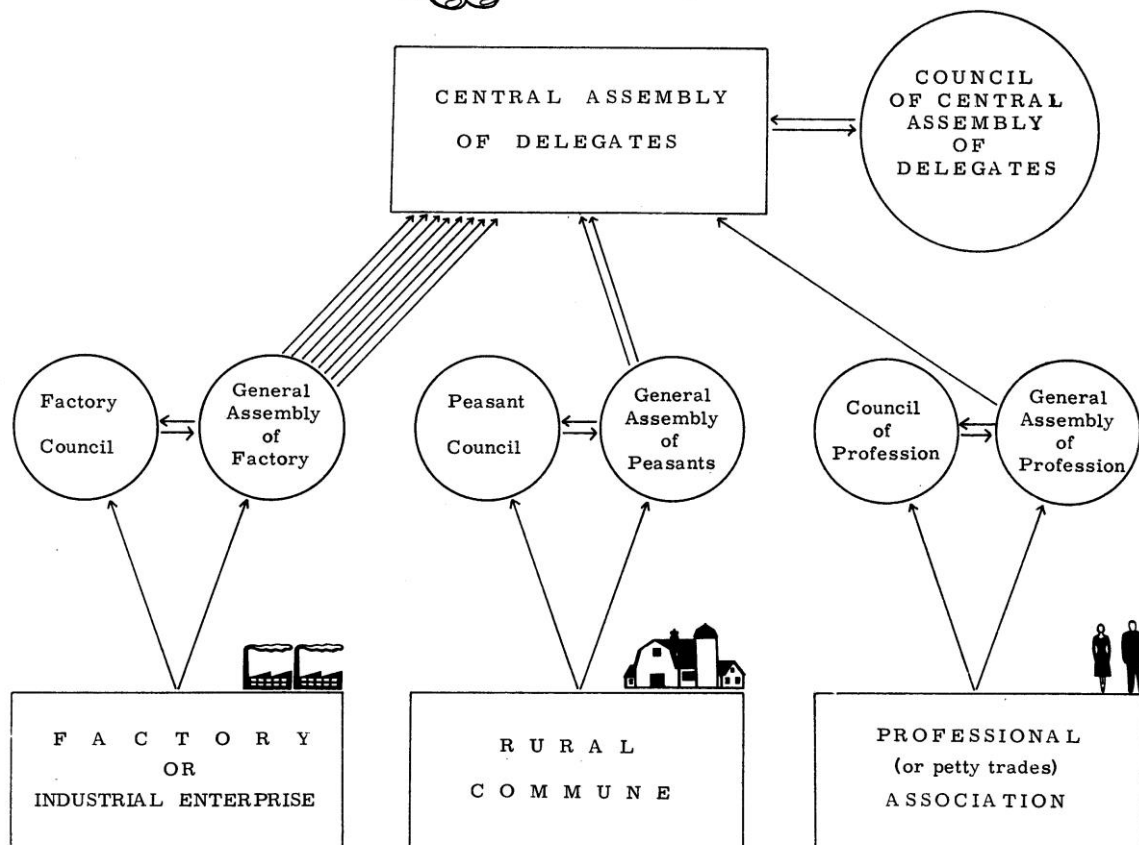
Many Marxists will denounce the text as an anarchist dream (anarchist dreams are better than Marxist nightmares -- but we would prefer, if possible, to remain awake!). Some will see the text as a major contribution to the perpetuation of wage slavery -- because it still talks of 'wages' and doesn't call for the immediate abolition of 'money' (although clearly defining the radically different meanings these terms will acquire in the early stages of a self-managed society).

The text will also be dismissed by many in the underground. They will consider it irrelevant because it does not call for the immediate 'abolition' of work. A more sophisticated criticism -- but along the same lines -- will be directed at us by the Situationists who constantly talk of 'workers' (sic) councils ... while demanding the abolition of work! Unfortunately, they seem to confuse attacks on the work ethic [a4] and on alienated labor, both of which are justified and necessary, with attacks on work itself. Such an approach fails to relate to the problems of transforming what exists here and now into what could open the way to a new society, for the construction of which, whether we like it or not, many million man-hours of labor will probably have to be expended.

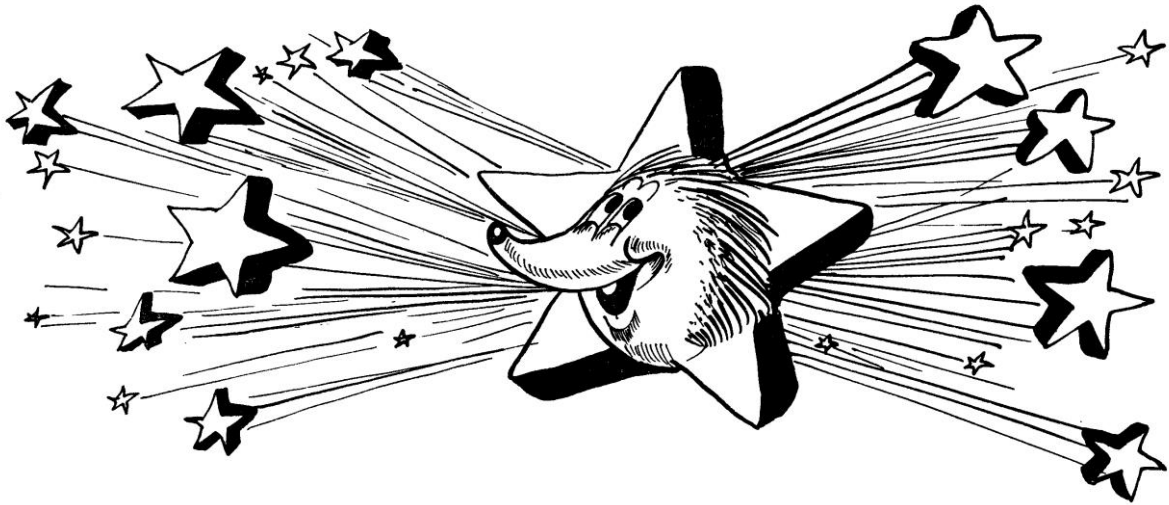
Finally the more percipient supporters of Women's Liberation will correctly point out that as long as millions of women have to stay at home they will be grossly under-represented in the various schemes the pamphlet envisages. The answer here is neither to consider housework as an 'industry' and encourage housewives to organize industrially (which would perpetuate the present state of affairs), nor for all authority to be vested in locality-based units. The position of women will change radically and new forms of representation will undoubtedly be created. All these are areas deserving the widest possible attention.

We hope that what is best in the text will survive the crossfire. We are frequently told: 'your critique of modern society is telling enough. But it is negative. These are enormous problems. How would you like to see things organized?'. Well, here at least is the draft of an answer, based on a coherent system of ideas. We will tell our questioner that a society, economically organized along the lines here described, would be infinitely preferable to what modern capitalist society has to offer us. And to those on the 'far left' we would say that such a society would also be preferable to what they and their 'vanguard Parties' are concocting 'on our behalf'. The ball would then clearly be in their court. They would have to relate to what the libertarians were saying, about economics as well as about other things That alone, in our opinion, is reason enough for putting forward our views.

## Basic units 1



# 1. Introduction



The development of modern society and what has happened to the working class movement over the last 100 years (and, in particular, since 1917) have compelled us radically to revise most of the ideas on which that movement had been based.

Several decades have gone by since the Russian Revolution. From that revolution it is not socialism that emerged, but a new and monstrous form of exploiting society in which the bureaucracy replaced the private owners of capital and 'the plan' took the place of the 'free market'.

There are several basic ingredients for the revision we propose. The first is to assimilate the vast experience of the Russian revolution and of what happened to it. The next is to grasp the real significance of the Hungarian Workers' Councils and other uprisings against the bureaucracy. But there are other ingredients to the proposed revision. A look at modern capitalism, and at the type of conflict it breeds, shows that throughout the world working people are faced with the same fundamental problems, often posed in surprisingly similar terms. These problems call for the same answer. This answer is socialism, a social system which is the very opposite both of the bureaucratic capitalism now installed in Russia, China and elsewhere -- and of the type of capitalism now prevailing in the West.

The experience of bureaucratic capitalism allows us clearly to perceive what socialism is not and cannot be. A close look both at past proletarian uprisings and at the everyday life and struggles of the working class -- both East and West -- enables us to posit what socialism could be and should be. Basing ourselves on the experience of a century we can and must now define the positive content of socialism in a much fuller and more accurate way than could previous revolutionaries. In today's vast ideological morass, people who call themselves socialists may be heard to assert that 'they are no longer quite sure what the word means'. We hope to show that the very opposite is the case. Today, for the first time, one can begin to spell out in concrete and specific terms what socialism could really be like.

The task we are about to undertake does not only lead us to challenge many widely held ideas about socialism, many of which go back to Lenin and some to Marx. It also leads us to question widely held ideas about capitalism, about the way it works and about the real nature of its crises, ideas many of which have reached us (with or without distortion) from Marx himself. The two analyses are complementary and, in fact, the one necessitates the other. One cannot understand the deepest essence of capitalism and its crises without a total conception of socialism. For socialism implies human autonomy, the conscious management by people of their own lives. Capitalism -- both private and bureaucratic [\[p1\]](#) -- is the ultimate negation of this autonomy, and its crises stem from the fact that the system, necessarily creates this drive to autonomy, while simultaneously being compelled to suppress it.

The revision we propose did not of course start today. Various strands of the revolutionary movement -- and



a number of individual revolutionaries -- have contributed to it over a period. In the very first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* [a5] we claimed that the fundamental division in contemporary societies was the division into order-givers (*dirigeants*) and order-takers (*exécutants*). We attempted to show how the working class's own development would lead it to a socialist consciousness. We stated that socialism could only be the product of the autonomous action of the working class. We stressed that a socialist society implied the abolition of any separate stratum of order-givers and that it therefore implied power at the base and workers' management of production.

But, in a sense, we ourselves have failed to develop our own ideas to the full. It would hardly be worth mentioning this fact were it not that it reflected -- at its own level -- the influence of factors which have dominated the evolution of revolutionary theory for a century, namely the enormous dead-weight of the ideology of exploiting society, the paralyzing legacy of traditional concepts and the difficulty of freeing oneself from inherited methods of thought.

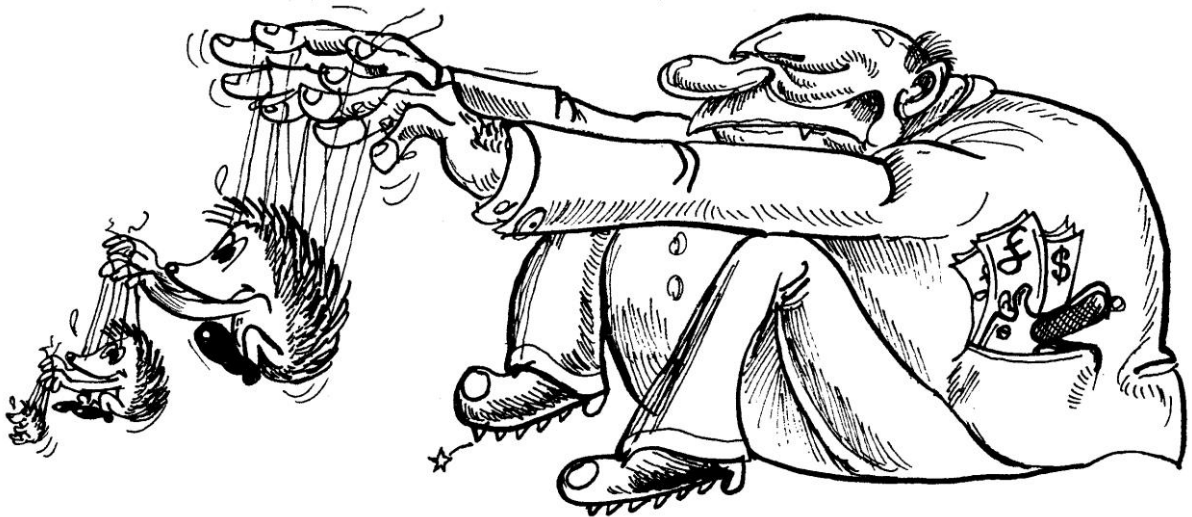
In one sense, our revision consists of making more explicit and precise what has always been the deepest content of working class struggles -- whether at their dramatic and culminating moments (revolution) or in the anonymity of working class life in the factory. In another sense, our revision consists in freeing revolutionary thought from the accumulated clinker of a century. We want to break the deforming prisms through which so many revolutionaries have become used to looking at the society around them.

Socialism aims at giving a meaning to the life and work of people; at enabling their freedom, their creativity and the most positive aspects of their personality to flourish; at creating organic links between the individual and those around him, and between the group and society; at overcoming the barriers between manual and mental work; at reconciling people with themselves and with nature. It thereby rejoins the most deeply felt aspirations of the working class in its daily struggles against capitalist alienation. These are not longings relating to some hazy and distant future. They are feelings and tendencies existing and manifesting themselves today, both in revolutionary struggles and in everyday life. To understand this is to understand that, for the worker, the final problem of history is an everyday problem.

To grasp this is also to perceive that socialism is not 'nationalization' or 'planning' or even an 'increase in living standards'. It is to understand that the real crisis of capitalism is not due to 'the anarchy of the market', or to 'overproduction' or to 'the falling rate of profit'. Taken to their logical conclusion, and grasped in all their implications, these ideas alter one's concepts of revolutionary theory, action and organization. They transform one's vision of society and of the world.



## 2. The Crisis of Capitalism



The capitalist organization of social life (both East and West) creates a constantly renewed crisis in every aspect of human activity. This crisis appears most intensely in the realm of production, [n1] although in its essence, the problem is the same in other fields, i.e., whether one is dealing with the family, with education, with culture, with politics or with international relations.

Everywhere, the capitalist structure of society imposes on people an organization of their lives that is external to them. It organizes things in the absence of those most directly concerned and often against their aspirations and interests. This is but another way of saying that capitalism divides society into a narrow stratum of order-givers (whose function is to decide and organize everything) and the vast majority of the population who are reduced to carrying out (executing) the decisions of those in power. As a result of this very fact, most people experience their own lives as something alien to them.

This pattern of organization is profoundly irrational and full of contradictions. Under it, repeated crises of one kind or another are absolutely inevitable. It is nonsensical to seek to organize people, either in production or in politics, as if they were mere objects, ignoring systematically what they themselves wish or how they themselves think things should be done. In real life, capitalism is obliged to base itself on people's capacity for self organization, on the individual and collective creativity of the producers. Without these it could not survive for a day. But the whole 'official' organization of modern society both ignores and seeks to suppress these abilities to the utmost. The result is not only an enormous waste due to untapped capacity. The system does more: it necessarily engenders opposition, a struggle against it by those upon whom it seeks to impose itself. Long before one can speak of revolution or of political consciousness, people refuse in their everyday working life to be treated as objects. The capitalist organization of society is thereby compelled not only to structure itself in the absence of those most directly concerned, but to take shape against them. The net result is not only waste but perpetual conflict.

If a thousand individuals have amongst them a given capacity for self-organization, capitalism consists in more or less arbitrarily choosing fifty of these individuals, of vesting them with managerial authority and of deciding that the others should just be cogs. Metaphorically speaking, this is already a 95% loss of social initiative and drive. But there is more to it. As the 950 ignored individuals are not cogs, and as capitalism is obliged up to a point to base itself on their human capacities and in fact to develop them, these individuals will react and struggle against what the system imposes upon them.

The creative faculties which they are not allowed to exercise on behalf of a social order which rejects them (and which they reject) are now utilized against that social order. A permanent struggle develops at the very kernel of social life. It soon becomes the source of further waste. The narrow stratum of order-givers has henceforth to divide its time between organizing the work of those 'below' and seeking to counteract, neutralize, deflect or manipulate their resistance. The function of the managerial apparatus ceases to be merely organization and soon assumes all sorts of coercive aspects. Those in authority in a large modern factory in fact spend less of their time in organization of production than in coping, directly or indirectly,

with the resistance of the exploited -- whether it be a question of supervision, of quality control, of determining piece rates, of 'human relations', of discussions with shop stewards or union representatives. On top of all this there is of course the permanent preoccupation of those in power with making sure that everything is measurable, quantifiable, verifiable, controllable, so as to deal in advance with any counteraction the workers might launch against new methods of exploitation. The same applies, with all due corrections, to the total organization of social life and to all the essential activities of any modern state.

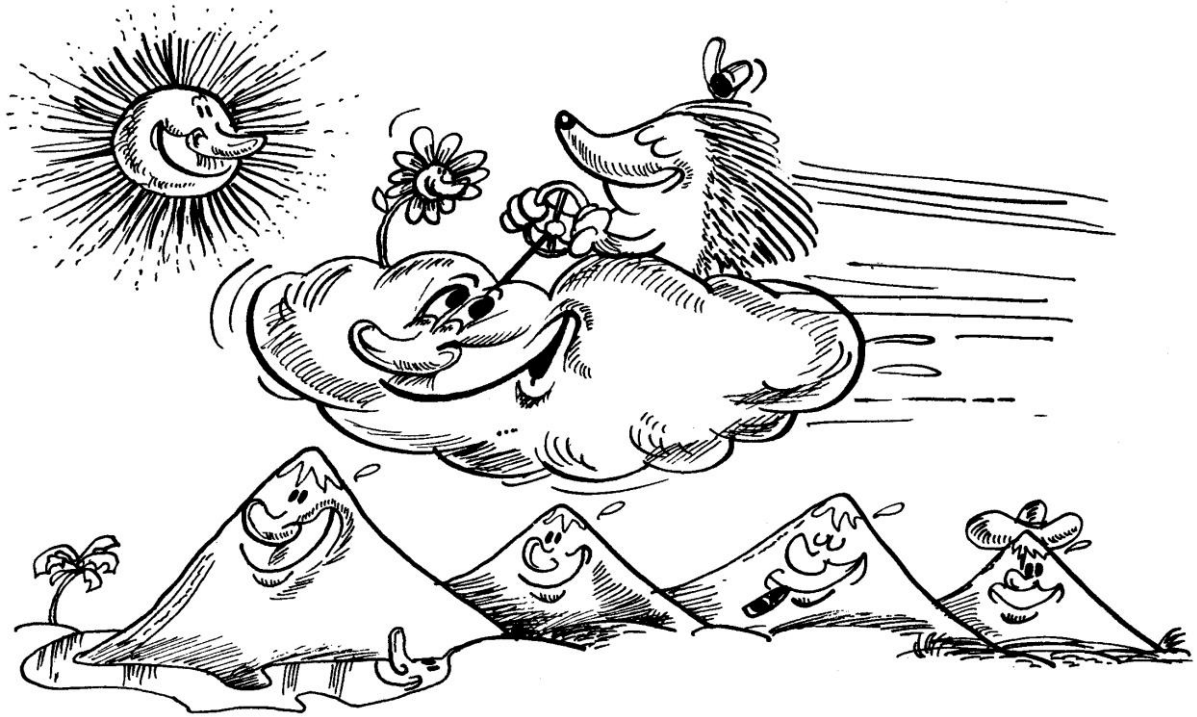
The irrationality and contradictions of capitalism do not only show up in the way social life is organized. They appear even more clearly when one looks at the real content of the life which the system proposes. More than any other social order, capitalism has made of work the center of human activity and more than any other social order capitalism makes of work something that is absurd (absurd not from the viewpoint of the philosopher or of the moralist, but from the point of view of those who have to perform it). What is challenged today is not only the 'human organization' of work, but its nature, its methods, its objectives, the very instruments and purpose of capitalist production. The two aspects are of course inseparable, but it is the second that needs stressing.

As a result of the nature of work in a capitalist enterprise, and however it may be organized, the activity of the worker instead of being the organic expression of his human faculties becomes something which dominates him as an alien and hostile force. In theory, the worker is only tied to this activity by a thin (but unbreakable) thread: the need to earn a living. But this ensures that even the day that is about to start dawns before him as something hostile. Work under capitalism therefore implies a permanent mutilation, a perpetual waste of creative capacity, and a constant struggle between the worker and his own activity, between what s/he would like to do and what s/he has to do.

From this angle too, capitalism can only survive to the extent that it cannot fashion reality to its moulds. The system only functions to the extent that the 'official' organization of production and of society are constantly resisted, thwarted, corrected and completed by the effective self-organization of people. Work processes can only be efficient under capitalism to the extent that the real attitudes of workers towards their work differ from what is prescribed. Working people succeed in appropriating the general principles relating to their work -- to which, according to the spirit of the system, they should have no access and concerning which the system seeks to keep them in the dark. They then apply these principles to the specific conditions in which they find themselves whereas in theory this practical application can only be spelled out by the managerial apparatus.

Exploiting societies persist because those whom they exploit help them to survive. But capitalism differs from all previous exploiting societies. Slave-owning and feudal societies perpetuated themselves because ancient slaves and medieval serfs worked according to the norms of those societies. The working class enables capitalism to continue by acting against the system. But capitalism can only function to the extent that those it exploits actively oppose everything the system seeks to impose upon them. [\[a6\]](#) The final outcome of this struggle is socialism namely the elimination of all externally-imposed norms, methods and patterns of organization and the total liberation of the creative and self-organizing capacities of the masses.

### **3. Basic Principles of Socialist Society**



Socialist society implies the organization by people themselves of every aspect of their social life. The establishment of socialism therefore entails the immediate abolition of the fundamental division of society into a stratum of order-givers and a mass of order-takers.

The content of the socialist reorganization of society is first of all workers' management of production. The working class has repeatedly staked its claim to such management and struggled to achieve it at the high points of its historic actions: in Russia in 1917-18, in Italy in 1920, in Spain in 1936, in Hungary in 1956.

Workers' Councils, based on the place of work, are the form workers' self-management will probably take and the institution most likely to foster its growth. Workers' management means the power of the local Workers' Councils and ultimately, at the level of society as a whole, the power of the Central Assembly of Workers Council Delegates. [a7] Factory Councils (or Councils based on any other place of work such as a plant, building site, mine, railway yard, office, etc.) will be composed of delegates elected by the workers and revocable by them, at any time, and will unite the functions of deliberation, decision and execution. Such Councils are historic creations of the working class. They have come to the forefront every time the question of power has been posed in modern society. The Russian Factory Committees of 1917, the German Workers' Councils of 1919, the Hungarian Councils of 1956 all sought to express (whatever their name) the same original, organic and characteristic working class pattern of self-organization. [a8]

Concretely to define the socialist organization of society is amongst other things to draw all the possible conclusions from two basic ideas: workers' management of production and the rule of the Councils. But such a definition can only come to life and be given flesh and blood if combined with an account of how the institutions of a free, socialist society might function in practice.

There is no question of us here trying to draw up 'statutes', 'rules', or an 'ideal constitution' for socialist society. Statutes, as such, mean nothing. The best of statutes can only have meaning to the extent that people are permanently prepared to defend what is best in them, to make up what they lack, and to change whatever they may contain that has become inadequate or outdated. From this point of view we must obviously avoid any fetishism of the 'Council' type of organization. The 'constant eligibility and revocability of representatives' are of themselves quite insufficient to 'guarantee' that a Council will remain the expression of working class interests. The Council will remain such an expression for as long as people are prepared to do whatever may be necessary for it to remain so. The achievement of socialism is not a question of better legislation. It depends on the constant self-activity of people and on their capacity to find within themselves the necessary awareness of ends and means, the necessary solidarity and determination.

But to be socially effective- this autonomous mass action cannot remain amorphous, fragmented and dispersed. It will find expression in patterns of action and forms of organization, in ways of doing things and ultimately in institutions which embody and reflect its purpose. Just as we must avoid the fetishism of 'statutes' we should also see the shortcomings of various types of 'anarchist' or 'spontaneist' fetishism, which in the belief that in the last resort working class consciousness will determine everything, takes little or no interest in the forms such consciousness should take, if it is really to change reality. The Council is not a gift bestowed by some libertarian God. It is not a miraculous institution. It cannot be a popular mouthpiece if the people do not wish to express themselves through its medium. But the Council is an adequate form of organization: its whole structure is such that it enables working class aspirations to come to light and find expression. Parliamentary-type institutions, on the other hand, whether called 'House of Commons', or 'Supreme Soviet of the USSR', are by definition types of institutions that cannot be socialist. They are founded on a radical separation between the people, 'consulted' from time to time, and those who are deemed to 'represent' them, but who are in fact beyond meaningful popular control. A Workers' Council is designed so as to represent working people, but may cease to fulfill this function. Parliament is designed so as not to represent the people and never ceases to fulfill this function. [\[n2\]](#)

The question of adequate and meaningful institutions is central to socialist society. It is particularly important as socialism can only come about through a revolution, that is to say as the result of a social crisis in the course of which the consciousness and activity of the masses reach extremely high levels. Under these conditions the masses become capable of breaking the power of the ruling class and of its armed forces, of bypassing the political and economic institutions of established society, and of transcending within themselves the heavy legacy of centuries of oppression. This state of affairs should not be thought of as some kind of paroxysm, but on the contrary as the prefiguration of the level of both activity and awareness demanded of men in a free society.

The 'ebbing' of revolutionary activity has nothing inevitable about it. It will always remain a threat however, given the sheer enormity of the tasks to be tackled. Everything which adds to the innumerable problems facing popular mass action will enhance the tendency to such a reflux. It is, therefore, crucial for the revolution to provide itself, from its very first days, with a network of adequate structures to express its will and for revolutionaries to have some idea as to how these structures might function and interrelate. There can be no organizational or ideological vacuum in this respect and if libertarian revolutionaries remain blissfully unaware of these problems and have not discussed or even envisaged them they can rest assured that others have. It is essential that revolutionary society should create for itself, at each stage, those structures that can most readily become effective 'normal' mechanisms for the expression of popular will, both in 'important affairs' and in everyday life (which is of course the first and foremost of all 'important affairs').

The definition of socialist society that we are attempting therefore requires of us some description of how we visualize its institutions, and the way they will function. This endeavor is not 'utopian', for it is but the elaboration and extrapolation of historical creations of the working class, and in particular of the concept of workers' management. The ideas we propose to develop are only the theoretical formulation of the experience of a century of working class struggles. They embody real experiences (both positive and negative), conclusions (both direct and indirect) that have already been drawn, answers given to problems actually posed or answers which would have had to be given if such and such a revolution had developed a little further. Every sentence in this text is linked to questions which implicitly or explicitly have already been met in the course of working class struggles. This should put a stop once and for all to allegations of 'utopianism'. [\[n3\]](#)

## **a. Institutions that People can Understand and Control**

Self-management will only be possible if people's attitudes to social organization alter radically. This in turn, will only take place if social institutions become a meaningful part of their real daily life. Just as work will only have a meaning when people understand and dominate it, so will the institutions of socialist society only become meaningful when people both understand and control them. [\[n4\]](#)

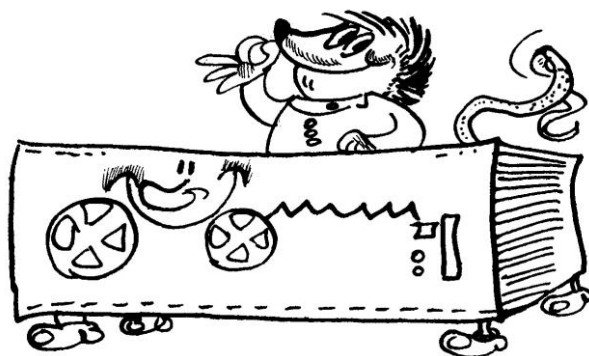
Modern society is a dark and incomprehensible jungle, a confusion of apparatuses, structures and institutions whose workings almost no one understands or takes any interest in socialist society will only be possible if it

brings about a radical change in this state of affairs and massively simplifies social organization. Socialism implies that the organization of a society will have become transparent for those who make up that society.

To say that the workings and institutions of socialist society must be easy to understand implies that people must have a maximum of information. This 'maximum of information' is something quite different from an enormous mass of data. The problem isn't to equip everybody with portable microfilms of everything that's in the British Museum. On the contrary, the maximum of information depends first and foremost in a reduction of data to their essentials, so that they can readily be handled by all. This will be possible because socialism will result in an immediate and enormous simplification of problems and the disappearance, pure and simple, of most current rules and regulations which will have become quite meaningless. To this will be added a systematic effort to gather and disseminate information about social reality, and to present facts both adequately and simply. Further on, when discussing the functioning of socialist economy, we will give examples of the enormous possibilities that already exist in this field.

Under socialism people will dominate the working and institutions of society. Socialism will therefore have, for the first time in human history, to institute democracy. Etymologically, the word *democracy* means domination by the masses. We are not here concerned with the formal aspects of this domination. Real domination must not be confused with voting. A vote, even a 'free' vote, may only be -- and often only is -- a parody of democracy. Real democracy is not the right to vote on secondary issues. It is not the right to appoint rulers who will then decide, without control from below, on all the essential questions. Nor does democracy consist in calling upon people electorally to comment upon incomprehensible questions or upon questions which have no meaning for them. Real domination consists in being able to decide for oneself, on all essential questions, in full knowledge of the relevant facts.

In these few words 'in full knowledge of the relevant facts' lies the whole problem of democracy. [n5] There is little point in asking people to pronounce themselves if they are not aware of the relevant facts. This has long been stressed by the reactionary or fascist critics of bourgeois 'democracy', and even by the more cynical Stalinists [n6] or Fabians. [a9] It is obvious that bourgeois 'democracy' is a farce, if only because literally nobody in contemporary society can express an opinion in full knowledge of the relevant facts, least of all the mass of the people from whom political and economic realities and the real meaning of the questions asked are systematically hidden. But the answer is not to vest power in the hands of an incompetent and uncontrollable bureaucracy. The answer is so to transform social reality that essential data and fundamental problems are understood by all, enabling all to express opinions 'in full knowledge of the relevant facts'.



## **b. Direct Democracy and Centralization**

To decide means to decide for oneself. To decide who is to decide is already not quite deciding for oneself. The only total form of democracy is therefore direct democracy.

To achieve the widest and most meaningful direct democracy will require that all the economic and political structures of society be based on local groups that are real, organic social units. Direct democracy certainly requires the physical presence of citizens in a given place, when decisions have to be taken. But this is not enough. It also requires that these citizens form an organic community, that they live if possible in the same milieu, that they be familiar through their daily experience with the subjects to be discussed and with the problems to be tackled. It is only in such units that the political participation of individuals can become total,

that people can know and feel that their involvement is meaningful and that the real life of the community is being determined by its own members and not by some external agency, acting 'on behalf of' the community. There must therefore be the maximum autonomy and self-management for the local units.

Modern social life has already created these collectivities and continues to create them. They are units based on medium-sized or larger enterprises and are to be found in industry, transport, building, commerce, the banks, public administration, etc., where people in hundreds, thousands or tens-of-thousands spend the main part of their life harnessed to common work, coming up against society in its most concrete form. A place of work is not only a unit of production: it has become the primary unit of social life for the vast majority of people. Instead of basing itself on geographical units, which economic development has often rendered highly artificial, the political structure of socialism will be largely based on collectivities involved in similar work. Such collectivities will prove the fertile soil on which direct democracy can flourish as they did (for similar reasons) in the ancient city or in the democratic communities of free farmers in the United States in the 19th century.

Direct democracy gives an idea of the decentralization [p2] which socialist society will be able to achieve. But an industrially advanced free society will also have to find a means of democratically integrating these basic units into the social fabric as a whole. It will have to solve the difficult problem of the necessary centralization, without which the life of a modern community would collapse.

It is not centralization as such which has made of modern societies such outstanding examples of political alienation or which has led to minorities politically expropriating the majority. This has been brought about by the development of bodies separate from and 'above' the general population, bodies exclusively and specifically concerned with the function of centralization. As long as centralization is conceived of as the specific function of a separate, independent apparatus, bureaucracy is indeed inseparable from centralization. But in a socialist society there will be no conflict between centralization and the autonomy of local organizations, for both functions will be exercised by the same institutions. There will be no separate apparatus whose function it will be to reunite what it has itself smashed up, which absurd task (need we recall it) is precisely the function of a modern bureaucracy. [a10]

Bureaucratic centralization is a feature of all modern exploiting societies. The intimate links between centralization and totalitarian bureaucratic rule, in such class societies, provokes a healthy and understandable aversion to centralization among many contemporary revolutionaries. But this response is often confused and at times it reinforces the very things it seeks to correct. 'Centralization, there's the root of all evil' [p3] proclaim many honest militants as they break with Stalinism or Leninism in either East or West. But this formulation, at best ambiguous, becomes positively harmful when it leads as it often does -- either to formal demands for the 'fragmentation of power' or to demands for a limitless extension of the powers of base groupings, neglecting what is to happen at other levels.

When Polish militants, for instance, imagine they have found a solution to the problem of bureaucracy when they advocate a social life organized and led by 'several centers' (the State Administration, a Parliamentary Assembly, the Trade Unions, Workers' Councils and Political Parties) they are arguing beside the point. They fail to see that this 'polycentrism' is equivalent to the absence of any real and identifiable center, controlled from below. And as modern society has to take certain central decisions the 'constitution' they propose will only exist on paper. It will only serve to hide the re-emergence of a real, but this time masked (and therefore, uncontrollable) 'center', from amid the ranks of the political bureaucracy.

The reason is obvious: if one fragments any institution accomplishing a significant or vital function one only creates an enhanced need for some other institution to reassemble the fragments. Similarly, if one merely advocates an extension of the powers of local Councils, one is thereby handing them over to domination by a central bureaucracy which alone would 'know' or 'understand' how to make the economy function as a whole (and modern economies, whether one likes it or not, do function as a whole). For libertarian revolutionaries to duck these difficulties and to refuse to face up to the question of central power is tantamount to leaving the solution of these problems to some bureaucracy or other.

Libertarian society will therefore have to provide a libertarian solution to the problem of centralization. This answer could be the assumption of carefully defined and circumscribed authority by a Federation of

Workers' Councils and the creation of a Central Assembly of Councils and of a Council Administration. We will see further on that such an Assembly and such an Administration do not constitute a delegation of popular power but are, on the contrary, an instrument of that power. At this stage we only want to discuss the principles that might govern the relationship of such bodies to the local Councils and other base groups. These principles are important, for they would affect the functioning of nearly all institutions in a libertarian society.

### **c. The Flow of Information and Decisions**

In a society where the people have been robbed of political power, and where this power is in the hands of a centralizing authority the essential relationship between the center and the periphery can be summed up as follows: channels from the periphery to the center only transmit information, whereas channels from the center to the periphery transmit decisions (plus, perhaps, that minimum of information deemed necessary for the understanding and execution of the decisions taken at the center). The whole set-up reflects not only a monopoly of decisional authority, but also a monopoly of the conditions necessary for the exercise of power, The center alone has the 'sum total' of information needed to evaluate and decide. In modern society, it can only be by accident that any individual or body gains access to information other than that relating to his immediate milieu. The system seeks to avoid, or at any rate, it doesn't encourage such 'accidents'.

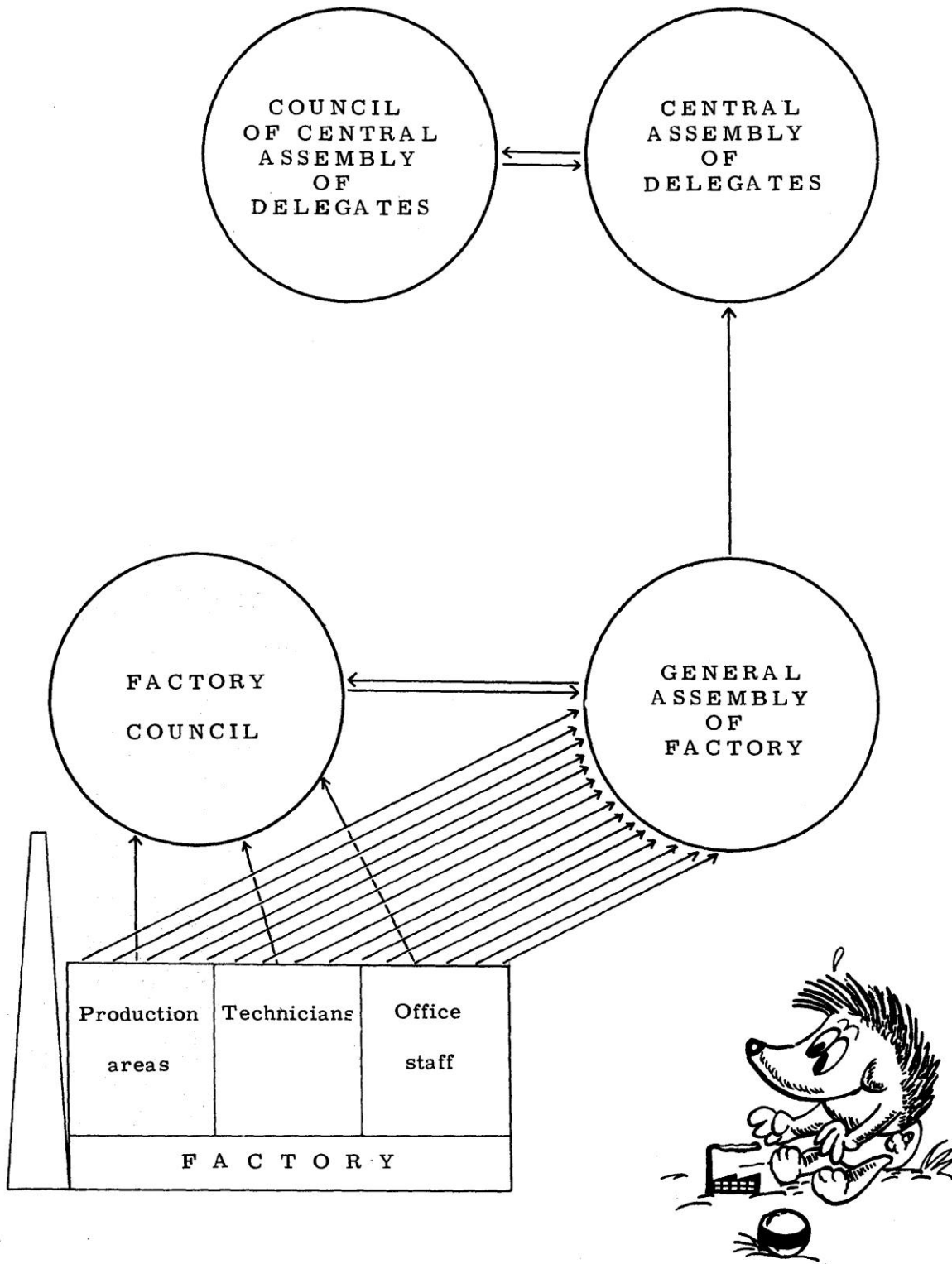
When we say that in a socialist society the central bodies will not constitute a delegation of power but will be the expression of the power of the people we are implying a radical change in all this. One of the main functions of central bodies will be to collect, transmit and disseminate information collected and conveyed to them by local groups. In all essential fields, decisions will be taken at grassroots level and will be notified to the 'center', whose responsibility it will be to help or follow their progress. A two-way flow of information and recommendations will be instituted and this will not only apply to relations between the Administration and the Councils, but will be a model for relations between all institutions and those who comprise them.

We must stress once again that we are not trying to draw up perfect blueprints. It is obvious for instance that to collect and disseminate information is not a socially neutral function, All information cannot be disseminated -- it would be the surest way of smothering what is relevant and rendering it incomprehensible and therefore uncontrollable. The role of any central bodies is therefore political, even in this respect.

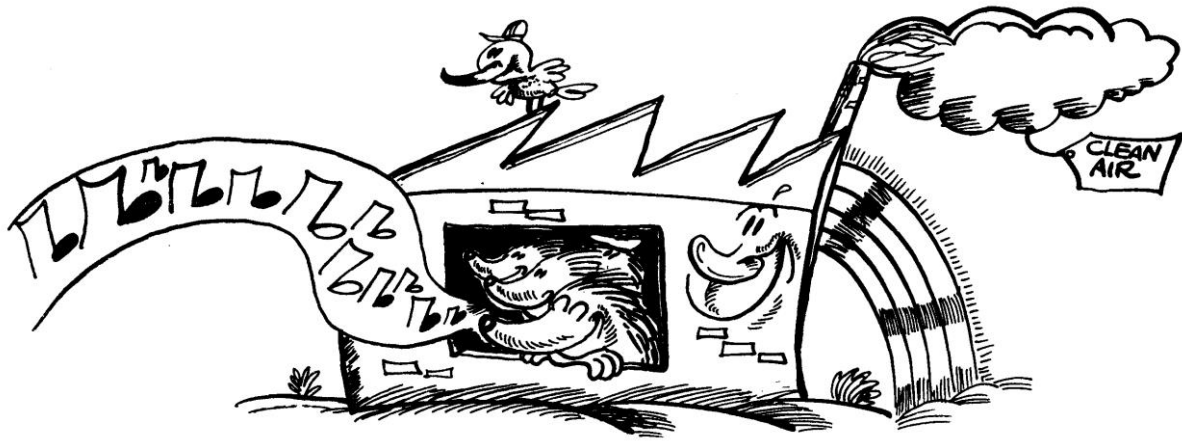




# Basic units 2



## 4. Socialism and the Transformation of Work



Socialism will only be brought about by the autonomous action of the majority of the population. Socialist society is nothing other than the self-organization of this autonomy. Socialism both presupposes this autonomy, and helps to develop it.

But if this autonomy is people's conscious domination over all their activities, it is clear that we can't just concern ourselves with political autonomy. Political autonomy is but a derivative aspect of what is the central content and problem of socialism: to institute the domination of mankind over the work process. [n7] A purely political autonomy would be meaningless. One can't imagine a society where people would be slaves in production every day of the week, and then enjoy Sundays of political freedom. [n8] The idea that socialist production or a socialist economy could be run, at any particular level, by managers (themselves supervised by Councils, or Soviets, or by any other body 'incarnating the political power of the working class') is quite nonsensical. Real power in any such society would rapidly fall into the hands of those who managed production. The Councils or Soviets would rapidly wither amid the general indifference of the population. People would stop devoting time, interest, or activity to institutions which no longer really influenced the pattern of their lives.

Autonomy is therefore meaningless unless it implies workers' management of production, and this at the levels of the shop, of the plant, of whole industries, and of the economy as a whole. But, workers' management is not just a new administrative technique. It cannot remain external to the structure of work itself. It doesn't mean keeping work as it is, and just replacing the bureaucratic apparatus which currently manages production by a Workers' Council -- however democratic or revocable such a Council might be. It means that for the mass of people, new relations will have to develop with their work, and about their work. The very content of work will immediately have to alter.

Today, the purpose, means, methods, and rhythms of work are determined, from the outside, by the bureaucratic managerial apparatus. This apparatus can only manage through resort to universal, abstract rules, determined 'once and for all'. These rules cover such matters as norms of production, technical specifications, rates of pay, bonus, and how production areas will be organized. The periodic revision of these rules regularly results in 'crises' in the organization of production. Once the bureaucratic managerial apparatus has been eliminated, this sort of structure of production will have to disappear, both in form and content.

In accord with the deepest of working-class aspirations, already tentatively expressed at the heights of working-class struggle, production norms will be abolished altogether, and complete equality in wages will be instituted. [a11] These measures, taken together as a first step, will put an end to exploitation and to all the externally imposed constraints and coercions in production. To the extent that work will still be necessary (and this itself will be a matter for constant review by society as a whole), work discipline will be a matter of relations between the individual work and the group with which s/he works, of relations between groups of workers and the shop as a whole, and of relations between various shops, and the General Assembly of the Factory or Enterprise.

Workers' management is therefore not the 'supervision' of a bureaucratic managerial apparatus by representatives of the workers. Nor is it the replacement of this apparatus by another, formed of individuals of working-class origin. It is the abolition of any separate managerial apparatus and the restitution of the

functions of such an apparatus to the community of workers. The Factory Council isn't a new managerial apparatus. It is but one of the places in which coordination takes place, a 'local headquarters' from which contacts between the factory and the outside world are regulated.

If this is achieved, it will imply that the nature and content of work are already beginning to alter. Today, work consists essentially in obeying instructions initiated elsewhere. Workers' management will mean the reuniting of the functions of decision and execution. But, even this will be insufficient -- or rather, it will immediately lead on to something else. The restitution of managerial functions to the workers will inevitably lead them to tackle what is, today, the kernel of alienation, namely the technological structure of work, which results in work dominating the workers instead of being dominated by them. This problem will not be solved overnight, but its solution will be the task of that historical period which we call socialism. Socialism is, first and foremost, the solution of this particular problem.

Between capitalism and communism there aren't 36 types of 'transitional society', as some have sought to make us believe. There is but one: socialism. And, the main characteristic of socialism isn't 'the development of the productive forces', or 'the increasing satisfaction of consumer needs', or 'an increase of political freedom'. The hallmark of socialism is the change it will bring about in the nature and content of work, through the conscious and deliberate transformation of an inherited technology. For the first time in human history, technology will be subordinated to human needs (not only to the people's needs as consumers but also to their needs as producers).

The socialist revolution will allow this process to begin. Its completion will mark the entry of humanity into the communist era. Everything else -- politics, consumption, etc. -- are consequences or implications, which one must certainly look at in their organic unity, but which can only acquire such a unity or meaning through their relation to the key problem: the transformation of work itself. Human freedom will remain an illusion and a mystification if it doesn't mean freedom in people's fundamental activity: the activity which produces. And, this freedom will not be a gift bestowed by nature. It will not automatically arise, out of other developments. It will have to be consciously created. In the last analysis, this is the content of socialism.

Important practical consequences flow from all this. Changing the nature of work will be tackled from both ends. On the one hand, conditions will be created which will allow the fullest possible development of people's human capacities and faculties. This will imply the systematic dismantling, stone by stone, of the whole edifice of the division of labor. On the other hand, people will have to give a whole new orientation to technical developments, and to how they may apply to production. These are but two aspects of the same thing: man's relation to technique.

Let us start by looking at the second, more tangible, point: technical development as such. As a first approximation, one could say that capitalist technology (the current application of technique to production) is rotten at the core because it doesn't help people dominate their work, its aim being the very opposite. Socialists often say that what is basically wrong with capitalist technology is that it seeks to develop production for purposes of profit, or that it develops production for production's sake, independently of human needs (people being conceived of, in these arguments, only as potential consumers of products). The same socialists then tell us that the purpose of socialism is to adapt production to the real consumer needs of society, both in relation to volume and to the nature of the goods produced.

Of course, all this is true, and any society lies condemned in which a single child or adult goes hungry. But the more fundamental problem lies elsewhere.

Capitalism does not utilize a socially neutral technology for capitalist ends. Capitalism has created a capitalist technology, for its own ends, which are by no means neutral. The real essence of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production's sake: it is to subordinate and dominate the producers. Capitalist technology is primarily characterized by its drive to eliminate the human element in productive labor and, in the long run, to eliminate man altogether from the productive process. That here, as elsewhere, capitalism fails to fulfill its deepest tendency -- and that it would fall to pieces if it achieved its purpose -- does not affect the argument. On the contrary, it only highlights another aspect of the crisis of the system.

Capitalism cannot count on the voluntary cooperation of the producers. On the contrary, it has constantly to face their hostility (or, at best, indifference). This is why it is essential for the machine to impose its rhythm on the work process. Where this isn't possible capitalism seeks at least to measure the work performed. In every productive process, work must therefore be definable, quantifiable, controllable from the outside. As long as capitalism can't dispense with workers altogether, it has to make them as interchangeable as possible and to reduce their work to its simplest expression, that of unskilled labor. There is no conscious conspiracy or plot behind all this.

There is only a process of 'natural selection', affecting technical inventions as they are applied to industry. Some are preferred to others and are, on the whole, more widely utilized. These are the ones which slot in with capitalism's basic need to deal with labor-power as a measurable, controllable and interchangeable commodity.

There is no capitalist chemistry or capitalist physics as such -- but, there is certainly a capitalist technology, if by this, one means that of the 'spectrum' of techniques available at a given point in time (which is determined by the development of science) a given group (or 'band') will be selected. From the moment the development of science permits a choice of several possible techniques, a society will regularly choose those methods which have a meaning for it, which are 'rational' in the light of its own class rationality. But the 'rationality' of an exploiting society is not the rationality of socialism. [n9] The conscious transformation of technology will, therefore, be a central task of a society of free workers.

Marx, as is well known, was the first to go beyond the surface of the economic phenomena of capitalism (such as the market, competition, distribution, etc.) and to tackle the analysis of the key area of capitalist social relations: the concrete relations of production in the capitalist factory. But "Volume I" of Capital is still awaiting completion. The most striking feature of the degeneration of the Marxist movement is that this particular concern of Marx's, the most fundamental of all, was soon abandoned, even by the best of Marxists, in favour of the analysis of the 'important' phenomena. Through this very fact, these analyses were either totally distorted, or found themselves dealing with very partial aspects of reality, thereby leading to judgments that proved catastrophically wrong.

Thus, it is striking to see Rosa Luxemburg devote two important volumes to the Accumulation of Capital, in which she totally ignores what this process of accumulation really means as to the relations of production. Her concern in these volumes was solely about the possibility of a global equilibrium between production and consumption and she was finally led to believe she had discovered a process of automatic collapse of capitalism (an idea, needless to say, concretely false and *a priori* absurd). It is just as striking to see Lenin, in his Imperialism, start from the correct and fundamental observation that the concentration of capital has reached the stage of the domination of the monopolies -- and yet, neglect the transformation of the relations of production in the capitalist factory, which results precisely from such a concentration, and ignore the crucial phenomenon of the constitution of an enormous apparatus managing production, which was, henceforth, to incarnate exploitation. He preferred to see the main consequences of the concentration of capital in the transformation of capitalists into 'coupon-clipping' rentiers. The working class movement is still paying the price of the consequences of this way of looking at things. In so far as ideas play a role in history, Khrushchev is in power in Russia as a by-product of the conception that exploitation can only take the form of coupon-clipping.

But, we must go further back still. We must go back to Marx himself. Marx threw a great deal of light on the alienation of the producer in the course of capitalist production and on the enslavement of man by the mechanical universe he had created. But Marx's analysis is at times incomplete, in that he sees but alienation in all this.

In Capital -- as opposed to Marx's early writings it is not brought out that the worker is (and can only be) the positive vehicle of capitalist production, which is obliged to base itself on him as such, and to develop him as such, while simultaneously seeking to reduce him to an automaton and, at the limit, to drive him out of production altogether. Because of this, the analysis fails to perceive that the prime crisis of capitalism is the crisis in production, due to the simultaneous existence of two contradictory tendencies, neither of which could disappear without the whole system collapsing. Marx shows in capitalism 'despotism in the workshop and anarchy in society' -- instead of seeing it as both despotism and anarchy in both workshop and society.

This leads him to look for the crisis of capitalism not in production itself (except insofar as capitalist production develops 'oppression, misery, degeneration, but also revolt', and the numerical strength and discipline of the proletariat) -- but in such factors as overproduction and the fall in the rate of profit. Marx fails to see that as long as this type of work persists, this crisis will persist with all it entails, and this whatever the system not only of property, but whatever the nature of the state, and finally whatever even the system of management of production.

In certain passages of Capital, Marx is thus led to see in modern production only the fact that the producer is mutilated and reduced to a 'fragment of a man' -- which is true, as much as the contrary [\[n10\]](#) -- and, what is more serious, to link this aspect to modern production and finally to production as such, instead of linking it to capitalist technology. Marx implies that the basis of this state of affairs is modern production as such, a stage in the development of technique about which nothing can be done, the famous 'realm of necessity'. Thus, the taking over of society by the producers -- socialism -- at times comes to mean, for Marx, only an external change in political and economic management, a change that would leave intact the structure of work and simply reform its more 'inhuman' aspects. This idea is clearly expressed in the famous passage of "Volume III" of Capital, where speaking of socialist society, Marx says:

'In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus, in the very nature of things, it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. ... Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it... and, achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of their human nature. But, it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins ... the true realm of freedom, which however can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite.' [\[a12\]](#)

If it is true that the 'realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases' it is strange to read from the pen of the man who wrote that 'industry was the open book of human faculties' that freedom could 'thus' only be found outside of work. The proper conclusion -- which Marx himself draws in certain other places -- is that the realm of freedom starts when work becomes free activity, both in what motivates it and in its content. In the dominant concept, however, freedom is what isn't work, it is what surrounds work, it is either 'free time' (reduction of the working day) or 'rational regulation' and 'common control' of exchanges with Nature, which minimize human effort and preserve human dignity. In this perspective, the reduction of the working day certainly becomes a 'basic prerequisite', as mankind would finally only be free in its leisure.

The reduction of the working day is, in fact, important, not for this reason however, but to allow people to achieve a balance between their various types of activity. And, at the limit, the 'ideal' (communism) isn't the reduction of the working day to zero, but the free determination by all of the nature and extent of their work. Socialist society will be able to reduce the length of the working day, and will have to do so, but this will not be its fundamental preoccupation. Its first task will be to tackle 'the realm of necessity', as such, to transform the very nature of work. The problem is not to leave more and more 'free' time to individuals -- which might well only be empty time -- so that they may fill it at will with 'poetry' or the carving of wood. The problem is to make of all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to find expression in creative activity.

The problem is to put poetry into work. [\[n11\]](#) Production isn't something negative, that has to be limited as much as possible for mankind to fulfill itself in its leisure. The institution of autonomy is also -- and, in the first place -- the institution of autonomy in work.

Underlying the idea that freedom is to be found 'outside the realm of material production proper' there lies a double error. Firstly, that the very nature of technique and of modern production renders inevitable the domination of the productive process over the producer, in the course of his work. Secondly, that technology and in particular modern technology follows an autonomous development, before which one can only bow. This modern technology would, moreover, possess the double attribute of, on the one hand, constantly reducing the human role in production and, on the other hand, of constantly increasing the productivity of labor. From these two inexplicably combined attributes would result a miraculous dialectic of technological progress: more and more a slave in the course of work, man would be in a position enormously to reduce the length of work, if only s/he could organize society rationally.

We have already shown however that there is no autonomous development of technology. Of the sum total of technologies which scientific development makes possible at any given point in time, capitalist society brings to fulfillment those which correspond most closely to its class structure, which permit capital best to struggle against labor. It is generally believed that the application of this or that invention to production depends on its economic 'profitability'. But there is no such thing as a neutral 'profitability': the class struggle in the factory is the main factor determining 'profitability'. A given invention will be preferred to another by a factory management if, other things being equal, it enhances the 'independent' progress of production, freeing it from interference by the producers. The increasing enslavement of people in production flows essentially from this process, and not from some mysterious curse, inherent in a given phase of technological development. There is, moreover, no magic dialectic of slavery and productivity: productivity increases in relation to the enormous scientific and technical development which is at the basis of modern production -- and it increases despite the slavery, and not because of it. Slavery implies an enormous waste, due to the fact that people only contribute an infinitesimal fraction of their capacities to production. (We are passing no *a priori* judgment on what these capacities might be. However low they may estimate it, the manager of Fords and the Secretary of the Russian Communist Party would have to admit that their own particular ways of organizing production only tapped an infinitesimal fraction of it).

Socialist society will therefore not be afflicted with any kind of technological curse. Having abolished bureaucratic capitalist relationships it will tackle at the same time the technological structure of production, which is both the basis of these relationships and their ever-renewed product.



## 1. THE FACTORY COUNCIL

### Possible Composition and Procedures

- Delegates from various shops, departments, and offices of a given enterprise (say 1 delegate per 100 or 200 workers).
- All delegates elected and immediately revocable by body they represent.
- MOST DELEGATES REMAIN AT THEIR JOBS; a rotating minority would ensure continuity.
- Factory Council meets, say, 1 or 2 half-days each week.

### Suggested Functions

- Coordination between shops, departments, and offices of a given enterprise.

- Maintenance of relations with other economic organizations, whether in same industry (vertical cooperation) or same locality (horizontal cooperation).
  - Maintenance of relations with outside world, in general.
- Determination of how to achieve given production target, given the general means allocated by the plan.
  - Organization of work in each shop or department.
  - Eventually, changes in the structure of the means of production.

## 2. THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- All those who work in a given enterprise (manual workers, office workers, technicians, etc.).
- Highest decision-making body for all problems relating to the factory [p4] as a whole.
- Meets regularly (say, 2 days a month) or more often if meeting wanted by specified number of workers, delegates, or shops.
- Decides on questions to be submitted to Factory Council for further elaboration, discussion, etc.
- Amends, rejects, refers back, or endorses all but routine decisions of the Factory Council.
- Elects delegates (WHO REMAIN AT WORK) to the central Assembly of Delegates. [p5]

## 5. Workers' Management: The Factory



### a. Functions

It is well known that workers can organize their own work at the level of a workshop or of part of a factory. Bourgeois industrial sociologists not only recognize this fact, but point out that 'primary groups' of workers often get on with their job better if management leaves them alone, and doesn't constantly try to insert itself into the production process.

How can the work of these various 'primary groups' -- or of various shops and sections -- be coordinated? Bourgeois theoreticians stress that the present managerial apparatus -- whose formal job it is to ensure such a coordination -- is not really up to the task: it has no real grip on the workers, and is, itself, torn by internal stresses. But having 'demolished' the present set-up by their criticisms, modern industrial sociologists have



nothing to put in its place. And, as beyond the 'primary' organization of production, there has to be a 'secondary' organization, they finally fall back on the existing bureaucratic apparatus, exhorting it 'to understand', 'to improve itself', 'to trust people more', etc., etc. [n12] The same can be said of 'reformed' or 'de-Stalinized' leaders in the Eastern Bloc.

What no one seems prepared to recognize (or even to admit) is the capacity of working people to manage their own affairs outside of a very narrow radius. The bureaucratic mind cannot see in the mass of people employed in a factory or office an active subject, capable of managing and organizing. In the eyes of those in authority, both East and West, as soon as one gets beyond a group of ten, fifteen or twenty individuals, the crowd begins -- the mob, the thousand-headed Hydra that can't act collectively, or that could only act collectively in the display of collective delirium or hysteria. They believe that only a specially evolved managerial apparatus, endowed, of course, with coercive functions, can dominate and control this mass.

But such are the muddles and shortcomings of the present managerial apparatus that even-today workers (or 'primary groups') are obliged to take on quite a number of coordinating tasks. Moreover, historical experience shows that the working class is quite capable of managing whole enterprises. In Spain, in 1936 and 1937, workers ran the factories. In Budapest, in 1956, big bakeries employing hundreds of workers carried on during and immediately after the insurrection. They worked better than ever before, under workers' self-management. Many such examples could be quoted.

The most useful way of discussing this problem is not to weigh up, in the abstract, the 'managerial capacities' of the working class. It is to disentangle the specific functions of the present managerial apparatus and to see which of them, under socialism, could be discarded, and which would need to be altered, and in what direction. Present managerial functions are of four main types and we will discuss them in turn:

### **1. Coercive functions**

These functions, and the jobs which go with them (supervisors, foremen, part of the 'personnel' department), would be done away with, purely and simply. Each group of workers would be quite capable of disciplining itself. It would also be capable of granting momentary authority from time-to-time to people, drawn from its own ranks, should it feel this to be needed for the carrying out of a particular job.

### **2. Administrative functions**

These relate to jobs, most of which are now carried out in the offices. Among them are accountancy and the 'commercial' and 'general' services of the enterprise. The development of modern production has fragmented and socialized this work, just as it has done to production itself. Nine-tenths of people working in offices attached to factories carry out tasks of execution. Throughout their life, they will do little else. Important changes will have to be brought about here.

The capitalist structure of the factory generally results in considerable over-staffing of these areas and a socialist reorganization would probably result in a big economy of labor in these fields. Some of these departments would not only diminish in size, but would witness a radical transformation of their functions. In the last few years 'commercial sections' have everywhere grown enormously. In a planned socialist economy, they would be mainly concerned with, on the one hand, obtaining supplies, and on the other, with deliveries. They would be in contact with similar departments in supply-factories and with stores, distributing to consumers. Once the necessary transformations had been brought about, offices would be considered 'workshops' like any others. They could organize their own work and would relate, for purposes of coordination, with the other shops of the factory. They would enjoy no particular rights by virtue of the nature of their work. They have, in fact, no such rights today, and it is as a result of other factors (the division between manual and 'intellectual' work, the more pronounced hierarchy in offices, etc.), that persons from among the office staff, may find their way into the ranks of management.

### **3. 'Technical' functions**

These are, at present, carried out by people ranging from consultant engineers to draftsmen. Here, too, modern industry has created 'collectives' in which work is divided up and socialized, and in which 90% of those involved do just as they're told. But, while pointing this out in relation to what goes on within these particular departments, we must recognize that these departments carry out managerial functions in relation to the production areas. Once production targets have been defined, it is this collective technical apparatus which selects ways and means, looks into the necessary changes in the tooling, determines the sequence and the details of various operations, etc. In theory, the production areas merely carry out the instructions issued

from the technical departments. Under the conditions of modern mass production a complete separation certainly exists between those who draw up the plans and those who have to carry them out.

Up to a point, all this is based on some thing real. Today, both specialization and technical and scientific competence are the privilege of a minority. But it doesn't follow in the least that the best way of using this expertise would be to leave to 'experts' the right to decide the whole of production. Competence is, almost by definition, restricted in its scope. Outside of his/her particular sector, or of the particular process which s/he knows, the technician is no better equipped to take a responsible decision than anyone else. Even within his/her own field, his/her viewpoint is often limited. He/she will often know little of the other sectors and may tend to minimize their importance although these sectors have a definite bearing on his own. Moreover -- and this is more important -- the technician is separated from the real process of production.

This separation is a source of waste and conflict in capitalist factories. It will only be abolished when 'technical' and 'productive' staff begin to cooperate in a thorough way. This cooperation will be based on joint decisions taken by the technicians and by those who will be working on a given task. Together, they will decide on the methods to be used.

Will such cooperation work smoothly? There is no intrinsic reason why unsurmountable obstacles should arise. The workers will have no interest in challenging the answers which the technician, in his capacity as technician, may give to purely technical problems. And, if there are disagreements, these will rapidly be resolved in practice. The field of production allows of almost immediate verification of what this or that person proposes. That, for this or that job or tool, this or that type of metal would be preferable (given a certain state of knowledge and certain conditions of production) will seldom be a matter for controversy.

But, the answers provided by technique only establish a general framework. They only suggest some of the elements which will, in practice, influence production. Within this given framework, there will probably be a number of ways of organizing a particular job. The choice will have to take into account on the one hand certain general considerations of 'economy' (economy of labor, of energy, of raw materials, of plant) and on the other hand -- and this is much more important considerations relating to the fate of man in production. And on these questions, by definition, the only people who can decide are those directly involved. In this area, the specific competence of the technician, as a technician, is *nil*. [\[n13\]](#)

The ultimate organization of production can, therefore, only be vested in the hands of the producers themselves. The producers will obviously take into account various technical points suggested by competent technicians. In fact, there will probably be a constant to-and-fro, if only because the producers themselves will envisage new ways of organizing the manufacture of products. These suggestions will pose new technical problems, about which the technicians will, in turn, have to put forward their comments and evaluations before a joint decision could be taken 'in full knowledge of the relevant facts'. But the decision -- in this case as in others -- will be in the hands of the producers (including the technicians) of a given shop (if it only affects a shop) -- or of the factory as a whole (if it affects the whole factory).

The roots of possible conflict between workers and technicians would therefore not be technical. If such a conflict emerged it would be a social conflict, arising from a possible tendency of the technicians to assume a dominating role, thereby constituting anew a bureaucratic managerial apparatus. What would be the strength and possible evolution of such a tendency?

We can't here discuss this problem in any depth. We can only re-emphasize that technicians don't constitute a majority -- or even an essential part -- of the upper strata of modern economic or political management. Incidentally, to become aware of this obvious fact helps one see through the mystifying character of arguments which seek to prove that ordinary people cannot manage production because they lack the 'necessary technical capacity'. The vast majority of technicians only occupy subordinate positions. They only carry out a divided work, on instructions from above. Those technicians who have 'reached the top' are not there as technicians, but as managers or organizers.

Modern capitalism is bureaucratic capitalism. It isn't -- and never will be -- a technocratic capitalism. The concept of a technocracy is an empty generalization of superficial sociologists, or a day dream of technicians confronted with their own impotence and with the absurdity of the present system. Technicians don't

constitute a class. From the formal point of view, they are just a category of wage-earners. The evolution of modern capitalism, by increasing their numbers and by transforming them into people who carry out fragmented and interchangeable work, tends to drive them closer to the working class. Counteracting these tendencies, it is true, are their position in the wages and status hierarchies -- and, also the scanty chances still open to them of 'moving up'. [a13] But these channels are gradually being closed as the numbers of technicians increases and as bureaucratization spreads within their own ranks. In parallel with all this, a revolt develops among them, as they confront the irrationalities of bureaucratic capitalism and experience increasing difficulties in giving free rein to their capacities for creative or meaningful work.

Some technicians already at the top, or on their way there, will side squarely with exploiting society. They will, however, be opposed by a growing minority of disaffected colleagues, ready to work with others in overthrowing the system. In the middle, of course, there will be the great majority of technicians, today apathetically accepting their status of slightly privileged employees. Their present conservatism suggests that they would not risk a conflict with real power, whatever its nature. The evolution of events may even radicalize them.

It is therefore most probable that workers' power in the factory, after having swept aside a small number of technical bureaucrats, will find support in a substantial number of other technicians. It should succeed, without major conflict, in integrating the remainder into the cooperative network of the factory.

#### **4. Truly managerial functions**

The people 'consulted' by a Company Chairman or Managing Director, before s/he takes an important decision, usually number less than a dozen, even in the most important firms. This very narrow stratum of management has two main tasks. On the one hand, it has to make decisions concerning investment, stocks, output, etc., in relation to market fluctuations and to long-term prospects. On the other hand, it has to 'coordinate' the various departments of the firm, seeking to iron out differences between various segments of the bureaucratic apparatus.

Some of these functions would disappear altogether in a planned economy, in particular, all those related to fluctuation of the market. Others would be considerably reduced: coordinating the different shops of a factory would be much easier if the producers organized their own work, and if different groups, shops, or departments could directly contact each other. Still other functions might be enhanced, such as genuine discussions of what might be possible in the future, or of how to do things, or about the present or future role of the enterprise in the overall development of the economy.

### **b. Institutions**

Under socialism 'managerial' tasks at factory level could be carried out by two bodies:

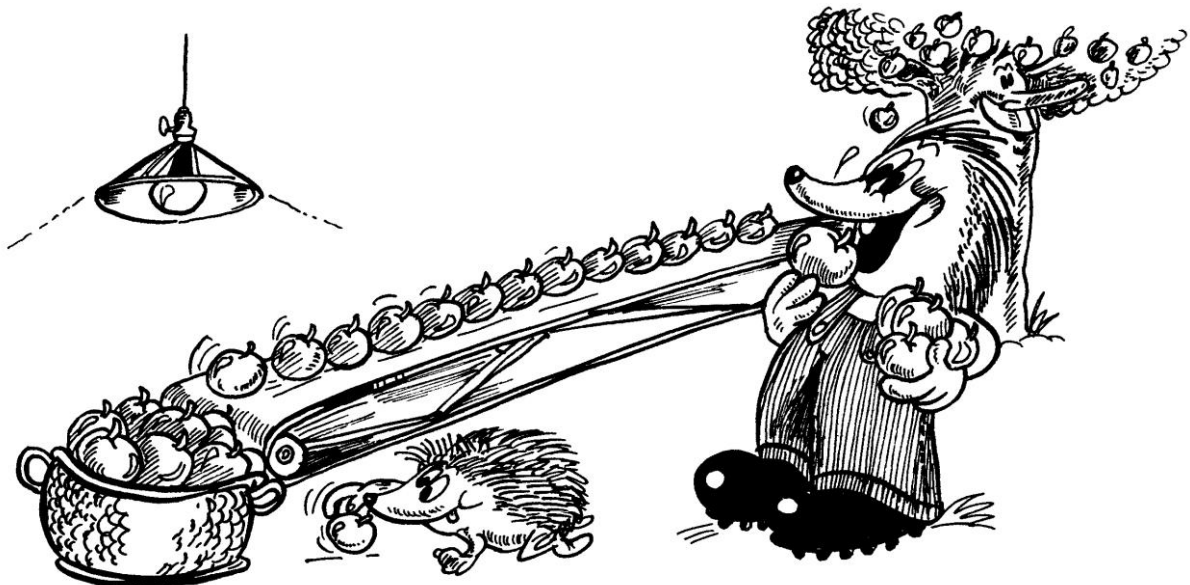
**a. The Factory Council**, composed of delegates from the various shops and offices, all of them elected and instantly revocable. In an enterprise of say 5,000 to 10,000 workers such a Council might number 30-50 people. The delegates would remain at their jobs. They would meet in full session as often as experience proved it necessary (probably on one or two half-days a week). They would report back continuously to their workmates in shop or office -- and would anyway probably have discussed all important matters with them previously. Rotating groups of delegates would ensure continuity. One of the main tasks of a Factory Council would be to ensure liaison and to act as a continuous regulating locus between the factory and the 'outside world'.

**b. The General Assembly** of all those who work in the plant, whether manual workers, office workers or technicians. This would be the highest decision-making body for all problems concerning the factory as a whole. Differences between different sectors would be thrashed out at this level. This General Assembly would embody the restoration of direct democracy into what should, in modern society, be its basic unit: the place of work. The Assembly would have to ratify all but routine decisions of the Factory Council. It would be empowered to question, challenge, amend, reject or endorse any decision taken by the Council. The General Assembly will, itself, decide on all sorts of questions to be submitted to the Council. The Assembly would meet regularly -- say, on one or two days each month. There would, in addition, exist procedures for calling such General Assemblies, if this was wanted by a given number of workers, or of shops, or of delegates.

For summaries of the composition and functions of these bodies, and of their relations with other basic units, see [Basic Units 1](#), [Basic Units 2](#), [The Factory Council and General Assembly](#), and [Council: Central Assembly of Delegates](#).



## 6. The Content of Workers' Management at Factory Level



It will help us to discuss this problem if we, rather schematically, differentiate between the static and the dynamic aspects of workers' management, between what will be immediately possible, at the very onset of socialist production, and what will become possible after a relatively short interval, as socialist production develops and as human domination over all stages of the productive process rapidly increases.

For the sake of clarity, we will first describe workers' management at factory level in a static way. We will then consider how it will develop, and how this development, itself, will constantly expand the areas of local freedom.

### a. Immediate Content

Looked at in a static way, the overall plan might allocate to a given enterprise a target to be achieved within a given time (we will examine further on how such targets might be determined under conditions of genuinely democratic planning). The general means to be allocated to the enterprise (to achieve its target)

would also be broadly outlined by the plan. For example, the plan might decide that the annual production of a given factory should be so many fridges, and that for this purpose such-and-such a quantity of raw materials, power, machinery, etc., should be made available.

Seen from this angle, workers' management implies that the workers' collective will itself be responsible for deciding how a proposed target could best be achieved, given the general means available. The task corresponds to the 'positive' functions of the present narrowly-based managerial apparatus, which will have been superseded. The workers will determine the organization of their work in each shop or department. They will ensure coordination between shops. This will take place through direct contacts whenever it is a question of routine problems or of shops engaged in closely related aspects of the productive process. If more important matters arose, they would be discussed and solved by meetings of delegates (or by joint gatherings of workers) of two or more shops or sections. The overall coordination of the work would be undertaken by the Factory Council and by the General Assembly of the Factory. Relations with the rest of the economy, as already stated, would be in the hands of the Factory Council.

As the whole thing becomes real in the hands of the workers of a given plant, a certain 'give and take' will undoubtedly occur between 'targets set' and 'means to be used'. It must be remembered, however, that these 'means' are usually the product of some other factory. 'Targets set' and 'means of production available for achieving them' do not, however, between them rigidly or exhaustively define all the possible methods that could be used. Spelling these methods out in detail, and deciding exactly how an objective will be achieved, given certain material conditions, will be the area in which workers' management will first operate. It is an important field, but a limited one, and it is essential to be fully aware of its limitations. These limitations stem from (and define) the framework in which the new type of production will have to start. It will be the task of socialist production constantly to expand this framework and constantly to push back these limitations on autonomy.

Autonomy, envisaged in this static way, is limited, first of all, in relation to the fixing of targets. True, the workers of a given enterprise will participate in determining the target of their factory insofar as they participate in the elaboration of the overall plan. But, they are not in total or sole control of the objectives. In a modern economy, where the production of most enterprises both conditions and is conditioned by that of others, the determination of coherent targets cannot as a rule be vested in individual enterprises, acting in isolation. It must be undertaken by (and for) a number of enterprises, general viewpoints prevailing over particular ones. We will return to this point later.

Initial autonomy will also be limited in relation to available material means. The workers of a given enterprise cannot autonomously determine the means of production they would prefer to use, for these are but the products of other enterprises or factories. Total autonomy for every factory, in relation to means, would imply that each factory could determine the output of all the others. These various autonomies would immediately neutralize one another. This limitation is, however, a less rigid one than the first (the limitation in relation to targets). Alterations of its own equipment, proposed by the user-factory, might often be accommodated by the producer-factory, without the latter saddling itself with a heavy extra load. On a small scale, this happens even today, in integrated engineering factories (car factories, for instance) where a substantial part of the tooling utilized in one shop may be made in another shop of the same factory. Close cooperation between plants making machine tools and plants using them, could quickly lead to considerable changes in the means of production actually used.



## **b. Subsequent Possibilities**

Let us now look at workers' management at factory level as it might develop, i.e., in its dynamic aspect. How would it contribute to transforming socialist production, i.e., to its primary objective? Everything we have suggested so far, will now have to be looked at again. The limits of autonomy will be found to have

widened very considerably.

The change will be most obvious in relation to the means of production. Socialist society will immediately get to grips with the problem of a conscious attack on the technology inherited from capitalism. Under capitalism, the means of production are planned and made independently of the user and of his/her preferences (manufacturers, of course, pretend to take the user's viewpoint into account, but this has little to do with the real user: the worker on the shop floor). But, equipment is made to be productively used. The viewpoint of the 'productive consumers' (i.e., of those who will use the equipment to produce the goods) is of primary importance. As the views of those who make the equipment are also important, the problem of the structure of the means of production will only be solved by the living cooperation of these two categories of workers. In an integrated factory, this would mean permanent liaison between the corresponding shops. At the level of the economy, as a whole, it would take place through normal permanent contacts between factories and between sectors of production. [n14]

This cooperation will take two forms. Choosing and popularizing the best methods, and rationalizing and extending their use, will be achieved through the horizontal cooperation of Councils, organized according to branch or sector of industry (for instance, textiles, the chemical industry, building, engineering, electrical supply, etc.). On the other hand, the integration of the viewpoints of those who make, and of those who utilize, equipment (or, more generally, of those who make and those who utilize intermediate products) will require the vertical cooperation of Councils representing the different stages of a productive process (steel industry, machine tool industry and engineering industry, for instance). In both cases, the cooperation will need to find embodiment in stable forms, such as Committees of Factory Council representatives (or wider conferences of producers) organized both horizontally and vertically. There would be room for extreme flexibility and many new forms will almost certainly evolve.

Considering the problem from this dynamic angle -- which, in the last resort, is the really fundamental one -- one can see, at once, that the areas of autonomy have considerably expanded. Already at the level of individual factories (but more significantly at the level of cooperation between factories), the producers are beginning to influence the structure of the means of production. They are, thereby, reaching a position where they are beginning to dominate the work process: they are not only determining its methods, but are now also modifying its technological structure.

This fact now begins to alter what we have just said about targets. Three-quarters of modern production consists of intermediate products, of 'means of production' in the widest sense. When producers decide about the means of production, they are participating, in a very direct and immediate way, in decisions about the targets of production. The remaining limitation, and it is an important one, flows from the fact that these means of production (whatever their exact nature) are destined, in the last analysis, to produce consumer goods. And the overall volume of these can only be determined, in general terms, by the plan.

But, even here, looking at things dynamically, radically alters one's vision. Modern consumption is characterized by the constant appearance of new products. Factories producing consumer goods will conceive of, receive suggestions about, study, and finally produce such products. This raises the wider problem of contact between producers and consumers. Capitalist society rests on a complete separation of these two aspects of human activity, and on the exploitation of the consumer. This isn't just monetary exploitation (through overcharging). Capitalism claims that it can satisfy people's needs better than any other system in history. But, in fact, capitalism influences both these needs themselves, and the method of satisfying them. Consumer preference can be manipulated by modern sales techniques.

The division between producers and consumers appears most glaringly in relation to the quality of goods. This problem is insoluble in any exploiting society. Those who only look at the surface of things only see a commodity as a commodity. They don't see in it a crystallized moment of the class struggle. They see faults or defects as just faults or defects, instead of seeing in them the resultant of a constant struggle between the worker and himself ('Could I do it better? Why should I? I'm just paid to get on with the job'). Faults or defects embody struggles between the worker and exploitation. They also embody squabbles between different sections of the bureaucracy managing the plant. The elimination of exploitation will of itself bring about a change in all this. At work, people will begin to assert their claims as future consumers of what they are producing. In its early phases socialist society will, however, probably have to institute forms of contact

(other than 'the market' ) between producers and consumers.

We have assumed, as a starting point for all this, the division of labor inherited from capitalism. But, we have also said that socialist society would, from the very beginning, have to tackle this division. This is an enormous subject that we can't even begin to deal with in this text. The basis of this task can, however, be seen even today. Modern production has destroyed many traditional professional qualifications. It has created many automatic or semi-automatic machines. It has, thereby itself, subverted the traditional framework of the industrial division of labor. It is tending to produce a universal worker, capable after a relatively short apprenticeship, of using most of the existing machines. Once one gets beyond its class aspects, the 'posting' of workers to particular jobs in a big modern factory corresponds less and less to a genuine division of labor and more and more to a simple division of tasks. Workers are not allocated to given areas of the productive process because their 'professional skills' invariably correspond to 'skills required' by management. They are often placed here rather than there because putting a particular worker in a particular place at a particular time happens to suit the personnel officer -- or the foreman -- or, more prosaically, just because a particular vacancy happened to be going.

Under socialism, factories would have no reason to accept the rigid division of labor now prevailing. There will be every reason to encourage a rotation of workers between shops and departments -- and, between production and office areas. Such a rotation will greatly help workers to manage production 'in full knowledge of the relevant facts'. [More and more workers will have become familiar at first hand with what goes on where they work.] The same applies to rotation of work between various enterprises, and in particular, between 'producing' and 'utilizing' units.

The residues of capitalism's division of labor will have gradually to be eliminated. This overlaps with the general problem of education, education not only of the new generations, but of those adults brought up under the previous system. We can't go into this problem here.



## 7. General Problems of Socialist Economy



### **a. Simplification and Rationalization of Data**

Socialist economy implies that the producers themselves will consciously manage all economic activity. This management will be exercised at all levels, and, in particular, at the overall or central level. It is illusory to believe that bureaucracies (even 'controlled' bureaucracies) left to themselves could guide the economy towards socialism. Such bureaucracies could only lead society towards new forms of exploitation. It is also wrong to think that 'automatic' objective mechanisms could be established, which, like the automatic pilots of a modern jet aircraft, could at each moment direct the economy in the desired direction. The same impossibilities arise whether one considers an 'enlightened' bureaucracy or some electronic super-computer, namely that the key problems are human ones. Any plan pre-supposes a fundamental decision on the rate of growth of the economy, and this, in turn, depends essentially on human decisions concerning the distribution of the social product between investment and consumption. [\[n15\]](#)

No 'objective' rationality can determine such a distribution. A decision to invest 10% of the social product is neither more nor less rational than a decision to invest 90% of it. The only rationality in the matter is the choice people make about their own fate, in full knowledge of the relevant facts. The fixing of plan targets by those who will have to fulfill them is, in the last analysis, the only guarantee of their willing and spontaneous participation.

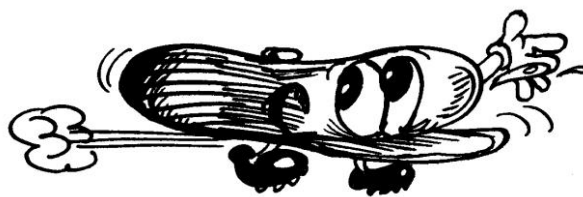
But this doesn't mean that the plan and the management of the economy are 'just political matters'. Socialist planning will base itself on certain rational technical factors. It is, in fact, the only type of planning which could integrate such factors into a conscious management of the economy. These factors consist of a number of extremely useful and effective 'labor-saving' and 'thought-saving' devices, which can be used to simplify the representation of the economy and of its interrelations, thereby allowing the problems of central economic management to be made accessible to all. Workers' management of production (this time at the level of the economy as a whole, and not just at the level of a particular factory) will only be possible if the fundamental decisions have been enormously simplified, so that the producers and their collective institutions are in a position to judge the key issues in an informed way. What is needed in other words, is for the vast current chaos of economic facts and relations to be boiled down to certain propositions, which adequately sum up the real problems and choices. These propositions should be few in number. They should be easy to grasp. They should summarize reality without distortion or mystification. If they can do this, they will form an adequate basis for meaningful judgments.

A condensation of such a type is possible, firstly, because there are rational ingredients to the economy, and secondly, because there exist already today, certain techniques allowing one to grasp the complexities of economic reality, and finally because it is now possible to mechanize and to automate all that does not pertain to human decisions in the strict sense.

A discussion of the relevant devices, techniques, and possibilities is therefore essential as from now. They



enable us to carry out a vast clearing of the ground, without which workers' management would collapse under the weight of the very subject matter it sought to deal with. Such a discussion is in no sense a 'purely technical' discussion and at each stage of it we will be guided by the general principles already outlined.



## b. The 'Plan Factory'

A plan of production, whether it deals with one factory or with the economy as a whole, resembles a reasoning. It can be boiled down to two premises and to one conclusion. The two premises are the material means one disposes of at the onset (equipment, stocks, labor, etc.), and the target one is aiming at (production of so many specified objects, to be brought about within this or that period of time). We will refer to these premises as the 'initial conditions' and the 'ultimate targets'. The 'conclusion' is the path to be followed to pass from initial conditions to ultimate target. In practice, this means a certain number of intermediate products to be made within a given period. We will call these conclusions the 'intermediate targets'.

When passing from simple initial conditions to a simple ultimate target, the intermediate targets can be determined quickly. As the initial conditions or the ultimate target (or both) become more complex, or are more spread out in time, the establishment of intermediate targets becomes more difficult. In the case of the economy as a whole (where there are thousands of different products, several of which can be made by different processes, and where the manufacture of any given category of products often directly or indirectly involves many others), one might imagine the complexity to be such that rational planning (in the sense of an *a priori* determination of the intermediate targets, given the initial conditions and ultimate target), would be impossible. The apologists of 'private enterprise' have been proclaiming this doctrine for ages. But, it isn't true. [\[n16\]](#) The problem can be solved, and available mathematical techniques in fact allow it to be solved remarkably simply. Once the 'initial conditions' are known and the 'ultimate targets' have been consciously and democratically determined, the whole content of planning (the determination of the intermediate targets) can be reduced to a purely technical task of execution, capable of being mechanized and automated to a very high degree.

The basis of the new methods is the concept of the total interdependence of all sectors of the economy (the fact that everything that one sector utilizes in production is itself the product of one or more other sectors; and the converse fact, that every product of a given sector will ultimately be utilized or consumed by one or more other sectors). The idea, which goes back to Quesnay and which formed the basis of Marx's *theory of accumulation*, has been vastly developed in the last few years by a group of American economists around Wassily W. Leontief, who have succeeded in giving it a statistical formulation. [\[n17\]](#) The interdependence is such that, at any given moment (for a given level of technique and a given structure of available equipment), the production of each sector is related, in a relatively stable manner, to the products of other sectors which the first sector utilizes ('consumes productively').

It is easy to grasp that a given quantity of coal is needed to produce a ton of steel of a given type. Moreover, one will need so much scrap metal or so much iron ore, so many hours of labor, such-and-such an expenditure on upkeep and repairs. The ratio 'coal used : steel produced', expressed in terms of value, is known as the 'current technical coefficient' determining the productive consumption of coal per unit of steel turned out. If one wants to increase steel production beyond a certain point, it won't help just to go on delivering more coal or more scrap metal to the existing steel mills. New mills will have to be built. Or, one will have to increase the productive capacity of existing mills. To increase steel output by a given amount, one will have to produce a given amount of specified equipment. The ratio 'given amount of specified equipment : steel-producing capacity per given period', again expressed in terms of value, is known as the 'technical coefficient of capital'. It determines the quantity of capital utilized per unit of steel produced in a

given period.

One could stop at this point, if one were only dealing with a single enterprise. Every firm bases itself on calculations of this kind (in fact, on much more detailed ones) when, having decided to produce so much, or to increase its production by so much, it buys raw materials, orders machinery or recruits labor. But when one looks at the economy as a whole things change. The interdependence of the various sectors has definite consequences. The increase of production of a given sector has repercussions (of varying intensity) on all other sectors and finally on the initial sector itself. For example, an increase in the production of steel immediately requires an increase in the production of coal. But this requires both an increase in certain types of mining equipment and the recruitment of more labor into mining. The increased demand for mining equipment, in turn, requires more steel, and more labor in the steel mills. This, in turn, leads to a demand for still more coal, etc., etc.

The use of Wassily W. Leontief's [p6] matrices, combined with other modern methods such as Koopmans' 'activity analysis' [n18] (of which 'operational research' is a specific instance) would, in the case of a socialist planned economy, allow theoretically exact answers to be given to questions of this type. A matrix is a table on which are systematically disposed the technical coefficients (both 'current technical coefficients' and 'technical coefficients of capital') expressing the dependence of each sector on each of the others. Every ultimate target that might be chosen is presented as a list of material means to be utilized (and therefore, manufactured) in specified amounts, within the period in question. As soon as the ultimate target is chosen, the solution of a system of simultaneous equations enables one to define immediately all the intermediate targets, and therefore, the tasks to be fulfilled by each sector of the economy.

The working-out of these relationships will be the task of a highly mechanized and automated specific enterprise, whose main work would consist in the mass production of various plans (targets) and of their various components (implications). This enterprise is the plan factory. Its central workshop would, to start with, probably consist of a computer whose 'memory' would store the technical coefficients and the initial productive capacity of each sector. If 'fed' a number of hypothetical targets, the computer could spell out the productive implication of each target for each sector (including the amount of work to be provided, in each instance, by the 'man-power' sector). [n19]



Around this central workshop, there would be others whose tasks would be to study the distribution and variations of regional production and investment and possible technical optima (given the general interdependence of the various sectors). They would also determine the unit-values (equivalences) of different categories of product. Two departments of the plan factory warrant special mention: that dealing with stock-taking and that dealing with the technical coefficients.

The quality of planning, conceived in this way, depends on how well people are informed of the real state of the economy which forms its basis. The accuracy of the solution, in other words, depends on adequate information about both 'initial conditions' and the 'technical coefficients'. Industrial and agricultural censuses are carried out at regular intervals even today, by a number of advanced capitalist countries: they offer a very crude basis, because they are extremely inaccurate and fragmented. The drawing up of an up-to-date and complete inventory will be one of the first tasks of a self-managed society. The collective preparation of such an inventory is a serious task. It can't be achieved 'from above', from one day to the next. Not, once drawn up, would such an inventory be considered final. Perfecting it and keeping it up-to-date would be a permanent task of the plan factory, working in close cooperation with those sections of the local Councils responsible for industrial stocktaking in their own areas. The results of this cooperation would constantly modify and 'enrich' the 'memory' of the central computer.

Establishing the 'technical coefficients' will pose similar problems. To start with, it could be done very roughly, using certain generally available statistical information ('on average, the textile industry uses so much cotton to produce so much cloth'). But, such knowledge will have to be made far more precise through technical information provided by the Councils of particular industries. The data 'stores' in the computer will have to be periodically revised as more accurate knowledge about the technical coefficients -- and in particular, about the real changes in these coefficients brought about by new technological developments is brought to light.

Knowledge of the real state of affairs, combined with the constant revision of basic data and with the possibility of drawing instant conclusions from them, will result in very considerable, possibly enormous, gains. The potentialities of these new techniques remain untapped, in the very field where they could be most usefully applied: that of the economy taken as a whole. Any technical modification, in any sector, could in theory affect the work load and the conditions of a rational choice of methods in all other sectors. A socialist economy would be able totally and instantaneously to take advantage of such facts. Capitalist economies only take them into account belatedly and in a very partial way.

The setting-up of such a plan factory should be immediately possible, in any country which is even moderately industrialized. The equipment necessary exists already. So do the people capable of working it. Banks and insurance companies (which will be unnecessary under socialism) already use some of these methods in work of this general type. Linking up with mathematicians, statisticians, econometricians, those who work in such offices could provide the initial personnel of the plan factory. Workers' management of production and the requirements of a rational economy will provide a tremendous impetus to the development, both 'spontaneous' and 'conscious' of rational techniques of planning.

Let us not be misunderstood; the role of the 'plan factory' won't be to decide on the plan. It won't impose anything on others. The targets of the plan will be determined by society as a whole, in a manner shortly to be described. Before any proposals are voted upon, however, the plan factory will work out and present to society as a whole the implications and consequences (for various groups of the population) of the plan (or plans) suggested. This will result in a vast increase in the area of real democracy (i.e., of deciding in full knowledge of the relevant facts). After a plan has been adopted, the task of the plan factory will be to constantly bring up-to-date the facts on which the plan was based, to draw the necessary conclusions from possibilities of change and to inform both the Central Assembly of Councils and the relevant sectors of any alterations in intermediate targets (and therefore, of production tasks) that might be worth considering.

In none of these instances would those actually working in the plan factory decide or impose anything -- except the organization of their own work.

### **c. Consumer Goods**

But what about consumption? In a socialist society, how could people determine what is produced?

It is obvious that this cannot be based on direct democracy. The plan can't propose, as an ultimate target, a complete list of consumer goods or suggest in what proportions they should be produced. Such a proposal would not be democratic, for two reasons. Firstly, it could never be based on 'full knowledge of the relevant facts', namely on a full knowledge of everybody's preferences. Secondly, it would be tantamount to a pointless tyranny of the majority over the minority. If 40% of the population wish to consume a certain article, there is no reason why they should be deprived of it under pretext that the other 60% prefer something else. No preference or taste is more logical than any other. Moreover, consumer wishes are seldom incompatible with one another. Majority votes in this matter would amount to rationing, an absurd way of settling this kind of problem anywhere but in a besieged fortress.

Planning decisions won't therefore relate to particular items, but to the general standard of living (the overall volume of consumption). They will not delve into the detailed composition of this consumption.

In relation to human consumption, deciding on living standards doesn't require the same kind of considerations that go into determining how many tons of coal are needed to produce so many tons of steel.

There are no 'technical coefficients of the consumer'. Under capitalism, there is, of course, some statistical correlation between income and the structure of demand (without such a correlation private capitalism couldn't function). But, this is only a very relative affair. It would be turned upside down under socialism. A massive redistribution of incomes will have taken place; profound changes will have occurred in every realm of social life; the permanent rape of the consumers through advertising and capitalist sales' techniques will have been abolished; new tastes will have emerged as the result of increased leisure.

Finally, the statistical regularity of consumer demand can't solve the problem of variations that might occur within a given period, between real demand and that envisaged in the plan. Genuine planning doesn't mean saying 'living standards will go up by 5% next year, and experience tells us that this will result in a 20% increase in the demand for cars, therefore let's make 20% more cars', and stopping at that. One may have to start in this way, where other criteria are missing, but there will have to be powerful correcting mechanisms capable of responding to disparities between anticipated and real demand.

Socialist society will have to regulate the pattern of its consumption according to the principle of consumer sovereignty. This implies the existence of some mechanism whereby consumer demand can genuinely make itself felt. The 'general decision' embodied in the plan will define:

- a. what proportion of its overall product society wishes to devote to the satisfaction of individual consumer needs,
- b. what proportion it would like to allocate to collective needs (I public consumption') and
- c. what proportion it wants to devote to 'developing the productive forces' (i.e., to invest). But the structure of consumption will have to be determined by the individual consumers themselves.

How could a mutual adaptation of supply and demand come about? How might consumer demand really manifest itself?

First there would have to be an overall equilibrium. The sum total distributed in any given period (as 'wages' and other benefits) would have to be equal to the value of consumer goods (quantities x prices) made available in that period. An 'empirical' initial decision would then have to be taken, to provide, at least, a skeleton for the structure of consumption. This initial decision would base itself on traditionally 'known' statistical data, but in full knowledge of the fact that these will have to be extensively modified by taking into account a whole series of new factors (such as the equalization of wages, for instance). Stocks of various commodities, in excess of what it is expected might be consumed in a given period will, initially, have to be scheduled for.

Three 'corrective' processes would then come into play, the net result of which would be to immediately demonstrate any gap between anticipated and real demand, and to bridge it:

- a. Available stocks would either rise or fall.
- b. According to whether the reserve stocks decreased or increased (i.e., according to whether demand had been initially underestimated or overestimated), there would be an initial rise or fall in the price of the various commodities. The reason for these temporary price fluctuations would have to be fully explained to the people.
- c. There would simultaneously take place an immediate readjustment in the output of consumer goods, to the level where (the stocks having been reconstituted) the production of goods equals the demand. At that moment, the sale price would again become equal to the 'normal price' (labor value) of the product.

Given the principle of consumer sovereignty' any differences between the actual demand and production scheduled will have to be corrected by a modification in the structure of production and not by resorting to permanent differences between selling prices and value. If such differences were to appear, they would automatically imply that the original planning decision was wrong, in this particular field.

#### **d. 'Money', 'Wages', Value**

Many absurdities have been said about money and its immediate abolition in a socialist society, and there is a great deal of loose thinking about the subject. [a14] It should be clear that the role of money is radically altered from the moment where it can no longer be a means of accumulation (the means of production being owned in common) or as a means of exerting social pressure (wages being equal). What residual function would money then have?

People will probably receive a token in return for what they put into society. [a15] These 'tokens' might take the form of units, allowing people to organize what they take out of society, spreading it out (a) in time, and (b) between different objects and services, exactly as they wish. As we are seeking here to get to grips with realities and are not fighting against words, we see no objection to calling these tokens 'wages' and these units 'money', [a16] just as a little earlier we used the words 'normal prices' to describe the monetary expression of labor value. [n20]

Under socialism labor value would be the only rational basis for any kind of social accountancy and the only yardstick having any real meaning for people. The first aim of socialist production will be to reduce both the direct and indirect expenditure of human labor power. Fixing the prices of consumer goods on the basis of their labor value, would mean that for everyone the cost of objects would clearly appear as the equivalent of the labor (in hours) s/he himself would have had to expend to produce them (assuming s/he had access to the average prevailing equipment and that s/he had an average social capacity).

It would both simplify and clarify things if the monetary unit was considered the 'net product of an hour of labor' and if this were made the unit of value. It would also assist total demystification if the hourly wage, equal for all, were a given fraction of this unit, expressing the ratio private 'consumption : total net production'.

If these steps were taken and thoroughly explained, they would enable the fundamental planning decisions (namely the distribution of the social product between consumption and investment) to be immediately obvious to everyone, and repeatedly drawn to their attention, every time s/he bought anything. Equally obvious would be the social cost of every object acquired.

## **e. Wage Equality**

Working class aspirations, whenever they succeed in expressing themselves independently of the trade union bureaucracy, are often directed against hierarchy and wage differentials. Basing itself on this fact, socialist society will introduce absolute wage equality.

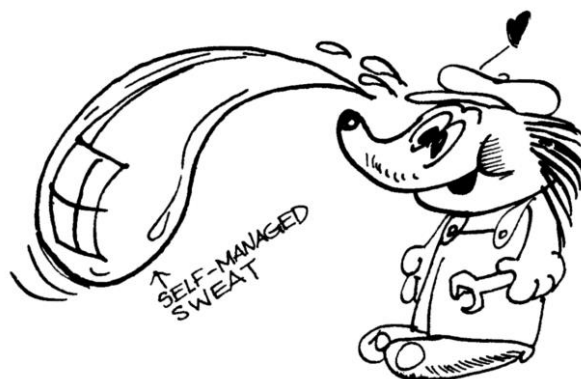
There is no justification for wage differentials, whether these reflect differing professional qualifications or differences in productivity. If an individual himself/herself advanced the costs of his/her professional training, and if society considered him/her 'an enterprise', the recuperation of those costs, spread out over a working lifetime would at most 'justify', at the extremes of the wages spectrum a differential of 2:1 (between a sweeper and a neurosurgeon). Under socialism, training costs would be advanced by society (they often are, even today), and the question of their 'recovery' would not arise. As for productivity, it depends (already today) much less on bonus and much more on the coercions exercised on the one hand by the machines and by the foreman (tending to push it up), and on the other hand by the disciplined resistance to production, imposed by primary working groups in the workshop (tending to keep it down). Socialist society could not increase productivity by economic constraints without resorting again to all the capitalist paraphernalia of norms, supervision, etc. Cooperation would flow (as it already does, in part, today) from the self-organization of primary groups in the workshops, from the natural relationships between different shops, and from gatherings of producers in different factories or different sectors of the economy. The primary group in a workshop, can, in general, secure that any particular individual does his/her share. If, for any particular reason, they couldn't work with a particular person -- they could ask him/her to leave the particular shop. It would then be up to the individual in question to seek entry into one of many other primary groups of workers and to get himself/herself accepted by them.

Wage equality will give a real meaning to consumption, every individual at last being assured of an equal vote. It will abolish a large number of conflicts both in everyday life and in production, and will enable an extraordinary cohesion of working people to develop. It will destroy at the very roots the whole mercantile monstrosity of capitalism (both private and bureaucratic), the commercialization of individuals, that whole universe where one doesn't earn what one is worth, but where one is worth what one earns. A few years of wage equality and little will be left of the whole distorted mentality of present day individuals.

## **f. The Fundamental Decision**

The fundamental decision, in a socialist economy, is the one whereby society as a whole determines what it wants (i.e., the ultimate targets of its plan). This decision is about two basic propositions. Given certain 'initial conditions', how much time does society want to devote to production? And how much of the total product does it want to see respectively allocated to private consumption, to public consumption, and to investment?

In both private and bureaucratic capitalist societies, the amount of time one has to work is determined by the ruling class by means of economic or direct physical constraints. No one is consulted about the matter. Socialist society, taken as a whole, will not escape the impact of certain economic facts (in the sense that any decision to modify labor time will -- other things being equal -- have a bearing on production). But, it will differ from all previous societies, in that for the first time in history, people will be able to decide about work in full knowledge of the relevant facts, with the basic elements of the problem clearly presented to them.



Socialism will also be the first social system enabling people to decide in a rational way about how society's product should be divided between consumption and investment. Under private capitalism, this distribution takes place in an absolutely arbitrary manner and one would seek in vain any 'rationality' underlying what determines investment. [n21] In bureaucratic capitalist societies, the volume of investment is also decided upon quite arbitrarily. The central bureaucracy, in these societies, have never been able to justify their choices except through recourse to incantations about the 'priority of heavy industry'. [n22] But, even if there were a rational, 'objective' basis for a central decision, such a decision would automatically be irrational, if it was reached in the absence of those primarily concerned, namely the members of society. Any decision taken in this way would reproduce the basic contradiction of all exploiting regimes. It would treat people, in the plan, as components of predictable behavior, as theoretical 'objects'. It would soon lead to treating them as objects in real life, too. Such a policy would contain the seeds of its own failure: instead of encouraging the participation of the producers in carrying out the plan, it would irrevocably alienate them from a plan that was not of their choosing. There is no objective 'rationality' allowing one to decide, by means of mathematical formulae, about the future of society, about work, about consumption, and about accumulation. The only rationality in these realms is the living reason of mankind, the decisions of ordinary men and women concerning their own fate.

But, these decisions won't flow from a toss of the dice. They will be based on a complete clarification of the problem and on full knowledge of the relevant facts. This will be possible because there exists, for any given level of technique, a definite relation between a given investment and the resulting increase in production. This relation is nothing other than the application to the economy as a whole of the 'technical coefficients of capital' of which we spoke earlier. Such-and-such an investment in steelworks will result in such-and-such an increase in what the steelworks turn out -- and such-and-such a global investment in production will result in such-and-such a net increase in the global social product. [n23] Therefore, such-and-such a rate of accumulation will allow such-and-such a rate of increase of the social product (and therefore, of the standard of living or amount of leisure). Finally, such-and-such a fraction of the product devoted to accumulation will also result in such and such a rate of increase of living standards.

The overall problem can therefore be posed in the following terms. Such-and-such an immediate increase in consumption is possible -- but it would imply a significant cut-down on further increases in the years to come. On the other hand, people might prefer to choose a more limited immediate increase in living standards, which would allow the social product (and hence, living standards) to increase at the rate of x% per annum in the years to come. And, so on. 'The conflict between the present and the future', to which the

apologists of private capitalism and of the bureaucracy are constantly referring, would still be with us. But, it would be clearly seen. And, society itself would settle the matter, fully aware of the setting and of the implications of what it was doing.

In conclusion, and to sum up, one could say that any overall plan submitted to the people for discussion would have to specify:

- a. the productive implications for each sector of industry, and as far as possible for each enterprise;
- b. the amount of work for everyone that these implied;
- c. the level of consumption during the initial period;
- d. the amounts to be devoted to public consumption and to investment;
- e. the rate of increase of future consumption.

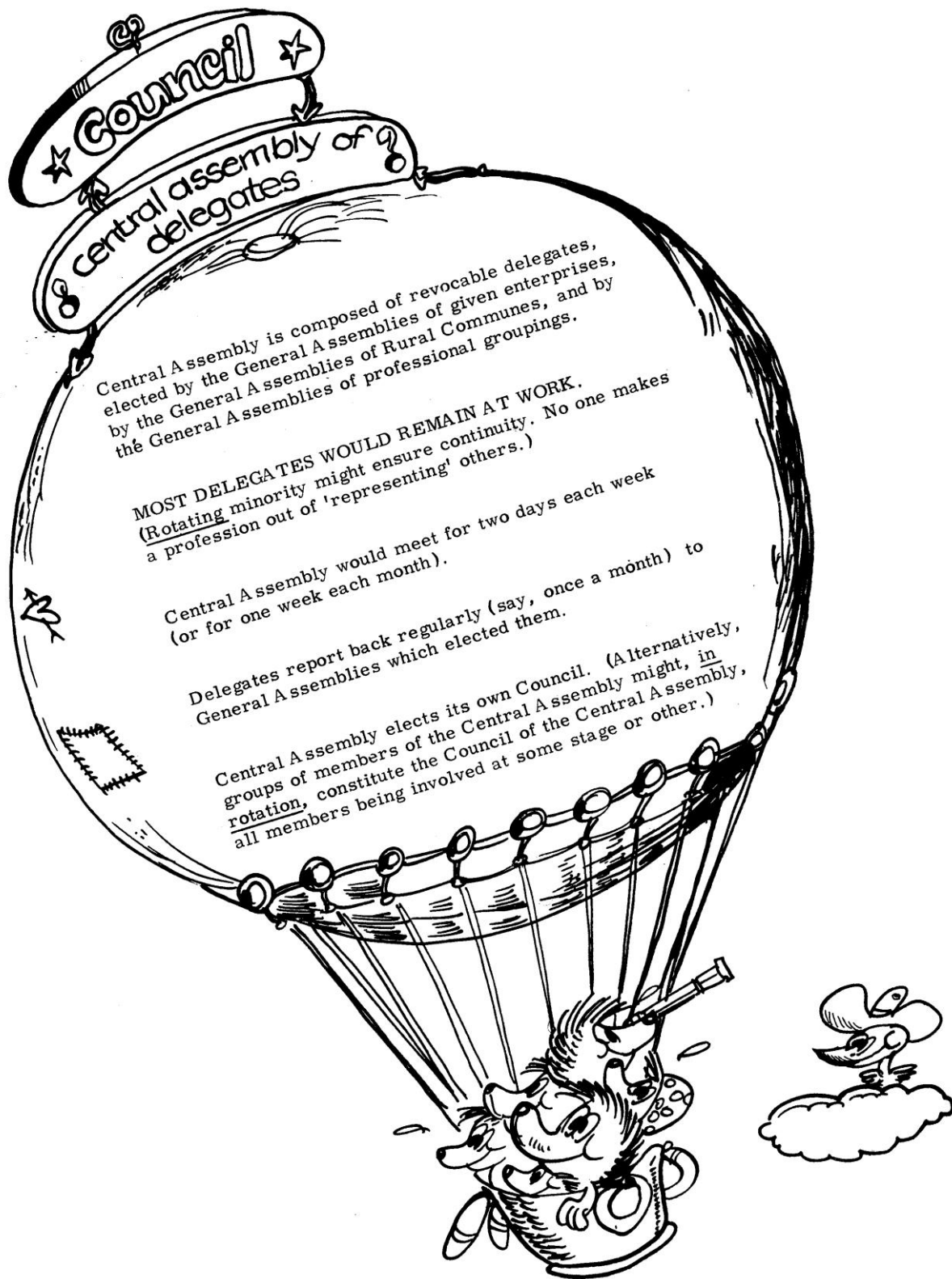
To simplify things, we have at times presented the decisions about ultimate and intermediate targets (i.e., the implications of the plan concerning specific areas of production) as two separate and consecutive acts. In practice, there would be a continuous give-and-take between these two phases, and a multiplicity of proposals. The producers will be in no position to decide on ultimate targets, unless they know what the implications of particular targets are for themselves, not only as consumers but as producers, working in a specific factory. Moreover there is no such thing as a decision 'taken in full knowledge of the relevant facts', if that decision is not founded on a number of choices, each with its particular implications.

The fundamental decisional process might, therefore, take the following form. Starting from below, there would, at first, be discussions in the General Assemblies. Initial proposals would emanate from the Workers' Councils of various enterprises and would deal with their own productive possibilities in the period to come. The plan factory would then regroup these various proposals, pointing out which ones were mutually incompatible or entailed unintended effects on other sectors. It would elaborate a series of achievable targets, grouping them as far as possible in terms of their concrete implications. [Proposal A implies that factory X will next year increase its production by Y% with the help of additional equipment Z. Proposal B, on the other hand, implies..., etc.]

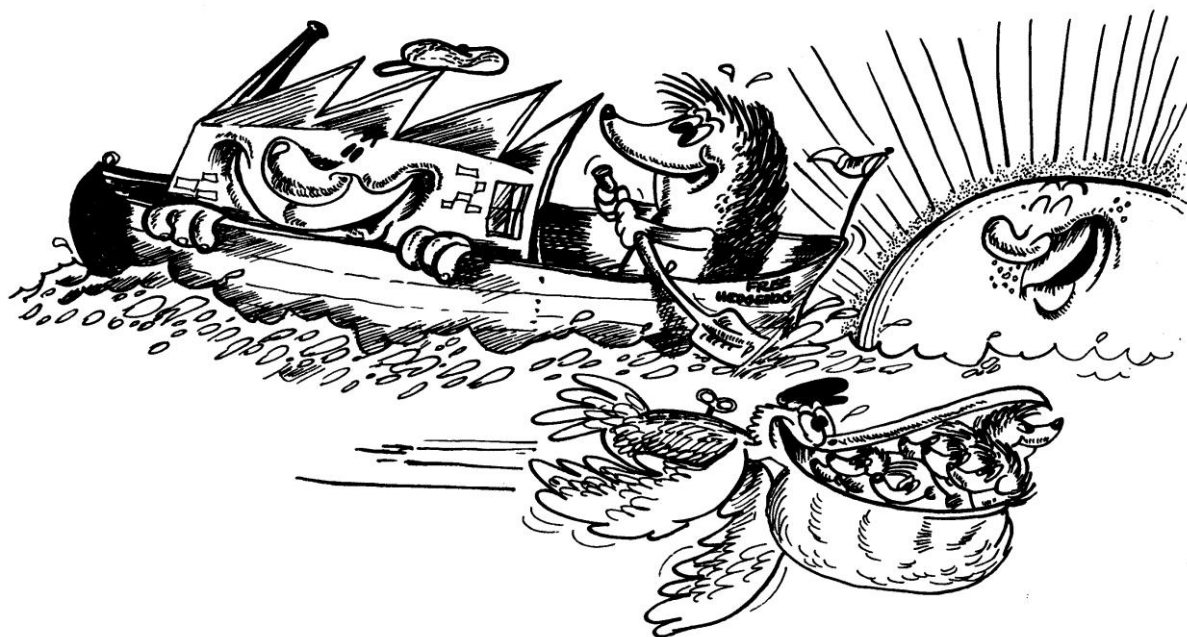
There would then be a full discussion of the various overall proposals, throughout the General Assemblies and by all the Workers' Councils, possibly with counter-proposals and a repetition of the procedure described. A final discussion would then lead to a simple majority vote in the General Assemblies.







## 8. The Management of the Economy



We have spelled out the implications of workers' management at the level of a particular enterprise. These consist of the abolition of any separate managerial apparatus and of the assumption of managerial authority by the workers themselves, organized in Workers' Councils and in General Assemblies of one or more shops or offices, or of a whole enterprise.

Workers' management of the economy as a whole also implies that the management of the economy is not vested in the hands of a specific managerial stratum, but that it belongs to organized collectivities of producers.

What we have outlined in the previous sections shows that democratic management is perfectly feasible. Its basic assumption is the clarification of data and the mass utilization of what modern techniques have now made possible. It implies the conscious use of a series of devices and mechanisms (such as the genuine consumer 'market', wage equality, the new relations between price and value -- and of course, the plan factory) combined with real knowledge concerning economic reality. Together, these will help clear the ground. The major part of planning is just made up of tasks of execution and could safely be left to highly mechanized or automated offices, which would have no political or decisional role whatsoever, and would confine themselves to placing before society a variety of feasible plans and their full respective implications for everyone.

This general clearing of the ground having been achieved, and coherent possibilities having been presented to the people, the final choice will lie in their hands. Everyone will participate in deciding the ultimate targets 'in full knowledge of the relevant facts', i.e., knowing the implications of his/her choice for himself/herself (both as producer and as consumer).

Once adopted, a given plan would provide the framework of economic activities for a given period. It would establish a starting point for economic life. But, in a free society, the plan will not dominate economic life. It is only a starting point, constantly to be taken up again and modified as necessary. Neither the economic life of society -- nor its total life -- can be based on a dead technological rationality, established once and for all. Society cannot alienate itself from its own decisions. It is not only that real life will almost of necessity diverge, in many aspects, from the 'most perfect' plan in the world. It is also that workers' management will constantly tend to alter, both directly and indirectly, the basic data and targets of the plan. New products, new methods, new ideas, new problems, new difficulties and new solutions will constantly be emerging. Working times will be reduced. Prices will fall, entailing reactions of the consumers and displacements of demand. Some of these modifications will only affect a single factory, others several factories and yet others, no doubt, the economy as a whole. [\[n24\]](#) The 'plan factory' would, therefore, not only be called upon to work once every five years; it would daily have to tackle some problem or another.

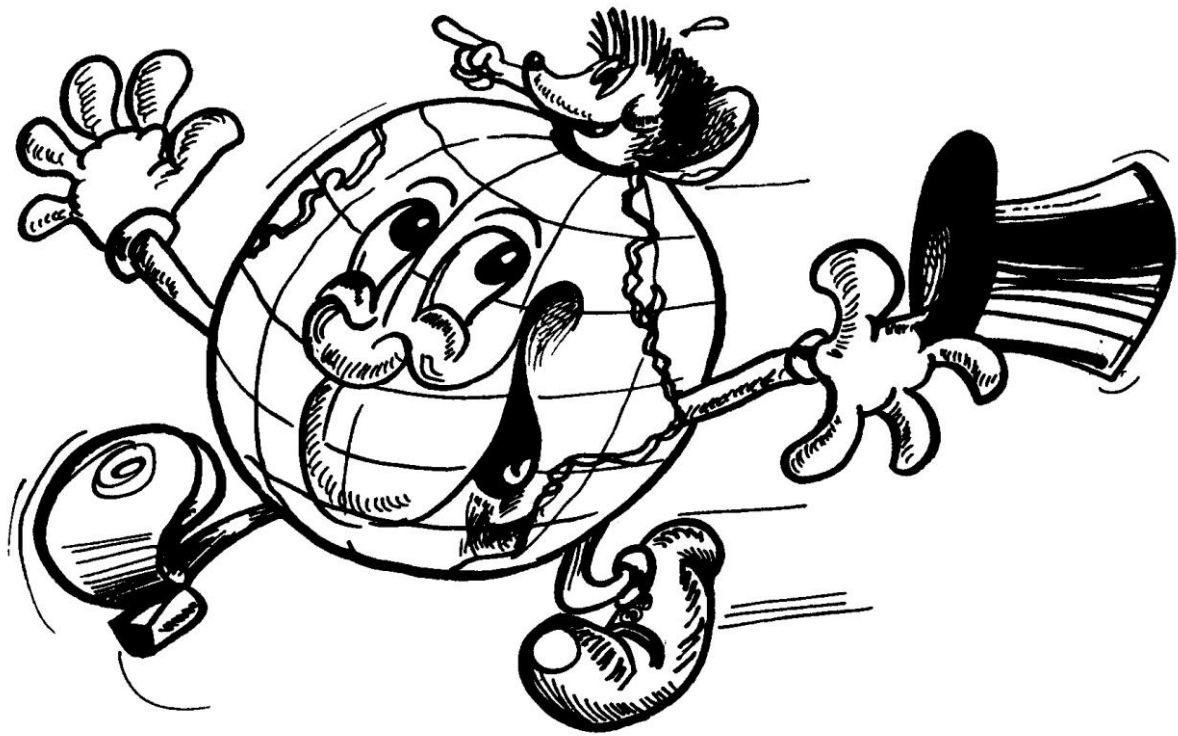
All this deals mainly with the form of workers' management of the economy, and with the mechanisms and institutions that might ensure that it functions in a democratic manner. These forms would allow society to give to the management of the economy the content it chose. In a narrower sense, they would enable society to orient the economy in any particular direction.

It is almost certain that the direction chosen would be radically different from that proposed by the best intentioned ideologists or philanthropists of modern society. All such ideologists (whether 'Marxist' or bourgeois) accept as self-evident that the ideal economy is one which allows the most rapid possible expansion of the productive forces and, as a corollary, the greatest possible reduction of the working day. This idea, considered in absolute terms, is absolutely absurd. It epitomizes the whole mentality, psychology, logic and metaphysics of capitalism, its reality as well as its schizophrenia. 'Work is hell. It must be reduced.' The rulers of modern society (East and West) believe that people will only be happy if they are provided with cars and butter. The population must therefore be made to feel that it can only be happy if the roads are choked with cars or if it can 'catch up with American butter production within the next three years'. And, when people acquire the said cars and the said butter, all that will be left for them to do will be to commit suicide, which is just what they do in that 'ideal' country called Sweden. This 'acquisitive' mentality which capitalism engenders, which helps capitalism live, without which capitalism could not exist, and which capitalism exacerbates to frenetic proportions, might just conceivably have been a useful aberration during a phase of human development. Socialist society will not be this absurd race after percentage increments in production. This will not be its basic concern.

In its initial phase, to be sure, socialist society will concern itself with satisfying consumer needs, and with a more balanced distribution of people's time between productive work and other activities. But, the real development of people and of social communities, will be socialism's central preoccupation. A very important part of social investment will, therefore, be geared to transforming machinery, to a universal and genuine education, to abolishing divisions between town and country, and between mental and manual labor. The growth of freedom within work, the development of the creative faculties of the producers, the creation of integrated and complete human communities, will be the paths along which socialist humanity will seek to find the meaning of its existence. These will, in addition, enable socialism to secure the material basis which it needs.



## 9. The Management of Society



We have already discussed the type of change that would be brought about by the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' cooperation of Workers' Councils, a cooperation secured through industrial councils composed of delegates from various places of work. A similar regional cooperation would be established through Councils representing all the units of a region. Cooperation will finally be necessary on a national level, for all the activities of society, whether economic or not.

A central body, which would be the expression and the emanation of the producers themselves, would ensure the general tasks of economic coordination, inasmuch as they were not dealt with by the plan itself -- or more precisely, inasmuch as the plan will have to be frequently or constantly amended (the very decision to suggest that it should be amended would have to be initiated somewhere). Such a body would also coordinate activities in other areas of social life, which have little or nothing to do with general economic planning. This central body would be the direct emanation of the Workers' Councils and of the local General Assemblies themselves. It would consist of a Central Assembly of Council Delegates, which Assembly would itself elect, from within its own ranks, a Central Council.

This network of General Assemblies and Councils is all that is left of 'the State' or 'power' in a socialist society. It is the whole 'state' and the only embodiment of 'power'. There are no other institutions from which proposals or decisions might emanate to influence people's lives. To convince people that there would be no other 'state' lurking in the background we must show:

- a. that such a pattern of organization could deal with all the problems that might arise in a free society -- and not only with industrial problems;
- b. that institutions of the type described could coordinate all those social activities which the population felt needed coordination (in particular, non-economic activities) -- in other words, that they could fulfill all the functions needed of a socialist administration (which are radically different from the functions of a modern State). We will finally have to discuss what would be the significance of 'parties' and of 'politics' in such a society.

## **a. The Councils: An Adequate Organization for the Whole Population**

The setting-up of Workers' Councils will create no particular problems in relation to industry (taking the term in its widest sense to include manufacture, transport, building, mining, energy production, public services, etc.). The revolutionary transformation of society will, in fact, be based on the establishment of such Councils and would be impossible without it.

In the post-revolutionary period, however, when the new social relations become the norm, a problem will arise from the need to regroup people working in smaller enterprises. This regrouping will be necessary if only to ensure them their full democratic and representational rights. Initially, it would probably be based on some compromise between considerations of geographical proximity and considerations of industrial integration. This particular problem isn't very important, for even if there are many such small enterprises, the number of those working in them only represents a small proportion of the total working population.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the self-organization of the population into Councils, could proceed as naturally in agriculture as in industry. It is traditional on the left to see the peasantry as a source of constant problems for working class power, because of its dispersion, its attachment to private property and its political and ideological backwardness. These factors certainly exist, but it is doubtful if the peasantry would actively oppose a working class power exhibiting towards it an intelligent and socialist attitude. The 'peasant nightmare', currently obsessing so many revolutionaries, results from the telescoping of two quite different problems; on the one hand, the relations of the peasantry with a socialist administration, in the context of a modern society; on the other hand, the relations between peasantry and State in the Russia of 1921 (or of 1932), or in the satellite countries between 1945 and the present time.

The situation which led Russia to the New Economic Policy of 1921 is of no exemplary value to any, even moderately, industrialized country. There is no chance of its repeating itself in a modern setting. In 1921, it was a question of an agriculture which did not depend on the rest of the national economy for its essential means of production, and which seven years of war and civil war had compelled to fall back on itself entirely. The Party was asking of this agriculture to supply its produce to the towns, without offering it anything in exchange. In 1932, in Russia (and after 1945 in the satellite countries), what happened was an absolutely healthy resistance of the peasantry to the monstrous exploitation imposed on it by a bureaucratic state, through forcible collectivization.

In a country such as France -- classically considered 'backward' in relation to the numerical importance of its peasantry -- workers' power would not have to fear a 'wheat strike'. It would not have to organize punitive expeditions into the countryside. Precisely, because the peasant is concerned with his/her own interests, s/he would have no cause to quarrel with an administration which supplies him/her with petrol, electricity, fertilizers, threshing machines and spare parts. Peasants would only actively oppose such an administration if pushed to the limit, either by exploitation or by an absurd policy of forced collectivization. The socialist organization of the economy would mean an immediate improvement in the economic status of most peasants, if only through the abolition of that specific exploitation they are subjected to through middlemen. As for forced collectivization, it would be the very antithesis of socialist policy in the realm of agriculture. The collectivization of agriculture could only come about as the result of an organic development within the peasantry itself. Under no circumstances, could it be imposed through direct or indirect (economic) coercion.

A socialist society would start by recognizing the rights of the peasants to the widest autonomy in the management of their own affairs. It would invite them to organize themselves into Rural Communes, based on geographical or cultural units, and comprising approximately equal populations. Each such Commune would have, both in relation to the rest of society and in relation to its own organizational structure, the status of an enterprise. Its sovereign organism would, therefore, be the General Assembly of peasants and its representational unit the Peasant Council. Rural Communes and their Councils would be in charge of local self-administration. They, alone, would decide when or if they wanted to form producers' cooperatives, and under what conditions. In relation to the overall plan, it would be the Rural Communes and their Councils that would argue with the Central administration, and not individual peasants. Communes would undertake to deliver such-and-such a fraction of their produce (or a given amount of a specific product) in



exchange for given credits [n25] or given amounts of the means of production. The Rural Communes themselves would decide how these would be distributed among their own members.

What about groups of workers involved in services of various kinds (from postmen to workers in entertainment). There is no reason why the pattern of their self-organization should not resemble that pertaining in industry as a whole. And, what about the thousand-and-one petty trades existing in towns (shop-keepers, cobblers, hairdressers, doctors, tailors, etc.)? Here, the pattern of organization could resemble what we have outlined for an 'atomized' occupation such as agriculture. Working class power would never seek forcibly to collectivize these occupations. It would only ask of these categories to group themselves into associations or cooperatives, which would at one-and-the-same time constitute their representative political organs and their responsible units in relation to the management of the economy as a whole. There would be no question, for instance, of socialized industry individually supplying each particular shop or artisan. It would supply the cooperatives of which these shopkeepers or artisans would be members, and would entrust to these cooperatives themselves to distribute within their own ranks. At the political level, people in these occupations would seek representation through Councils, for it is difficult to see how else they could be genuinely represented. There would be no fraudulent elections of either the western or Russian types.

These solutions admittedly present serious shortcomings when compared with industrially based Workers' Councils -- or even when compared with the Rural Communes. Workers' Councils or Rural Communes aren't primarily based on an occupation (when they are still so based, this would reflect their weakness rather than their strength). They are based on a working unity and on a shared life. In other words, Workers' Councils and Rural Communes are organic social units. A Cooperative of artisans or of petty traders, geographically scattered and living and working separately from one another, will only be based on a rather narrow community of interests. This fragmentation is a legacy of capitalism, which socialist society would sooner or later seek to transcend. There are possibly too many people in these occupations today. Under socialism, part of them would probably be absorbed into other occupations. Society would grant funds to the remainder to enable them, if they so wished, to organize themselves into larger, self-managed units.

When discussing people in these various occupations, we must repeat what we said about the peasantry -- namely that we have no experience of what their attitudes might be to a socialist society. To start with, and up to a point, they will doubtless remain 'attached to property'. But up to what point? All that we know is how they reacted when Stalinism sought forcibly to drive them into a concentration camp. A society which would grant them autonomy in their own affairs, which would peacefully and rationally seek to integrate them into the overall pattern of social life, which would give them a living example of democratic self-management, and which would give them positive help if they wanted to proceed towards socialization, [p7] would certainly enjoy a different prestige in their eyes (and would have a different kind of influence on their development) than did an exploiting and totalitarian bureaucracy, which by everyone of its acts reinforced their 'attachment to property' and drove them centuries backward.



## b. The Councils and Social Life

The basic units of social organization envisaged so far would not only manage production. They would, at the same time and primarily, be organs for popular self-management in all its aspects. They would be both organs of local self-administration and the only bases of the central power, which would only exist as a Federation or regrouping of all the Councils.

To say that a Workers' Council will be an organ of popular self-management (and not just an organ of workers' management of production), is to recognize that a factory or office isn't just a productive unit, but is also a social cell and locus of individual 'socialization'. Although this varies from country to country, and from workplace to workplace, a mass of activities, other than just earning a living, take place there (canteens, cooperatives, sports clubs, libraries, rest houses, collective outings, dances), activities which allow human ties both private and 'public' to become established. To the extent that the average person is today active in 'public' affairs, it is more likely to be through some activity related to work than in his capacity as an abstract 'citizen', voting once every 5 years. Under socialism, the transformation of the relations of production, and of the very nature of work, would enormously reinforce the positive significance, for each worker, of the working collective to which s/he belonged.

Workers' Councils and Rural Communes would probably take over all 'municipal' functions. They could also take over many others, which the monstrous centralization of the modern capitalist state has removed from the hands of local groups, with the sole aim of consolidating the dominion of the ruling class and of its bureaucracy over the whole population. Local Councils, for instance, might take over the local administration of justice and the local control of education.

The two forms of regroupment -- productive and geographical -- today seldom coincide. Peoples' homes are at variable distances from where they work. Where the scatter is small, as in a number of industrial towns or industrial suburbs (or in many Rural Communes), the management of production and local self-administration might be undertaken by the same General Assemblies and by the same Workers' Councils. Where home and work place don't overlap, geographically-based local Councils (Soviets) would have to be instituted, directly representing both the inhabitants of a given area and the enterprises in the area. Initially, such geographically-based local Councils may be necessary in many places. One might envisage them as 'collateral' institutions, also in charge of local affairs. They would collaborate at local and at national level with the Councils of producers (Workers' Councils) which alone however would embody the new power in production. [\[n26\]](#)



The problems created by the parallel existence of the two kinds of Councils could soon be overcome, if changes took place in where people chose to live. [a17] This is but a small aspect of an important problem that will hang over the general orientation of socialist society for decades to come. Underlying these questions are all the economic, social and human problems of town planning in the deepest sense of the term. At the limit, there even lies the problem of town and country. It is not for us here to venture into these fields. All we can say is that a socialist society will have to tackle these problems as total problems, from the very start, for they impinge on every aspect of peoples' lives and on society's own economic, political and cultural purpose.

What we have said about local self-administration also applies to regional self-administration. Regional Federations of Workers' Councils or of Rural Communes will be in charge of coordinating these bodies at a regional level and of organizing activities best tackled at such a level.

### **c. Industrial Organization of 'State' Functions**

We have seen that a large number of functions of the modern State (and not merely 'territorial' functions), will be taken over by local or regional organs of popular self-administration. But, what about the truly 'central' functions, those which affect the totality of the population, in an indivisible manner?

In class societies, and in particular under classical 19th-century 'liberal' capitalism, the ultimate function of the State was to guarantee the maintenance of the existing social relations through the exercise of a legal monopoly of violence. According to classical revolutionary theory, the state consisted of 'specialized bodies of armed men, and prisons'. In the course of a socialist revolution, this state apparatus would be smashed, the 'specialized detachments of armed men' dissolved and replaced by the arming of the people, the permanent bureaucracy abolished, and replaced by elected and revocable officials.

Under modern capitalism, increasing economic concentration and the increasing concentration of all aspects of social life (with the corresponding need for the ruling class to submit everything to its control), have led to an enormous growth of the state apparatus, of its functions, and of its bureaucracy. The State is no longer just a coercive apparatus which has elevated itself 'above' society. It is the hub of a whole series of mechanisms whereby modern society functions from day to day. At the limit, the modern State subtends all social activity, as in the fully developed state capitalist regimes of Russia and the satellite countries. Even in the West, the modern state does not only exercise 'power' in the narrow sense, but takes on an ever-increasing role in management and control not only of the economy, but of a whole mass of social activities. In parallel with all this, the State takes on a whole lot of functions which in themselves could perfectly well be carried out by other bodies, but which have either become useful instruments of control, or which imply the mobilization of considerable resources which the State alone possesses.

In many people's minds, the myth of the 'State, as the incarnation of the Absolute Idea' (which Engels mocked a century ago), has been replaced by another myth, the myth of the State as the inevitable incarnation of centralization and of the 'technical rationalization' required by modern social life. This has had two main effects. On the one hand, it has led to people considering outmoded, utopian or inapplicable some of the more revolutionary insights of Marx or Lenin (in relation to the events of 1848, 1871, or 1905). On the other hand, it has led to people swallowing the reality of the modern Russian State, which simultaneously epitomizes [n27] the most total negation of previous revolutionary conceptions of what socialist society might be like, and exhibits a monstrous increase of those very features criticized, in capitalist society, by previous revolutionaries (the total separation of rulers and ruled, permanent officialdom, great privileges for the few, etc.).

But, this very evolution of the modern state contains the seed of a solution. The modern state has become a gigantic enterprise -- by far the most important enterprise in modern society. It can only exercise its managerial functions to the extent that it has created a whole network of organs of execution, in which work has become collective, fragmented and specialized. What has happened here is the same as what has happened to the management of production in particular enterprises. But, it has happened on a much vaster scale. In their overwhelming majority, today's government departments only carry out specific and limited



tasks. They are 'enterprises', specializing in certain types of work. Some (such as Public Health) are socially necessary. Others (such as Customs) are quite useless, or are only necessary in order to maintain the class structure of society (such as the Police). Modern governments often have little more real links with the work of 'their' departments than they have, say, with the production of motor cars. The notion of 'administrative rights', which remains appended to what are, in fact, a series of 'public services', is a juridical legacy, without real content. Its only purpose is to reinforce the arbitrariness and irresponsibility of those at the top of various bureaucratic pyramids.

Given these facts, the solution would not lie in the 'eligibility and revocability' of all public servants. This would be neither necessary (these officials exercise no real power) nor possible (they are specialized workers, whom one could no more 'elect' than one would elect electricians or doctors). The solution would lie in the industrial organization, pure and simple, of most of today's government departments. In many cases, this would only be giving formal recognition to an already existing state of affairs. Concretely, such industrial organization would mean:

- a. the explicit transformation of these government departments into 'enterprises' having the same status as any other enterprise. In many of these new enterprises, the mechanization and automation of work could be systematically developed to a considerable degree;
- b. the function of these enterprises would be confined to the carrying out of the tasks allotted to them by the representative institutions of society;
- c. the management of these enterprises would be through Workers' Councils, representing those who work there. These office workers, like all others, would determine the organization of their own work. [\[n28\]](#)

We have seen that the 'plan factory' would be organized in this way. A similar pattern might apply to whatever persists or could be used of any current structure relating to the economy (foreign trade, agriculture, finance, industry). Current State functions, which are already 'industrial' (public works, public transport, communications) would be similarly organized. So, probably, would education, although here there would be latitude for a very wide variety of techniques and experiments.

#### **d. The 'Central Assembly' and Its 'Council'**

What remains of the functions of a modern state will be discussed under three headings:

- (a) the material basis of authority and coercion 'the specialized bands of armed men and prisons' (in other words the army and the law);
- (b) internal and external 'politics', in the narrow sense (in other words the problems that might be posed to a self-managed society if confronted with internal opposition or with the persistence of hostile exploiting regimes in neighboring countries);
- (c) real politics: the overall vision, coordination and general purpose of social life.

Concerning the Army, it is obvious that 'the specialized bands of armed men' would be dissolved. The people would be armed. If war or civil war developed, workers in factories, offices and Rural Communes would constitute the units of a non-permanent, territorially-based militia, each Council being in charge of its own area. Regional regroupings would enable local units to become integrated, and if necessary, would allow the rational use of heavier armament. [\[n29\]](#) If it proved necessary, each Council would probably contribute a contingent to the formation of certain central units, which would be under the control of the Central Assembly of Delegates. [\[a18\]](#)



As for the administration of justice, it would be in the hands of rank-and-file bodies. Each Council might act as a 'lower court' in relation to 'offenses' committed in its area. Individual rights would be guaranteed by procedural rules established by the Central Assembly, and might include the right of appeal to the Regional Councils or to the Central Assembly itself. There would be no question of a 'penal code' or of prisons, the

very notion of punishment being absurd from a socialist point of view. 'Judgments' could only aim at the re-education of the social 'delinquent' and at his/her reintegration into the new life. Deprivation of freedom only has a meaning if one considers that a particular individual constitutes a permanent threat to others (and in that case, what is needed is not a penitentiary but the medical -- and much more often social -- help of fellow human beings). [\[a19\]](#)

Political problems -- in the narrow, as well as in the broader sense -- are problems concerning the whole population, and which the population as a whole is, therefore alone, in a position to solve. But, people can only solve them if they are organized to this end. At the moment, everything is devised so as to prevent people from dealing with such problems. People are coned into believing that political problems can only be solved by the politicians' those specialists of the universal, whose most universal attribute is precisely their ignorance of any particular reality.

The necessary organizations will comprise, first of all, the Workers' Councils and the General Assemblies of each particular enterprise. These will provide living *milieux* for the confrontation of views and for the elaboration of informed political opinions. They will be the ultimate sovereign authorities for all political decisions. But, there will also be a central institution, directly emanating from these grass-roots organizations, namely the Central Assembly of Delegates. The existence of such a body is necessary, not only because some problems require an immediate decision (even if such a decision is subsequently reversed by the population) -- but more particularly because preliminary checking, clarification, and elaboration of the facts is nearly always necessary -- before any meaningful decision can be taken. To ask the people as a whole to pronounce themselves without any such preparation, would often be a mystification and a negation of democracy (because it would imply people having to decide without full knowledge of the relevant facts). There must be a framework for discussing problems and for submitting them to popular decision, or even for suggesting that they should be discussed. These are not just 'technical' functions. They are deeply political, and the body that would initiate them would be, whether one liked it or not, an indispensable central institution -- although entirely different in its structure and role from any contemporary central body.

The real problem -- which in our opinion should be discussed rationally and without excitement -- isn't whether such a body should exist or not. It is how to ensure that it is organized in such a manner that it no longer incarnates the alienation of political power in society and the vesting of authority in the hands of specialized institutions, separate from the population as a whole. The problem is to ensure that any central body is the genuine expression and embodiment of popular will. We think this is perfectly possible under modern conditions.



The Central Assembly of Delegates would be composed of men and women elected directly by the local General Assemblies of various factories and offices. These people would be revocable at all times by the bodies that elected them. They would remain at work, just as would the delegates to the local Workers' Councils. Delegates to the Central Assembly would meet in plenary session as often as necessary. In meeting twice a week, or during one week of each month, they would almost certainly get through more work than any present parliament (which hardly gets through any). At frequent intervals (perhaps once a month), they would have to give an account of their mandate to those who had elected them. [\[n30\]](#)

Those elected to the Central Assembly would elect from within their own ranks -- or would appoint to act in rotation -- a Council, perhaps composed of a few dozen members. The tasks of this body would be restricted to preparing the work of the Central Assembly of Delegates, to deputizing for it when it was not in session, and to convening the Assembly urgently, if necessary.

If this 'Central Council' exceeded its jurisdiction and took a decision which could or should have been taken by the Central Assembly, or if it took any unacceptable decisions, these could immediately be rescinded by

the next meeting of the Central Assembly, which could also take any measures necessary, up to and including the 'dissolution' of its own Council. If, on the other hand, the Central Assembly took any decision which exceeded its jurisdiction, or which properly belonged to the local Workers' Councils or to the local General Assemblies, it would be up to these bodies to take any steps necessary, up to and including the revocation of their delegates to the Central Assembly. Neither the Central Council nor the Central Assembly could persevere in unacceptable practices (they would have no power of their own, they would be revocable, and in the last analysis, the population would be armed). But, if the Central Assembly allowed its Council to exceed its rights -- or, if members of local Assemblies allowed their delegates to the Central Assembly to exceed their authority -- nothing could be done. The population can only exercise political power if it wants to. The organization proposed would ensure that the population could exercise such power, if it wanted to.

But, this very will to take affairs into one's own hands isn't some blind force, appearing and disappearing in some mysterious way. Political alienation in capitalist society isn't just the product of existing institutions which, by their very structure, make it technically impossible for the popular will to express or fulfill itself. Contemporary political alienation stems from the fact that this will is destroyed at its roots, that its very growth is thwarted, and that finally all interest in public affairs is totally suppressed. There is nothing more sinister than the utterances of sundry liberals, bemoaning the 'political apathy of the people', an apathy which the political and social system to which they subscribe would recreate daily, if it didn't exist already. This suppression of political will in modern societies stems as much from the content of modern 'politics' as from the means available for political expression. It is based on the unbridgeable gulf that today separates 'politics' from real life. The content of modern politics is the 'better' organization of exploiting society: the better to exploit society itself. Its methods are necessarily mystifying: they resort either to direct lies or to meaningless abstractions. The world in which all this takes place is a world of 'specialists', of underhand deals and of spurious 'technicism'.

All this will be radically changed in a socialist society. Exploitation having been eliminated, the content of politics will be the better organization of our common life. An immediate result will be a different attitude of ordinary people towards public affairs. Political problems will be everyone's problems, whether they relate to where one works or deal with much wider issues. People will begin to feel that their concerns have a real impact, and perceptible results should soon be obvious to all. The method of the new politics will be to make real problems accessible to all. The gulf separating 'political affairs' from everyday life will narrow and eventually disappear.

All this warrants some comment. Modern sociologists often claim that the content and methods of modern politics are inevitable. They believe that the separation of politics from life is due to an irreversible technological evolution, which makes impossible any real democracy. It is alleged that the content of politics -- namely the management of society -- has become highly complex, embracing an extraordinary mass of data and problems, each of which can only be understood as a result of advanced specialization. All this allegedly being so, it is proclaimed as self-evident that these problems could never be put to the public in any intelligible way -- or only by simplifying them to a degree that would distort them altogether. Why be surprised then, that ordinary people take no more interest in politics than they do in differential calculus?

If these 'arguments' -- presented as the very latest in political sociology, but in fact, as old as the world [\[n31\]](#) -- prove anything, it is not that democracy is a utopian illusion but that the very management of society, by whatever means, has become impossible. The politician, according to these premises, would have to be the 'Incarnation of Absolute and Total Knowledge'. No technical specialization, however advanced, entitles its possessor to influence areas other than his/her own. An assembly of technicians, each the highest authority in his/her particular field -- would have no competence (as an assembly of technicians) to solve anything.

Only one individual could comment on any specific point, and no one would be in a position to comment on any general problem.

In fact, modern society is not managed by technicians as such (and never could be). Those who manage it don't incarnate 'Absolute Knowledge' -- but rather generalized incompetence. In fact, modern society is hardly managed at all -- it just drifts. Just like the bureaucratic apparatus at the head of some big factory, a

modern political 'leadership' only renders verdicts -- and, usually quite arbitrary ones. It decides between the opinions of the various technical departments designed to 'assist' it, and over which it has very little control. In this, our rulers are themselves caught up in their own social system, and experience the same political alienation which they impose on the rest of society. The chaos of their own social organization renders impossible a rational exercise of their own power even in their own terms. [\[n32\]](#)

We discuss all this because it enables us once again to stress an important truth. In the case of politics as in the case of production, people tend to blame modern technology or modern 'technicism', in general, instead of seeing that the problems stem from a specifically capitalist technology. In politics, as in production, capitalism doesn't only mean the use of technically 'neutral' means for capitalist ends. It also means the creation and development of specific techniques, aimed at ensuring the exploitation of the producers -- or the oppression, mystification and political manipulation of citizens, in general. At the level of production, socialism will mean the conscious transformation of technology. Technique will be made to help the people. At the level of politics, socialism will imply a similar transformation: technique will be made to help democracy.

Political technique is based essentially on the techniques of information and of communication. We are here using the term 'technique' in the widest sense (the material means of information and of communication only comprise a part of the corresponding techniques). To place the technique of information at the service of democracy, doesn't only mean to put material means of expression in the hands of the people (essential as this may be). Nor does it mean the dissemination of all information, or of any information, in whatever form. It means, first and foremost, to put at the disposal of mankind the necessary elements enabling people to decide in full knowledge of the relevant facts. In relation to the plan factory, we have given a specific example of how information could be used so as vastly to increase people's areas of freedom. Genuine information would not consist in burying everyone under whole libraries of textbooks on economics, technology and statistics: the information that would result from this would be strictly nil. The information provided by the plan factory would be compact, significant, sufficient and truthful. Everyone will know what s/he will have to contribute and the level of consumption s/he will enjoy if this or that variant of the plan is adopted. This is how technique (in this instance economic analysis, statistics, and computers) could be put at the service of democracy in a decisive field.

The same applies to the technique of communication. It is claimed that the very size of modern societies precludes the exercise of any genuine democracy. Distances and numbers allegedly render direct democracy impossible. The only feasible democracy it is claimed is representative democracy, which 'inevitably' contains a kernel of political alienation, namely, the separation of the representatives from those they represent.

In fact, there are several ways of envisaging and of achieving representative democracy. Parliament is one. Councils are another, and it is difficult to see how political alienation could arise in a properly functioning Council system. If modern techniques of communication were put at the service of democracy, the areas where representative democracy would remain necessary would narrow down considerably. Material distances are smaller in the modern world than they were in Attica, in the 5th century B.C.. At that time the voice range of the orator -- and hence, the number of people s/he could reach -- was limited by the functional capacity of his/her vocal cords. Today, it is unlimited. In the realm of communicating ideas, distances haven't only narrowed -- they have disappeared.

If society felt it to be necessary, one could, as from today, establish a General Assembly of the whole population of any modern country. Radio-television [\[p8\]](#) could easily link up a vast number of General Assemblies, in various factories, offices, or rural Communes. Similar, but more limited, link-ups could be established in a vast number of cases. [\[n33\]](#) The sessions of the Central Assembly or of its Council could easily be televised. This, combined with the revocability of all delegates, would readily ensure that any central institution remained under the permanent control of the population. It would profoundly alter the very notion of 'representation'. [\[n34\]](#)

People bemoan the fact that the size of the modern 'city', compared with those of yesterday (tens of millions

rather than tens of thousands), renders direct democracy impossible. They are doubly blind. They don't see, firstly, that modern society has recreated the very *milieu*, the work place, where such democracy could be reinstated. Nor do they see that modern society has created and will continue to create the technical means for a genuine democracy on a massive scale. They envisage the only solution to the problems of the supersonic age in the coach-and-four terms of parliamentary political machinery. And, they then conclude that democracy has become 'impossible'. They claim to have made a 'new' analysis -- and, they have ignored what is really new in our epoch: the material possibilities of at last transforming the world through technique, and through the mass of ordinary people who are its living vehicle.

### **e. The 'State', 'Parties', and 'Politics'**

What would 'the state', 'politics', and 'parties' consist of in such a society? There would be residues of a 'state' to the extent that there would not immediately be a pure and simple 'administration of things', that majority decisions would still prevail, and that there, therefore, still remained some limitations to individual freedom. There would no longer be a 'state' to the extent that the bodies exercising power would be none other than the productive units or local organizations of the whole population, that the institutions organizing social life would be but one aspect of that life itself, and that what remained of central bodies would be under the direct and permanent control of the base organizations. This would be the starting point. Social development could not but bring about a rapid reduction of the central aspects of social organization: the reasons for exercising constraints would gradually disappear, and the fields of individual freedom would enlarge. [Needless to say, we are not talking here about formal 'democratic freedoms', which a socialist society would immediately and vastly expand, but about the 'essential' freedoms: not only the right to live, but the right to do what one wants with one's life.]

Freed from all the paraphernalia and mystifications which currently surround it, politics in such a society would be nothing but the collective discussing and solving of problems concerning the future of society -- whether these be economic, education, sexual -- or whether they dealt with the rest of the world, or with internal relations between social groups. All these matters which concern the whole of the population would belong to them.

It is probable, even certain, that there would be different views about such problems. Each approach would seek to be as coherent and systematic as possible. People, dispersed geographically or professionally, might share particular viewpoints. These people would come together to defend their views, in other words would form political groups.

There would be no point in pretending that a contradiction wouldn't exist between the existence of such groups and the role of the Councils. Both could not develop simultaneously. If the Councils fulfill their function, they will provide the main living *milieu* not only for political confrontations, but also for the formation of political opinions. Political groups, on the other hand, are more exclusive *milieux* for the schooling of their members, as well as being more exclusive poles for their loyalty. The parallel existence of both Councils and political groups would imply that a part of real political life would be taking place elsewhere than in the Councils. People would then tend to act in the Councils according to decisions already taken outside of them. Should this tendency predominate, it would bring about the rapid atrophy and finally the disappearance of the Councils. Conversely, real socialist development would be characterized by the progressive atrophy of established political groups.

This contradiction could not be abolished by a stroke of the pen or by any 'statutory' decree. The persistence of political groups would reflect the continuation of characteristics inherited from capitalist society, in particular, the persistence of diverging interests (and their corresponding ideologies), even after their material basis had shrunk. People will not form parties for or against the Quantum Theory, nor in relation to simple differences of opinion about this or that. The flowering or final atrophy of political groups will depend on the ability of workers' power to unite society. [\[n35\]](#)

If organizations expressing the survival of different interests and ideologies persist, a libertarian socialist organization, voicing its own particular outlook, will also have to exist. It will be open to all who favor the total power of the Councils, and will differ from all others, both in its *programme* and in its practice,

precisely on this point: its fundamental activity will be directed towards the concentration of power in the Councils and to their becoming the only centers of political life. This implies that the libertarian organization would have to struggle against power being held by any particular party, whatever it may be.

It is obvious that the democratic power structure of a socialist society excludes the possibility of a Party 'holding power'. The very words would be meaningless within the framework we have described. Insofar as major trends of opinion might arise or diverge on important issues, the holders of majority viewpoints might be elected delegates to the Councils more often than others, etc. [This doesn't necessarily follow, however, for delegates would be elected mainly on the basis of a total trust, and not always according to their opinion on this or that question.] The parties would not be organizations seeking power; and the Central Assembly of Delegates would not be a 'Workers' Parliament'; people would not be elected to it as members of a party. The same goes for any Council chosen by this Central General Assembly.

The role of a libertarian socialist organization would initially be important. It would have systematically and coherently to defend these conceptions. It would have to conduct an important struggle to unmask and denounce bureaucratic tendencies, not in general, but where they concretely show themselves; and above all, it might initially be the only group capable of showing the ways and means whereby working class democracy might flower. The work of the group could, for instance, considerably hasten the setting-up of the democratic planning mechanisms we have analyzed earlier.

A libertarian organization is, in fact, the only place where, in exploiting society, a get-together of workers and intellectuals can already be achieved. This fusion would enable the rapid use of technology by the organs of working class power. But, if some years after the revolution, the libertarian group continued to grow, it would be the surest sign that it was dead -- as a libertarian revolutionary organization.



## **f. Freedom and Workers' Power**

The problem of political freedom arises in two forms: freedom for political organizations and the rights of various social strata of the population.

Nationally, the Councils alone would be in a position to judge to what extent the activities of any given political organization could be tolerated. The basic criterion which would guide their judgment would be whether the organization in question was seeking to re-establish an exploiting regime. In other words, was it trying to abolish the power of the Councils? If they judged this to be the case, the Councils would have the right and the duty to defend themselves, at the ultimate limit by curtailing such activities. But this yardstick won't provide an automatic answer in every specific instance, for the very good reason that no such universal answer can ever exist. The Councils will each time have to carry the political responsibility for their answers, steering a course between two equal and very serious dangers: either to allow freedom of action to enemies of socialism who seek to destroy it -- or, to kill self-management themselves through the restriction of political freedom. There is no absolute or abstract answer to this dilemma. Nor is it any use trying to minimize the extent of the problem by saying that any important political tendency would be represented inside the Councils: it is perfectly possible and even quite probable that there might exist within the Councils tendencies opposed to their total power. [\[a20\]](#)

The 'legality of Soviet Parties', a formula through which Trotsky believed, in 1936, that he could answer this problem, in fact, answers nothing. If the only dangers confronting socialist society were those due to 'restorationist' tendencies, there would be little to fear for such parties wouldn't find much support in the workers' assemblies. They would automatically exclude themselves from meaningful political life. But, the main danger threatening the socialist revolution, after the liquidation of private capitalism [p9], doesn't arise from restorationist tendencies. It stems from bureaucratic tendencies. Such tendencies may find support in some sections of the working class, the more so as their *programmes* do not and would not aim at restoring traditional and known forms of exploitation, but would be presented as 'variants' of socialism. In the beginning, when it is most dangerous, bureaucratism is neither a social system nor a definite *programme*: it is only an attitude in practice. The Councils will be able to fight bureaucracy only as a result of their own concrete experience. But, the revolutionary tendency inside the Councils will always denounce 'one-man management' -- as practiced in Russia -- or the centralized management of the whole economy by a separate apparatus -- as practiced in Russia, Poland or Yugoslavia. It will denounce them as variants, not of socialism, but of exploitation, and it will struggle for all light to be shed on the organizations propagating such aims.

It is hardly necessary to add, that although it might conceivably become necessary to limit the political activity of this or that organization, no limitation is conceivable in the domains of ideology or of culture.

Another problem might arise: should all sections of the population, from the beginning, have the same rights? Are they equally able to participate in the political management of society? [p10] What does working class power mean in such circumstances? Working class power means the incontrovertible fact that the initiative for and the direction of the socialist revolution and the subsequent transformation of society can only belong to the working class. Therefore, it means that the origin and the center of socialist power will quite literally be the Workers' Councils. But, working people do not aim at instituting a dictatorship over society and over the other strata of the population. Their aim is to install socialism, a society in which differences between strata or classes must diminish rapidly and soon disappear. The working class will only be able to take society in the direction of socialism to the extent that it associates other sections of the population with its aims. Or, to the extent that it grants them the fullest autonomy compatible with the general orientation of society. Or, that it raises them to the rank of active subjects of social management, and does not see them as objects of its own control -- which would be in conflict with its whole outlook. All this is expressed in the general organization of the population into Councils, in the extensive autonomy of the Councils in their own field, and in the participation of all these Councils in the central administration.

What happens if the working class does not vastly outnumber the rest of the population? Or, if the revolution is from the start in a difficult position, other strata being actively hostile to the power of the Workers' Councils? Working class power might then find concrete 'expression in an unequal participation of the various strata of society in the central administration. In the beginning, for example, the proletariat might have to allow a smaller voice to the Peasants Councils than to other Councils, even if it allows this voice to grow as class tensions diminish. But, the real implications of these questions are limited. The working class could only keep [p11] power if it gained the support of the majority of those who work for a living, even if they are not industrial workers. In modern societies, wage and salary earners constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, and each day increases their numerical importance. If the large majority of industrial workers and other wage earners supported revolutionary power, the regime could not be endangered by the political opposition of the peasants. If the forementioned sections did not support revolutionary power, it is difficult to see how the revolution could triumph, and even more how it could last for any length of time.



## 10. Problems of the Transition



The society we are talking about is not communism, which supposes total freedom, the complete control by people over all their own activities, the absence of any constraint, total abundance -- and human beings of a totally different kind.

The society we are talking about is socialism, and socialism is the only transitional society between a regime of exploitation and communism. What is not socialism (as here defined) isn't a transitional society, but an exploiting society. We might say that any exploiting society is a society of transition, but of transition to another form of exploitation. The transition to communism is only possible if exploitation is immediately abolished, for otherwise, exploitation continues and feeds on itself. The abolition of exploitation is only possible when every separate stratum of order-givers ceases to exist, for in modern societies it is the division into order-givers and order-takers which is at the root of exploitation. The abolition of a separate managerial apparatus means workers' management in all sectors of social activity. Workers' management is only possible through new institutions embodying the direct democracy of the producers (the Councils). Workers' management can only be consolidated and enlarged insofar as it attacks the deepest roots of alienation in all



fields and primarily in the realm of work.

In their essence, these views closely coincide with Marx's ideas on the subject. Marx only considered one kind of transitional society between capitalism and communism, which he called indifferently 'dictatorship of the proletariat' or 'lower stage of communism'. For him, this society implied an end to exploitation and 'to a separate state apparatus.

These elementary truths have been systematically hidden or distorted. Let us leave aside the Stalinists, whose historic job it has been to present concentration camps, the absolute power of factory managers, piece-rates and *Stakhanovism* as the finished products of socialism. The same mystification, in a more subtle but just as dangerous form, has been propagated by the Trotskyists and by Trotsky himself. They have managed to invent an increasing number of transitional societies, slotting more or less happily into one another. Between communism and capitalism, there was socialism. But between socialism and capitalism there was the Workers' State. And between the Workers' State and capitalism there was the 'degenerated Workers' State' (degeneration being a process, there were gradations: degenerated, very degenerated, monstrously degenerated, etc.). After the War, according to the Trotskyists, we witnessed the birth of a whole series of 'degenerated Workers' States' (the satellite countries of Eastern Europe), which were degenerated without ever having been Workers' States. All these gymnastics were performed so as to avoid having to admit that Russia was an exploiting society without a shred of socialism about it, and so as to avoid drawing the conclusion that the fate of the Russian Revolution made it imperative to re-examine all the problems relating to the programme and content of socialism, to the role of the proletariat, to the role of the Party, etc.

The idea of a 'transitional society' other than a socialist society is a mystification. This is not to say, far from it, that problems of transition do not exist. In a sense, the whole of socialist society is determined by the existence of these problems, and by the attempt of people at solving them. But, problems of transition will also exist in a narrower sense. They will flow from the concrete conditions which will confront the revolution at the start.

For instance, the Revolution might only start in one country, or in one group of countries. As a result, it would have to sustain pressures of a very different kind and duration. On the other hand, however swift the international spread of the revolution, a country's internal development will play an important role in allowing the principles of socialism to be applied. For example, agriculture might create important problems in France, but not in the USA or Great Britain (where the main problem would be that of the extreme dependence of the country on food imports). In the course of our analysis, we have considered several problems of this kind and hope to have shown that solutions tending in a socialist direction existed in each case.

We have not been able to consider the special problems which would arise if the revolution remained isolated in one country for a long time -- and we can hardly do it here. But, we hope to have shown that it is wrong to think that the problems arising from such an isolation are insoluble, that an isolated workers' power must die heroically or degenerate, or that it can at the most 'hold on' while waiting. The only way to 'hold on' is to start building socialism, otherwise degeneration has already set in, and the reason for 'holding on' is nothing. For workers' power, the building of socialism from the very first day is not only possible, it is imperative. If it doesn't take place, the power held has already ceased to be workers' power. [\[n36\]](#)

The *programme* we have outlined is a *programme* for the present, capable of being realized in any reasonably industrialized country. It describes the steps -- or the spirit guiding the steps -- which the Councils will have to take from the very first weeks of their power, and this, whether this power has spread to several countries or is confined to one. Perhaps, if we were talking about Albania, there would be little we could do. But, if tomorrow in France, or in Britain, or even in Poland (as yesterday in Hungary), Workers' Councils emerged without having to face a foreign military invasion, they could only:

- federate into a Central Assembly and declare themselves the only power in the land;
- proceed to arm the working class and order the dissolution of the police and of the standing army;

- proclaim the expropriation of the capitalists, the dismissal of all managers, and the taking over of the management of all factories by the workers themselves organized into Workers' Councils;
- proclaim the abolition of work norms and institute full equality of wages and salaries;
- encourage other categories of workers to form Councils and to take into their own hands the management of their respective enterprises;
- ask, in particular, the workers in government departments to form Councils to proclaim the transformation of these state bodies into enterprises managed by those who work in them;
- encourage the peasants and other self-employed sections of the population to group themselves into Councils and to send their representatives to a Central Assembly;
- proceed to organize a 'plan factory' and promptly submit a provisional economic plan for discussion by the local Councils;
- call on the workers of other countries and explain to them the content and meaning of these measures.

All this would be immediately necessary. And, it would contain all that is essential to the building of socialism.

## Notations

by Cornelius Castoriadis (1957)

(n1-nN)

n1 'Production' here meaning the shop-floor, not 'the economy' or 'the market'.

n2 The belief that socialism can be achieved through Parliament is, therefore, naive in the extreme. Moreover, it perpetuates illusions in the significance of this kind of popular 'representation'.

n3 In the first chapter of his book, The Workers' Councils (Melbourne: 1950), Anton Pannekoek develops a similar analysis of the problems confronting socialist society. On the fundamental issues our points of view are very close.

n4 Bakunin once described the problem of socialism as being 'to integrate individuals into structures which they could understand and control'.

n5 The words are to be found in "Part III" of Engels' Anti-Duhring.

n6 A few years ago a certain 'philosopher' could seriously ask how one could even discuss Stalin's decisions, as one didn't know the real facts upon which he alone could base them. (J. P. Sartre, "*Les Communistes et la Paix*", in *Les Temps Modernes*, July and October-November of 1952).

n7 We deliberately say 'to institute' and not 'to restore', for never in history has this domination really existed. All comparisons with historical antecedents -- for instance, with the situations of the artisan or of the free peasant, however fruitful they may be in some respects, have only a limited scope and risk leading one one into utopian thinking.

n8 Yet this is almost exactly what Lenin's definition of socialism as 'electrification plus (the political power of the) Soviets' boiled down to.

n9 Academic economists have analyzed the fact that of several technically feasible possibilities, certain ones are chosen, and that these choices lead to a particular pattern of technology applied in real life, which seems to concretize the technique of a given period. [See, for instance, Joan Robinson's The Accumulation of Capital (London; 1956; pages 101-178)]. But in these analyses, the choice is always presented as flowing from considerations of 'profitability' and, in particular, from the 'relative costs of capital and labor'. This abstract viewpoint has little effect on the reality of industrial evolution. Marx, on the other hand, underlines

the social content of machine-dominated industry, its enslaving function.

n10 In other words, abilities, know-how, and awareness, are developed in production.

n11 Strictly speaking, poetry means creation.

n12 In J. A. C. Brown's The Social Psychology of Industry (Penguin Books, 1954), there is a striking contrast between the devastating analysis the author makes of present capitalist production and the only 'conclusions' he can draw which are pious exhortations to management to 'do better', to 'democratize itself', etc.

n13 In other words, what we are challenging is the whole concept of a technique capable of organizing people from the outside. Such an idea is as absurd as the idea of a psychoanalysis in which the patient would not appear, and which would be just a 'technique' in the hands of the analyst.

n14 This problem is distinct from that of overall planning. General planning is concerned with determining a quantitative framework so much steel and so many hours of labor at one end, so many consumer goods at the other. It does not have to intervene in the form or type of the intermediate products.

n15 One might add that the rate of economic growth also depends:

(a) on technical progress. But, such technical progress is itself critically dependent on the amounts invested, directly or indirectly, in research;

(b) on the evolution of the productivity of labor. But, this hinges on the amount of capital invested per worker and on the level of technique (which two factors again bring us back to investment). More significantly, the productivity of labor depends on the producers' attitude to the economy. This, in turn, would center on people's attitude to the plan, on how its targets were established, on their own involvement and sense of identification with the decisions reached, and, in general, on factors discussed in this text.

n16 Bureaucratic 'planning' as carried out in Russia and the Eastern European countries proves nothing, one way or the other. It is just as irrational and just as wasteful. The waste is both 'external' (the wrong decisions being taken) and 'internal' (brought about by the resistance of the workers to production). For further details, see "*La revolution proletarienne contre la bureaucratie*" in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (Number 20).

n17 The field is in constant expansion. However, the starting points remain the following:

- Wassily W. Leontief; The Structure of American Economy, 1919-1939: An Empirical Application of Equilibrium Analysis; Oxford University Press (1941, 1951, 1953, 1957, 1966).
- Wassily W. Leontief, et. al.; Studies in the Structure of American Economy: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in Input-Output Analysis; Harvard University Press (New York: 1953).

n18 T. C. Koopmans; Activity Analysis of Production and Allocation proceedings of a Conference; John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (New York: 1951).

n19 The division of the economy into some 100 sectors, which roughly corresponds to present computer capacity, is about 'halfway' between its division (by Marx) into two sectors (consumer goods and means of production) and the thousand sectors that would be required to ensure a perfectly exact representation. Present computer capabilities would probably be sufficient in practice, and could be made more precise, even now, by tackling the problem in stages.

n20 Labor value includes, of course, the actual cost of the equipment utilized in the period considered. [For the working out of labor values by the matrix method see the article "*Sur la dynamique du capitalisme*" in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Number 12.] The adoption of labor value as a yardstick is equivalent to what academic economists call 'normal long-term costs'. The viewpoint expressed in this text corresponds to

Marx's, which is in general attacked by academic economists, even 'socialist' ones. For them, 'marginal costs' should determine prices. [See for instance: Joan Robinson; An Essay on Marxian Economics; Macmillan & Co Ltd (London, 1949); pages 23 -28.] We can't here go into this discussion. All that we can say is that the application of the principle of marginal costs would mean that the price of an air ticket between London and New York would at times be zero, (when the plane was already full) and at times be equivalent to that of the whole aircraft (when the plane was empty).

n21 In his major work on this theme -- and after a moderate use of differential equations -- Keynes comes up with the conclusion that the main determinants of investment are the 'animal spirits' of the entrepreneurs (The General Theory, pages 161-162). The idea that the volume of investment is primarily determined by the rate of interest (and that the latter results from the interplay of the 'real forces of productivity and thrift' was long ago demolished by academic economists themselves (see Joan Robinson's The Rate of Interest and Other Essays, 1951).

n22 One would look in vain through the voluminous writings of Mr. Bettelheim for any attempt at justification of the rate of accumulation 'chosen' by the Russian bureaucracy. The 'socialism' of such 'theoreticians' doesn't only imply that Stalin (or Khrushchev) alone can know. It also implies that such knowledge, by its very nature, cannot be communicated to the rest of humanity. In another country, and in other times, this was known as the *Führer-prinzip*.

n23 This net increase is obviously not just the sum of the increases in each sector. Several elements add up or have to be subtracted before one can pass from the one to the other. On the one hand, for instance, there would be the 'intermediate utilizations' of the products of each sector -- on the other hand, the 'external economies' (investment in a given sector, by abolishing a bottleneck, could allow the better use of the productive capacities of other sectors, which although already established were being wasted hitherto). Working out these net increases presents no particular difficulties. They are calculated automatically, at the same time as one works out the 'intermediate objectives' (mathematically, the solution of one problem immediately provides the solution of the other).

We have discussed the problem of the global determination of the volume of investments. We can only touch on the problem of the choice of particular investments. The distribution of investments by sectors is automatic once the final investment is determined (such-and-such a level of final consumption directly or indirectly implies such-and-such a productive capacity in each sector). The choice of a given type of investment from amongst several producing the same result could only depend on such considerations as the effect that a given type of equipment would have on those who would have to use it -- and here, from all we have said, their own viewpoint would be decisive.

n24 From this angle (and, if they weren't false in the first place), Russian figures which show that year-after-year the targets of the plan have been fulfilled to 100% would provide the severest possible indictment of Russian economy and of Russian society. They would imply, in effect, that during a given 5-year period nothing happened in the country, that not a single new idea arose in anyone's mind (or else, that Stalin, in his wisdom, had foreseen all such ideas and incorporated them in advance in the plan, allowing -- in his kindness -- inventors to savor the pleasures of illusory discovery).

n25 Complex, but by no means insoluble economic, problems will probably arise in this respect. They boil down to the question of how agricultural prices will be determined in a socialist economy. The application of uniform prices would maintain important inequalities of revenue ('differential incomes') between different Rural Communes or even between different individuals in a given Commune (because of differences in the productivity of holdings, differential soil fertility, etc.). The final solution to the problem would require, of course, the complete socialization of agriculture. In the meantime, compromises will be necessary. There might perhaps be some form of taxation of the wealthier Communes to subsidize the poorer ones until the gap between them had been substantially narrowed (completely to suppress inequalities by this means would however amount to forcible socialization). One should note in passing that differential yields today stem in part from the quite artificial working of poor yield soils through subsidies paid by the capitalist state for

political purposes. Socialist society could rapidly lessen these gaps by questioning certain subsidies, while at the same time massively helping to equip poor, but potentially viable Communes.

n26 Although the Russian word '*soviet*' means 'council', one should not confuse the Workers' Councils we have been describing in this text with even the earliest of Russian Soviets. The Workers' Councils are based on the place of work. They can play both a political role, and a role in industrial management of production. In its essence, a Workers' Council is a universal organism. The 1905 Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies, although the product of a general strike and although exclusively proletarian in composition, remained a purely political institution. The Soviets of 1917 were, as a rule, geographically-based. They, too, were purely political institutions, in which all social layers opposed to the old regime would get together (see Trotsky's 1905 and his History of the Russian Revolution). Their role corresponded to the 'backwardness' of the Russian economy and of Russian society at the time. In this sense, they belong to the past. The 'normal' form of working class representation in the Revolution to come will undoubtedly be the Workers' Councils.

n27 Not in what it hides (the police terror and the concentration camps), but in what it officially proclaims, in its Constitution.

n28 The formation of Workers' Councils of State Employees was one of the demands of the Hungarian Workers' Councils.

n29 Neither the means nor the overall conception of war could be copied from those of an imperialist country. What we have said about capitalist technology is valid for military technique: there is no neutral military technique, there is no 'H-bomb for socialism'. P. Guillaume has clearly shown (in his article, "*La Guerre et notre époque*", Numbers 3, 5, and 6 of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) that a proletarian revolution must necessarily draw up its own strategy and methods (mainly propaganda) suitable to its social and human objectives. The need for 'strategic weapons' does not arise for a revolutionary power.

n30 In a country like France, such a Central Assembly of Delegates might consist of 1,000 to 2,000 delegates (one delegate per 10,000 or 20,000 workers). A compromise would have to be reached between two requirements: as a working body, the Central Assembly of Delegates should not be too large, on the other hand, it must ensure the most direct and most widely-based representation of the organisms from which it emanates.

n31 Plato discusses them at length, and his Protagoras is, in part, devoted to them.

n32 See C. Wright Mills' White Collar (pages 347-348) and The Power Elite (New York; 1956; pages 134 sq, 145sq, etc.) for an illustration of the total lack of any relationship between 'technical' capacities of any kind and current industrial management or political leaderships.

n33 It might be claimed that the problem of numbers remains, and that all would never be able to express themselves in the time available. This isn't a valid argument. There would rarely be an Assembly of over 20 people where everyone wanted to speak, for the very good reason that when there is something to be decided there aren't an infinite number of options or an infinite number of arguments. In rank-and-file workers' gatherings, convened, for instance, to decide on a strike, there are hardly ever 'too many' interventions. The two or three fundamental opinions having been voiced, and various arguments having been exchanged, a decision is soon reached.

The length of speeches, moreover, often varies inversely with the weight of their content. Russian leaders may speak for four hours at Party Congresses and say nothing. The speech of the *Ephore* which persuaded the Spartans to launch the Peloponnesian War occupies 21 lines in *Thucydides* (I, 86). For an account of the laconicism of revolutionary assemblies see Trotsky's account of the Petrograd Soviet of 1905 -- or accounts of the meetings of factory representatives in Budapest in 1956 (*Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Number 21, pages 91-92).

n34 Televising present parliamentary procedures, on the other hand, could be a sure way of driving even further nails into the coffin of this institution.

n35 The basis of parties is not a difference of opinion, as such, but differences on fundamentals and the more or less systematic unity of each 'nexus of views'. In other words parties express a general orientation corresponding to a more or less clear ideology, in its turn flowing from the existence of social positions leading to conflicting aspirations.

As long as such positions exist and lead to a political 'projection' of expectations, one cannot eliminate political groups -- but as these particular differences disappear, it is unlikely that groups will be formed about 'differences' in general.

n36 All the discussion about 'socialism in one country' between the Stalinists and the Left Opposition (1924-27) shows to a frightening degree how men make history thinking they know what they are doing, yet understand nothing about it. Stalin insisted it was possible to build socialism in Russia alone, meaning by socialism, industrialization, plus the power of the bureaucracy. Trotsky vowed that this was impossible, meaning by socialism, a classless society.

Both were right in what they said, and wrong in denying the truth of the other's allegation. But, neither was talking about socialism. And no one, during the whole discussion, mentioned the regime inside Russian factories, the relation of the proletariat to the management of production, nor the relation of the Bolshevik Party, where the discussion was taking place, to the broad masses, who were in the long run, the main interested party in the whole business.

## **As We See It** by *Solidarity* (London)

**1** Throughout the world, the vast majority of people have no control whatsoever over the decisions that most deeply and directly affect their lives. They sell their labor power while others who own or control the means of production accumulate wealth, make the laws, and use the whole machinery of the State to perpetuate and reinforce their privileged positions.

**2** During the past century, the living standards of working people have improved. But neither these improved living standards, nor the nationalization of the means of production, nor the coming to power of parties claiming to represent the working class, have basically altered the status of the worker as worker. Nor have they given the bulk of mankind much freedom outside of production. East and West, capitalism remains an inhuman type of society where the vast majority are bossed at work, and manipulated in consumption and leisure. Propaganda and policemen, prisons and schools, traditional values and traditional morality, all serve to reinforce the power of the few and to convince or coerce the many into acceptance of a brutal, degrading and irrational system. The 'Communist' world is not communist and the 'Free' world is not free.

**3** The trade unions and the traditional parties of the left started in business to change all this. But they have come to terms with the existing patterns of exploitation. In fact, they are now essential if exploiting society is to continue working smoothly. The unions act as middlemen in the labor market. The political parties use the struggles and aspirations of the working class for their own ends. The degeneration of working class organizations, itself the result of the failure of the revolutionary movement, has been a major factor in creating working class apathy, which in turn, has led to the further degeneration of both parties and unions.

**4** The trade unions and political parties cannot be reformed, 'captured', or converted into instruments of working class emancipation. We don't call, however, for the proclamation of new unions, which in the conditions of today would suffer a similar fate to the old ones. Nor do we call for militants to tear up their union cards. Our aims are simply that the workers themselves should decide on the objectives of their

struggles and that the control and organization of these struggles should remain firmly in their own hands. The *forms* which this self-activity of the working class may take will vary considerably from country to country and from industry to industry. Its basic *content* will not.

**5** Socialism is not just the common ownership and control of the means of production and distribution. It means equality, real freedom, reciprocal recognition, and a radical transformation in all human relations. It is 'man's positive self-consciousness'. It is man's understanding of his environment and of himself, his domination over his work and over such social institutions as he may need to create. These are not secondary aspects, which will automatically follow the expropriation of the old ruling class. On the contrary, they are essential parts of the whole process of social transformation, for without them no genuine social transformation will have taken place.

**6** A socialist society can therefore only be built from below. Decisions concerning production and work will be taken by workers' councils composed of elected and revocable delegates. Decisions in other areas will be taken on the basis of the widest possible discussion and consultation among the people as a whole. The democratization of society down to its very roots is what we mean by 'workers' power'.

**7** *Meaningful action*, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists their demystification. *Sterile and harmful action* is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them, and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others -- even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.

**8** No ruling class in history has ever relinquished its power without a struggle and our present rulers are unlikely to be an exception. Power will only be taken from them through the conscious, autonomous action of the vast majority of the people themselves. The building of socialism will require mass understanding and mass participation. By their rigid hierarchical structure, by their ideas, and by their activities, both social-democratic and Bolshevik types of organizations discourage this kind of understanding and prevent this kind of participation. The idea that socialism can somehow be achieved by an elite party (however 'revolutionary') acting 'on behalf' of the working class is both absurd and reactionary.

**9** We do not accept the view that by itself the working class can only achieve a trade union consciousness. On the contrary, we believe that its conditions of life and its experiences in production constantly drive the working class to adopt priorities and values and to find methods of organization which challenge the established social order and established pattern of thought. These responses are implicitly socialist. On the other hand, the working class is fragmented, dispossessed of the means of communication, and its various sections are at different levels of awareness and consciousness. The task of the revolutionary organization is to help give proletarian consciousness an explicitly socialist content, to give practical assistance to workers in struggle and to help those in different areas to exchange experiences and link up with one another.

**10** We do not see ourselves as yet another leadership, but merely as an instrument of working class action. The function of *Solidarity* is to help all those who are in conflict with the present authoritarian social structure, both in industry and in society at large, to generalize their experience, to make [\[p12\]](#) a total [\[p13\]](#) critique of their condition and of its causes, and to develop the mass revolutionary consciousness necessary if society is to be totally transformed.



## Annotations

by *Solidarity* (1972)

(a1-aN)

- a1 The *Cornucopia* or horn of plenty was a horn overflowing with fruit and flowers which, for the Romans, symbolized abundance.
- a2 Our text is a close (but not always literal) translation of the French original. The milieu in which our pamphlet will be distributed and discussed differs from that of the 1957 article. Throughout, our main concern has been with getting essential concepts over to as wide (and unspecialized) an audience as possible. To a great extent, this has influenced our choice of wording and sentence structure. Paragraphs have been shortened. A number of sectional and chapter headings have been added. Some additional footnotes have been inserted (clearly indicated as '*Solidarity*' footnotes). One or two of the original footnotes have been omitted, and one or two others incorporated into the text proper, which has been slightly shortened. The diagrams and illustrations are our own.
- a3 See "Hungary '56" by Andy Anderson, a '*Solidarity*' book, now again in print. (25p plus postage.)
- a4 This is an area where '*Solidarity*' has been slow in saying what needed to be said.
- a5 Published in March 1949.
- a6 The paralyzing effect on the functioning of any segment of capitalist society of 'working to rule' (i.e., of accepting the rules made by those in authority) indirectly illustrated this point.
- a7 See [The 'Central Assembly' and Its 'Council'](#) for a discussion on the functions of such an 'assembly', in a completely self-managed society.
- a8 See our texts "The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control: 1917-1921", "From Spartakism to National Bolshevism", and "Hungary '56" for a fuller documentation of these experiences.
- a9 Bernard Shaw once cynically described democracy as 'substituting election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few'.
- a10 Those who argue about the 'intrinsic merits' of decentralization seldom pursue their thoughts to their logical conclusions. Do they really envisage every town and every village generating its own electricity (or atomic power), arranging its own jet aircraft schedules, importing its own tea or sugar, growing its own bananas, or building its own neurosurgical centers? Or will the 'free' society dispense with these altogether?
- a11 We are fully aware that this statement will be taken out of context and that we will be accused of standing for the 'perpetuation of the wage-slavery, etc., etc.' For a discussion of the role of money and wages in the early stages of socialism, see [Money](#), [Wages](#), [Value](#). For a discussion of how money can readily be



abolished from one day to the next, see any utopian writings, i.e., any writings in which the author substitutes his/her own wishes for tendencies existing here and now, within capitalist society itself. The experience of groups which have attempted the immediate abolition of money has so far been one of invariable recuperation by established society. Those who had taken their wishes for reality, have had reality imposed upon their wishes.

a12 Karl Marx; "Volume III" of Capital; Foreign Languages Publishing House (Moscow: 1959); pages 799-800.

a13 See the article, "The New Proletariat" by John King in *Solidarity* (London), Volume VI, Number 1.

a14 All the preceding talk of 'wages', 'prices' and 'the market' will, for instance, undoubtedly have startled a certain group of readers. We would ask them momentarily to curb their emotional responses and to try to think rationally with us on the matter.

a15 This will probably prove necessary for as long as some kind of work proves necessary (i.e., for as long as there is not such vast abundance as to allow the immediate and full satisfaction of every conceivable human demand). Those who think in terms of a society of immediate abundance, where work is unnecessary and where every citizen will forthwith be able to consume whatever he wants in terms of goods and services, seldom pause to consider who will produce these goods or provide these services, or who will produce the machines to produce them.

a16 One could also invent new words, if it would make people happy, but this would not change the underlying reality.

a17 Today, those who can afford it are prepared to travel considerable distances to work, often at considerable physical or financial cost to themselves, because of the drabness, dirt, smell, or noise of where they work. Many others live at a distance just because there is no suitable accommodation in the vicinity. How will the new society cope with the horror of most modern workplaces? Will it seek to associate workplaces and homes -- or, on the contrary, to separate them?

a18 Tanks were used to suppress revolutionary uprisings in Berlin in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Aircraft were used to bomb civilians in the Spanish Civil War. It would be sheer self-deception to blind oneself to the likelihood that similar attempts would be made to put down revolutionary uprisings in Western Europe or the USA. The main defense of the revolution would of course be political, an appeal over the heads of their government to the working people of the 'enemy' side. But, what if the revolutionaries were physically attacked? Should they be prepared to use tanks in self-defense? If bombed, would they be entitled to use fighter aircraft or bombers to destroy enemy airfields? Single bombers or squadrons of bombers? There is a ruthless internal logic in these questions. The collective use of tanks or aircraft implies the services to maintain them, and is not a function for a local Council, but for some regional or national body. However abhorrent this may seem to some libertarians, we see no way out. We would be interested to hear of alternative means from those who throw up their hands in horror at our suggestions.

a19 The task of such bodies would be much easier than it is at present. Today, this task usually consists in 're-adapting the deviant' to the requirements and values of a destructive and irrational society. In the future, it would be to help those still dominated by the old ideology of self-seeking to see that their problems can best be tackled in conjunction with others.

a20 This occurred when the Social Democrats were in a majority in the German Workers' Councils, immediately after the World War I.

# Post-Notations

by *Lust for Life* (2006)

(p1-pN)

p1 The 'theocratic' expression of capitalism presents itself as opposed to international corporate & statist models of -- as well as post-national global -- capital-ism, but merely changes the veneer and style of its common inversion.

p2 Posing 'decentralization' to 'centralization' as an "opposite" to the partiality of human social organization that having a 'center' now is, avoids solution, presenting the flip-side to 'centralism', completing a false consciousness, rationally trapping human experience up to now in an either-or paradox -- which bourgeois thinking refuses to resolve -- whilst the best of both ('omnicentralization') places the 'center' everywhere, as opposed to nowhere, annihilating the historical use of 'center' in its limited hierachical manner.

p3 The nature of the statement 'centralization is the root of all evil', exposes the need to supersede absolutism and anti-dynamism.

p4 Also, 'enterprise'.

p5 Many of the "delegation tasks" can be handled by a secured internet and satellite connectivity.

p6 See [Establishing a Database for Revolutionary Planning as a Work of the Unemployed Councils](#).

p7 this next discussion of people's self-expression as needing "socialization", bothers me immensely, as there is no "norm" to be imposed, but a supersession of norms and the flip-sided 'one-sidedness' of antitheses. The fullest of greed demands it starts from everyone, and not just as 'malady of the dictatorship of the partialized particular', in this case, of industrial proletariat in the cities.

p8 Note that secure computer-networking facilitates labor-intensive and mediating organizational forms.

p9 Also, note "public" varieties dominated by proto-statist renditions festered by theocrats and workerists.

p10 If alienated "power" is to cease, and the bourgeois "rights" of liberty without social freedom at the point of production is also non-existent, then what "rights" and "power" are being curbed -- unless they still exist and the revolution never took place at all!

p11 Note that power separate[d] from its expressor-transformer is "separate power", as of an alien[ated] power, and necessarily "appears" to "walk by itself", to be "self-"perpetuative, as by magic, as part of that social relationship process by which we alienate our person[a]-al, speci[es]-al, and soci[o]-al selves to the symbolic, as hidden, and as supposedly eternal.

p12 We seek to publicize the possibility of "going beyond" of dichotomy, paradox, deadlock, and a "safe and well-maintained hierarchy" by synthesizing "truth" kernels -- on supposedly "opposite" or incompatible sides -- that is not merely the [mal-]practice of principlelessness, complicity, and slack -- so as to elevate, evolve, and challenge the current reality and all the forces that desire it *as* status quo and/or *as* a moment of generalized self-sacrifice.

p13 The notion of *totality* includes dynamic and eternal self-evolution, that is that we, as an expression of that totality change ourselves and it.

## Release History

Release	Date	Released By	Format and Features
v1.0	1957	<i>Paul Cardan</i> (English pseudonym of Cornelius Castoriadis)	Published text.
v1.1	March 1972	<i>Solidarity</i> (c/o 123 Latham Road - London E.6 U.K.)	Published text. This release reformatted, added graphics, and added the Preface and annotations.
v2.0	November 05, 2006	<i>Lust for Life</i>	HTML for the web. Reformatted and corrected any misspellings and punctuation errors found in preceding editions. Pulled original and <i>Solidarity</i> citations away from page bottoms as well as apart to allow the original 1957 and <i>Solidarity</i> views their historical "due" -- as well as adding my own post-notations -- from the bottom of pages (which do not exist in contiguous HTML files) to the end of the text. Kept all graphics, which were not noted by author; presuming that, by style, they were added at the time of the <i>Solidarity</i> edition; they show a playfulness (of the "mole") like that revealed in the challenging characters in comic books of the late 1960s.
v 3.0	August 2013	<i>libcom.org</i>	Converted into PDF, mobi and epub format.